

***ÂBERU* IN IRANIAN PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES**

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A thesis submitted to Faculty of Languages and Literatures, Department of English
Linguistics, University of Bayreuth, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of
the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy in English Linguistics*

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April, 2023

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ÂTA	<i>Âberu</i> -Threatening Act
IÂTA	Individual <i>Âberu</i> -Threatening Act
CÂTA	Collectivist <i>Âberu</i> -Threatening Act
SC	Sociocultural components
IC	Institutional components
SRSQ	Speaker Response-Seeking Questions

LIST OF PERSIAN TERMS AND PHRASES

- Âberu* (n): Literally the water of face. Honor, reputation, credibility, fame, esteem, prestige, and dignity of a person, also society, and a community or group
- Âberu-bar* (adj): Relates to a person destroying another's *âberu*
- Âberu-riz* (adj): Relates to a person destroying another's *âberu*
- Âberu-mand* (adj): A person with *âberu*, an honorable person
- Âberu be bâd dâdan* (v): Trans: "Let *âberu* be gone with the wind:" to lose *âberu*
- Âberu-dâri kardan* (v): To practice *âberu*
- Âberu kasb kardan* (v): To earn or enhance *âberu*
- Âberu-rizi kardan* (v): To shed *âberu*
- Arj* (n): The social position that a person reaches, and it may denote their high status and rank
- Bâten* (n): The inside or an internal aspect of human existence
- Bi-âberu* (adj): A person with no *âberu* or with no honor
- Bi-adab* (adj): Impolite
- Beztal-mal* (n) : people's property or *mardom*'s property
- Bozorgvâri* (n): Person's honor and dignity or considering great respect for a person
- Ĉâdor* (n): A kind of veil for female to cover their body from head to toe
- Dast e qod râ joloye kasi derâz nakardan* (IDM): Not to stretch a hand before others to beg for money
- Efteqâr* (n): Used in the sense of referring to respect and esteem, both shown by a person and shown by others to that person
- Enqelâb* (n): Revolution (reference to the 1979 Revolution)
- Enqelâbi* (adj): A revolutionary person
- Enqelâbiyun* (adj, pl): Revolutionary people
- Qeyre-enqelâbi* (adj): A non-revolutionary person
- Qeyre-enqelâbiyun* (adj, pl): Non-revolutionary people
- Zede-enqelâbi* (adj): Anti-revolutionary person
- Zede-enqelâbiyun* (adj, pl): Anti-revolutionary people
- E'tebâr* (n): Used to express credibility, trustworthiness, authority, and the related confidence placed in a person
- Ez^ωat* (n): Status-related prestige, respect, honor, fame, or esteem
- Harfe mardom* (NP): People's talk
- Heysiyat* (n): Status-related prestige, respect, honor, fame, esteem, reputation, and good name
- Hefze âberu kardan* (v): To protect *âberu*

Hormat (n): Used in the sense of referring to respect and esteem, both shown by a person and shown by others to that person

Jâh (n): The social position that a person reaches, and it may denote their high status and rank

Mahjub (adj): Well-mannered, courteous

Manzelat (n): High position

Maqâm (n): Rank

Mardom (n): People

Martabat (n): Grandeur

Melat (n): Nation

Mo'adab (adj): Polite

Mohandes (n): Engineer

Nâm-E Nik (n+E+adj): Good name

Nâmus (n): Chastity and purity

Orz (n): Status-related prestige, respect, honor, fame, or esteem

Pul-e halâl (n-E+adj): Pure money

Pul-E kasi râ qordan (IDM): To abscond with or embezzle somebody's money

Qadr (n): Used to express value or merit

Qostax (adj): Rude

Raftan e âberu (v): Trans: "Âberu is gone:" when someone's *âberu* has been tarnished

Rudarbâyesti(n): State or feeling of distance out of respect

Surate xod râ bâ sili sorx negah dâştan (IDM): Trans: "To keep one's face red, even with a slap," to maintain *âberu*

Ša'an (n): Used to express value or merit.

Šaraf (n): Used in the sense of referring to respect and esteem, both shown by a person and shown by others to that person

Šarmandegi (n): Being ashamed

Šaxiat(n): Identity or personality

Šerâfat (n): Person's honor and dignity or considering great respect for a person

Šekaste-nafsi (n): Self-lowering

Šohrat (n): Used in the sense of referring to respect and esteem, both shown by a person and shown by others to that person

Šokuh (n): Honor

Ta'arof (n): Ritual courtesy

Zâher-râ hefz kardan (v): Keep up one's appearance; *Zâher* (Appearance)

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my beloved daughter, Tamana, whose presence inspires me every day, to my cherished family in Iran, and to the courageous Iranian women who continue to fight fearlessly for their rights. May their strength, resilience, and unwavering determination pave the way for a brighter, more just future.

ABSTRACT

Most research on social interaction investigates politeness and impoliteness phenomena in Western and non-Western contexts, based on the face notion. However, its theoretical and analytical perspectives would vary due to cultural differences. Thus, this research introduces the concept of *âberu*, and *âberu*-threatening strategies applied by Iranian politicians in televised presidential debates. It therefore suggests an *âberu*-work model that takes the Iranian political discourse, an Eastern country with a collectivist culture, into account.

The data consists of 12 televised presidential debates in 2009, 2013, and 2017. They are consulted to have access to verbal interactions among candidates for later illustration. Whereas no official Persian and English transcriptions are available as the main research; a professional Iranian translator and a second translator, the researcher, have translated and transcribed the data.

The data induces the researcher to suggest *âberu*-work model based on the following two models to be able to analyze it. First, impoliteness is breaching intentionally or unintentionally the overarching macro cultural schema of politeness, which has five lower-level cultural schemata (Sharifian and Tayebi, 2017). However, only the violation of *âberu* cultural schema is investigated due to the competitive nature of this study. Second, that understanding is adjusted with Bull's (1996) model of politicians with three aspects of the face. Therefore, Iranian politicians intentionally threaten their opponents' *âberu*, their opponent's significant others' *âberu*, and their opponent's party's *âberu*. As a result, this study puts forward an *âberu*-threatening act framework that results from an intentional, rather than unintentional, breach of *âberu* cultural schema when politicians challenge the pragmatic components of their adversaries' *âberu*. It also indicates that Iranian politicians adopt various sociocultural *âberu*-threatening strategies to threaten their rivals' individualistic *âberu*, and their collectivist *âberu* when attacking their networks' *âberu* to threaten the intended politicians' *âberu*. In this manner, the Iranian politicians may exploit the Individual *Âberu*-Threatening Act (IÂTA), or the Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening Act (CÂTA) and apply or combine various linguistic strategies to question the pragmatic components of their rivals' *âberu*.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Ein Großteil der Forschung untersucht die Erscheinungen der Höflichkeit und Unhöflichkeit im westlichen und nichtwestlichen Kontext auf Grundlage des Gesichtskonzepts. Jedoch variieren dabei die theoretischen und analytischen Perspektiven aufgrund kultureller Unterschiede. Daher stellt diese Forschungsarbeit das Konzept des *âberu* vor und der *âberu*-bedrohenden Strategien, die von iranischen Politikern in Präsidentschaftsdebatten im Fernsehen angewandt wurden. Demzufolge wird ein *âberu*-Arbeitsmodell vorgestellt, das den politischen Diskurs im Iran in den Blick nimmt, einem östlichen Land mit einer kollektivistischen Kultur.

Die Daten beinhalten zwölf im Fernsehen übertragene Präsidentschaftsdebatten der Jahre 2009, 2013 und 2017. Diese werden herangezogen, um einen Zugang zu gewähren zu den verbalen Interaktionen unter den Kandidaten zum Zwecke einer späteren Erläuterung. Da kein Hauptkorpus offizieller persischer und englischer Transkriptionen verfügbar ist, wurden die Daten von einem iranischen Fachübersetzer und einer weiteren Übersetzerin, der Forscherin, übersetzt und transkribiert.

Die Daten haben die Forscherin dazu veranlasst, das *âberu*-Arbeitsmodell vorzustellen, das auf den folgenden zwei Modellen zur Analyse basiert. Erstens verletzt die Unhöflichkeit beabsichtigt oder unbeabsichtigt das übergreifende makrokulturelle Schema der Höflichkeit, welches fünf untergeordnete kulturelle Schemata umfasst (Sharifian und Tayebi, 2017). Es wird jedoch aufgrund der kompetitiven Eigenschaft dieser Studie nur die Verletzung des kulturellen Schemas des *âberu* untersucht. Zweitens wird dieses Verständnis angepasst mit Bulls (1996) Modell von Politikern mit drei Aspekten des Gesichts. Demzufolge beschmutzen iranische Politiker absichtlich das *âberu* ihrer Gegner, das *âberu* bedeutender Personen im Zusammenhang ihrer Gegner und das *âberu* der gegnerischen Partei. Daher schlägt diese Studie ein Rahmenkonzept der *âberu*-bedrohenden Handlungen vor, das sich aus einem beabsichtigten und nicht einem unbeabsichtigten Verstoß gegen das kulturelle Schema des *âberu* ergibt, wenn Politiker die pragmatischen Komponenten des *âberu* ihrer Gegner in Frage stellen. Es wird auch darauf hingewiesen, dass iranische Politiker verschiedene linguistische Strategien zur Bedrohung des *âberu* anwenden, um das individualistische *âberu* ihrer Rivalen zu beschmutzen ebenso wie deren kollektivistisches *âberu* beim Angriff auf das *âberu* ihrer Netzwerke zur Bedrohung des *âberu* des jeweiligen Politikers. Auf diese Weise könnten die iranischen Politiker den Individual *Âberu*-Threatening Act (IÂTA, individuelle *âberu*-bedrohende Handlung) oder den Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening Act (CÂTA, kollektivistische *âberu*-bedrohende Handlung) als Instrument einsetzen und verschiedene linguistische

Strategien anwenden oder kombinieren, um die pragmatischen Komponenten des *âberu* ihrer Rivalen in Frage zu stellen.

ERKLÄRUNGEN/ DECLARATION

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I have been supported by many people and it would not have been possible to accomplish this research without their invaluable support or feedback.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, PD. Dr. Eric A. Anchimbe for his enthusiastic support, raising challenging and constructive questions and making detailed and insightful comments during my doctorate research. I appreciate him for being available to discuss issues related to my research and for sharing his sophisticated knowledge and experience generously.

I would also like to extend my words of gratitude to Dr. Vahid Parvaresh (Anglia Ruskin University, UK), for his constructive feedback. I am also extremely grateful to Dr. Ali Rahimi (VIT University, India), whose permanent and generous support kept me motivated. I appreciate Dr. Ahmad Izadi, who was an Alexander von Humboldt Senior Fellowship at Bayreuth University, for his extensive consultation providing me with a thorough understanding of fundamental concepts in Iranian culture. Special thanks also go to Dr. Mohamad Salehi and Dr. Behrouz Mahmudi Bakhtiari associate professors at Sharif University of Technology and Tehran University, respectively, for their help to access Persian literature.

I also thank my best friend Zahra Kia Darbandsari, a PhD candidate in English Studies in Tehran, for connecting me to the database at the National Library in Tehran.

I sincerely appreciate Prof. Dr. Jonathan Culpeper and Prof. Dr. Peter Bull whom I met at the 12th International Conference on (Im)Politeness at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge. I appreciate their feedback and consultation during the conference and after it via several emails. Prof. Dr. Farzad Sharifian†; a pioneer of cultural linguistics, the Chair in Cultural Linguistics at Monash University, whose tremendous help is indelible. Although he was seriously sick, he never withheld his support from me. I believe this dissertation could not find its initial approach without his unconditional support.

I would also like to sincerely thank my friends and the participants of this study for spending their precious time cooperating with me.

My dearest daughter cannot be excluded because of her understanding and collaboration with me to accomplish this research. Moreover, my family in Iran deserves my hearties appreciation for their invaluable support.

Finally, I would like to thank the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD: German Academic Exchange) for awarding me a Postgraduate Scholarship to pursue my PhD research at the University of Bayreuth.

Chapter 1

General Introduction: Investigating *Âberu* in Iranian Presidential Debates (2009-2017)

1.1 Introduction

Iran is a multiethnic nation with various ethnic groups, including Persians, Kurds, Lurs, Arabs, Baluchs, and Turkmen. The Persians are the largest ethnic group and their language, Persian or Farsi, is the official language of the country. Indeed, Persian is the first language for Persians and the second language for other ethnic groups. For these two reasons, the Persians hold most governmental positions. In terms of religion, Iran is an Islamic country. Although Islam is the dominant religion, some people belong to different Islamic sects, e.g., Shi'a and Sunni as well as other religions, such as Bahá'í, Judaism, and Christianity. Notably, that most Persians are Shi'a Muslims, the predominant religious group in Iran.

The ethnic diversity of Iran also signals that it is culturally diverse. Although each ethnic group has its own social norms and cultural schemas, in a broad sense, they are generally described as group-based or collectivist (Koutlaki 2010; Sharifian 2017, 2011, 2007; Assadi 1980; O'Shea 1999). Iranian ethnic groups, regardless of their indigenous languages, religious backgrounds, and localized or group-based norms, tend to share common or general cultural and societal values. For instance, they apply collectivist principles in their daily interactions and adhere to societal norms that shape moral orders, which are positively evaluated by society and others, collectively referred to as *mardom*. They also share some common cultural schemas that are critical in the types of relationships constituted through social interactions.

However, due to their population size and social position, the Persians have had a significant impact on other cultures. Despite this influence, different ethnic groups in Iran share substantial features that bind them into an expansive collectivist culture. This does not negate the presence of individualist cultural patterns but simply indicates that some degree of heterogeneity exists. People from the same culture or ethnic group may have diverse interpretations of social events and evaluate the same action or behavior differently. With such a perspective, investigating social interaction within Iranian society requires solid theoretical entrenchment in this collectivist cultural space.

Therefore, a study of *âberu*: a person's social credibility, honor, and reputation as a member of the collectivist entity, can only be properly conducted within a framework that acknowledges the specificities of the Iranian context. For this reason, the (im)politeness theoretical models of the West may not be suitable here, just as they may not be in other Eastern countries with collectivist cultures and unique cultural schemas. Therefore, the (im)politeness phenomenon proposed in the Western context cannot be transferred without modification to a non-western context such as Iranian presidential debates.

1.2 Aim and scope of the research

Sharifian (2007) asserts that *âberu* is the most dominant social schema in Iranian cultural cognition. This cultural schema has two components: *Âb* and *ru*, the first constituent means 'water' and the second means 'face.' Thus, the whole term, *âberu*, linguistically conveys 'water of face' implying two concepts: freshness and healthiness of one's face or the sweat on one's face. The former occurs as a result of one's general well-being, which represents their accepted social image by others, and the latter happens on account of damage to one's honor and social image, causing distress to the point of sweating.

Sharifian (2007) defines *âberu* as a multifaceted cultural schema in which in-group members' faces are connected, and their *âberu* is influenced by in-group members' verbal and nonverbal behavior and personality. Later, Sharifian (2011) states that the closest concept to *âberu* in other cultures is 'face,' with possible Persian-English equivalents such as honor, reputation, pride, and dignity.

Indeed, *âberu* encompasses a blend of social, cultural, and religious norms or values and virtues such as dignity, reputation, grandeur, and honor. It is also an interactional phenomenon established in relationships with others to protect one's individual and collective personality, identity, and social status, and its loss may be perceived as the deterioration of a particular order, which threatens their lives.

In their daily interactions, Iranians generally evaluate each other's *âberu* to see if their verbal and non-verbal behavior conforms to or deviates from cultural, social, and religious norms of the society. Every Iranian is an interdependent member of their group whose behavior is interpreted by other in-group members based on their group values and norms. From a broader perspective, every in-group member is responsible for protecting their individual *âberu* to be initially accepted as a group member and then enhance their collectivist group *âberu* in the eyes of outgroup members, the rest of the society, or *mardom* (significant

others). This shows that every individual is connected to and dependent on their own group when inflicting group *âberu*-loss or helping the group in *âberu*-boost phenomena.

Societal norms require Iranians to protect both their individual and collectivist *âberu*, as well as that of their interlocutors, even when those interlocutors are outgroup members. Indeed, Iranians maintain their self-*âberu* when enhancing their interactants' *âberu*. This is similar to the cyclic experience described by Anchimbe (2018) in postcolonial societies, where the more people offer to others, the more they receive in return. In the same vein, in Iranian culture, the more Iranians positively attend to others' *âberu*, the more they enhance their own *âberu*. Conversely, when they threaten others' *âberu*, they may threaten their own *âberu* too. It means therefore that *âberu*-boost or *âberu*-loss is a bilateral phenomenon in this collectivist culture. Indeed, Iranians are obliged by social, cultural, and religious norms to protect both their own and their interlocutors' *âberu*.

The data analyzed in this study indicate that *âberu* extends individual concerns to collective concerns thereby manifesting its interpersonal and relational dimensions. On the one hand, Iranian politicians simultaneously shield their *âberu* as part of their individual identities while safeguarding their collectivist or group *âberu* as political party members. On the other hand, they disgrace their opponents individually or collectively by publicly attacking *âberu* of their social and political networks. To meet this end, Iranian politicians apply *âberu*-boost behavior to maintain or enhance their individualist and collectivist *âberu*, while adopting *âberu*-loss behavior to damage or threaten either aspect of their opponents' *âberu*. In Iranian presidential debates, *âberu*-boost behavior is achieved through abiding by cultural and social norms, Islamic values, the 1979 Islamic Revolution's principles, and its Shi'a leader's worldview. Indeed, Iranian politicians enhance the sociocultural or institutional components of their *âberu* within debates while threatening the same pragmatic components of their adversaries' *âberu*.

The sociocultural components (SC) of *âberu* are shared by all Iranians including politicians and the populace. Iranians' *âberu* can be influenced positively or adversely by their gender, age, religion, appearance, social status, etc. In contrast, institutional components (IC) of *âberu* only impact the Iranian politicians' *âberu* since they are of high value in this community of practice. For instance, Iranian politicians are expected to rigidly adhere to Ayatollah Khomeini's ideals, his Islamic Revolution's goals, and Islamic values to uphold justice and fight against injustice. As a result, when presidential candidates respect Ayatollah Khomeini the values of his Islamic Revolution, they enhance the IC of their *âberu* since this is the expected behavior in this community of practice. In contrast, if they are accused of

distancing themselves from Ayatollah Khomeini, his religious Revolution, and Islamic values, the IC of their *âberu* has been threatened, and they may lose their *âberu*, potentially leading to failure in the elections.

Therefore, Iranian politicians adopt *âberu*-enhancing strategies to exalt themselves and their networks while applying *âberu*-threatening strategies to attack their rivals and their networks to achieve their institutional goals. In this respect, their goals directly influence the choice of *âberu*-enhancing or threatening strategies. When politicians address or involve their own relevant networks in the sense of association, they apply *âberu*-enhancing strategies. In contrast, when they engage their opponents or their opponents' networks while detaching themselves, they adopt *âberu*-threatening strategies against their adversaries.

Chapter four introduces the factors influencing Iranians' *âberu* called the pragmatic components of *âberu*. Then, Chapters five and six analyze how Iranian politicians apply a variety of linguistic strategies to challenge those influential factors to threaten their opponents' *âberu*. As a result, what happens in Iranian culture and political discourse extends beyond the scope of (im)politeness. I therefore refer to this phenomenon an *âberu*-threatening or *âberu*-enhancing act which should be analyzed in its own term. The primary focus of this research, however, is on *âberu*-threatening act.

In summary, this study aims to analyze the role of a politician's *âberu* in non-harmonious political interactions among candidates in Iranian presidential debates. I focus on the cultural schema of *âberu*, literally water-of-face, encompassing a person's credibility, honor, grandeur, and reputation, rather than the concept of 'face.' Concerning the significant role of *âberu* in Iranian political discourse, this research not only proposes an *âberu* framework to explain how *âberu*-threatening acts occur, but also introduces *âberu*-threatening strategies adopted by politicians to tarnish their adversaries' *âberu*, either individually or collectively.

To achieve this aim, the present research scrutinizes interaction among fifteen Iranian presidential candidates in 12 televised electoral debates from 2009 to 2017, sourced from YouTube archives, and is guided by the following research questions.

1. What framework functions in Iranian presidential debates to analyze politicians' non-harmonious interaction, concerning the concept of *âberu*?
2. How do politicians threaten their opponents' *âberu*, considering the Iranian collectivist culture?
3. What linguistic strategies do politicians apply to threaten their opponents' *âberu*?

1.3 Analytical frameworks in this study

Given the different cultural schemas, societal norms, and values among various groups, as well as the significance of the concept of *âberu* among Iranian politicians, I propose *âberu*-work model to analyze intentional non-harmonious interactions among Iranian presidential candidates. This *âberu*-work model is based on the following models.

- i. Sharifian and Tayebi's (2017) model of politeness, or the cultural schema of *adab* (*manner or politeness*)
- ii. Bull et al.'s (1996) model of politicians, which includes three aspects of the face; politicians' own individual face, the face of their significant others, and the face of their party.

First, according to Sharifian and Tayebi (2017), impoliteness is defined as the intentional or unintentional breach of the five overarching macro-cultural schemas of Persian politeness. These schemas include *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy), *rudarbâyesti* (state or feeling of distance out of respect), *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering), *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), and *âberu* (face). This study specifically focuses on the violation of *âberu* cultural schema, a choice influenced by the inherent dynamics of presidential debates.

Sharifian and Tayebi's (2007) model is guided by Culpeper's (2011) impoliteness model, which regards impoliteness as a negative attitude towards specific behavior in a specific context. It indicates whether interactants' expectations and desires or beliefs are satisfied during their interactions. When there is a clash of expectations, desires, or beliefs, it is viewed negatively, as such behaviors may result in offense or emotional consequences for the interactants. Culpeper (2011) also identifies the strength of intentionality as a critical factor in determining the offense's intensity.

This study adapts that understanding by examining how *âberu*-threatening act contradicts Iranian culture, moral codes, and values. In these interactions, politicians dissociate themselves from their adversaries to attack their rivals' *âberu* in goal-oriented interactions. They intentionally adopt various sociocultural *âberu*-threatening strategies to inflict *âberu*-loss on their opponents to achieve their goal of winning the elections. This behavior is negatively interpreted or evaluated by the targeted politicians, or likely by the remote TV audience, or *mardom* (people). In most cases, such behavior elicits an immediate reaction from offended politicians. Therefore, Iranian politicians violate the cultural schema of *âberu* when they intentionally threaten their opponents' *âberu* or *âberu* of their networks, including *âberu* of the

opponent's significant others and party. It is worth mentioning that the notion of intentionality-where impoliteness is seen as an intentional act to attack one's face in a specific context (Culpeper et al. 2003; Culpeper 2005; & Culpeper 2011)- is also explored in Iranian presidential debates. However, this study proposes the concept of an *âberu*-threatening act resulting from a deliberate break of *âberu* cultural schema, when candidates deviate from expected norms and values and threaten their opponents' *âberu*.

Regarding the aspects of *âberu*, Iranian politicians intentionally threaten their opponents' *âberu* or their opponents' networks' *âberu*, including their significant others' *âberu* and their party's *âberu*. Bull et al.'s (1996) model of politicians with three (aspects of the) faces: their own (politicians') individual face, the significant others' face, and the party's face, is appropriated in this study to uncover the individual and collectivist aspects of Iranian politicians' *âberu*. Therefore, depending on which aspect of *âberu* has been attacked in presidential debates, candidates individually or collectively threaten their opponent's *âberu* when intentionally and unmitigatedly breaching *âberu* cultural schema to win electoral office. In other words, a candidate's *âberu* can be threatened individually when his individual *âberu* has been attacked; Individual *Âberu*-Threatening Act (IÂTA), or collectively when his network's *âberu* has been tarnished; a Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening Act (CÂTA).

In Chapter two, initially, I review some Western (im)politeness theories and explain their inadequacy in Iranian collectivist culture. I then explain how I adapted the above-mentioned theories, i.e., Sharifian and Tayebi's (2017) model of politeness or the cultural schema of *adab* (manner or politeness) and Bull et al.'s (1996) model of politicians with three aspects of the face, to fit this data.

1.4 The outline of the research

This research encompasses seven chapters, including the Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter two, 'Inadequacy of Western theories for Iranian political discourse' conducts a brief literature review of Western (im)politeness theories and models. It mostly focuses on those that I could relate to and adapt the best to this research. Then, it presents the Persian (im)politeness models, which apply concepts specific to the Iranian culture and known among Iranians. This chapter also demonstrates the inadequacy of the Persian (im)politeness models, and explains why it is compulsory to develop a new theoretical framework for analyzing the current data.

Chapter three provides a bird's-eye view of the Iranian political system and the structure of the Iranian presidential debates. It also offers brief summaries of the participants' political background. This chapter outlines the research design, data collection instruments, methods, and framework for analyzing the data.

Chapter four, titled 'Introducing the concept of *âberu*,' explores the notion of *âberu* and its etymology in Iranian culture and the Persian language. It also demonstrates its importance in Iranian (Islamic) culture, outlines its aspects, and how it has been developed among common Iranians. Then, it interprets the role of *âberu* in Iranian political discourse and among presidential candidates and how politicians confront their adversaries by *âberu*-boost or loss when tackling influential factors on *âberu*. Alongside what I refer to here as the sociocultural components (SC) of *âberu* including wealth, appearance, education, age, and social status affecting common people's *âberu*, the institutional factors (IC) of *âberu* can touch Iranian politicians' *âberu*. Iranian politicians can enhance the IC of their *âberu* when being involved in the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and cooperating with Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution. They also boost their political *âberu* when approved by the supreme leader and *mardom*. Indeed, the study examines the factors mentioned above as constructive pragmatic components of *âberu* that affect one's *âberu*. Furthermore, it indicates that the context, the relationship between individuals, and their shared knowledge help them understand how *âberu* encapsulates one's honor, credibility, reputation, or grandeur.

The individual and collectivist *âberu*-threatening acts in Iranian presidential debates are presented in chapters five and six. Chapter five illustrates how politicians threaten their opponents' *âberu* by targeting its individual aspect and outlines the sociocultural *âberu*-threatening strategies they employ to achieve their goals. Data analysis indicates that Iranian politicians apply four sociocultural *âberu*-threatening strategies to challenge either the SC or IC of their rivals' *âberu*, as outlined below.

- i. Questioning the opponent
- ii. Asking Speaker response-seeking Questions
- iii. Disclosure
- iv. Disclaimers

Indeed, politicians threaten their rivals' individual *âberu* when challenging the influential factors of their *âberu* by adopting the above linguistic strategies.

In a similar manner, chapter six focuses on the collectivist aspect of *âberu* and how politicians take advantage of it when attacking their rivals' networks' *âberu* to damage the

intended opponent's *âberu*. Data analysis shows how Iranian politicians employ and combine various linguistic strategies to intensify the collectivist *âberu*-threatening act and effectively threaten *âberu* of their targeted opponents.

Iranian presidential candidates threaten *âberu* of their opponents' party through criticism, accusation, and questioning strategies. They also attack *âberu* of their opponents' significant others, including their families, relatives, or associates. Chapter six indicates that Iranian politicians most frequently adopt accusation and questioning strategies to challenge the SC or IC of their rivals' family members' and relatives' *âberu*.

Chapter seven, the conclusion, reconsiders the critical findings of this study and its contribution. It summarizes the significant role of *âberu* in the daily lives of Iranians and politicians. This chapter revisits aspects of *âberu*, its pragmatic components, and how Iranian politicians challenge those pragmatic components to threaten aspects of their rivals' *âberu*. It briefly explains why the concept of *âberu* fits this study, unlike the Western-based notion of face. Additionally, it outlines why I postulate an *âberu*-work framework to analyze Iranian politicians' *âberu*-threatening behavior and the various linguistic strategies they employ to achieve their institutional goals.

Indeed, it answers the research questions proposed in this chapter and discusses the limitations of this study and proposes possible future research.

Chapter 2

Inadequacy of Western Theories for Iranian Political Discourse

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to review Western impoliteness theories and to demonstrate their inadequacy in analyzing Iranian collectivist culture and consequently in Iranian political discourse. Indeed, the chapter considers the collectivist nature of Iranian culture as central to any analysis of social interaction phenomena, especially those studied under pragmatics. The chapter also reviews (im)politeness theories in Persian pragmatics.

This chapter highlights the inadequacy of previous models and the need for a new model to analyze the present data. It should be noted that since (im)politeness appears to be the most relevant phenomenon happening in Iranian presidential debates, the literature review is directed predominantly at (im)politeness phenomenon.

2.2 Impoliteness in Western contexts

Culpeper (1996) proposed the initial model of impoliteness, parallel but opposite to Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness. Brown and Levinson (1987) formulate politeness principles in terms of conflict avoidance to maintain one's positive and negative faces in case of a face attack. In their study, impoliteness was regarded as a mere absence of politeness. However, Culpeper (1996) conceptualizes impoliteness as an individual phenomenon, in which people apply communicative strategies to attack one's face and create social disruption. Similarly, Eelen (2001) stresses that impoliteness should be approached independently and not simply as an absence of politeness. In this respect, Bousfield (2008) develops a comprehensive impoliteness framework. In contrast, Culpeper (2011) emphasizes that as politeness focuses on how interactants utilize linguistic strategies to conduct harmonious social contact, impoliteness concentrates on how interactants deploy linguistic strategies to cause offense and attack face. Additionally, impolite behavior can happen as often as polite behavior in everyday conversations. Impoliteness phenomena became the focus of much research when acknowledged as focal and strategic human linguistic behavior in everyday interactions. The

following studies also indicate that conflictive talks or non-harmonious interactions are central to human behavior, being sanctioned in certain discourses, and should be analyzed through the lens of impoliteness theories. For instance, Lakoff (1989) conducted a study on psychotherapeutic and courtroom trial discourse, Culpeper (1996) examines army training discourse, and Harris (2001) investigates parliamentary discourse. These studies illustrate that impoliteness is not merely the failure of politeness. This aligns with the findings of Beebe (1995) and Bousfield (2008).

Culpeper et al. (2003: 1546) outline impoliteness as “communicative strategies designed to attack face, and thereby cause social conflict and disharmony.” They consider the speaker’s intention to support or attack their addressees’ faces, which is a complex matter. To this end, they examine the prosody and discoursal context of the interactants to better understand their behavior and infer their intentions. Later, Culpeper (2005: 38) revises his definition of impoliteness and offers further contexts in which impoliteness can be realized as follows: “Impoliteness comes about when: (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking or a combination of (1) and (2).” He underscores the role of interaction when elaborating on his definition and declaring that impoliteness is a phenomenon constructed through social interaction between interlocutors. He claims that in most situations, impoliteness involves either (1) or (2), suggesting that the speaker intentionally offends the hearer and the hearer acknowledges the offense. However, he acknowledges that recognizing intentions is extremely problematic, as they must be inferred in communication.

In line with Culpeper et al. (2003) and Culpeper (2005), Bousfield (2008) also emphasizes the role of intention in face-attacks and their reconstruction. He supports this by analyzing the discoursal roles of participants, context, co-text, activity type, power dynamics, rights, and obligations of interactants, among other factors, to determine whether impoliteness can be attributed to the speaker. He states that successful impoliteness occurs when the speaker intends to cause face damage, and the hearer perceives this spiteful intention. Otherwise, the impoliteness has failed. Therefore, Bousfield (2008: 72) defines impoliteness as follows:

Impoliteness constitutes the communication of intentionally gratuitous and conflictive verbal face-threatening acts (FTAs) which are purposefully delivered: i. unmitigated, in contexts where mitigation is required, and/or, ii. with deliberate aggression, that is, with the face threat exacerbated, ‘boosted’, or maximized in some way to heighten the face damage inflicted (Bousfield 2008: 72).

In contrast to Bousfield's (2008) and Culpeper's (1996, 2005) viewpoints, Terkourafi (2008) argues that the recognition of the speaker's intention by the hearer results in 'rudeness,' rather than impoliteness. From her perspective, "impoliteness occurs when the expression used is not conventionalized relative to the context of occurrence, it threatens the addressee's face... but no face-threatening intention is attributed to the speaker by the hearer (Terkourafi 2008: 70)." As seen, there is a fuzzy border between impoliteness, rudeness, and aggressive behavior, making it difficult to reach a single definition of (im)politeness. However, all theories unanimously insist on face-threatening behavior. Interestingly, Culpeper (2008) expands on his earlier facework and blends it critically with relational work and issues of power primarily in contexts involving "sanctioned aggressive facework" to distinguish impoliteness, rudeness, and over-politeness. In his studies, Culpeper strongly emphasizes intention by repeatedly asserting that impoliteness is intentional.

Bousfield and Locher (2008) that scholars increasingly agree on a broadly accepted definition of impoliteness, defining it as "face-aggravating behavior in a specific context, clearly involves the relational aspect of communication in that social actors negotiate their positions vis-à-vis each other (Bousfield & Locher 2008: 5)." Beyond interpersonal relationships in specific contexts, Holmes et al. (2008) imply their societal and behavior norms. They state that verbal impoliteness occurs when the hearer perceives linguistic behavior as threatening their face or social identity and violating appropriate behavioral norms. Nonetheless, this behavior may occur either intentionally or unintentionally within specific contexts and among particular interactants.

In line with early (im)politeness studies, which were primarily face-based, maxim-based, and rooted in Gricean principles (Brown & Levinson 1987; Leech 1983), Culpeper (1996) and Culpeper et al. (2003) developed their impoliteness theories and strategies based on the concept of face and its positive and negative aspects. However, Culpeper (2005) distances his theory from Brown and Levinson's (1987) and highlights individual autonomy. Culpeper (2005) adopts Spencer-Oatey's (2002: 530) rapport management work, in which she concentrates on the study of the politeness phenomenon while considering "the social psychological component of the management of relations." Influenced by Spencer-Oatey's (2002) theory, Culpeper (2005) modifies his impoliteness strategies to align with the concepts of quality face and social identity face and proposes the 'off-record impoliteness.' Culpeper also accentuates the interaction between linguistic and nonlinguistic signals and the context of impoliteness.

In line with Culpeper (2005), Bousfield (2008) also argues that the positive and negative face discrepancy is rendered superfluous in Culpeper's (1996) and Culpeper et al.'s (2003) impoliteness super strategies. He therefore simplifies the communication of impoliteness by modifying Culpeper's impoliteness strategies. He focuses on the concept of face regardless of its aspects and puts forward two overarching 'tactics,' 'on record impoliteness' and 'off-record impoliteness' to avoid the positive and negative face. In Bousfield's (2008) study, speakers explicitly attack their interactants' faces, construct their faces in a non-harmonious or conflictive manner, and deny their face wants, rights, or needs when applying on-record impoliteness strategies. Furthermore, speakers may employ off-record strategies to attack their interactants' faces indirectly, by way of implicatures.

There is a gradual shift from the individual face to discursive and relational face-work. Researchers such as Locher (2004: 51), and Locher and Watts (2005: 11) investigate (im)politeness phenomenon in the relational approach to cover "the entire spectrum from polite and appropriate to impolite and inappropriate behavior." Locher and Watts (2005: 77) emphasize the concept of first-order (im)politeness as "a judgment made by a participant in an interaction with respect to the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the social behavior of co-participants, rather than a second-order, technical term in a theory of im/politeness." They specifically adopt the first-order notions of (im)politeness when examining how laypersons perceive impoliteness. Hence, they argue that (im)politeness is form of a relational work in which people judge each other's behavior based on dynamic norms and expectations shaped by their own past experiences.

In his book which adopts a sociopragmatic perspective, *Impoliteness: Using Language to Cause Offence*, Culpeper (2011) revises his definition of impoliteness. Culpeper's approach is rooted in how social and pragmatic factors interact to shape impoliteness. Indeed, he defines impoliteness as an attitude towards certain behaviors in a specific context, influenced by associated schemata used in interpreting and constructing social discourse. He adopts Spencer-Oatey's (2002) 'rapport management theory' to determine the role of the central face in the impoliteness phenomenon and to probe what kind of face has been tackled. Culpeper (2011) scrutinizes three fundamental notions in addition to face; social norms, intentionality, and emotions to elaborate on impoliteness. Therefore, Culpeper (2011: 22) defines impoliteness in his book as follows: "Impoliteness involves (a) a mental attitude held by a participant and comprised of negative evaluative beliefs about particular behaviors in particular social contexts, and (b) the activation of that attitude by those particular in-context behaviors." As Culpeper (2011) insists on a negative evaluation of specific behavior in a specific context,

Eelen (2001), Dániel Z Kádár and Sara Mills (2014), and Watts (2003) accentuate that (im)politeness is theorized as evaluations made within localized interactions. Arundale (2006, 2010) and Spencer-Oatey (2008) theorize (im)politeness as a form of interpersonal evaluation. In fact, their focus is on how these evaluations affect and shape interpersonal relationships and communication dynamics. Regardless of the significance of evaluation in (im)politeness, Haugh (2013a) states that evaluation has been notably under-theorized in pragmatics, as it can be carried out either by participants or analysts.

In summary, all of the above perspectives intersect on the importance of context and social norms in shaping what is considered (im)politeness. They also agree on the evaluative nature of (im)politeness, whether it is the negative evaluation emphasized by Culpeper (2011) or the more neutral evaluations noted by others. However, the primary departure lies in the focus on the evaluative process itself and its implications. Culpeper's (2011) specific emphasis on a negative mental attitude contrasts with the broader, more interaction-focused evaluations by Eelen (2001) and others. Furthermore, Haugh's (2013a) critique introduces a meta-perspective on the need for better theorization as he highlights the gap in the existing theories, emphasizing the need for a more robust theorization of the evaluative process itself, particularly regarding who is making the evaluation, participants or external analysts.

To delve deeper into the evaluative process and its implications, it is essential to distinguish between first-order and second-order concepts of (im)politeness, the focus of the next section. This distinction will provide a clearer understanding of how politeness operates both in everyday interactions and within theoretical frameworks. However, recent works also offer a more comprehensive and updated understanding of impoliteness, addressing previous gaps and incorporating new dimensions and methodologies. These works emphasize the importance of context in understanding impoliteness, recognizing that impoliteness is not only shaped by the social and interactional context in which it occurs but also that it is a dynamic phenomenon that evolves with ongoing interactions and societal norms. The evaluative process of impoliteness is central across these studies. Some explore how individuals and participants perceive and interpret impolite behaviors, aligning with the first-order concept of (im)politeness, while others take a broader view by applying second-order theoretical frameworks.

For instance, Culpeper and Hardaker (2017) expand on earlier work by providing a comprehensive overview of current research on linguistic impoliteness. Their volume includes new empirical studies and theoretical advancements that incorporate multimodal analysis, digital communication, and cross-cultural perspectives. By integrating multimodal and digital

perspectives, this work addresses the evolving nature of communication in the digital age, providing an understanding of how impoliteness manifests across different contexts and media. This expansion beyond traditional face-to-face interactions serves to contextualize impoliteness in contemporary communicative practices, reflecting the complex ways in which impoliteness can occur. Specifically, they explore how digital communication platforms like social media and instant messaging alter the perception and enactment of impoliteness, considering factors such as anonymity and the absence of non-verbal cues.

Haugh and Sinkeviciute (2019) focus on the role of metapragmatic awareness and judgments in constructing and perceiving impoliteness. They emphasize the importance of participants' understanding and interpretations of impoliteness, aligning with the first-order concept of (im)politeness. Their research enhances the theoretical framework by highlighting how metapragmatic awareness, participants' awareness of and reflections on language use, plays a critical role in the cognitive and interpretive processes involved in impoliteness. This focus on metapragmatic awareness addresses a previously under-theorized area, offering deeper insights into how individuals cognitively process and evaluate impolite behavior. For example, they examine how different cultural backgrounds influence individuals' awareness and judgments of what constitutes impolite behavior in various communicative situations.

Kádár and Haugh (2013, 2021) propose a discursive approach, focusing on how (im)politeness is negotiated in interaction and introducing the concept of "moral order" to explain the influence of societal norms. Their approach shifts the focus from static models of (im)politeness to dynamic, interactional processes, highlighting how impoliteness is contextually constructed and negotiated between interactants. By emphasizing the relational aspects of (im)politeness and how it is dynamically co-constructed, their work provides a more flexible and context-sensitive understanding, bridging the gap between individual behaviors and broader social norms. They investigate scenarios such as workplace interactions and public debates, illustrating how moral orders influence the interpretation and negotiation of impoliteness.

Similarly, Bargiela-Chiappini and Kádár (2020) examine how ritualized behaviors and communicative practices shape the perception and enactment of impoliteness. They highlight the role of context and cultural variability, addressing the need for a better understanding of impoliteness that accounts for cultural and situational differences. Their research underscores the importance of considering ritualized and culturally specific practices in analyzing impoliteness, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how impoliteness is perceived and enacted in various cultural contexts. For instance, they explore how ceremonial practices

in different cultures may frame certain actions as polite or impolite, which may not be immediately apparent without a deep cultural understanding.

Terkourafi (2020) introduces the concept of “impoliteness as practice,” viewing it as a dynamic set of behaviors shaped by social and interactional contexts. This approach moves beyond fixed definitions of impoliteness, offering a more adaptable framework that accounts for the fluid nature of social interactions and the contextual factors that shape impoliteness. Terkourafi’s perspective emphasizes the importance of viewing impoliteness as a practice that is continuously shaped by and responsive to social contexts, thus providing a more flexible framework for understanding impolite behavior. She examines real-life examples, such as conflict resolution in community settings, to demonstrate how impoliteness can be strategically employed and interpreted differently depending on the social context.

Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2022) investigates impoliteness in online environments, such as social media and forums, considering the impact of anonymity and technological affordances. This work addresses the gap related to digital communication, providing insights into how impoliteness is constructed and perceived in online interactions, which are increasingly relevant in today’s digital society. Blitvich’s research highlights the unique dynamics of online communication, where anonymity and the lack of non-verbal cues can intensify impolite interactions. By exploring impoliteness in digital contexts, this work expands the scope of impoliteness research to include contemporary forms of communication. For instance, she analyzes the role of trolls and flame wars on social media platforms, illustrating how anonymity can embolden individuals to engage in more aggressive and impolite behavior than they may in face-to-face interactions.

These recent contributions collectively advance the field by incorporating new empirical data, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches. They address the evolving nature of communication, the importance of context and cultural variability, and the cognitive processes involved in evaluating impoliteness. By integrating these insights, the understanding of impoliteness becomes more comprehensive, reflecting the complexity and diversity of (im)polite behavior in modern interactions.

2.3 First-order and second-order concepts of (im)politeness

In the study of (im)politeness, a critical distinction exists between first-order and second-order concepts, which illuminates the complex interplay between everyday experiences and theoretical frameworks. First-order concepts, or *Politeness1*, refer to the intuitive and

context-dependent evaluations of behavior, such as what is perceived as polite or impolite based on everyday social norms. These are grounded in the subjective experiences of individuals and reflect how people naturally interpret and react to interactions. On the other hand, second-order concepts, or *Politeness2*, involve the theoretical constructs and models developed by scholars to analyze and explain the principles underlying polite and impolite behavior. This theoretical perspective seeks to construct comprehensive frameworks that account for the variability of politeness across different cultures and contexts. By exploring the contributions of various researchers who bridge these two approaches, this section highlights how theoretical advancements, and empirical observations collectively enhance the understanding of (im)politeness.

Kienpointner (1997) examines various forms of rudeness and their communicative purposes, with a particular emphasis on impolite remarks. His study seeks to classify these types of rudeness and explore their impact on social interactions, especially in terms of how they either uphold or disturb social harmony. In addition to addressing the nature of rudeness, Kienpointner's work integrates everyday understandings of impoliteness with theoretical perspectives, underscoring the intricate nature of impolite behavior and its diverse expressions across different settings. Indeed, Kienpointner provides a foundation for further studies on how impoliteness operates in everyday interactions by classifying and examining the functions of rudeness. This foundational work is particularly relevant as (im)politeness research has attracted significant attention in sociolinguistics and pragmatics, focusing on the conceptualization and expression of politeness and impoliteness. It should be noted that a fundamental aspect of this field is distinguishing between first-order (folk) and second-order (theoretical) concepts of politeness (Watts, Ehlich, & Ide, 1992; Eelen, 2001).

Watts, Ehlich, and Ide (1992), along with Eelen (2001), laid the groundwork for differentiating first-order and second-order approaches in (im)politeness studies. According to their studies, first-order concepts or politeness1 involve social actors' evaluations of behaviors, such as impolite, rude, polite, or polished, based on the norms of their specific discursive contexts, reflecting everyday understandings. Second-order politeness, or *Politeness2*, refers to the theoretical and analytical concepts developed by researchers to study and explain the phenomena of politeness and impoliteness. This perspective is concerned with creating models and theories to understand the underlying principles and mechanisms of polite behavior across different cultures and contexts.

Eelen (2001) also provides a critical distinction between first-order and second-order understandings of politeness and impoliteness. He argues that traditional politeness theories

often overlook the layperson's perspective, leading to a gap between theoretical models and real-world applications. Eelen's work emphasizes the importance of integrating folk concepts into academic discourse, thus calling for a more comprehensive approach to (im)politeness that acknowledges everyday experiences and interpretations. This means one should consider how social actors themselves interpret and practice politeness in their interactions. Indeed, his study highlights the gap between how politeness is experienced and understood by ordinary people and how it is conceptualized by researchers. Eelen's critique pushes the field to reconsider and refine its approaches, ensuring that theoretical models do not become too detached from actual social practices. His work encourages a balanced approach that values both everyday experiences of politeness and rigorous theoretical analysis, promoting a more comprehensive study of (im)politeness.

Similarly, Watts (2003) offers an extensive overview of politeness theories, underscoring the necessity of considering both first-order and second-order concepts. He critiques the rigidity of existing models and advocates for a more dynamic understanding of (im)politeness. Watts' significant contribution lies in his argument for incorporating everyday judgments and theoretical models, thus fostering a more context-sensitive approach to politeness research. In the same manner, Terkourafi (2005) addresses the need to move beyond micro-level analyzes in (im)politeness research. She argues for the inclusion of broader social and cultural factors, which influence how politeness and impoliteness are perceived and enacted. Terkourafi's work is pivotal in expanding the scope of (im)politeness research to include macro-level influences, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of these phenomena.

In their work, Locher and Bousfield (2008) introduce the interplay between impoliteness and power, offering insights into how first-order and second-order concepts of impoliteness can be differentiated and analyzed in various contexts. They examine how power dynamics shape interactions and how impoliteness can serve as a tool for asserting or challenging authority. Their work highlights the complex relationship between language, power, and social norms, making a significant contribution to the field. Indeed, Locher and Bousfield (2008) highlight that second-order approaches use first-order notion at a theoretical level, aiming to develop frameworks that explain and categorize politeness behaviors. Bousfield (2008) also provides a detailed analysis of impoliteness strategies and their effects in interaction, highlighting both first-order and second-order perspectives. He explores how individuals use language to cause offense and the impact of these strategies on social relationships. Bousfield's work emphasizes the practical implications of impoliteness,

shedding light on the mechanisms through which it operates and its consequences for interpersonal communication.

Additionally, Culpeper (2011) provides a comprehensive exploration of impoliteness from both a first-order and second-order perspective. He introduces key theories and models of impoliteness and discusses how these can be applied to real-world interactions. In fact, he introduces key theories and models of impoliteness, discussing how these can be applied to real-world interactions. Culpeper's work is instrumental in advancing our understanding of impoliteness, providing a detailed framework for analyzing offensive language and behavior.

Kádár and Haugh (2013b) offer a thorough examination of politeness and impoliteness, distinguishing between first-order and second-order concepts of (im)politeness. They discuss how these concepts are understood and operationalized in different cultural contexts highlighting the variability and complexity of (im)politeness across societies. Their work underscores the importance of cultural sensitivity in (im)politeness research, contributing to a more global perspective on the subject. It is also worth mentioning that Haugh (2013) specifically focuses on the relationship between face, facework, and (im)politeness, distinguishing between first-order and second-order approaches to these concepts, emphasizing the need to consider both theoretical constructs and everyday interactions. Haugh's work provides valuable insights into how individuals manage their social identities and relationships through (im)politeness, offering a comprehensive view of the interplay between language, identity, and social norms.

The recent studies on first-order approach, such as Bousfield's (2021) illustrates how individuals perceive and evaluate (im)politeness during real-time interactions. In his book, Bousfield emphasizes the fluid nature of these evaluations, demonstrating that perceptions of (im)politeness can change based on various factors such as context, relationships between participants, and situational elements. Through detailed case studies and empirical data, he exemplifies how everyday (im)politeness is negotiated and understood by speakers in different settings. For instance, he examines workplace interactions, casual conversations, and online communication to show how (im)politeness strategies are adapted and interpreted differently depending on the context and the participants involved.

In the same manner, in their comprehensive overview, Kádár and Haugh (2013) examine how politeness is perceived and practiced across different cultures. They emphasize the importance of understanding first-order politeness, the layperson's perspective, by integrating cross-cultural studies and empirical research. They discuss various factors that influence perceptions of politeness, such as power dynamics, social distance, and cultural

norms. They provide numerous examples from different cultural contexts to illustrate how politeness is enacted and understood by individuals, highlighting the diversity and subjectivity of politeness practices. For example, they compare greeting rituals, expressions of gratitude, and forms of address in different cultures to show how politeness is contextually grounded and culturally specific.

Haugh (2020) also explores politeness as a dynamic social practice, focusing on how individuals understand and enact (im)politeness in their daily lives. He argues that (im)politeness is not a fixed attribute, but a process influenced by cultural norms, individual intentions, and the specific context of the interaction. Haugh analyzes a wide range of communicative situations, such as face-to-face conversations, service encounters, and intercultural interactions, to highlight the variability and complexity of (im)politeness practices. He shows that what counts as polite or impolite can vary significantly across different cultural and situational contexts, and he emphasizes the role of social norms and expectations in shaping these perceptions.

Shifting to the second-order approach, in their handbook, Culpeper, Haugh, and Kádár (2017) offer in-depth analyses and discussions on the theoretical aspects of (im)politeness. They cover foundational theories, methodological approaches, and applications of (im)politeness research. They compile contributions from leading researchers to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of the field and future research directions. They address key topics such as the conceptualization of impoliteness, methodological challenges in studying (im)politeness, and the implications of (im)politeness theories for understanding social interaction. It serves as a critical reference for researchers looking to deepen their understanding of the theoretical constructs underlying (im)politeness studies.

Terkourafi (2020) also examines the intersection of impoliteness and moral order, exploring how impoliteness is understood and theorized within different moral frameworks. She critically assesses existing theories of impoliteness, proposing new ways to conceptualize the relationship between impoliteness and societal norms. Terkourafi provides a detailed analysis of how impoliteness functions within various cultural and moral contexts, offering fresh perspectives on its theoretical underpinnings. For instance, she discusses how impoliteness can be perceived as a violation of moral expectations and how these perceptions vary across different societies. Her work highlights the need for more theoretical models that account for the moral dimensions of impoliteness.

In terms of the theoretical aspect, Locher and Larina (2020) also present a collection of essays addressing recent developments and innovations in (im)politeness theory. Locher and

Larina compile contributions from various scholars who critique and expand upon traditional (im)politeness theories. They cover new methodological approaches, theoretical models, and applications of (im)politeness research, highlighting the evolving nature of the field. Topics include the role of digital communication in shaping (im)politeness, the impact of global and local cultures on politeness practices, and the integration of new empirical methods in (im)politeness research. Their volume aims to push the boundaries of existing theories and propose new directions for future studies, making it a valuable resource for researchers interested in the latest theoretical advancements in (im)politeness.

In conclusion, the field of (im)politeness research is enriched by the contributions of scholars, who emphasize the importance of integrating both first-order and second-order perspectives. This integration fosters a more context-sensitive understanding of politeness and impoliteness, acknowledging the complexity of social interactions across different cultural contexts. The ongoing dialogue between first-order and second-order approaches ensures that the study of (im)politeness remains relevant and reflective of both theoretical advancements and everyday communicative practices.

2.4 Limitation of Western theories

Although early Western (im)politeness theories, rooted in face and maxim-based frameworks, provide valuable insights into individualistic and direct communication styles, they often fall short when applied to collectivist contexts such as Iranian political discourse. Therefore, in harmony with Kádár's (2017) findings, rituals and cultural concepts, unique to each culture, should be integrated to (im)politeness studies. Kádár (2017) extends Erving Goffman's foundational work on face and ritual, emphasizing the role of rituals in maintaining and managing social relationships and moral order. His approach moves beyond earlier frameworks by focusing on the formal and functional aspects of rituals in politeness research.

In line with Kádár's (2017) understanding of rituals, this study also introduces the concept of *âberu*, particularly in the context of maintaining and managing social relationships and moral order. In Iranian culture maintaining *âberu* involves adhering to social norms and behaviors that preserve one's honor, dignity, grandeur, reputation etc. Rituals in Iranian society often serve to reinforce cultural norms and values, ensuring individuals act in ways that are socially acceptable and honorable (*âberu-mand*).

According to Kádár (2017), rituals are defined as recurrent, emotively invested actions that reinforce or transform interpersonal relationships. In detail, rituals are not one-time events

but recurrent actions that follow a certain formality. They are systematic and structured interactions that occur regularly within a community. They carry emotional significance for the participants. They are not merely procedural but involve an emotional investment that strengthens their impact on interpersonal relationships. In the same vein, the ethnographic research of this study demonstrates that the concept of *âberu* is deeply tied to emotional and social investment, where maintaining one's *âberu* is crucial to personal and familial reputation. Rituals, such as *ehterâm* (respect, deference) by adopting *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy), *rudarbâyesti* (state or feeling of distance out of respect), *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering), *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), and *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering), are emotionally charged events that enhance one's *âberu*.

Kádár (2017) emphasizes that rituals are pivotal in maintaining or altering relationships between individuals, as they serve to reinforce existing bonds or transform interaction dynamics. These rituals are intricately linked to the communal moral order, helping to uphold or restore a perceived moral balance within a community by addressing social norms and values. This perspective is particularly relevant in Iranian culture, where rituals play a central role in preserving *âberu* (honor and social reputation) and in sustaining social relationships. In the Iranian cultural framework, rituals such as *ehterâm* (respect), *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy), *rudarbâyesti* (state or feeling of distance out of respect), *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering), *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), and *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering) are crucial for demonstrating and maintaining *âberu*. These practices are deeply embedded in the fabric of daily life and social interactions, reflecting a commitment to societal norms and collective values. For instance, within Iranian families, adult children often remain with their parents until marriage, and even in cases of divorce, they may return to their families. This practice underscores the mutual dependence and interconnectedness within the family unit, where individuals identify strongly with their ingroup. In fact, the sense of 'we' in Iranian culture extends beyond familial bonds to encompass a broader social responsibility. Each member of the collective bears the responsibility of upholding the group's honor by adhering to cultural norms. This collective responsibility ensures that individuals conform to both group-specific and broader societal norms, thereby protecting their own and their group's social standing. In this context, rituals not only reinforce personal and familial relationships but also serve to align individual behavior with communal expectations, maintaining the intricate balance of honor and respect within the society.

In his study, Keshavarz (2020) also focuses on Persian address forms and self-reference terms, exploring how these linguistic practices function in social interactions within Iranian

society. The study specifically examines how these forms of address, related to self-abasement and other-elevating, help navigate social hierarchies and relationships. While Keshavarz's research does not cover a broad range of Iranian rituals or provide detailed case studies of rituals in various social settings, it offers valuable insights into how language functions as a ritualistic practice in reinforcing social norms and maintaining social cohesion. His findings complement Kádár's theoretical framework by illustrating how Persian address forms and self-reference terms function as ritualistic practices that reinforce social norms and navigate social relationships, thereby supporting the argument that language-based rituals play a crucial role in upholding social order and cohesion. However, it should be mentioned that Kádár's (2017) theoretical framework emphasizes the significance of linguistic practices, including rituals of politeness and respect, in managing interpersonal dynamics and sustaining communal values. His findings suggest that such linguistic practices are integral to maintaining social order and cohesion. This study builds on these insights by integrating the concept of *âberu* (honor and social reputation) into the study of rituals and social interactions. While earlier Western theories of (im)politeness offer valuable perspectives on individualistic and direct communication styles, they may not fully address the cultural nuances present in Persian pragmatics (Iranian political discourse).

Kádár (2017) views rituals as phenomena that are co-constructed through interactions, meaning that their meaning and impact are shaped by the participants' interactions and their shared understanding of the ritual's significance. This perspective underscores that the significance of a ritual evolves through social engagement and mutual interpretation among participants. In the same manner, the concept of *âberu* is also constructed and co-constructed through interaction within connectedness or separation via practicing *ehterâm* (respect, deference) through adopting the following cultural schemas; *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy), *rudarbâyesti* (state or feeling of distance out of respect), *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering), *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), and *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering). This study highlights how the sociocultural components of *âberu* are intricately linked to the participants' shared experiences and interpretations within their community of practice. It underscores how the importance and application of *âberu* are contextually determined by the specific values and norms of the community, thereby influencing which aspects of *âberu* are prioritized in social interactions.

He, Kádár (2017) also introduces new concept of 'fringing' referring to the 'decorative' form of behavior within rituals that can trigger (im)politeness inferences. This behavior is not always strategic but is emotively invested and can influence how the ritual is perceived. This concept is particularly relevant to understanding Iranian political discourse. Iranian presidential

candidates and politicians frequently engage in ritualistic behaviors that embody fringing to navigate and influence their social and political landscapes. In other words, the Iranian presidential candidates' interactions indicate that they often engage in ritualistic behaviors strategically to protect and enhance their *âberu*. For instance, acts of public generosity and displays of humility toward the nation, or demonstrating submission and obedience to the supreme leader, are strategic maneuvers designed to preserve or enhance one's *âberu*. These ritualistic behaviors not only reflect adherence to cultural norms but also serve to reinforce the politician's position within the social and political hierarchy. By leveraging fringing, Iranian politicians can subtly reinforce their legitimacy and political capital while also appealing to the emotive aspects of their audience's perceptions, thereby maintaining or elevating their status within the complex social and political framework.

In general, various units within the same culture possess diverse norms, and people from various cultures own differing cultural conceptualizations. Consequently, the social actors from collectivist cultures may tackle different cultural concepts and rituals within their social interactions from those from individualistic ones. Therefore, social actors from individualistic or collectivist cultures grasp heterogeneous cultural schemas within their daily social practices. For instance, the concept of face and the intentional face attack in a particular social context, such as a political discourse, are critical in the impoliteness phenomenon in a Western individualist culture (Fernandez Garcia, 2014; Murphy, 2014). However, in Iranian collectivist culture, the concept of *âberu* (literally honor), and the intentional *âberu*-threatening behavior capture the Iranian politicians' non-harmonious interactions the best. Inevitably, in this chapter, I initially presented a body of literature on impoliteness in individualistic societies since what happens there is somewhat similar to what occurs in Iranian collectivist society. In both contexts, there is the communication of conflictive verbal behavior, or the manifestation of the intentional non-harmonious interaction, which is threatening. However, the damage inflicted on people's rights, social image, and personality in collectivist societies can be extended to one's immediate networks or groups.

It should be highlighted that in Western contexts, it is one's face being threatened while in the Iranian context, it is their *âberu* being attacked. Indeed, due to cultural differences between Western and Eastern societies, this research particularly introduces the concept of *âberu*, with its individual and collectivist aspects, for Iranian political discourse in chapter four. The concept of *âberu* best fits to analyze the Iranian politicians' intentional non-harmonious interaction or their threatening behavior negatively evaluated within Iranian sociocultural and religious norms.

As a brief introduction to *âberu*, this study illustrates that *âberu* is a dynamic phenomenon whose meaning changes in different relationships; it is maintained, enhanced, or damaged during an interaction. According to this study, *âberu* is constituted and destroyed when politicians from the same party build an association to enhance their collectivist *âberu* but simultaneously dissociate themselves from their rivals to threaten either aspect of their *âberu* intentionally within their ongoing interactions on televised presidential debates. They systematically challenge the components of their opponents' *âberu* to offend or disgrace them publicly, against public belief and expectations. Indeed, Iranian politicians stimulate the third party, the audience, people, or *mardom* to carry out negative evaluations against their intended opponents. Politicians intentionally make their opponents suffer from *âberu*-loss to make them lose the election. In this fashion, Iranian politicians achieve their institutional goal when intentionally committing an *âberu*-threatening act. In chapter four, I illustrate the concept of *âberu* and its significance in Iranian culture and among Iranians and Iranian politicians.

However, in the following sections, I initially demonstrate why Brown and Levinson's (1987) concepts of positive face and negative face, and Spencer-Oatey's (2002) rapport management theory are not fully applicable to Persian social interaction in general and to Iranian presidential debate discourse in particular.

2.5 A critique of the theory of face and its applicability to Iranian culture

Goffman (1972) introduces the notion of the face as a central concept in communication when individuals project public images for themselves in their daily interactions. Goffman (1972: 7) defines face as

the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. The face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes-albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself (Goffman 1972: 7).

He highlights that the face is each person's most personal and valuable possession, the source of their security and pleasure, but gained on condition. Indeed, society lends them the face conditionally if they behave appropriately to the face that they project. According to Goffman (1967), individuals' position in society to build their public image limits their behavior to maintain their face. They are expected to uphold their self-image, treat themselves

with respect, and avoid actions or activities that threaten their self-image. In this respect, Goffman (1967) declares that the maintenance of face can be claimed by two duty considerations: duty to oneself, known as pride, and duty to wider social units, called honor. Subsequently, people accept such limitations in behavior due to pride or honor. Goffman compares those behavioral restrictions to jail when mentioning that “approved attributes and their relation to face make every man his own jailer; this is a fundamental social constraint even though each man may like his cell” (Goffman 1967: 9-10). Afterwards, he states that each person is concerned with his own face and others’ faces when showing self-respect and simultaneous consideration for others’ feelings and endeavor to uphold their faces. Therefore, Goffman defines defensive and protective orientations towards saving faces and expresses that people defend their faces and protect other participants’ faces at the same time, regardless of their dominance. Consequently, face concerns escalate facework, which Goffman (1967: 8) refers to it as “the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face.” He also argues that it “serves to counteract ‘incidents’- that is, events whose effective symbolic implications threaten face” (Goffman 1967: 8).

Brown and Levinson (1987) adopt Goffman’s (1967) notion of the face to postulate their politeness theory, in which they attribute two aspects to the face: negative face and positive face. They defined them as follows.

Negative face: the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 62)...[the] want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 129).

Positive face: the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 62)...[the] perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/ acquisitions/ values resulting from them) should be thought of as desirable (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 101).

However, numerous researchers (Hill et al. 1986; Matsumoto 1988; Ide 1989; Matsumoto 1989; & Mao 1994) criticize Brown and Levinson’s view of the negative face, the notion of imposition embedded in individualism in Western culture and questioned the universality of face. In her work, Ide (1989) argues that politeness should not be universally understood through the lens of face alone, as proposed by Brown and Levinson. Instead, she introduces the concept of *wakimae* a Japanese term that emphasizes discernment, situational appropriateness, and social indexing. *Wakimae* involves the use of linguistic and non-linguistic cues to show respect and maintain social harmony according to the situational context and

social norms. Ide's work highlighted that in Japanese culture, politeness is more about adhering to social norms and fulfilling role expectations rather than managing face as an individualistic notion.

Matsumoto (1988, 1989) also contributes significantly to the critique of the universality of Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. In her studies, Matsumoto emphasizes that the Japanese concept of *amae* (dependence on the benevolence of others) and hierarchical social structures play a crucial role in Japanese politeness practices. She argues that the Western-centric notion of face does not fully capture the collectivist and hierarchical nature of Japanese society, where the maintenance of group harmony and adherence to social roles and expectations are paramount. Matsumoto's findings suggest that the Western concept of individual face needs to be adjusted to account for the communal and relational aspects prevalent in many non-Western cultures.

Mao (1994) focuses on the differences between Chinese and Western conceptions of face and politeness. Mao highlights that in Chinese culture, face is closely tied to one's social roles and status within the community, rather than individual autonomy. He introduced the concepts of *lian* (face as moral character) and *mianzi* (face as social prestige), which are essential to understanding Chinese interpersonal interactions. Mao's work demonstrated that Chinese face management involves maintaining one's moral standing and social reputation within the collective, which contrasts with the more individualistic approach observed in Western contexts. His critique illustrates that Brown and Levinson's model may overlook the cultural specifics that influence face and politeness in different societies.

The critiques and findings of Ide, Matsumoto, and Mao underscore the need for a more accurate understanding of politeness that incorporates cultural variability. These scholars argue for the importance of considering local cultural contexts, social norms, and values when studying politeness and impoliteness. They advocate for moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach and developing theories that can account for the diverse ways in which different cultures conceptualize and enact politeness.

In summary, while face remains a central construct in understanding politeness and impoliteness, its application and interpretation vary significantly across cultures. The works of Ide, Matsumoto, and Mao provide essential insights into these cultural variations, challenging the universality of Western-based politeness theories and calling for more culturally sensitive frameworks. In other words, the Western studies often reflect an Anglo-centric viewpoint of interpersonal relations, predominantly focusing on individualistic societies. Therefore, this perspective may not fully capture the intricacies of (im)politeness dynamics in collectivist

cultures or societies with different social structures and norms such as Iran with its own unique cultural schemas.

In her critique of face, Koutlaki (1997) also states that Brown and Levinson's concept of negative face and the related notion of imposition have extremely limited relevance in Iranian culture. According to Koutlaki's (1997) study, negative face-defined as an individual's explicitly acknowledged right to maintain freedom from imposition-does not seem to hold the same importance as Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest. However, Koutlaki (1997) does not claim that negative face does not exist in Iranian culture; on the contrary, she argues that a person's right to freedom of action is a fundamental human right. Her ethnographic interviews, however, indicate that Persian native speakers did not attach importance to a person's right to have their actions unimpeded. She therefore highlights that the Persian concept of face is oriented toward an ideal social identity and public image, rather than an individual one. Indeed, the Persian concept of face is inseparable from the group and derives its meaning in connection with it. In this framework, Koutlaki (1997) defines two interrelated aspects of the Persian concept of face in her proposed politeness system: *šaxsiat* (personality, character, honor, self-respect, and social standing) and *ehterâm* (respect, honor, esteem, dignity). Koutlaki argues that Iranians should consider both aspects of face in their daily interactions to maintain politeness. *Šaxsiat*, a person's identity, results from their manner, educational background, family background, and upbringing. *Ehterâm* is realized through speakers' adherence to politeness and *ta'arof* rules (ritual courtesies) and their consideration of the addressee's position, age, status, and relationship when making offers or issuing invitations. In critique of face, Koutlaki (1997), also states that Brown and Levinson's concept of negative face and the related notion of imposition, have an extremely limited pertinence in Iranian culture. According to Koutlaki's (1997) study, negative face as an individual's explicitly acknowledged right to maintain freedom of imposition does not seem to have the same importance as Brown and Levinson (1987) ascribe. However, Koutlaki (1997) does not claim that negative face does not exist in Iranian culture, on the contrary, she expresses that a person's right to freedom of action is their fundamental human right. However, her ethnographic interviews indicate that Persian native speakers did not attach any importance to a person's right to have their actions unimpeded. She therefore highlights that the Persian face is oriented toward an ideal social identity, and public image, rather than an individual image. Indeed, the Iranian concept of the face does not detach itself from the group but grasps its meaning in connection with it. In this fashion, Koutlaki (1997) defines two interrelated aspects of the Persian face in her proposed Persian politeness system: *šaxsiat* (personality, character, honor, self-respect, and social

standing) and *ehterâm* (respect, honor, esteem, dignity). Koutlaki claims that Iranians should consider both aspects of the face in their daily interactions to be polite. *Šaxsiat*, a person's identity, is the result of their manner, educational background, family background, and upbringing. *Ehterâm* is realized through speakers' adherence to the politeness and *ta'arof* rules (ritual courtesies) and the consideration of their addressee's position, age, status, and relationship when making offers or issuing invitations.

It should be noted that Koutlaki (1997) draws an essential difference between the two 'sides' of the face. *Šaxsiat* has its root in individuals and their backgrounds and is more static, while *ehterâm* is more dynamic and flows from speakers to addressees. In other words, *ehterâm* is almost always present in Iranian interactions, and it is often reliant on a person's *šaxsiat*. As shown, *šaxsiat* and *ehterâm*'s manifestations are closely intertwined. People demonstrate their *šaxsiat* (personality) through their behavior when conforming to social manners and treating their interlocutors with the appropriate amount of *ehterâm* (respect). She also refers to *šaxsiat* as *âberu*; however, Sharifian (2011) differentiates between the two concepts (*šaxsiat* and *âberu*). He claims that *âberu* is engaged with social stratification and social groupings such as family status in Iranian society. On the contrary, *šaxsiat* is more about 'individuality' as being situated within an individual. He states that *šaxsiat* is principally interpreted when an individual attempt to create a socially admissible image of *šaxs* (person) in the eyes of others. He also argues *šaxsiat* is a dynamic concept, one that can be acquired or diminished through social interactions.

Sharifian (2007) also introduces *âberu* as the most dominant social schema in Iranian cultural cognition and defines it as a multifaceted cultural schema in which in-group members' faces are interconnected, and their *âberu* is influenced by the behavior and personality of the entire group. Sharifian (2011) states that the closest concept to *âberu* in other cultures is 'face,' whose probable Persian English equivalents may be honor, reputation, pride, and dignity. In the same vein, Tayebi (2016) accentuates that since *âberu* is closely associated with the concept of face and social image, Iranians not only maintain and enhance their own *âberu*, but also safeguard *âberu* of their extended networks and interlocutors' and avoid threatening it. In summary, according to Sharifian (2007, 2011), Sharifian and Tayebi (2017), and Tayebi (2016), *âberu* can be defined as a concept constructed from a blend of social values and norms referring to dignity, reputation, and honor and it is boosted or lost in Iranians' daily interactions.

This understanding aligns with Fetzer's (2013) exploration of procedural knowledge in political discourse. Fetzer (2013) examines the impact of cultural norms, values, and ideologies on the strategies and rhetoric used by politicians. She emphasizes that individuals within a

speech community have a procedural understanding of their group's linguistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural conventions. This procedural knowledge shapes the way meaning is created and understood in verbal exchanges, including political discussions. In Iranian culture, procedural knowledge guides how individuals navigate the dual aspects of *šaxsiat* and *ehterâm* in their daily interactions. It also informs how *âberu* is maintained and negotiated within social and, particularly, political contexts.

The research by Koutlaki (1997), Sharifian (2007, 2011), and Tayebi (2016) highlights the profound interconnection between individual identity and group dynamics within Iranian culture. This interconnectedness is emblematic of collectivist societies like Iran, where social harmony and group cohesion take precedence over individual autonomy and personal accomplishments. In such contexts, personal achievements are often evaluated in terms of how they contribute to the group's overall *âberu*. Consequently, a procedural knowledge of *âberu* is crucial for understanding how individuals navigate their social and political relationships. It reflects the broader collectivist values that influence interactions, demonstrating how individuals' behaviors are shaped by the imperative to maintain and enhance collective honor and reputation.

According to Hofstede et al. (2010), in individualist societies, members' ties are weak, and strong ties are limited to members of immediate families. They also claim that in societies with individualist cultures, individuals prioritize themselves, safeguard their own rights, and select the groups they wish to belong to. On the contrary, researchers such as Triandis (1995) and Markus and Kitayama (1991) have further elaborated on the distinctions between collectivist and individualist cultures. Triandis (1995) suggests that in collectivist cultures, there is a greater emphasis on group harmony and interdependence, with individuals deriving their identity from belonging to cohesive social units such as extended families, communities, or ethnic groups. Similarly, Markus and Kitayama (1991) emphasize the role of the self in shaping cultural differences, highlighting that in collectivist cultures, the self is defined in relation to others, whereas in individualist cultures, the emphasis is on personal autonomy and distinctiveness.

Hofstede et al. (2010) highlight that individuals pledge loyalty to their groups to receive mutual support and protection in collectivist cultures. This notion aligns with the findings of other researchers such as Oyserman et al. (2002), who emphasize the importance of social embeddedness and collective goals in collectivist cultures. They argue that individuals in collectivist societies prioritize the needs of the group over their own interests, fostering strong interpersonal bonds and a sense of shared identity. This emphasis on group cohesion and

mutual support contributes to the maintenance of social harmony and solidarity within collectivist cultures, contrasting with the emphasis on individual autonomy and self-expression prevalent in individualist societies.

Therefore, Iran is regarded as a collectivist society. One notable study that characterizes Iran as a collectivist culture is conducted by Triandis (1995). Triandis discusses the distinction between individualist and collectivist cultures and places Iran within the category of collectivist cultures. Additionally, research by Hofstede, Hofstede, and Minkov (2010) provides insights into cultural dimensions that influence social behavior in Iran. While Hofstede's study does not explicitly label Iran as collectivist, it does shed light on cultural values such as the importance of family and community ties, which are characteristic of collectivist cultures. He, indeed, emphasizes the importance of group harmony and interdependence in collectivist societies, traits that are often associated with Iranian culture. Furthermore, studies by Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier (2002) and Markus and Kitayama (1991) offer perspectives on cultural differences between individualist and collectivist societies. Although they may not specifically mention Iran, their frameworks can be applied to understand the collectivist tendencies observed in Iranian culture, such as the emphasis on group solidarity and the prioritization of collective goals over individual needs.

As a result, the critique of face in Persian pragmatics and alternative concepts such as *šaxsiat*, *ehterâm* and *âberu* sheds light on the dynamics of social interaction in Iranian society. It underscores the need for a culturally sensitive approach to understanding and analyzing interpersonal communication, recognizing the intricate balance between individual identity and collective harmony within collectivist cultures like Iran. In particular, the concept of face with its negative aspect and individualistic attribute is not widely applicable to Iranian culture and the political discourse discussed in this study.

2.6 Spencer-Oatey's rapport management and its applicability to the Iranian hierarchical and patriarchal system

Spencer-Oatey's (2002) rapport management model encompasses two motivational sources: concerns over face and sociality rights. The former refers to Brown and Levinson's (1987) face model, but also incorporates a social/interpersonal perspective through its two interrelated aspects: quality face and social identity face. Face is associated with personal/social

value, including people's sense of worth, dignity, honor, credibility, reputation, and competence.

Sociality rights partly relate to Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of negative face but are not limited to autonomy-imposition issues. They also address association and cost-benefit concerns. Therefore, equity and association rights are interrelated aspects of sociality rights that focus on personal/social entitlements, reflecting people's concerns about fairness, consideration, and social inclusion or exclusion.

According to Culpeper (2005), in Spencer-Oatey's (2002) rapport management model, the infringement of sociality rights may merely result in annoyance or irritation. However, the violation of face rights leads to a sense of face threat or loss for the intended person.

2.6.1 Face rights: Quality face in Iranian culture

As stated by Spencer-Oatey (2002), in terms of quality face, people expect to be evaluated positively based on their personal attributes, such as abilities, appearance, competence, and confidence. Quality face is similar to Brown and Levinson's (1987) concept of positive face.

In Chapter Four, I illustrated that *âberu* consists of two components: sociocultural components (SC) and institutional components (IC). The former includes factors such as possessions, appearance, social status, education, and age, which influence Iranians' *âberu* and exist in their cognition. The latter refers to localized or institutional factors that affect only Iranian politicians' *âberu*, rather than that of every individual. Indeed, the institutional component of *âberu* is specifically observed among Iranian politicians.

This study shows that Spencer-Oatey's (2002) concept of quality face may be roughly comparable to the cognitive pragmatic components of *âberu* since Iranians evaluate one another in terms of their level of education, possession, appearance, age, and profession. Indeed, they do so to evaluate their interlocutors' *âberu*. In other words, Iranians endeavor to attain such qualities to maintain decent *âberu* or enhance their *âberu*. In chapter four, I explain how the above-mentioned factors play significant roles in Iranians' *âberu*. In brief, Iranians can enhance their *âberu* among their own group members and enjoy a superior social status in the eyes of the rest of society if they achieve a higher, or even decent level of the above-mentioned qualities.

In this respect, Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) provide an example in their study where a speaker perceives her friend's comment about her shoes as offensive in the presence of a third party or *mardom* (people) since the comment implies her short height, threatening her 'quality face.' Their example illustrates that the target person has been negatively evaluated in terms of her appearance, offensive per se, but the offense has been intensified by the presence of a third party. This example highlights how crucial it is for Iranians to be positively evaluated by others before significant *mardom*. Sharifian and Tayebi (2017: 404) claim that "quality face is also directly associated with one's social image or *âberu*; consequently, comments made about one's personal qualities in public can threaten one's social image and be evaluated as offensive." As a result, Iranians endeavor to enhance their qualities, or the sociocultural components (SC) of their *âberu*, to boost their *âberu* in the eyes of others or the public. However, every pragmatic component of *âberu* influences one's *âberu* idiosyncratically. Challenging some pragmatic components of *âberu* may be more threatening while questioning the others may be less damaging.

In Iranian culture, acquiring these qualities creates certain expectations among Iranians. In other words, possessing superior qualities command more respect or positive evaluation among one's group members and society at large. For instance, educated people with prestigious professions are generally interpreted positively by both their in-group members and society as a whole. These people could enhance their *âberu* (credibility or reputation) by improving their social status or social image in public through higher education or career advancement. Arguably, these expectations may evolve into widespread beliefs that people must accumulate qualities or particularly the pragmatic components of their *âberu* to be recognized as an *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) member of society. However, if Iranians do not practice or embody some of the influential components, it does not imply that they are not *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) people or they lack *âberu*. For instance, while higher education leads people to enjoy a better social status and respect, its absence does not necessarily result in *âberu*-loss. However, Izadi (2016) argues that quitting tertiary education unfinished may result in *âberu*-damage for Iranians. Furthermore, data analysis in this study suggests that questioning politicians or their networks' credentials constitutes an *âberu*-threatening behavior.

It is important to note that each Iranian may enhance their group's *âberu* by individually improving the qualities or factors that influence their *âberu*. When Iranians enhance their individual qualities, they contribute their collectivist *âberu* and strengthen a collectivist reputation, honor, grandeur, or credibility for their immediate groups. In other words, they boost their collectivist *âberu* in the public eye in which their immediate group is a part of a

bigger society. Each group acknowledges other social groups as individual social units and evaluates them collectively by attributing their individuals' behavior to the entire group.

Although Spencer-Oatey's (2002) concept of quality face may be comparable to cognitive or sociocultural components of *âberu*, it does not encompass the collectivist aspect of *âberu*. For instance, in Iranian families whose children attain higher education and prestigious occupations and earning titles such as Mr./Ms. Dr or Engineer not only do they build self-*âberu* but also contribute to their families' collectivist *âberu* as children's success reflects their parents' proper upbringing. Indeed, Iranians maintain or boost their collectivist *âberu* by strengthening their individual *âberu* through enhancements in the sociocultural components (SC) of *âberu*, such as maintaining an appropriate appearance, pursuing higher education to enhance competence, and acquiring possessions (see 4.5).

It is important to recognize that specific pragmatic components also influence *âberu* of particular groups. In other words, some groups are expected to practice or uphold certain qualities. For instance, Iranian women must uphold their chastity to be acknowledged by their in-group members. They must avoid engaging in sex before marriage in most Iranian families. Otherwise, they risk exclusion from their immediate groups to prevent extended collectivist *âberu*-loss. As a result, the practice of honor-killing is justified when the male members murder the female relatives, being accused of bringing dishonor or shame upon the family. In other words, male family members commit honor-killings to safeguard their family's collectivist *âberu* in the eyes of *mardom* (people). As illustrated, chastity is a unique factor affecting women's *âberu*, whereas men are exempt from this expectation. Therefore, Iranians must protect the pragmatic component of their *âberu* to preserve their individual *âberu* and be recognized as *âberu-mand* (respected) members of their groups. Otherwise, they may face exclusion to safeguard the collectivist *âberu* of their immediate groups. In summary, if one threatens their own *âberu* or fails to uphold the pragmatic components of their *âberu*, they also threaten their directly related groups' *âberu*.

It appears that Spencer-Oatey's (2002) concept of quality face is practiced similarly across different genders. Moreover, it is uncertain whether the absence of quality face may lead to serious adverse consequences. In this regard, Spencer-Oatey's (2002) quality face does not fully meet our expectation for analyzing this data.

2.6.2 Face rights: Social identity face in Iranian culture

The second interrelated aspect of face is

social identity face: we have a fundamental desire for people to acknowledge and uphold our social identities or roles, e.g., as group leader, valued customer, a close friend. Social identity face is concerned with the value that we effectively claim for ourselves in terms of social or group roles, and is closely associated with our sense of public worth (Spencer-Oatey 2002: 540).

Indeed, Spencer-Oatey (2002) explicitly incorporates the interpersonal or social component in her model when distinguishing between independent and interdependent perspectives. In other words, she goes beyond the personal or individual conceptualization of face proposed by Brown and Levinson.

Based on the ethnographic research conducted for this study, all participants unanimously emphasize the role of *âberu* among Iranians. They stress that Iranians would be acknowledged by their social roles when they are *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*, respected) people. This means that individuals must uphold components of *âberu* to be regarded as *âberu-mand* members of their immediate groups representing those groups positively in society. For instance, as illustrated in Section 2.4.1, in Iranian culture, women are expected to embody an additional quality, chastity, to be acknowledged as *âberu-mand* in-group members. Otherwise, they cannot preserve any social identity. Indeed, no one can claim their social roles or individual and collectivist identities without minding the sociocultural components of their *âberu*.

All Iranians endeavor to develop both their individual and collectivist *âberu* to uphold their social identities while enhancing the cognitive and pragmatic components of their *âberu*. Iranians also desire for their in-group members to acknowledge and maintain their social identities and roles. To achieve this, they protect their individual *âberu* by safeguarding their collectivist *âberu*. Iranians cannot claim public worth without attending to the collectivist *âberu* of their groups. Indeed, they must first be recognized as *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) members within their own directly related groups in order to preserve their roles among their in-group members. It is crucial to be accepted as an *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) person by one's immediate network, as their behavior is attributed to their in-group members by the rest of society. In other words, society or *mardom* recognizes them as either valued or unworthy connected parts of larger units. As seen, one's social role is closely linked with their in-group

members' collective worth. Therefore, the feature introduced by Spencer-Oatey does not fully align with Iranian collectivist culture, in which collectivist *âberu* is essential for presenting social identities and roles. In brief, every Iranian has the responsibility to protect and enhance both aspects of their *âberu* in order to preserve their individual and collectivist social standing. In other words, Iranians must enhance their *âberu* to ensure others acknowledge their social roles.

2.6.3 Sociality rights: Equity rights in Iranian culture

Spencer-Oatey (2002: 540) defines equity rights as follows, and introduces cost-benefit and autonomy-imposition as vital components for equity entitlement:

We have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to personal consideration from others so that we are treated fairly: that we are not unduly imposed upon or unfairly ordered about, that we are not taken advantage of or exploited, and that we receive the benefits to which we are entitled (Spencer-Oatey 2002: 540).

According to Hofstede et al.'s (2010) classification, Iranian culture reflects a hierarchy versus equality dynamic in its perception of power distance. Specifically, Iranians tend to assume that those in positions of power possess greater authority, which stems from their knowledge, age, wealth, education, appearance, or gender. In this context, individuals in power are regarded as more *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) by default. Within this hierarchical system, subordinates often obey those in power, either consciously or unconsciously. Examples of these power dynamics include teachers versus students, doctors versus nurses, nurses versus patients, parents versus children, fathers versus mothers, husbands versus wives, brothers versus sisters, the highly educated versus the uneducated, the rich versus the poor, and, in general, males versus females, all reflecting asymmetrical social power. Iranians acknowledge that some individuals within their groups instinctively command more authority and power, such as parents in families, elderly individuals in various contexts, and teachers in classrooms. Consequently, subordinate members carefully regulate their verbal and nonverbal behaviors, opinions, or criticisms when interacting with those at the top of the hierarchy to avoid threatening their own *âberu*. In fact, Iranians are mindful of their powerful interlocutors' *âberu* according to sociocultural norms in order to maintain their own *âberu*, as this process is cyclical. The more they regard their interlocutors' *âberu* positively, the more they enhance their own *âberu*.

In essence, females are regarded as the secondary gender, youth and children are undervalued due to the absence of (advanced) age, and students and patients are seen as submissive due to their lack of power within the Iranian hierarchical system. In fact, these subordinates do not seek equality or equity, as cultural and societal norms dictate that they must respect or submit unhesitatingly to those in power. Moreover, according to the first two maxims of politeness outlined by Leech (1983), tact and generosity, in Iranian culture, subordinates aim to minimize the cost and maximize the benefit to others, while minimizing the benefit and maximizing the cost to themselves. This behavior is intended to protect their own *âberu* by being regarded as considerate individuals, even if it comes at their own expense. Arguably, the role of context, the relationship between interactants, and their shared schema must not be overlooked when investigating whether these maxims seriously or slightly impact one's individual and collectivist *âberu*.

A characteristic example of Leech's (1983) maxims of tact and generosity is the concept of humbleness among Iranians. In this context, they minimize the benefit to themselves and maximize it for their interlocutors, while also maximizing the cost to themselves and minimizing it for their interlocutors. This behavior demonstrates their awareness of *adab* (etiquette) or politeness, in line with Koutlaki's (1997) findings. As shown, the concept of equity loses its meaning when a certain group is expected to prioritize the needs and interests of others in order to preserve their own *âberu*. In other words, subordinates must be vigilant to avoid threatening their collectivist *âberu*. For example, youth are particularly responsible for not threatening their parents' *âberu*, which has been accumulated over a lifetime. Indeed, the costs often outweigh the benefits for subordinate individuals when they are socially compelled to protect their collectivist *âberu* more rigorously.

In a society with such impositions on specific genders or groups, Spencer-Oatey's (2002) equity rights have limited applicability, as pre-existing expectations and assumptions always influence one's *âberu*. As a result, certain groups, such as men versus women, clerics versus non-clerics, older individuals versus youth, and Persians versus other ethnicities, are granted more autonomy and benefits, leading to a higher social status. Therefore, the key factor among Iranians, regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, or other characteristics, is that they accumulate *âberu* from an early age and carefully protect it throughout their lives, as it plays a crucial role in both their individual and collective existence.

2.6.4 Sociality rights: Association rights in Iranian culture

Association rights are another aspect of sociality rights which Spencer-Oatey (2002) describes as follows:

We have a fundamental belief that we are entitled to the association with others that are in keeping with the type of relationship that we have with them. These association rights relate partly to interactional association/dissociation (the type and extent of our involvement with others), so that we feel, for example, that we are entitled to an appropriate amount of conversational interaction and social chit-chat with others (e.g., not ignored on the one hand, but not overwhelmed on the other). They also relate to affective association/dissociation (the extent to which we share concerns, feelings, and interests (Spencer-Oatey 2002: 540).

Spencer-Oatey (2002) emphasizes that the nature of the relationship, sociocultural norms, and personal preferences determine “an appropriate amount” of conversational interaction. However, in Iranian collectivist culture, satisfying group norms is considered more critical than attending to personal preferences when determining the appropriate amount of conversational interaction. Iranian individuals must fulfill the needs of their associative groups to protect and enhance their collectivist *âberu* in order to be recognized as worthy members. Therefore, collectivist preferences take precedence, as protecting collectivist *âberu* is the primary objective. In other words, collectivist interests outweigh individual preferences in Iranian culture. Indeed, Iranians protect their collectivist *âberu* by enhancing their own individual *âberu* through adherence to their group norms.

For instance, in more conservative ethnic groups or families, as responsible members of the group, women carefully monitor their verbal and non-verbal behavior when interacting with male members of other groups. They do so to avoid damaging their collectivist *âberu*. In other words, if these women wish to be acknowledged as worthy members of their groups, they do not form associations based solely on their individual preferences. Instead, they associate with others according to the conventions and structures predetermined within their groups, which are influenced by societal norms and values. As a result, involvement in conversational interactions and the appropriate amount of interaction is determined by group norms. Iranian women adhere to these norms because being accepted as with *âberu* members of the group is an urgent desire for every Iranian. To achieve this, these women sacrifice their personal concerns, feelings, and interests to preserve the collective ones. This is essential, as it is crucial to maintain one's collectivist *âberu*. In fact, there is a widely held belief among Iranians that they are entitled to association with others only to the extent that it does not threaten their collectivist *âberu*.

Accordingly, Spencer-Oatey's (2002) association rights cannot be equally applied in Iranian culture. Interactional associations and dissociations appear to be defined at different levels. Iranians direct their verbal and non-verbal behavior towards protecting and enhancing both their own and their interlocutors' individual and collectivist *âberu*.

In conclusion, Spencer-Oatey's (2002) rapport management model is inconsistent with Iranian cultural schemas. In Iranian collectivist culture, the concept of *âberu* plays a significant role. Iranians strive to accumulate more *âberu* in order to be recognized as with *âberu* people in their lives. They put considerable effort into fitting into their groups to be acknowledged by their in-group members. In other words, in Iranian collectivist culture, religious norms, cultural values, and popular beliefs play a more significant role than individual preferences. Individuals aim to meet their groups' needs and adhere to their groups' values and norms in order to be accepted as with *âberu* in-group members. Indeed, they seek to be valuable parts of a unit, even at the cost of sacrificing personal preferences. As demonstrated, Iranians follow societal and cultural norms to be recognized as valuable members of their directly related groups, rather than pursuing personal preferences or exercising sociality rights and equity, which may threaten both their own *âberu* and that of their group.

Regarding cultural differences and the varying cultural schemas between Eastern and Western societies in the understanding of (im)politeness, this research proposes an *âberu*-rooted model to analyze Iranian politicians' intentional non-harmonious interactions.

2.7 (Im)politeness studies about Persian social interaction

According to Beeman (1976), Assadi (1980), and Izadi (2015), insufficient studies on Persian (im)politeness pragmatics have been conducted. Among these is Salimiayan and Mahmoodi Bakhtiari's (2017) study, in which they investigate Culpeper's (1996) impoliteness strategies in a Persian play and introduce new strategies, though still rooted in the concept of *face*. As another example, Tajeddin et al. (2014) examine variations in native English speakers' and EFL learners' perceptions of (im)politeness embedded in apology production, yet they also adhere to the *face*-based model of impoliteness. However, Babai Shishavan and Sharifian (2013), Izadi (2013), Koutlaki (1997), Sharifian (2011), and Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) investigate (im)politeness while considering Persian cultural schemas such as *ehterâm* (respect), *šaxiat* (personality), *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy), *rudarbâyesti* (state or feeling of distance out of respect), *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering), *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), *âberu* (lit. honor or face), and *heysiyat* (lit. honor).

Koutlaki (1997) investigates the Iranian system of politeness and ritual politeness or *ta'arof*. She introduces *ehterâm* (respect) and *šaxiat* (personality) as two interrelated aspects of the Persian *face* to explore Iranian ritual politeness or *ta'arof*. In her ethnographic research, Koutlaki (1997) defines *ta'arof* as positive qualities and goodwill that individuals apply to boost their interlocutors' social standing while simultaneously lowering their own. Indeed, *ta'arof* operates as expressions of deference, humility, and cordiality, where speakers humble themselves while simultaneously elevating their interlocutors to express respect or *ehterâm* towards them.

Iranians maintain their social relationships by adopting *ta'arof* behavior and strengthening their social bonds. Indeed, in Koutlaki's study, *ta'arof* is considered means of association. Koutlaki (1997) classifies Persian politeness strategies according to three maxims: deference, humility, and cordiality, which are adapted from Leech's (1983) maxim of politeness. According to Koutlaki's findings, Iranians show deference to others and elevate them in relation to themselves through the deference or approbation maxim. They apply the humility maxim to show respect by lowering themselves in relation to others. Under the cordiality maxim, they express interest in others' affairs, concern for their needs, comfort, and welfare, as well as agreement and sympathy with others. Therefore, according to Koutlaki's findings, a person who conforms to Persian manners of politeness and adheres to moral codes is regarded as someone with a high *šaxiat* (personality), deserving to be treated with more *ehterâm* (respect).

In Iranian presidential debates, however, politicians do not observe deference toward their opponents. They neither humiliate themselves to respect their adversaries nor sympathize with other parties. It seems that Iranian politicians violate the politeness maxims introduced by Koutlaki (1997), resulting in impoliteness. However, due to the zero-sum nature of presidential debates, candidates are expected to praise themselves and their networks while disparaging their opponents in order to win power. Therefore, a parallel but opposite model to Koutlaki's model of politeness does not fit the Iranian presidential debates when analyzing politicians' intentional non-harmonious behavior. In other words, considering *ta'arof* as a manifestation of politeness and interpreting its absence as an indication of impoliteness is meaningless in this competitive context.

This setting is characterized by what Levinson (1979) terms as a 'zero-sum game,' a concept that originates from game theory and economics. In a zero-sum game, the gain of one participant directly equates to a loss for another, creating a competitive environment where

benefits are mutually exclusive. Applied to interpersonal communication, this theory suggests that one participant's advantage often comes at the expense of another's.

In the context of presidential debates, where candidates' interactions are intensely competitive, violations of *âberu* can be particularly pronounced. The zero-sum nature of such debates means that actions which damage or challenge another candidate's *âberu* (honor or reputation) are strategically employed to gain an upper hand. Analyzing how *âberu* is violated provides insights into the strategies candidates use to exploit the competitive, zero-sum framework of the debates, highlighting how one candidate's loss of *âberu* is often mirrored by another's gain.

Interestingly, Davidai and Ongis (2019) investigate how both liberals and conservatives in American political discourse perceive life as zero-sum, particularly when it benefits their respective positions. Chinoy et al. (2023), in their study *Zero-Sum Thinking and the Roots of U.S. Political Divides*, also explore the association between a zero-sum mindset and political preferences, examining how it influences policy stances and contributes to political divisions. Thus, Iranian presidential debates can be viewed as zero-sum games, where the success or gain of one candidate directly corresponds to the loss of another. In this context, any positive outcome, such as gaining public support, appearing competent, and establishing credibility, for one candidate necessarily results in a negative outcome for their opponent, such as losing public support or appearing less competent. Iranian politicians strive to maintain or enhance their political *âberu*, aiming to boost their own while diminishing their opponents'. This competitive behavior aligns with the dynamics of a zero-sum game, where elevating oneself often involves undermining others. In zero-sum contexts like Iranian televised debates, adhering to politeness maxims, such as deference or sympathy towards opponents, is counterproductive. Iranian politicians are incentivized to violate these norms to maximize their own gains (support or votes) at the expense of their rivals' losses. The intentional non-harmonious behavior, where Iranian candidates neither humiliate themselves nor respect their adversaries, is a strategic choice rooted in the zero-sum nature of the debates. In essence, Iranian presidential candidates engage in *âberu*-threatening behavior intentionally to damage their opponents' *âberu* while enhancing their own.

Shifting back to Persian impoliteness, Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) propose the macro-cultural schema of *adab* (politeness) and investigate the role of culture in the perception of impoliteness. In line with Culpeper (2011: 12), who states that "different groups of people-different 'cultures'-have different norms and different values," Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) explore cultural conceptualization to examine how speakers exhibit variations in their access

to cultural understandings. They also focus on the relational nature of *âberu* and the layperson's perception of impoliteness.

Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) adopt Culpeper's (2011) definition of impoliteness, which occurs when a clash of expectations, desires, and beliefs takes place. They investigate how particular cultural schemas dictate appropriate linguistic and non-linguistic behavior, considering speakers' relationships and social contexts. If these expectations are not met, the failure is perceived as impoliteness in their study.

They employ a three-layer methodology: (a) meta-discourse analysis, (b) discourse analysis, and (c) conceptual analysis. The meta-discourse analysis identifies words or expressions frequently used by participants when illustrating an impolite act that occurred in an interaction. Next, Sharifian and Tayebi analyze the scenarios that led to the evaluation of impoliteness in the second layer. Finally, they examine the link between the perception and evaluation of impoliteness to the underlying cultural conceptualizations, drawing on ethnography to understand the relevant cultural frameworks. However, they emphasize that all three layers are interrelated. They argue that, in specific contexts, assessments of impoliteness may be influenced by certain cultural conceptualizations that are heterogeneously shared.

Interestingly, Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) probe the concept of *šaxiat* (character and personality) introduced by Koutlaki (2002), which depends on one's behavior, educational background, and upbringing at the meta-discourse level. As indicated earlier, a person with high *šaxiat* or *ba-šaxiat* is considered a polite person with character, adhering to expected codes of behavior, while a person without *šaxiat* or *bi-šaxiat* is viewed as impolite, lacking character, and deviating from social and moral codes in the eyes of others. Subsequently, Sharifian and Tayebi consider *ba-šaxiat* and *bi-šaxiat* as meta-discourse markers, alongside other Persian discourse markers, to evaluate (im)polite acts.

In their cultural schema of *adab* (manner or politeness), Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) define five macro-cultural schemas: *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy), *rudarbâyeti* (state or feeling of distance out of respect), *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering), *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), and *âberu* (face). I have previously explained the cultural schema of *ta'arof* and highlighted its ineffectiveness in Iranian presidential debates. Regarding the cultural schema of *rudarbâyeti* (state or feeling of distance out of respect), Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) emphasize that differences in people's social and relational status shape this schema. Indeed, Iranians practice a certain degree of respect and politeness in particular roles and positions associated with sociocultural distance. Sharifian and Tayebi further stress that the cultural schemas of *ta'arof* and *rudarbâyeti* are closely connected, as *rudarbâyeti* is a state or feeling that stimulates the

practice of *ta'arof*. Similarly, Babai and Sharifian (2013) state that when one treats others with more *rudarbâyeti*, they are expected to practice more *ta'arof*.

Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) argue that the cultural schema of *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering) encourages Iranians to avoid any egoistic thoughts or behaviors, fostering modesty and, ultimately, politeness. This aligns with Koutlaki's maxim of humility or self-lowering. They highlight that a common manifestation of this schema is the refusal of compliments, which serves to show modesty. This often involves softening the compliment, returning it to the complimenter, reassigning it to others, or even attributing it to God.

Iranians practice the cultural schema of *šarmandegi* (being ashamed) as a means of expressing their politeness. Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) state that expressing *šarmandegi* is one of the strategies that allow Persian speakers to practice *ta'arof*. When Iranians adopt the strategy of *šarmandegi*, they are aware that "the other person may have undergone some kind of trouble in providing the speaker with goods and services," even though that person "is not necessarily obligated to provide such services" (Sharifian, 2011: 104). It can be assumed that *šarmandegi* is typically practiced after receiving a cordial service, in line with Koutlaki's cordiality maxim. In other words, because Iranians are generally concerned about the problems and issues of other group members, they often make an effort to address their interactants' needs and concerns, thereby inspiring a sense of *šarmandegi* as a way to express politeness.

In terms of the cultural schema of *âberu*, Sharifian (2011: 141) states that one's *âberu* represents their social image and is "a metonym for how a person as a whole would appear to others." Iranians are expected to maintain both their own *âberu* and that of their interlocutors, while avoiding tarnishing it. According to Sharifian, *âberu* is the closest concept to the Western notion of *face* when representing one's social image. However, this study demonstrates that *âberu* encompasses aspects that differ from the Western concept of face.

Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) conclude that the intentional or unintentional violation of the cultural schemas mentioned above results in impoliteness. However, considering the competitive nature of presidential debates, only the intentional violation of *âberu* cultural schema, with its adverse consequences, would be damaging for politicians. In this research, presidential candidates neither practice *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering) to humble themselves and be acknowledged as modest nor exhibit *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), i.e., feeling remorse for their statements or performance, in order to be seen as individuals who adhere to moral codes. Instead, they aim to dominate the platform without engaging in *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy) or *rudarbâyeti* (state or feeling of distance out of respect), striving to enhance their own *âberu* and undermine that of their adversaries. Consequently, they speak confidently, exalt

themselves and their networks in every respect, while publicly disgracing their rivals by intentionally damaging their *âberu*. This occurs because, in political discourse-particularly in the competitive environment of presidential debates-the dynamics are often shaped by a zero-sum game mentality, where candidates seek to elevate themselves while diminishing their opponents. Such a competitive atmosphere compels Iranian politicians to prioritize the enhancement of their own *âberu* at the expense of others, rather than adhering to cultural norms of self-lowering (*šekaste-nafsi*) or expressing humility through *šarmandegi*.

Moreover, the mediated nature of political discourse intensifies the stakes for politicians. In the context of televised debates or public speeches, Iranian politicians are acutely aware of the audience's perceptions and the potential impact on their political *âberu*. Consequently, there is heightened pressure to project strength, confidence, and authority, which may conflict with the cultural expectation of humility and modesty.

In essence, the competitive dynamics and mediated nature of political discourse create an environment where the intentional violation of cultural schemas-particularly *âberu*-may be perceived as a strategic necessity rather than an act of impoliteness. Politicians prioritize their own political capital and image management, often at the expense of traditional cultural values of humility and modesty.

Izadi (2016) also examines Persian cultural practices such as *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy) and *rudarbâyesti* (a sense of diffidence, reservedness, and shyness), the role of Persian honorifics in (im)politeness evaluations within localized interactions, and how Arundale's (2010) Face Constituting Theory relates to the Persian *face*, which encompasses a dialectic of relational connection and separation.

In his study, Izadi (2016) asserts that *rudarbâyesti* and *ta'arof* are context-dependent strategies that cannot be universally applied as manifestations of politeness. For example, they are unsuitable in professional settings, where their adoption may be perceived as over-politeness. He argues that "Persian cultural practices of *ta'arof* and *rudarbâyesti* at times conflate with professional practices and, as such, are ascribed evaluations of irrelevance, inapplicability, and excessiveness, thus deemed over-polite" (Izadi 2016: 21). Similarly, the use of *rudarbâyesti* and *ta'arof* in presidential debates would be nonsensical, given that politicians in these contexts compete for power and are not expected to prioritize their rivals or sacrifice their own desires, interests, and wants for the benefit of their opponents.

Izadi (2013: 1331) states that giving deference in Persian is akin to giving *ehterâm*; it involves humbling or lowering oneself while simultaneously raising or elevating the addressee to communicate that the interlocutor holds a socially superior position. This practice is,

however, in direct contrast to the nature of Iranian political discourse. Deference is linguistically realized through honorifics in the Persian language, which can transform forms of deference into both deferential and humiliating expressions (Jahangiri, 2000, as cited in Izadi, 2013). Izadi (2015: 83) asserts that Persian honorifics are “the linguistic manifestations of *ehterâm* (respect and deference), which is an instantiation of *adab* (politeness), and with which they often collocate.” He further emphasizes that Persian honorifics are intertwined with *ta’arof* through *ehterâm*. Therefore, it can be interpreted that Iranians commonly practice *ta’arof*, *rudarbâyesti*, *šekaste-nafsi*, and *šarmandegi* to foster bonding or association, thereby expressing their sense of *ehterâm*. However, this practice is notably absent in Iranian presidential debates, where candidates deliberately attack each other’s *âberu*. Izadi (2015) further clarifies that when honorifics are employed ironically or sarcastically, deviating from societal moral norms, they lead to dissociation. Interestingly, the ironic or sarcastic use of honorifics is a prevalent norm in this study, as presidential candidates often sarcastically address their adversaries as ‘Excellency’ or ‘Majesty,’ immediately juxtaposing these titles with criticisms or accusations.

Izadi (2015) examines the Persian *face* as a relational phenomenon that is dynamically co-constituted in interactions, in alignment with Arundale’s (2010) *Face Constituting* theory. Izadi argues that relational connection and separation are dialectically related and mutually defined. Consequently, each conversational meaning or action can be projected and interpreted as simultaneously involving a certain degree of both connection and separation. Izadi (2017) asserts that interactants’ *šaxiat* (character and personality) can be attended to or clashed simultaneously in their daily interactions, as they either maintain or undermine each other’s *šaxiat*. In other words, when one protects or damages their interlocutor’s *šaxiat*, they are also co-constructing their own *šaxiat*, indicating its cyclic nature. He emphasizes that *šaxiat* is constructed relationally and interactionally through both association and dissociation, as people either connect or distance themselves from others. Similar to the Persian *face* that Izadi (2017) examines in terms of its relational and interactional nature, *âberu* is also constructed and co-constructed among presidential candidates through their interactions, as I explain in detail in Chapter Four.

As demonstrated in this chapter, most studies on Persian pragmatics focus on specific cultural schemas for practicing *ehterâm* (respect, deference) to achieve *adab* (politeness). These studies also examine how the violation of cultural schemas leads to impoliteness. However, this study posits that Iranian presidential candidates do not practice *ehterâm* through the strategies of *ta’arof*, *rudarbâyesti*, *šekaste-nafsi*, or *šarmandegi* in presidential debates. On

the contrary, politicians prioritize maintaining and enhancing their own *âberu* and that of their networks, while attacking and damaging their opponents' *âberu*, all without adhering to the aforementioned cultural schemas. The study asserts that, in the context of Iranian presidential debates, these cultural schemas-except for *âberu*-are ineffective, as the act of *âberu*-threatening is a sanctioned, intentional non-harmonious interaction.

In line with the significance of the concept of *âberu*, it is important to note that the participants in the ethnographic research for this study have provided a scale ranging from the most negative to the most positive concepts. They have established the following continuum: *bi-âberu* (a person with no *âberu* or roughly, no honor), *qostax* (rude), *bi-adab* (impolite), *mahjub* (well-mannered, courteous), *mo'adab* (polite), and *âberu-mand* (someone with *âberu*). The first three concepts carry negative connotations, while the latter three carry positive implications. Participants assign the most negative connotation to *bi-âberu* (a person with no *âberu* or roughly, no honor) and the most positive one to *âberu-mand* (someone with *âberu*). The placement of *bi-âberu* and *âberu-mand* at opposite ends of the spectrum highlights that *âberu* is regarded as a more crucial cultural concept than *adab* (politeness or manner) among Iranians.

The recognition of *âberu* as a key concept in Iranian political discourse offers valuable insights into the dynamics of political communication and strategy in Iran. Firstly, by acknowledging *âberu* as a fundamental cultural value, political actors can tailor their communication strategies to resonate with the cultural norms and expectations of the Iranian populace. This entails adopting linguistic expressions and behaviors that align with notions of political honor, dignity, and respect, thereby cultivating a positive perception of their own *âberu* among the electorate. In line with Kádár's (2017) findings that rituals play a crucial role in maintaining or altering relationships, this concept can be seen in the ritualistic behaviors of Iranian politicians.

Moreover, the identification of a continuum ranging from *bi-âberu* to *âberu-mand* is also in harmony with political actors' behavior when strategically positioning themselves along this continuum and aiming to project themselves as individuals with high *âberu* while casting their opponents as lacking political *âberu* or integrity. This strategic maneuvering is supported by Fetzer's (2013) findings, which explore how cultural norms, values, and ideologies shape the strategies and rhetoric employed by politicians. Therefore, Iranian politicians strategically craft their messages to appeal to cultural values and norms associated with *âberu* via the mediated discourse as it shapes public perceptions and influences political narratives. Iranian

politicians utilize linguistic strategies to position themselves politically *âberu-mand* in the eyes of the electorate while threatening their opponents' *âberu*.

As a result, due to the inadequacy of the Western (im)politeness models and those of Persian pragmatics, this study sets the stage for a focused exploration of the Iranian concept of *âberu* within the framework of *âberu*-threatening act. This involves attacking the opponent's *âberu*, e.g., questioning their adherence to Islamic values, and challenging their loyalty to the principles of the Islamic Revolution. By applying insights gained from the distinction between first-order accumulated data (based on ethnographic research) and second-order concepts (data analysis), delve deeper into how *âberu* functions in Iranian culture, particularly, among Iranian politicians in the political discourse. This research scrutinizes how *âberu* is negotiated and maintained among Iranian politicians. Therefore, this study focuses on understanding the concept *âberu* and its role in maintaining social harmony and identity in Iranian society and an *âberu*-threatening act among Iranian politicians.

In Iranian presidential debates, *âberu*-threatening acts are strategic moves aimed at discrediting opponents and swaying public opinion. Everyday social practices in Iran emphasize maintaining *âberu* through respect, *ta'arof*, *rudarbâyesti*, *šekaste-nafsi*, and *šarmandegi* (harmonious interaction) while political debates may be characterized by non-harmonious interactions. This highlights the importance of cultural norms and schemas in shaping social behavior, and how they may be influenced by contexts such as political discourse.

This study also emphasizes the importance of cultural context in shaping political communication practices, in line with Fetzer (2013) highlighting how cultural norms, values, and ideologies influence the strategies and rhetoric employed by politicians. As previously mentioned, she emphasizes that members of a speech community possess procedural knowledge of their linguistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural practices, which shapes meaning production and interpretation in verbal interactions, including political discourse. In the same manner, in this study, the concept of *âberu*, which is deeply rooted in Iranian culture, guides Iranian politicians' behaviors. Iranian politicians leverage cultural norms and values, such as religious principles and societal expectations, to enhance their *âberu* and tarnish their opponents', manifesting the cultural dimensions of Iranian political discourse.

It can therefore be claimed that what is happening in the Iranian presidential debates is beyond impoliteness since politicians adopt various linguistic strategies to protect, boost or restore their own *âberu* while attacking, damaging, or ruining their opponents' *âberu* and that of their networks.

2.8 Iranian mediated political discourse

It is necessary to contextualize the unique features of Iran's political landscape and media environment. Iranian political discourse is deeply embedded in its theocratic and republican structure. Political figures, from the Supreme Leader to elected officials, operate within a framework that balances religious authority with republican elements. Their discourse often reflects institutional goals such as promoting Islamic values, maintaining national sovereignty, and addressing economic and social issues. Unlike more open societies, Iranian political discourse is heavily monitored and regulated by state authorities. Topics such as criticism of the Supreme Leader or discussions that counter state narratives are often restricted. This aligns with Lauerbach and Fetzer's (2007) observation of restricted discourse topics.

According to Lauerbach and Fetzer (2007), political discourse is an institutional discourse, differing from everyday conversation, as politicians pursue institutional goals and procedures within their interactions. Although they state that political discourse has been restricted by discourse topic choices, more neutral discursive styles and discourse identities, and a turn-taking strategy, its multilayered nature and the natural occurrence of the language turn it into an engaging discourse. In the same vein, Iranian politicians may adopt a more coded discursive style to navigate censorship and avoid backlash. For instance, reformist politicians may frame their critiques in a way that does not explicitly challenge the core tenets of the regime but still conveys their message. This careful framing allows them to stay within acceptable limits and avoid severe repercussions.

Procedural knowledge encompasses members' shared understanding of appropriate discourse practices and cultural contexts, which shape political discourse within speech communities (Fetzer 2013). In the case of Iranian political discourse, this shared procedural knowledge is reflected in several shaping factors, with the promotion of Islamic principles being central to its practices. Politicians frequently reference the Qur'an, Hadith, and other religious texts to legitimize their positions and appeal to the devout segment of the population. Historical references to the Islamic Revolution are pervasive. Politicians use the Revolution as a symbol of resistance and resilience, reinforcing their connection to its ideals and to the legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini. Endorsement from significant religious and political figures, particularly Ayatollah Khomeini and the current Supreme Leader, are pivotal. Such endorsements lend credibility and legitimacy to political figures and their agendas. The endorsement by the Supreme Leader, in particular, can be decisive in gaining public and

institutional support. Iranian politicians must also address the needs and concerns of the populace. This involves addressing socio-economic issues, ensuring stability, and promoting policies that resonate with the public's aspirations. In this manner, Iranian politicians can maintain their own *âberu* and that of their political allies. Therefore, they carefully navigate public discourse, avoiding statements or actions that could damage their own *âberu*. This aligns with the constructivist view of political discourse, where politicians dynamically interact with their audience and peers to construct a more *âberu-mand* image of themselves.

The data illustrate that Iranian political discourse is multi-layered as it incorporates religious rhetoric, nationalistic themes, and socio-economic discussions. This complexity engages various segments of the population, from devout followers of the regime to those pushing for reform.

Goffman (1981) also associates political discourse with media discourse and calls it podium events. In line with Goffman, Iranian political discourse often unfolds in state-controlled media. Events like presidential debates, speeches by the Supreme Leader, and parliamentary sessions are meticulously staged and broadcast. Moreover, Lauerbach and Fetzer (2007: 15) introduce presidential debates as social events "which are either addressed to or performed for a live or mass media audience." In the same manner, Iranian presidential debates are the events designed to address both domestic and international audiences. For example, presidential debates in Iran, though controlled, are platforms where candidates address voters' concerns while signaling their positions to international observers.

According to Scannell (1998), political discourse in the media is also inherently public and on-record, meaning it is designed for an audience that is not physically present but is watching or listening through the media. This public nature impacts what can be said and how it is said because the statements are subject to public scrutiny and can be referenced or recontextualized by others. Iranian presidential debates, being broadcasted to a national audience, are prime examples of on-record discourse. Iranian politicians are acutely aware that their statements during these debates will be scrutinized not just by their immediate opponents and the moderators but also by a wider audience, including the general public and media analysts. This awareness should influence the strategies they adopt in maintaining and enhancing their own *âberu* but threatening their adversaries'.

In conclusion, Iranian mediated political discourse is a complex interplay of institutional goals, religious principles, historical references, authoritative endorsements, and public engagement all deeply influenced by the concept of *âberu*. This multifaceted nature, guided by

procedural knowledge among the community of practice, ensures that political communication remains a powerful tool for both governance and public persuasion in Iran.

2.9 Harmonious interaction versus non-harmonious interaction in Iranian mediated political discourse

Fetzer's (2013) conceptualization of political discourse as media discourse highlights its institutional and public nature, distinguishing it from everyday interactions. According to Fetzer (2013), procedural knowledge involves understanding symbolic sign systems (such as language), pragmatic principles (including politeness and argumentation), and sociocultural contexts (norms and values) within a speech community. This aligns with the findings of the current study, which illustrate how Iranian politicians leverage procedural knowledge of *âberu* to navigate political debates. Politicians strategically employ cultural norms and values to enhance their own *âberu* while undermining their opponents' *âberu*. For example, in Iranian presidential debates, candidates emphasize their alignment with Islamic values and revolutionary principles to gain legitimacy and public support. This strategic application of procedural knowledge reflects how Iranian political actors utilize shared cultural schemas to communicate effectively within their speech community, both in harmonious and non-harmonious interactions.

It is evident that distinguishing between harmonious and non-harmonious interactions is crucial for understanding the dynamics of Iranian presidential debates and their implications for political discourse and social cohesion.

In contrast to the 'non-harmonious interaction' observed in Iranian presidential debates, a parallel exploration of 'harmonious interaction' highlights a contrasting approach to interpersonal communication within Iranian society. While the competitive nature of political debates often fosters confrontational discourse aimed at enhancing individual and group *âberu* while undermining opponents, everyday interactions in Iranian culture typically emphasize harmony and mutual respect.

Based on Sharifian (2011), Sharifian and Tayebi (2017), Koutlaki (2002), and Izadi's (2015) findings, along with the results of this study, it is possible to characterize harmonious interaction in Iranian society through the pervasive practice of *ta'arof*, a ritualized form of courtesy and deference. *Ta'arof* functions as a mechanism for building and maintaining social bonds, emphasizing mutual respect and consideration for others' feelings. In line with Koutlaki (2010), individuals often engage in polite exchanges, express humility, and demonstrate

concern for the well-being of others, all of which can be associated with harmonious interaction. On the one hand, this ethos of mutual respect fosters a sense of community and solidarity, contributing to social cohesion and collective harmony. On the other hand, in accordance with Fetzer's (2013) findings, Iranians' practice of cultural schemas such as *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy), *ehterâm* (respect), *rudarbâyesti* (deference), and *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering) reflects a deep procedural knowledge of their cultural context.

Moreover, in harmony with Koutlaki (2010), Sharifian (2007, 2011), and Izadi's (2013, 2016) findings, the cultural schemas of *ehterâm* (respect) and *rudarbâyesti* (deference out of respect) play a central role in promoting harmonious interaction. Individuals uphold these values by showing reverence towards others, acknowledging their social status, and avoiding behaviors that may cause offense or discomfort. In doing so, Iranian individuals contribute to an environment of mutual understanding and cooperation, where interpersonal relationships are nurtured and strengthened by adherence to these cultural norms. Furthermore, it can be claimed that when Iranians practice the cultural schemas introduced by Sharifian and Tayebi (2017), such as *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering) and *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), they are engaging in harmonious interaction, as these behaviors reflect a deep understanding of moral codes.

In harmonious interactions, the focus is not on individual assertiveness or competitive advantage, but rather on fostering empathy, compassion, and inclusivity by adhering to societal norms and values. The Iranian populace prioritizes collective well-being over personal interests, striving to create a supportive and inclusive social environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

While 'non-harmonious interaction' may indeed dominate certain contexts, such as political debates, it is imperative to acknowledge the prevalence and profound significance of 'harmonious interaction' within Iranian society. By promoting values of mutual respect, empathy, and cooperation, harmonious interactions serve as the cornerstone for nurturing strong social bonds and fostering a sense of unity within the community. These interactions not only uphold the cherished cultural notion of *âberu* but also actively contribute to its preservation and enhancement. As individuals adhere to established cultural schemas and comply with sociocultural norms, they not only safeguard their own *âberu* but also work towards enhancing *âberu* of their interlocutors. This commitment to harmonious interaction reflects the deeply ingrained cultural ethos of Iran, where collective well-being and social cohesion are prioritized over individual interests.

However, non-harmonious interaction, as observed in Iranian presidential debates, deviates from the norms of mutual respect and cooperation typically seen in everyday interactions. In these debates, politicians engage in confrontational discourse aimed at enhancing their own *âberu* and discrediting their opponents, while simultaneously threatening their rivals' *âberu*. This non-harmonious behavior manifests through attacks on their rivals' (political) *âberu*. Iranian politicians often use directive language and rhetoric to assert their positions and elevate their own *âberu*, while challenging their opponents' *âberu*. This includes individual or collective attacks, derogatory remarks, revealing damaging information, accusing rivals of distancing themselves from Islamic Revolution ideologies, or employing inflammatory speech designed to discredit adversaries and damage their *âberu* in order to sway public opinion.

Unlike the deferential behavior expected in harmonious interactions, politicians in debates may disregard norms of respect and humility. Instead of showing deference towards their opponents, they may adopt a confrontational stance, seeking to dominate the conversation and assert their authority. They exalt themselves and their parties but refrain from undermining themselves to show respect to their adversaries, for instance, by mentioning their revolutionary credentials and strict adherence to Ayatollah Khomeini's principles. Indeed, the competitive nature of presidential debates fosters a zero-sum mentality, where candidates view politics as a winner-takes-all game, which leads to a lack of deference in this discourse. In this context, politicians prioritize their own interests and seek to gain an advantage to enhance their own political *âberu* at the expense of threatening that of their opponents, resulting in adversarial interactions and discord.

As observed, non-harmonious interaction in Iranian presidential debates arises due to several factors, including political competition, public perception, and strategic considerations. Presidential candidates are under pressure to distinguish themselves from their opponents and appeal to voters, which leads to heightened conflict and polarization. They may also feel compelled to adopt *âberu*-related strategies to demonstrate strength and leadership qualities, particularly in a highly scrutinized public forum. Consequently, they strategically employ non-harmonious tactics to gain a competitive advantage and secure electoral success, prioritizing short-term gains over long-term relationships.

Overall, non-harmonious interaction in Iranian presidential debates reflects the competitive and adversarial nature of contemporary politics, where the pursuit of power and influence often takes precedence over principles of mutual respect and cooperation.

Additionally, it should be noted that the media also influences both harmonious and non-harmonious interactions among Iranian politicians. Mediated political discourse in Iran is deeply shaped by the ideologies of the Islamic Revolution. The media, often state-controlled or influenced, plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and reinforcing the values promulgated by the revolution's leaders. It frequently reflects and reinforces cultural and Islamic values such as honesty, humility, and respect for authority. Politicians who align their rhetoric with these values can bolster their legitimacy, appeal to the electorate, and enhance their political *âberu*. As previously mentioned, references to Ayatollah Khomeini and the principles of the Islamic Revolution are employed publicly to frame political arguments. For example, accusing an opponent of deviating from these principles is a potent rhetorical strategy—a non-harmonious behavior—that can significantly damage their *âberu*.

Data analysis also reveals that Iranian politicians and the media strategically use cultural and religious references to influence public perception. Iranian politicians can enhance their own *âberu* while undermining their rivals' by positioning themselves as true adherents to Khomeini's teachings and defenders of the revolution. This strategic use of cultural and religious references aligns with Fetzer's (2013) analysis of political discourse, which highlights how the public and on-record nature of political talk enables politicians to construct and recontextualize their messages for mass audiences. Fetzer emphasizes the significance of mediated political discourse in translating macro-political ideologies into accessible, everyday language, thereby allowing politicians to personify party-political agendas and ideologies. In the Iranian context, this involves leveraging the revered status of Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution and adhering to cultural norms to resonate with the electorate's cultural and religious values, thereby reinforcing their own *âberu* and tarnishing their opponents' through a carefully constructed public image.

In summary, the contrast between harmonious and non-harmonious interactions in Iranian presidential debates underscores the complex interplay between cultural norms, religious values, and political strategies. Mediated political discourse, shaped by the ideologies of the Islamic Revolution, both influences and is influenced by these dynamics. While everyday interactions prioritize social cohesion and mutual respect, the competitive nature of political debates fosters adversarial tactics that often challenge these values. Understanding this dichotomy is crucial for grasping the broader implications of political discourse in Iran and its impact on both social and political cohesion.

In sum, in everyday interactions, Iranians adhere to cultural norms that promote harmonious relationships and collective well-being. This dichotomy between everyday

harmonious interactions and the non-harmonious nature of political debates highlights the distinct procedural knowledge and communicative goals in different contexts.

2.10 Conclusion

Considering the discussion in this chapter, it is evident that Western impoliteness theories are less suitable for analyzing the non-harmonious interactions of Iranian presidential candidates due to significant cultural differences and specific cultural concepts. While Western (im)politeness theories span individual face-work and maxim-based studies to relational and interactional face and discursive approaches, they remain grounded in the concept of individual "face." This study, however, suggests that the collectivist nature of Iranian culture and its cultural schemas must be central when analyzing politicians' non-harmonious interactions in Iranian presidential debates. Therefore, the concept of "face" is not of primary importance among Iranian politicians, and the Western (im)politeness theories, which are rooted in the individual face concept, fail to adequately address their non-harmonious interactions.

The literature review of (im)politeness theories in Persian pragmatics indicates that these models are inadequate for this context, emphasizing the necessity of developing a new model to analyze the present data. Indeed, most studies in Persian pragmatics focus on how Iranians practice *ehterâm* (respect, deference) through strategies such as *ta'arof* (ritual courtesy), *rudarbâyesti* (distance out of respect), *šekaste-nafsi* (self-lowering), *šarmandegi* (being ashamed), and *adab* (politeness). They also examine how violations of these cultural schemas lead to impoliteness. This research reveals that Iranian presidential candidates do not practice *ehterâm* to defer to their interactants. Instead, they utilize linguistic strategies to maintain or enhance their own and their networks' *âberu* (honor), while attacking or damaging their opponents' *âberu*. In other words, Iranian presidential candidates explicitly or implicitly target their rivals' *âberu* to win the election. They do not practice *ta'arof*, *rudarbâyesti*, *šekaste-nafsi*, or *šarmandegi* to undermine themselves and exalt their rivals.

In summary, chapter two emphasizes the inadequacy of traditional politeness models, such as Koutlaki's (2010) and the cultural schemas proposed by Sharifian and Tayebi (2017), when applied to the competitive environment of Iranian presidential debates. This highlights the need for a contextual approach to (im)politeness, where cultural norms and schemas cannot be uniformly applied across all settings. The chapter further stresses that *âberu* is a critical cultural schema in Iranian presidential debates, unlike other schemas like *ta'arof*, *rudarbâyesti*, *šekaste-nafsi*, and *šarmandegi*. In this competitive context, *âberu* becomes a strategic tool for

politicians to attack their opponents and elevate their own status. As previously mentioned, Iranian presidential candidates threaten their rivals' *âberu* to gain an advantage, demonstrating the strategic use of *âberu*-threatening acts, which aligns with Levinson's zero-sum game theory, where one's gain is another's loss.

Therefore, an *âberu*-based model is best suited for analyzing the intentional non-harmonious interactions of Iranian politicians within Iranian political discourse.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the data collection instruments and methods used to gather the data analyzed in this study. A theoretical framework appropriate for analyzing the data from Iranian presidential debates is briefly introduced in this chapter but is thoroughly explained in Chapter Four. The framework is based on the concept of *âberu*, which literally means ‘honor.’

3.2 Data collection

This research examines the televised Iranian presidential debates held in 2009, 2013, and 2017 to analyze the interactions between presidential candidates. In other words, it focuses on this specific form of Iranian political discourse.

The primary data for this study consists of Iranian televised presidential debates from 2009, 2013, and 2017. In these debates, the participating politicians are candidates in the presidential elections, addressing or performing for distant audiences to achieve their institutional goals. Moreover, the natural language used in this context was particularly compelling to examine. To collect the data, I consulted YouTube archives, which provided a total of 30 hours of footage. In total, 12 televised presidential debates were analyzed: six from 2009, three from 2013, and three from 2017—all of which are available on YouTube.

The Persian transcriptions of the debates were sourced from *Nasim Online Newspaper*, *BBC News Persian*, *Hamshahri Online Newspaper*, and *Aftab News*. The English transcripts were obtained from *Press TV*, *Critical Threats* organization, and *BBC News*. However, I had to revise and edit all the Persian transcripts due to inaccuracies. Many media outlets omitted portions of the spoken discourse or paraphrased candidates’ statements, and some transcripts were mere summaries of the debates. The issue was even more pronounced in the English versions, as only one full English transcript existed, from the 2009 debate between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi, while the rest were only summaries. Consequently, a professional Persian-English translator was engaged to translate the remaining debates into English.

3.3 Iranian presidential debates

3.3.1 The 2009 electoral debates

In June 2009, Iran held its tenth presidential election since the Islamic Revolution. The incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, ran against three opponents: conservative Mohsen Rezaei and reformist candidates Mir Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi, all of whom had been pre-approved by the Guardian Council. The candidates participated in six live televised debates, which were broadcast nightly on the state television channel IRIB3 (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) in Tehran. Each debate lasted 90 minutes, totaling 540 minutes in all. As mentioned earlier, recordings of these debates are available in YouTube archives.

Each pair of candidates debated only once, on June 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8, 2009. The debates were conducted in a studio without an audience, within a tightly controlled political environment. Notably, this was the first time Iran had ever held televised debates between presidential candidates. The debates were moderated by Reza Pour Hossein, who played a minimal role. His responsibilities were limited to introducing the candidates, posing questions at the beginning of each segment, and managing turn-taking between participants. Beyond that, he remained mostly silent, functioning as a timekeeper.

The moderator posed several questions, and each candidate was allotted ten minutes per response. In total, each candidate had approximately 45 minutes to answer questions, defend themselves, or challenge their rivals. The real-time format of the debates provided the public with an unprecedented opportunity to witness direct and often heated exchanges between the candidates.

One of the most striking aspects of the debates was the incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's repeated attacks on his opponents. Although the debate rules prohibited candidates from targeting individuals not present in the studio, Ahmadinejad frequently made broad accusations and criticisms against his rivals' associates, who were not involved in the debates or the election. During the 2009 debates, Mousavi accused Ahmadinejad of violating debate rules, spreading falsehoods, fabricating charges against political opponents, and leading the country toward dictatorship. In response, Ahmadinejad publicly disparaged Mousavi and his political allies and even openly criticized Mousavi's wife.

3.3.2 The 2013 electoral debates

After the Islamic Revolution, Iran held its eleventh presidential election from May 31 to June 7, 2013. The state-owned television channel IRIB broadcast all three televised debates, which featured all eight candidates in a group format, unlike the one-on-one debates of 2009. As in the 2009 election, the Guardian Council approved eight candidates for placement on the ballot: Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Qolam-Ali Haddad-Adel, Ali Akbar Velayati, Saeed Jalili, Mohsen Rezaei, Mohammad Qarazi, Hassan Rouhani, and Mohammad Reza Aref. Of these, all except Rouhani and Aref were classified as “hardline conservatives,” while Rouhani and Aref represented the reformist candidates. Two candidates, Aref and Haddad-Adel, withdrew from the race on June 10 and 11, respectively.

As in 2009, the debates were conducted in a studio without a live audience. However, unlike the 2009 electoral debates, the number of moderators increased to two: a main moderator and an assistant moderator. Morteza Heidari served as the primary moderator for all debates, responsible for drawing candidates’ names to determine the speaking order, posing pre-selected questions, and managing time. Each debate lasted approximately four hours, contributing an additional 720 minutes of data to the overall study.

The three debates focused on key topics, including economic issues, cultural and social matters, foreign policy, and Iran’s negotiations with the P5+1 group regarding its nuclear program. In the first round, candidates were randomly selected to express their views on the debate’s central topic within four minutes. Their opponents were then given two minutes to discuss or critique their responses. At the end of this round, the candidates who had been challenged were allotted an additional three minutes to respond to criticisms. In the second round, the moderator posed specific questions to each candidate, who had two minutes to respond. Finally, in the concluding round, candidates outlined their proposed policies and delivered closing remarks, each within a two-minute time limit.

3.3.3 The 2017 electoral debates

The 2017 televised debates were conducted in a tightly controlled political environment to prevent any post-election unrest similar to that of 2009. Consequently, three live debates were held at Studio No. 11 in Tehran and broadcast on the IRIB’s local channel. As in previous elections, the Guardian Council approved six candidates: the incumbent Hassan Rouhani, reformist candidates Eshaq Jahangiri and Mostafa Hashemi Taba, and hardline candidates

Ebrahim Raisi, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, and Mostafa Agha Mir Salim. The debates followed a group format, with all candidates participating simultaneously. Similar to the 2009 televised debates, a single moderator, Morteza Heidari, was responsible for posing questions and managing time. Once again, no live audience was present in the studio. Each debate lasted three hours, contributing an additional 540 minutes of data to the overall study.

The debates were structured around three main themes: social issues, the economy, and politics. In the first round, candidates were given four minutes to respond to the moderator's questions. Their opponents then had two minutes to critique the response, after which the original speaker was allotted five minutes to address the criticisms. Notably, the selection of candidates for each question was determined by a random draw. In the second round, each candidate was required to respond to specific questions within a uniform time limit of two minutes. Finally, the debates concluded with a three-minute wrap-up session.

3.4 Participants in Iranian televised presidential debates

Lauerbach and Fetzer (2007) distinguish between first-frame and second-frame participants, likening them to individuals “on the podium” and those in the audience, respectively. They emphasize that the audience's presence as public representatives is an optional component of media discourse. In the context of Iranian presidential debates, there is no immediate audience, meaning that second-frame participants are absent from this study. As a result, candidates address only the remote television audience.

From a media discourse perspective, the primary participants in this study are the Iranian presidential candidates, referred to as first-frame participants. In total, there are 18 such politicians: four from the 2009 election, eight from 2013, and six from 2017. However, this study specifically analyzes the interactions of 15 candidates.

Since the following chapters will examine these interactions in detail, Table 1 and Table 2 provide an overview of the coding system for candidates and their backgrounds, respectively, as they are the primary focus of this study.

Table 1. Candidates' Coding System

Candidates' Names	Candidates' Abbreviated Names
Ahmadinejad	AHMDNJD
Mousavi	MSV
Karoubi	KRB
Rezaei	RZ
Rouhani	RHN
Qalibaf	QLBF
Jalili	JLL
Aref	ARF
Hadad Adel	HDDL
Velayati	VLTY
Qarazi	QRZ
Raisi	RS
Jahangiri	JHNGR
Mirsalim	MRS LM
Hashemi Taba	HSHMTB

In chapters four, five, and six, the examples have been coded using the following format: month-year-candidate's abbreviated name, followed by the debate number (e.g., 6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No. 3). This indicates that the example was spoken by Ahmadinejad in June 2009 during the third presidential debate. Similarly, the code "6-2017-QLBF, Debate No. 3" signifies that the example was taken from Qalibaf's speech in the third debate of June 2017.

Table 2. The Background of the Presidential Candidates in 2009

Candidates	Election	Education	Party	Cleric/ Non-cleric	Political positions
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (Age: 53, 1956)	2009	- PhD in Traffic and Transport, Tehran's University of Science and Technology	Conservative hardliner	Non-cleric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active student leader in the demonstration against the monarchy - Member of the Revolutionary Guard - Governor of Ardabil - Lecturer at Tehran's University of Science - Co-founder of Abadgaran or Developers Group - Mayor of Tehran - Incumbent president in 2009
Mir Hossein Mousavi (Age: 69, 1942)	2009	- MA in Architecture from the National University of Iran	Reformist	Non-cleric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Member of the underground resistance movement against the Pahlavi regime - First political director of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) - Editor-in-chief of the IRP's official newspaper <i>The Islamic Republic</i> - Foreign Minister - Prime Minister - Member of the Expediency Council - President and editorial director of the Iranian Academy of the Arts in Tehran
Mahdi Karoubi	2009	- BA in Theology from the University of Tehran	Reformist	Cleric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opponent of Pahlavi's regime - Member of Khomeini's Comrades - Head of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee

(Age: 72, 1937)					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Head of the Martyrs' Foundation - Speaker of the Majles - Adviser to the Supreme Leader - Founder of the National Trust Party
Mohsen Rezaei (*) (Age: 55 / 59, 1954)	2009/ 2013	- BSc in Mechanical Engineering from the Iran University of Science and Technology	Conservative hardliner	Non-cleric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opponent of Pahlavi's regime - Co-founders of the Islamic Revolution Mujahideen organization - Mansouroun guerrilla fighter protecting Ayatollah Khomeini - Member of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps - Secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council - Chair of the Commission for Macroeconomics and Commerce - Commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

* Candidates marked with an asterisk contested in more than one election.

Table 3. The Background of the Presidential Candidates in 2013

Candidates	Election	Education	Party	Cleric/ Non-cleric	Political positions
Hassan Rouhani (*) (Age: 65/69, 1948)	2013/ 2017	- Clerical training in Qom - PhD in Law from Glasgow Caledonian University	Reformist	Cleric	- Opponent of Pahlavi's regime - Member of the legislative assembly or Majlis - Assembly of Experts - Commander of Iran's air defenses - Member of the High Council for National Defense - Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council - Iran's chief nuclear negotiator - Incumbent president in 2017
Mohammad Baquer Qalibaf (*) (Age: 52/56, 1961)	2013/ 2017	- PhD in political geography from Tarbiat Modares University	Conservative hardliner	Non-cleric	- Former air force pilot certified to fly Airbus aircraft - Chief commander of Iran's Imam Ridha troops - Chief commander of Nasr Troops during the Iran-Iraq war - Director of Khatam-al-anbia - Commander of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force - Chief of the Iranian Police Forces - Representative of President Mohammad Khatami to fight against smuggling - Mayor of Tehran
Saeed Jalili	2013	- PhD in political sciences	Conservative hardliner	Non-cleric	- Member of Basij - Volunteer of the army of Guardians of the Islamic Revolution during the Iran-Iraq war/

(Age: 56, 1965)					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Diplomat of the Foreign Ministry - Member of the Supreme National Security Council - Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, European and American affairs Secretary of the Iranian Supreme National Security Council - Chief Nuclear Negotiator - Member of the Expediency Council
Qolam Ali Hadad Adel (Age: 68, 1945)	2013	- PhD in Philosophy from the University of Tehran	Conservative hardliner	Non-cleric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Iranian philosopher - Former chairman of the Parliament - First non-cleric speaker of Majlis - Member of Deputy Culture - Islamic Guidance Minister - Deputy Education Minister - Head of the Iranian Academy of Persian Language and Literature
Ali Akbar Velayati (Age: 68, 1945)	2013	- M.Sc. from the University of Tehran, and pediatrics degrees from Johns Hopkins University	Conservative hardliner	Non-cleric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opponent of Pahlavi's regime - Deputy Health Minister - Tehran's representative in the first term of the Islamic Consultative Assembly - Foreign Minister during the presidencies of Ayatollah Khamenei, and Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani - Senior advisor in charge of International Affairs to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution
Mohamad Qarazi	2013	- M.S. in engineering at the	Conservative hardliner	Non-cleric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imam Khomeini's comrade during his exile in France

(Age: 71, 1942)		University of Tehran			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Member of Mojagedine-e-Xalq - Minister of Petroleum in Mir Hossein Mousavi's cabinet - Minister of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone in Rafsanjani's administration - Member of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC)/ A Member of Parliament
Mohammad Reza Aref (Age: 64, 1951)	2013	- PhD in electrical engineering from Stanford University, Stanford, CA, USA	Reformist	Non-cleric	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Parliamentary leader of reformists' Hope Fraction in the Iranian Parliament - Head of Reformists' Supreme Council in terms of policymaking - Faculty Member with the Isfahan University of Technology - Professor of electrical engineering at the Sharif University of Technology, Tehran - Minister of Post, Telegraph, and Telephone in Khatami's presidency - First Vice President of Khatami in his second term

Note. Candidates marked with an asterisk contested in more than one election.

Table 4. The Background of the Presidential Candidates in 2017

Candidates	Election	Education	Party	Cleric/ Non-cleric	Political positions
Ebrahim Raisi (Age: 58, 1959)	2017	- Clerical training in Mashhad and Qom - No tertiary education	Conservative hardliner	Cleric	- Custodian and chairman of Astan Quds Razavi - Deputy Head of the Central Revolutionary Prosecutor's Office - Member of the Assembly of Experts - Attorney of the General of Iran
Eshaq Jahangiri Kouhshahi (Age: 60, 1957)	2017	- PhD in Science and Research from Azad University, Tehran.	Reformist	Non-cleric	- Governor of Isfahan - Minister of Industries and Mines in Khatami's cabinet - Deputy Head of the Agriculture Department in Kerman - Parliament member - First Vice President of Hassan Rouhani's government
Mostafa (Aqa) Mirsalim (Age: 70, 1947)	2017	- M.Sc. in Internal Combustion Engines from Ecole Nationale Superieure de Petrole et des Moteurs	Conservative hardliner	Non-cleric	- Chief of national police - Advisor to former president Ayatollah Khamenei - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance - Expediency Discernment Council - Assistant professor of Mechanical Engineering, Amir Kabir University of Technology, Tehran
Mostafa Hashemi Taba (Age: 71, 1946)	2017		Reformist	Non-cleric	- Minister of Industries - Vice President in Khatami's government - Head of the National Olympic Committee - Co-founder, Executives of Construction Party

3.4.1 Ethnographic research: Concepts related to *âberu*

The ethnographic research method was employed to address the lack of literature on the concept of *âberu*, its features, aspects, and pragmatic components, which form the first-order concept of *âberu*. After analyzing the data, I observed a discrepancy between the factors influencing an Iranian politician's *âberu* and those affecting a common Iranian's *âberu*. This analysis prompted me to reconsider the factors influencing *âberu* as introduced by researchers such as Sharifian (2007, 2011, 2017), Sharifian and Tayebi (2017), Koutlaki (1999, 2010), and, to some extent, Izadi (2013, 2017).

Consequently, the ethnographic research method was adopted to explore the layperson's understanding of the concept of *âberu* and its sociocultural components. The survey was conducted through social media platforms, namely WhatsApp and Instagram. In July 2021, I administered a survey in Persian via a public story on my Instagram page. I asked my Iranian Instagram followers to define the concept of *âberu*, explain its significance in their daily lives and within their families and social circles, and describe how one's *âberu* might be undermined or enhanced.

In parallel, I conducted the same survey on my WhatsApp status, inviting all my contacts to participate. The survey question was framed as follows:

Survey 1 question, Persian:

شما چگونه آبرو را تعریف می کنید؟
جایگاه آبرو در خانواده شما و میان اقوام شما کجاست؟
چه عواملی می تواند بر روی آبرو تاثیر گذار باشد؟

Survey 1 question, English:

1. How do you define *âberu*?
2. How significant is *âberu* in your family and among your relatives?
3. What factors can influence one's *âberu*?

In both surveys, 51 native speakers of Persian participated: 32 females and 19 males. The participants were undergraduates, aged 18 to 35, from Tehran and Isfahan. Thirteen participants submitted their answers via text messages, while the remaining 38 sent recorded voice messages. The voice messages were transcribed, and the text messages were transferred to Word for later analysis.

Interestingly, the analysis of the first survey prompted me to conduct the second one, as many participants introduced additional significant concepts such as *bi-âberu* (a person with no *âberu* or roughly no honor), *qostax* (rude), *biadab* (impolite), *mahjub* (well-mannered or courteous), *mo'adab* (polite), and *âberu-mand* (someone with *âberu*). As a result, on 28 January 2022, I launched a new survey, posting it as a story on my Instagram. I also ran the same survey on my WhatsApp status. The second survey question was framed as follows:

Survey 2 question, Persian:

لطفا مفاهیم زیر را بر اساس درک و یا تجربه ی خود از منفی ترین به مثبت ترین بچینید.
بی ادب. محجوب. گستاخ. آبرومند. مودب. بی آبرو

Survey 2 question, English:

Please order the following concepts from the most negative to the most positive based on your understanding or experience.

Biadab (impolite), *mahjub* (well-mannered or courteous), *qostax* (rude), *âberu-mand* (someone with *âberu*) *mo'adab* (polite), and *bi-âberu* (a person with no *âberu* or roughly with no honor).

I then selected the same participants by adjusting the status settings on WhatsApp and the story settings on Instagram to ensure that the survey was conducted among a homogeneous group across all surveys. I asked them to draw a continuum and place these specific fundamental concepts in order, from the most negative to the most positive, to determine whether the concept of *âberu* is the most significant among Iranians.

Twenty-nine participants numbered the concepts from one (the most negative) to six (the most positive) via text messages, which were transferred to Word for later analysis. The remaining 21 participants ordered the concepts from the most negative to the most positive via voice messages, which were transcribed for subsequent analysis.

3.4.2 Occurrence of *âberu*-related terms in the research

Chapter four exclusively focuses on the concept of *âberu* and introduces dictionary entries related to it, which are also considered *âberu*'s interwoven concepts. The entries are extracted from the *Dehkhoda Dictionary* (Dehkhoda et al., 1991) and the *Persian Dictionary: Farhang-e-Farsi* (Moin, 2008). These entries specify that *âberu* may refer to any of the following concepts. The 15 concepts relevant to *âberu* and used in this study are listed below.

- i. *Kerâmat*; man's honor and dignity or considering great respect for a man.

- ii. *E'tebâr*; the social position that a person reaches, and it may denote their high status and rank.
- iii. *Arj*; the social position that a person reaches, and it may denote their high status and rank.
- iv. *Ez^oat*; honor, dignity, fame, or esteem.
- v. *Šohrat*; status-related prestige, respect, honor, fame, or esteem.
- vi. *Heysiyyat*; honor, dignity, fame, or esteem.
- vii. *Efteqâr*; used in the sense of referring to respect and esteem, both shown by a person and shown by others to that person.
- viii. *Hormat*; used in the sense of referring to respect and esteem, both shown by a person and shown by others to that person.
- ix. *Šaraf* or *šerafat*; used in the sense of referring to man's honor and dignity.
- x. *Bozorgvâri*; man's honor and dignity or considering great respect for a man.
- xi. *E'tebâr*; used to express credibility, trustworthiness, authority, and the related confidence placed in a person.
- xii. *Nâmus*; chastity and purity.
- xiii. *Qadr* or *ša'an*; used to express value or merit.
- xiv. *Manzelat*; used to express value or merit.
- xv. *Ehterâm*; respect and esteem.

Dehkhoda et al. (1991) and Moin (2008) have introduced the above-mentioned concepts as the most closely related to *âberu*. Likewise, Figure 2 in Chapter 5 shows that Iranian politicians have applied the concept of *âberu* and its interwoven elements 146 times in the electoral debates of 2009, 2013, and 2017. Interestingly, Iranian politicians not only applied the term *âberu* explicitly, but they also made extensive use of its interwoven concepts in the debates. As seen in Figure 2, *efteqâr* (the sense of respect and esteem) with 26.02% (38 tokens) and *ez^oat* (dignity) with 23.28% (34 tokens) are the most frequently used, while *âberu* with 4.79% (7 tokens) occupies sixth place, which may signify its sensitivity.

To deepen the analysis, a thesaurus-based approach was employed to compare *âberu*-related terms used in the debates with their definitions in the *Dehkhoda* and *Moin* dictionaries. This comparison revealed that *kerâmat* and *šaraf*, both terms referring to honor and dignity, were frequently used in the debates. The thesaurus definitions align with how politicians invoke these terms to enhance their own image and political *âberu*, while attacking that of their opponents. For instance, *kerâmat* is defined as nobility and dignity, and it was often used by Iranian candidates to assert their moral superiority. *E'tebâr* and *arj*, relating to social position

and high status, were also commonly used. The nuances in the thesaurus entries helped clarify how politicians use these terms strategically to question or affirm authority. For example, *arj* is defined as value, worth, and high rank, and Iranian politicians used it to emphasize their contributions and societal roles. In the 2017 debates, candidate Raisi stated, “Our administration will elevate the *arj* of the Iranian worker,” using *arj* to connect with the electorate by promising to enhance their social status. *Ezʔat* and *heysiyat*, both relating to honor, dignity, and fame, indicate a focus on public perception and reputation in political discourse. As mentioned, *Dehkhoda* defines *ezʔat* as a state of being honored and respected, which aligns with its frequent use in Iranian presidential debates to enhance political credibility. For instance, the entry for *ezʔat* was compared to its usage in the 2009 debates, where candidates often referred to *ezʔat* when discussing national pride and dignity, as defined in the thesaurus.

To better illustrate the semantic interplay, Figure 2 visually represents the frequency and context of *âberu*-related terms alongside their thesaurus definitions. This visual comparison highlights the prominence and distribution of these terms, providing a clearer picture of their strategic use in political debates. The findings suggest that Iranian politicians not only enhance their own *âberu*, but also relate it to Iran and consider themselves responsible for gaining and enhancing Iran’s *âberu*. For instance, in example [27] from the 2009 election, Mousavi frequently accuses Ahmadinejad of damaging Iran’s *âberu* and insists on promoting Iran’s *âberu* in various international arenas. Various examples are extracted to demonstrate the use of *âberu*-related terms (See Chapter Five).

In brief, the data indicate that Iranian politicians challenge their opponents’ *âberu* and its relevant concepts, but not with the intent to disgrace them publicly. Therefore, the frequency of the term *âberu* and its related concepts was counted in each presidential debate to observe how frequently politicians applied them. To this end, the Persian transcripts of the electoral debates in 2009, 2013, and 2017 were transferred to MS Word 2019. There, I was able to search for each concept or term using the “Advanced Find” function in MS Word to determine the total frequency of each concept. The concepts and their frequencies were then inserted into Excel to create representative diagrams.

3.5 Data analysis

Due to the significant role of the concept of *âberu* among both ordinary Iranians and Iranian politicians, there is a need to propose an *âberu*-based analytical framework capable of

analyzing Iranian politicians' intentional *âberu*-threatening behavior. As indicated above, ethnographic research shows that *âberu* has two aspects or levels: individual and collectivist, and these levels are reflected in the data collected. Therefore, in this study, we initially examine whether Iranian politicians attack their opponents' *âberu* individually or collectively, as shown in Figure 1. In other words, I investigate whether Iranian politicians apply the Individual *Âberu*-Threatening Act (I \hat{A} TA) or the Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening Act (C \hat{A} TA) to attack their adversaries' *âberu*.

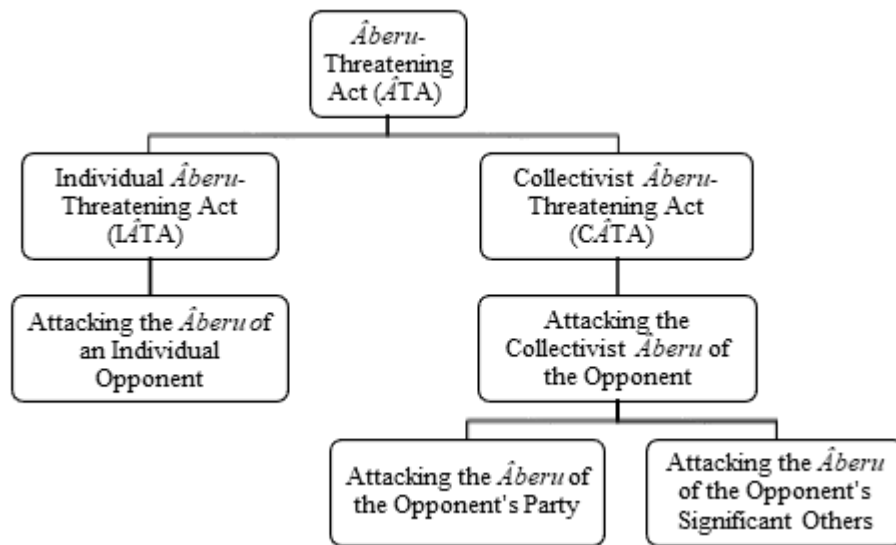


Figure 1. *Âberu*-Threatening Act (\hat{A} TA)

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained the electoral process within the Iranian context, the structure of each debate, and provided a brief biography of each candidate. I have outlined the rationale for selecting the data, along with the process of data collection, translation, and transcription, as well as the appropriate framework for analyzing the data. Chapter four presents an analytical framework based on *âberu* for analyzing political discourse within the collectivist context of Iran.

Chapter 4

Introducing the Concept of *Âberu*

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the linguistic and philosophical meanings of *âberu*, an emic concept that plays a significant role in Iranian culture. It is also extensively utilized by politicians in the electoral debates analyzed in this study. Additionally, I explore the individual and collectivist dimensions of *âberu* and how these are appropriated by Iranians, using examples from Iranian politicians participating in presidential debates.

The chapter further discusses how the concept of *âberu* is realized and shaped through interaction among Iranians. Accordingly, certain factors influencing *âberu* of both Iranians and Iranian politicians are identified and illustrated with examples drawn from the study data. Moreover, the role of *âberu* in Iranian presidential debates is examined, with particular attention to how politicians strive to maintain or enhance their own *âberu* while undermining that of their opponents.

In summary, this chapter demonstrates why the concept of *âberu* is integral to Iranian culture and particularly relevant in the context of presidential debates.

4.2 *Âberu* in the Persian language and Iranian culture

Sharifian (2007) argues that *âberu* is the most dominant social schema in Iranian cultural cognition. This cultural schema consists of two components: *âb* and *ru*. The first component, *âb*, means ‘water,’ while the second, *ru*, means ‘face.’ Thus, the term *âberu* linguistically conveys the notion of ‘water of the face.’

As mentioned in chapter three, dictionary entries from Dekhoda et al. (1991) and Moin (2008) indicate that *âberu* may refer to various concepts, including *jâh* or *arj*, *orz*, *ezwat*, *šohrat*, *heysiyat*, *nâm-e nik*, *nâmus*, *qadr*, or *ša’an*, among others (see 3.4.2).

Moreover, Aryanpur’s (1974) *Persian-English Dictionary* defines *âberu* as respect, credit, prestige, and honor. Therefore, dictionary entries indicate that *âberu* is a highly complex

concept. It carries multiple meanings for native Persian speakers as insiders while perplexing non-Persians as outsiders attempting to define it.

Since *âberu* is considered a cultural schema by Sharifian (2007), its message can be transmitted smoothly within its cultural group, leading to a more homogeneous interpretation among its members. Depending on the context of linguistic behavior and the shared cultural cognition of its members, they may select a specific meaning or a combination of meanings to convey their message.

In Persian, according to the Dehkhoda Dictionary (1991: 7-13), the term *âb* itself is used to express categories associated with (i) high position (*manzelat*), status (*jâh*), rank (*maqâm*), and grandeur (*qadr* or *martabat*); (ii) grandeur (*ezw*), respect (*šharaf*), honor (*šokuh*), as well as related beauty and splendor; and (iii) trustworthiness (*e'tebâr*).

Therefore, in its metaphorical sense, *âb* signifies that possessing water symbolizes high status and rank, which serve as grounds for respect and esteem. Conversely, losing *âb* may result in unpleasant consequences. As noted in the Dehkhoda Dictionary, the phrase *âb bordan* literally means 'taking water away,' but metaphorically, it signifies an attack on a person's dignity, status, or honor.

According to Moore (2004), further breaking down the term *âberu* into its constituent parts-*âb* + *e* + *ru*-traces its origins back to ancient roots as a descendant of Indo-Iranian, a sub-branch of Indo-European, and now the official language of Iran. In other words, *âb* originates from the Indo-Iranian language family and stems from the Indo-Iranian root *ap*, whose plural form is *apas*.

George E. Moore states that the term *ap* also appears in Avestan texts, the primary collection of religious scriptures in Zoroastrianism. However, its form has undergone modifications over time through a diachronic process. In Middle Persian, it evolved into *api* before transitioning into the extensively used form *âb* in New Persian. Moore emphasizes that despite these variations, all forms retain the same meaning-water-a significant element in Iranian culture.

Boyce (1996) highlights that water played a paramount role in the lives of nomadic Indo-Iranians, as it was the source of life. Consequently, streams and wells from which they and their herds drank were revered, much like the fires upon their hearths. Zoroastrians regularly made offerings to the household well or the nearest stream, as well as to fire hearths, in a similar manner. As a result, they were regarded as worshipers of water and fire.

According to Mary Boyce, Zoroastrians took great care to preserve the purity of water and envisioned it as embodying deities characterized by brightness, radiance, glitter, and glory-

attributes they extended to water itself. Interestingly, due to water's purifying properties, the *Small Avesta* states that water could purify men's seed and pregnant women's wombs, facilitating an easier birth.

In the same vein, Skjærvø (2002) states that in the *Old Avesta*, Ahura Mazdâ, the All-Knowing Ruler, fashioned the cow, the waters, and the plants in sequence. Water was the second substance created by the supreme God in Iranian cosmology, reflecting its significance. Water was also regarded as a *sacred* element alongside air, fire, and Earth, according to Zoroaster's prayers or mantras (Kanga 2014), since living creatures require water for drinking, air for breathing, fire for cooking, and Earth for growing plants to sustain life. Thus, Earth, air, fire, and water were deeply revered in that religion. Cultivating fields and raising cattle were considered religious obligations. Consequently, water was represented as a life-giving force, a source of fertility, and a vital element for existence due to its purifying and protective properties (Zaborowska 2014). Therefore, when rain fell in abundance, it irrigated the fields and was considered a blessing from God. However, when it was scarce, as a fundamental necessity for survival, it led to crop damage and drought, ultimately resulting in the cessation of life (Habashi 2000).

Consequently, one could argue that water was highly revered among Iranian Zoroastrians for various reasons: (i) it was essential for sustaining life, (ii) it was regarded as the second sacred element in the creation of the world and was subsequently worshipped, (iii) it possessed purifying and fertility-enhancing properties, and (iv) it was associated with brightness, radiance, glitter, and glory, embodying the presence of deities. All these factors confirm the significant role and status of water in Zoroastrian Iranian traditions and beliefs.

A similarly elevated status is granted to water in Islam, as the Quran repeatedly associates it with the source of life and fertility, as exemplified in the following verses. However, the final verse emphasizes the purifying power of water in a metaphorical sense, symbolizing the purification of humankind from sins, falsehood, and impurity.

- i. Surah Al-Baqarah, The Cow, Verse 164: Most surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day and the ships which sail through the sea with that profits men, and the water (rain) which Allah sends down from the sky, then gives life with it to the earth after its death and scatters in it all kinds of moving creatures and in the veering of the winds and the clouds made subservient between the sky and the earth, there are Signs for a people who are mindful.

- ii. Surah Al-Anbiyâ, The Prophets, Verse 30: Did not those who disbelieve see that the heavens and the earth were joined together as one united piece? Then We parted them? And We have created every living thing from water. Will they not then believe?
- iii. Surah Al-Nahl, The River, Verse 65: And Allah sends down water from the sky. So, he revived the earth therewith after its death. Most surely there is a Verse (proof) in this for people who hear.
- iv. Surah Al-mu'minun, The Believers, Verse 18: And We send down water from the sky with a predestined amount, then We caused with it (lakes, rivers, seas) in the earth, and most surely, we are able to take it away (with condensation).
- v. Surah Al-Anfâl, The Spoils of War, Verse 11: (Remember) when He overwhelmed you with drowsiness giving security from Him. And sent down upon you water from the sky that He may purify you thereby and take away from you the whispers of Satan and that He may fortify your hearts and steady your footsteps thereby.

In harmony with the final verse, Kadivar (2015), a Shi'a theologian, highlights that water is essential for Muslims in ritual purification. In a physical sense, they must perform ablution (*vozu*) before praying and an obligatory bath (*qosl*) after sexual intercourse. Therefore, the use of pure water is necessary to ensure the validity of these practices. Consequently, the absence of clean water poses challenges for Muslims in managing daily life, practicing religious values, and worshipping Allah (Kadivar 2015). Interestingly, water's purifying function is evident both in the ancient practices of Indo-Iranian peoples and in the Islamic traditions of Iranian Muslims.

In the same vein, Lange (2007) mentions that water may have been a recurring attribute associated with prophets in Islamic tradition, symbolizing sainthood or a sign of their high moral character. Therefore, water is treated with deep reverence.

According to Shi'a *Hadith* and a quotation from Imam Baqir, water was included in the dowry of Muhammad's daughter, Fatimah Zahra, underscoring its moral significance. He stated that the Fatimah had two forms of dowry: a celestial dowry and a terrestrial dowry. The former included one-fifth of the world, one-third of heaven, and four rivers-the Euphrates, the Nile, the Nehruwân, and the Balkh-rivers known for their abundant waters. The latter consisted of five hundred Arab dirhams. According to the *Hadith*, God wished to exalt Fatimah spiritually, appointing water as her dowry to bestow upon her a high status and honor.

As demonstrated above, *âb* holds profound significance among both nomadic and Muslim Iranians. Based on its philosophical roots and dictionary definitions, *âb*, in its compound form *âberu*, serves as an indicator of esteem, honor, status, and dignity.

4.3 The importance of *âberu* in Iranian culture

Regarding Wierzbicka's (1997: 195) assertion that "every society has its own keywords," *âberu* is one such keyword, whose interpretation can provide insight into how individuals think and evaluate their social interactions based on their beliefs, social norms, and values.

As mentioned earlier, Sharifian (2007) states that *âberu*, literally "water of the face," is one of the most fundamental concepts in Iranian culture. He further explains that the term *âberu* may convey two meanings: the freshness and healthiness of one's face or the sweat on one's face.

In the first sense, the concept of 'face' appears to be a metonym for one's general wellbeing, and it is also metaphorically associated with a schema that embodies the image of a person, a family, or a group, particularly as viewed by others in the society. In the second sense, the sweat on one's face may be used as a metonym for cases where damage to one's honor and [the] social image has made him/her upset to the point of sweating (Sharifian 2007: 36).

Due to the significance of *âberu* schema in Iranian culture and the Persian language, Sharifian (2011: 141) presents various expressions commonly used by native Persian speakers.

- *Âberu rizi kardan* (pouring *âberu*) 'to disgrace'
- *Âberu bordan* (taking *âberu*) 'to disgrace'
- *Âberu xaridan* (buying *âberu*) 'saving face [*âberu*]'
- *Âberu dâri kardan* (maintaining *âberu*) 'maintaining face [*âberu*]'
- *Bi âberu* (without *âberu*) 'disgraced'
- *Âberu-dâr* (*âberu*-poss) 'respectable, decent'

Regarding the first two phrases above, it should be noted that *âberu rizi kardan* is a compound transitive action verb. When used in a sentence, the agent, the one disgracing others, is of primary importance. In contrast, *âberu bordan* is a compound intransitive action verb; when employed in a sentence, the focus shifts to the theme, or the person being disgraced. The distinction between the first two phrases is lost in their English translation as 'disgrace.'

Below are additional idiomatic expressions and collocations with *âberu* based on my experience as a native speaker of Persian.

- *Âberu kasb kardan* (earning *âberu*) 'establishing *âberu*'
- *Raftan e âberu* (*âberu* is gone) 'to disgrace' or 'one's *âberu* has been tarnished'

- *Âberu be bâd dâdan* (let âberu be gone with the wind) ‘~to disgrace’ or ‘one’s âberu has been tarnished’
- *Hefze âberu kardan* (maintaining âberu) ‘~ saving âberu’
- *Âberu-bar* or *âberu-riz* (a person who destroys other’s âberu) ‘~ to disgrace’

Furthermore, Hosseini et al. (2017-2018: 22) argue that *âberu* can be conceptualized as the structural metaphor "ÂBERU IS A COMMODITY," emphasizing that "the exact nature of this commodity is ‘water,’ which has always been a rare and hard-to-find resource in the dry and arid climate of Iran." They further explain that *âberu* can be metaphorically spilled, bought, sold, pawned, exchanged for money, or even auctioned, as it can be treated like a commodity. Therefore, *âberu* is considered the most precious commodity that every individual, along with their close associates, strives to establish, enhance, protect, or restore through their daily interactions with others.

From a philosophical perspective, Ossowska (1980) asserts that *âberu* is perceived as a protective shield woven from the concepts of dignity, reputation, trust, grandeur, credit, and honor in Iranian culture (cited in Zaborowska 2014). It is important to note that these interwoven concepts influence one’s social status and prestige. Similarly, Zaborowska (2014: 55) claims that “*Âberu*, in its philosophical understanding, is a veil protecting an individual, woven from a mixture of values, norms, and virtues. This veil protects the individual by safeguarding their *shaxsiat* ‘personality’, demonstrating their adherence to certain principles.” She further asserts that *âberu* serves as an indicator of fidelity to these norms and principles, and its violation disrupts the framework of a specific order, which can directly threaten one’s life. Indeed, this violation is menacing, as it results in the loss of credibility, honor, grandeur, and reputation. In short, it is crucial for Iranians to adhere to social, cultural, and religious norms and values in their daily lives to prevent any damage to their credibility, honor, grandeur, and reputation, while upholding both their own *âberu* and that of their interlocutors.

It is important to note that *âberu* may relate to any of the above-mentioned concepts or a combination of them. However, people reach coherent interpretations based on context, relationship types, and shared cultural schemata.

Interestingly, nearly all the participants agreed that they become acquainted with the concept of *âberu* within their families at an early age, and that they must stockpile and preserve their *âberu* throughout their lives. People can build *âberu* when their family members, relatives, neighbors, or colleagues approve of their behavior and manners, provided they conform to social and cultural norms. Therefore, *âberu* can only be accumulated when others, either in one’s inner or outer society, confirm one’s behavior. In other words, individuals build

âberu (*âberu kasb kardan*) by endeavoring to gain social credibility, honor, reputation, grandeur, and prestige through social approval over the course of their lives. They then attempt to maintain their *âberu* (*hefze âberu kardan*) by adhering to social, cultural, and moral norms and values. Finally, once they establish firm principles based on social and cultural norms and values and adhere to them throughout their lives, society evaluates them positively. As a result, they are regarded as *âberu-mand* or *âberu-dar*, meaning they are those who possess *âberu*.

To highlight the importance of *âberu* among Iranians, ethnographic research was conducted in which participants were asked to arrange six concepts on a continuum, ranging from the most negative to the most positive, based on their own understanding. Participants were asked to draw a continuum including the following concepts: *bi-âberu* (a person with no *âberu*, or roughly no honor), *qostax* (rude), *bi-adab* (impolite), *mahjub* (well-mannered, courteous), *mo'adab* (polite), and *âberu-mand* (someone with *âberu*).

Based on Persian speakers' positive evaluation of specific behaviors in particular situations-especially when these behaviors align with social, cultural, and religious norms-concepts such as *mahjub* (well-mannered, courteous), *mo'adab* (polite), and *âberu-mand* (someone with *âberu*) are triggered. In contrast, behaviors that are negatively judged and break societal norms result in negative evaluations such as *bi-âberu* (a person with no *âberu*, or roughly no honor), *qostax* (rude), and *bi-adab* (impolite). The dominant role of the concept of *âberu* among Iranians is evident when interviewees position the concepts of *bi-âberu* and *âberu-mand* at the extremes of the continuum, with *bi-âberu* on the most negative side and *âberu-mand* on the most positive side (see 3.4.1).

In this regard, O'Shea (1999: 101) states that "*âberu*, or honor, is a powerful social force for Iranians. All Iranians measure themselves to a great extent by the honor they accumulate through their actions and social interactions." Thus, *âberu* is an essential element of one's family, social, and professional life, which can be enhanced or tarnished not only in the eyes of in-group members but also in the eyes of outgroup members. In other words, in Iranian collectivist culture, an individual's *âberu* is shaped through interactions with others. Others assess an individual's behavior-whether it conforms to or deviates from social norms and popular beliefs-and then attribute *âberu* accordingly, often linking it to the individual's related group.

Sharifian (2007) further argues that *âberu* serves as a crucial reference point in every aspect of Iranians' lives. Therefore, it is a significant misfortune when one loses *âberu*, as functioning within a group would become complicated and associated with humiliation and embarrassment. Additionally, it is important to note that the concept of "group" can range from

a family to a broader network, such as extended relatives, a company, an organization, or even a government.

4.4 Characteristics of *âberu*

Studies by Hofstede et al. (2010) demonstrate that in collectivist cultures, stable and tightly-knit groups exist, where in-group members pledge loyalty to one another in exchange for support. Similarly, in Iranian culture, individuals form strong bonds with their in-group members and adhere to group norms to ensure mutual protection and support. This social dynamic is closely tied to the concept of *âberu*, or honor, which plays a pivotal role in Iranian society.

Markus and Kitayama (1991) distinguish between individualistic and collectivist cultures by examining how individuals perceive themselves in relation to others. In individualistic cultures, people view themselves as independent entities, whereas in collectivist cultures such as Iran, one's identity is largely defined by social networks and group affiliations. This distinction is evident in the way Iranians protect their *âberu*, which involves preserving the honor and reputation of their group in the public sphere. In such cultures, personal achievements are often viewed through the lens of group benefits and social harmony.

Gelfand et al. (2006) offer valuable insights into how cultural norms are maintained and enforced, particularly in cultures characterized by "tightness" or "looseness." Tight cultures, with their strong social norms and low tolerance for deviant behavior, align closely with the concept of *âberu*, where maintaining group *âberu*-or honor-requires strict adherence to social and cultural expectations. In Iranian culture, the tightness of social norms means that deviations from these norms can result in significant social repercussions, thereby reinforcing the importance of *âberu* in guiding behavior and maintaining social order.

In other words, Iranians adhere to social and cultural norms, as well as their group values, to protect their group's *âberu* in the public eye. This study reveals that the concept of *âberu* has various characteristics. It encompasses both individualistic and collectivist aspects, is constructed and co-constructed in interactions, and involves multiple components, which I will illustrate in the following sections.

4.4.1 *Âberu* at the individual and collectivist levels

Before discussing the levels or aspects of *âberu*, it may be worth mentioning the concept of kinship, which is a prevalent concept in collectivist cultures such as Iranian culture. Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo (1999: 230) proposed several kinship categories in their study, such as ‘mum,’ ‘dad,’ ‘aunty,’ ‘close relative,’ ‘in-laws,’ etc., which can also be applied to Iranian culture, though with some variation.

In Iranian culture, the categories of ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ are more elastic and can be extended beyond one’s biological parents to include in-laws. For example, it is common for people to call their mothers-in-law ‘mum’ and their fathers-in-law ‘dad’ as a mark of respect. Additionally, children may not only call their parents’ close friends ‘aunt’ or ‘uncle,’ but they may also refer to their own close friends’ parents in the same way to show respect. Among Iranians, kinship extends from the nuclear family to the extended family, encompassing ‘close relatives’ such as cousins, nephews or nieces, half-brothers, and half-sisters, similar to the kinship structures observed in Cameroonian and Ghanaian cultures, as noted in Anchimbe’s (2018) study.

These familial bonds, often initiated within the immediate family, expand to larger, cohesive social networks, including extended families, relatives, friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and neighbors. Notably, close friends may also refer to one another as ‘sister’ or ‘brother,’ further blurring the lines between biological kinship and social bonds. In this way, kinship in Iranian culture transcends blood relations, emphasizing the importance of respect and social cohesion.

The concept of kinship is also observable in the context of presidential debates. A recommended behavior in both Islam and Iranian culture is to establish kinship and religious bonds within society. Islam teaches that all Muslims are religious sisters and brothers, which fosters greater solidarity and amity among them, creating a strong sense of brotherhood, sisterhood, or kinship. Accordingly, politicians often take advantage of this concept of brotherhood and refer to their opponents as their Muslim brothers, expressing amity toward them.

Examples [1-2] illustrate how Karoubi and Jahangiri attribute blame to their rivals. They are acutely aware that public criticism is negatively perceived in Iranian culture and Islam, potentially causing mutual harm to both politicians and their opponents. This awareness likely explains why Karoubi refers to Ahmadinejad as *barâdar e man* ‘my brother’ [1], and Jahangiri addresses Qalibaf as *barâdar e aziz* ‘Dear brother’ [2]. By using these fraternal terms,

politicians aim to convey camaraderie and mitigate any damage to their own *âberu*. In essence, they refer to their adversaries as *barâdar* or ‘brothers’ because they fear being misjudged or seen as thoughtless by the public when publicly accusing or criticizing opponents, even though this practice contradicts Iranian cultural and religious norms.

[1]

6-2009-KRB, Debate No.3

آقای احمدی نژاد عزیز! برادر من! وهم و خیال و اینها نیست، پیام خمینی تا پیام احمدی نژاد زمین تا آسمان فرق دارد

(Lit. Trans.) Mr Ahmadinejad dear! Brother my! Hallucination and fantasies and these are not, Ayatollah Khomeini’s message until Ahmadinejad’s message, earth until sky, has a difference.

(Com. Trans.) Dear Mr. Ahmadinejad! My brother! It is not a hallucination nor fantasies. The difference between Ayatollah Khomeini’s message and Ahmadinejad’s is like heaven and Earth.

[2]

6-2017-JHNGR, Debate No.3

آقای قالیباف! برادر عزیز گویی این دفعه برای تخریب آمدید ولی به شما اطلاعات غلط می دهند

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Qalibaf! Brother dear! It seems this time for destruction you had come, but to you false information they give.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Qalibaf! Dear brother! It seems you had come for destruction this time, but they give you false information.

Iranian politicians may call their opponents *barâdar* or ‘brother’ to show their amity and mitigate self *âberu*-damage before threatening their rivals’ *âberu* due to the cyclic nature of *âberu*-damage. In other words, Iranian politicians adhere to these cultural expectations by addressing their opponents with terms of endearment such as ‘brother’, thereby avoiding direct confrontation and preserving both their own and their rivals’ *âberu*.

The maintenance, enhancement, and protection of *âberu* are individual concerns to firmly stand within one’s immediate group and group concerns about standing within the broader society. Although Iranians have their individuality, they are always part of a larger group, reflecting their attachment to a community. Arguably, Iranians often put their personal interests and needs on hold to conform to the expectations of their related groups and avoid

negative evaluations from both their in-group members and the broader society (Izadi, 2017). Indeed, individuals are accountable for their group's *âberu* and pledge loyalty to their collectivist *âberu*. This means that norms and values associated with kinship are considered essential within the group, and each individual member is responsible for safeguarding their group's *âberu* in society. Every individual can have either a positive or detrimental impact on their group's *âberu*. Therefore, the concept of *âberu* operates on two levels: individual *âberu* and collectivist *âberu*.

The individual and collectivist aspects of *âberu* are further illustrated by the ethnographic research findings in this study. In an Iranian family, children are expected to adopt a respectful demeanor to preserve their parents' *âberu*. In turn, parents also have an obligation to avoid actions that could harm or threaten their children's *âberu*. For instance, when a child behaves poorly, it brings shame to the entire family, especially to the parents, as their parenting abilities are questioned. On the other hand, divorced parents can also jeopardize their children's *âberu*, as society may judge the children based on their parents' failed marriage. Children's future lives are often shaped by their parents' relationship status, as society may view them as potentially unsuccessful future spouses, much like their parents. Divorce, which is considered taboo in Iranian culture, can severely damage a family's collectivist *âberu*. Therefore, some couples may opt to remain in an unhappy marriage, rather than risk the social stigma of divorce, to uphold cultural and social expectations. As evident, every member of the group must be mindful of their behavior and adhere to societal values to protect their collectivist *âberu*.

Individuals, as members of groups, must uphold their own individual *âberu* to be accepted as worthy members of their respective groups, enabling them to support their collectivist *âberu* in the public eye. One's behavior can directly affect their network's *âberu*. Consequently, every individual is responsible for ensuring that their actions align with societal values, as any loss of *âberu* negatively impacts their family or their collectivist *âberu*. As a result, Iranians bear the responsibility of maintaining and enhancing their *âberu*, and by extension, *âberu* of the family or group to which they belong. Enhancing *âberu* translates to a higher social status or greater respect for individuals and their directly related groups. Furthermore, Iranians are expected to add to *âberu* of their interlocutors and their networks by conforming to societal norms and manners.

Like ordinary Iranians, politicians also possess two aspects of *âberu*: their own individual *âberu* and their collectivist *âberu*. However, their collectivist *âberu* extends beyond their family to include their party's *âberu* and *âberu* of their significant others. The party

includes core supporters, proponents, headquarters staff, ministers, cabinet members, and colleagues, while the significant others include family members and relatives, who may also possess political or apolitical power, often linked to governmental organizations. Due to the collectivist nature of *âberu*, candidates and their networks can exert both favorable and disastrous impacts on each other's *âberu* through their interactions. Politicians therefore work to establish *âberu* for themselves, their party, and their significant others, recognizing the importance of collectivist *âberu*. In fact, they leverage the collectivist nature of *âberu* to enhance their network's *âberu*, which in turn enhances their own individual *âberu*. However, when their network's *âberu* is damaged, their own *âberu* is inevitably affected as well.

Though contrary to public belief, this aligns with the nature of political debates, presidential candidates often attack their opponents' and their networks' *âberu*, rather than adding to their own, as is culturally and socially expected. In fact, candidates may intentionally and unreservedly tarnish either aspect of their adversary's *âberu* to publicly disgrace them, potentially provoking defensive or offensive reactions aimed at protecting their own *âberu*.

In summary, within Iranian collectivist culture, *âberu* is either enhanced or damaged through interaction, serving as an individual's most valuable collective possession and the cornerstone of their security and well-being. In other words, *âberu* of the group is embedded within *âberu* of its individuals, and each person has the power to either strengthen or threaten their collective *âberu* depending on the state of their own individual *âberu*. As mentioned earlier, the accumulation of *âberu* is a lifelong process, with families playing a key role in educating individuals about its preservation. Indeed, individuals merchandise *âberu*, which can signify credit, reputation, honor, or grandeur, through their daily interactions.

4.4.2 *Âberu* in interaction

Arundale (2006) points to the relational dialectic nature of the face constituted or co-constituted in terms of the dialectical opposition between connection with others and separation from them. Don and Izadi (2011) and Izadi (2017) also examine Arundale's Face Constituting Theory (FCT) in relation to the Persian face. In his paper, Izadi (2017) relates the FCT to the culture-specific emic understanding of face in Persian culture. He also argues that relational connection and separation are voiced as bonding and differentiation among Iranians. Izadi (2017) states that the Persian emic concept of *âberu* is constituted or co-constituted within a dialectic relation of bonding and differentiation.

This study also indicates that *âberu* is an interactional phenomenon constituted or co-constituted. It is interactionally built via relationships among people. As indicated earlier, *âberu* may relate to any of the following concepts: reputation, credibility, grandeur, and honor. Therefore, the sequence of utterances, the relationship between participants, and their shared cultural schemata help them approach a consistent meaning or interpretation of *âberu*. Indeed, the concept of *âberu* and its appropriate interpretation is established within an interaction, a situation in which people communicate and then evaluate one another's verbal and non-verbal behavior in terms of social, moral, and cultural norms and values.

According to Izadi (2017), *âberu* can be shed like water (*âberu-rizi*) within daily interactions and in terms of differentiation. As already mentioned, *âberu* can be lost, lent, bought, gained, and kept like a commodity (Hosseini et al. 2017-2018) during an interaction. Hence, Iranians put their best effort into accumulating *âberu* in their whole lives. However, they cannot construct and co-construct *âberu* in isolation or independent of other members of society. Iranians need connectedness for others to give them credit and confirm that their behavior conforms with societal values. Indeed, within in-group connectedness, individuals form a group together in which their behavior influences one another's *âberu* due to the unity among them. At the same time, each group is separated from other groups of society due to the differentiation between them, in terms of group values and norms.

Within the bonding and connectedness among in-group members, they evaluate each other's behavior to stand as a worthy group in the whole society since outgroup members may judge or interpret them accordingly. Therefore, *âberu*-work is an interpersonal phenomenon. In other words, Iranians need to be confirmed by their in-group members as an individual and by others as a group collectively. If they are acknowledged by their own in-group members and outgroup members, they can protect their accumulated *âberu*, stand up in society, and enhance their social standing. In this manner, Iranians present themselves as *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) people in various social encounters to enhance their own individual *âberu* and their collectivist *âberu* in the eyes of others. Therefore, when others find them *âberu-mand* (someone with *âberu*), they earn considerable *ehterâm* (respect) and are granted higher social status. Iranians, thus, are continually involved in *âberu*-work to maintain their *âberu* in the presence of others. They also avoid shedding their interlocutors' *âberu* (*âberu-rizi kardan*) as it may inflict their own *âberu* due to its cyclic nature. Therefore, they endeavor to enhance their *âberu* among their in-group or outgroup members when engaging in certain religious practices and rituals or conforming to specific group norms and adhering to standard social or cultural

norms of the society to be positively evaluated by their own local society or group and the rest of society.

Âberu is an indispensable element in Iranians' daily lives. Iranians co-construct *âberu* dynamically within their everyday actions and interactions. As a result, one may be regarded as an *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) person, bi-*âberu* (without *âberu*) person, *âberu-bar* or *âberu-riz* person (one confronting others with *âberu*-loss) due to others' evaluations or judgments. An *âberu-bar* or *âberu-riz* person may damage their interlocutors' *âberu* by accusing or criticizing them publicly or disclosing unpleasant pieces of information about them in front of others or the public. Although they need to preserve their interlocutor's *âberu*, whether or not the interlocutor is connected to a group. When connected, individuals may enhance one another's *âberu* among their in-group members. Consequently, they may gain more collectivist *âberu* in the eyes of outgroup members. While separated, people may maintain either aspect of their outgroup interlocutor's *âberu*; their individual or collectivist *âberu*. Indeed, an individual may lend *âberu* to their outgroup addressees to boost their own individual and collectivist *âberu* due to the cyclic nature of *âberu*.

An anecdote, provided by one of the interviewees, may give us a better understanding of the concept of *âberu*. It illustrates how *âberu* is built and preserved in a family by the connectedness among them. Indeed, a family attends to its individual members' *âberu* to protect its collectivist *âberu* in the public eye. The interviewee is a young undergraduate female whose older brother's business has collapsed and he is in debt. She stresses that her family, i.e., parents, the younger brother, and herself, attempt to pay back the older brother's debt to avoid threatening the whole family's *âberu*. She frequently highlights that her family is an *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) family in which they never abscond or eat anybody's money (*pul-E kasi râ qordan*), an action which is flatly condemned by Islamic and Iranian cultural values. In other words, *pul-E kasi râ qordan* or to abscond is an *âberu*-threatening behavior and if the family cannot repay its member's debt, it would be a collective *âberu-rizi* (*âberu*-shedding) for the whole family. Therefore, the whole family endeavors to compensate for the older brother's slack business to protect their accumulated *âberu*.

So, the family's primary concern is to avoid *âberu-rizi* (*âberu*-shedding) in the public eye since they have accumulated this *âberu* within their interactions their whole life. It can therefore be interpreted that, on the one hand, Iranians assess one another's behavior and manners and attribute them to the people directly related to them. Consequently, in the mentioned example, all family members feel responsible for the behavior of the unsuccessful member of the family. On the other hand, what is remarkable here is that people care about

how others judge them or interpret their behavior indicating the importance of the ‘*harfe mardom*’ or ‘people’s talk’ (Sharifian, 2007). As illustrated in this example, this family also minds how other people think of them reflecting their fear of being negatively retypified or interpreted by others. Indeed, since this family wishes to avoid *âberu-rizi* (*âberu*-shedding) among people or ‘*mardom*,’ everyone adjusts the conduct of the family member.

As a result, since one’s action or behavior influences their in-group members’ *âberu*, Iranians are more cautious about producing accountable behavior and manners while adhering to social, moral, and cultural norms, and not deviating from them. Therefore, *âberu* may be established within one’s immediate family but be developed or damaged in dynamic relations in a bigger society when people mutually present themselves to one another. In other words, the centrality of communication and interaction in building and preserving *âberu* is of great importance. *Âberu* is conceptualized within interactions among people, belonging to the same or different groups.

4.4.3 *Âberu*-loss and *âberu*-boost phenomena

As indicated above, Iranians are expected to enhance and protect both aspects of their *âberu* and their interlocutors’ *âberu* due to cultural, social, and religious norms. When they or their networks deviate from societal values, people evaluate them negatively. Consequently, every group member can damage their own *âberu* and, by extension, their collectivist *âberu*, in a phenomenon known as *âberu*-loss. Indeed, when individuals commit a crime or do something wrong in this normative culture and fail to behave appropriately based on expected norms in different situations, they confront themselves and their group members with *âberu*-loss. On the contrary, when they adhere to societal norms and values and exhibit their best behavior, they preserve or enhance their own individual *âberu* and, consequently, their collectivist *âberu*, in a process known as *âberu*-boost. In the same respect, Sharifian and Tayebi (2017) and Izadi (2017) state that one can build and enhance their *âberu* by adhering to social norms but can also lose their *âberu* when they breach societal norms.

Âberu has two main sets of components: sociocultural and institutional. The sociocultural components of *âberu* are well known among all Iranians, including the general populace and Iranian politicians. However, the institutional components of *âberu* are mainly recognized among Iranian politicians, according to this study’s findings. Therefore, Iranians can boost or damage either aspect of their *âberu* or their interlocutors’ *âberu* when they either positively attend to or challenge the factors impacting one’s *âberu*. It should be noted that

individual *âberu* and collectivist *âberu* are inextricably intertwined and can be damaged or boosted simultaneously.

In the following sections, I will illustrate how common Iranians enjoy privileged social status, boosting both their individual *âberu* and their networks' *âberu* as they achieve advanced age, a decent life, educational credentials, and social positions, while maintaining their appearance. Furthermore, I will explain how Iranian politicians enhance their political *âberu* or the institutional components of their *âberu* when they align themselves with the Islamic Revolution, its leader, and the supreme leader's ideologies, in addition to the sociocultural components of *âberu*.

4.5 Multifunctionality of references to *âberu* in Iranian televised presidential debates

References to *âberu* in Iranian televised presidential debates serve as multifaceted tools for politicians, encompassing various strategic and rhetorical purposes. Building upon the cultural significance and meanings associated with *âberu*, politicians strategically employ these references to achieve specific communicative goals within the context of televised debates.

Firstly, Iranian politicians assert national identity and revolutionary *âberu* when they frequently invoke *âberu* to assert Iran's national integrity, prestige, and reputation on the global stage. References to incidents such as Iran being labeled as an "axis of evil" (See example [28]) underscore the need to protect Iran's *âberu* from defamation and hostile actions. Additionally, politicians emphasize the collective responsibility of Iranians to protect the *Enqelâb's* (Revolution's) *âberu* (example [29]), highlighting its significance as a symbol of national pride and revolutionary legacy. It should be noted that references to the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini underscore the importance of preserving the revolutionary legacy and maintaining Iran's ideological integrity. In other words, by linking *âberu* to Iran's revolutionary ideals and achievements, politicians evoke a sense of collective belonging and solidarity among Iranians, fostering unity and cohesion in the face of internal and external challenges.

By emphasizing the importance of utilizing the country's collective capacity, including the virtuous *mardom*, intellectuals, and experts, Iranian politicians aim to portray themselves as champions of Iran's prosperity and development. References to *mardom's ehterâm* (esteem), *kerâmat* (honor), and *ez'at* (dignity) (see example [34]) underscore the need to safeguard the

rights and dignity of all strata of society, positioning politicians as defenders of Iranian values and rights.

References to '*ehterâm*' (esteem), '*kerâmat*' (honor), and '*ez^oat*' (dignity) underscore the responsibility of politicians to protect Iran's national honor and dignity. Instances where Iran's '*ez^oat*' has been compromised, such as abandoning hostages without proper recognition, example [33], are highlighted to illustrate the importance of preserving national dignity and pride. Politicians are thus tasked with upholding *mardom*'s mental security and dignity, reflecting the interconnectedness of individual responsibility, collective identity, and national *âberu*.

Secondly, Iranian politicians challenge their opponents' commitment and competence through references to *âberu*, which serve as a rhetorical tool for questioning their dedication to Iran's national interests and revolutionary ideals. Iranian politicians critique their adversaries' actions or policies, questioning their ability to protect Iran's *âberu* (example [30]), or accusing them of undermining Iran's prestige and reputation through their conduct. By framing *âberu* as a central concern and evaluating opponents' performance in relation to it, politicians seek to delegitimize their opponents' claims to leadership and competence (e.g., examples [50], [56], and [81]). However, they also utilize references to *âberu* to demonstrate their own competence and leadership qualities, presenting themselves as capable and trustworthy leaders who prioritize the welfare and reputation of the nation. By aligning themselves with values associated with *âberu*, such as '*efteqâr*' (the sense of respect and esteem) and '*hormat*' (the sense of respect and dignity), they seek to persuade voters of their suitability for high office and their ability to effectively represent Iran's interests on the global stage (see examples [47] and [56]).

Thirdly, Iranian presidential candidates refer to *âberu* to mobilize public support and solidarity behind a particular political agenda or leader. By appealing to Iranians' sense of national pride and collective identity, politicians seek to galvanize popular support for their policies and initiatives, portraying themselves as defenders of Iran's honor and dignity. References to past incidents (e.g., example [35]), where Iran's *âberu* was threatened or compromised, aim to evoke emotional responses and rally public support for measures aimed at safeguarding Iran's national interests. In addition, the data in this study indicate that Iranian politicians use *âberu* to frame their policies and initiatives. When discussing specific issues, they connect them to the broader concept of *âberu*, reinforcing their commitment to safeguarding Iran's dignity and honor (see examples [27, 28, 30, 35, 40, 51, 56]).

To achieve the above-mentioned communicative effects, Iranian politicians exploit interconnected concepts of *âberu*, such as '*heysiyat*' (dignity), '*ezwat*' (honor), and '*manzelat*' (grandeur), as well. These interwoven concepts are related to *âberu* and can be invoked to highlight different aspects of Iran's prestige, respect, and dignity. These interwoven concepts also allow Iranian politicians to address various dimensions of *âberu*, tailoring their rhetoric to specific communicative goals and contexts. The strategic use of these interconnected concepts aligns with the idea that rituals are co-constructed through interactions, as discussed by Kádár (2017). The significance of *âberu* is shaped by participants' interactions and shared understanding within their community of practice. This dynamic process underscores how cultural values and norms influence political rhetoric and communication strategies in Iranian debates.

As Fetzer (2013) argues, political communication is deeply influenced by the shared cultural knowledge within a community. In the context of Iranian presidential debates, *âberu* serves as a culturally ingrained concept that all participants, both politicians and the audience, understand and navigate through their interactions. Iranian politicians leverage this shared understanding of *âberu* to resonate with their audience, drawing on collective cultural values to assert their credibility, enhance their political *âberu*, challenge those of their opponents, and rally support. This shared cultural knowledge of *âberu* allows Iranian politicians to invoke it as a strategic tool, knowing that their audience will comprehend the implications and significance of such references. This aligns with Fetzer's assertion that cultural norms and ideologies shape the way political rhetoric is constructed and understood. The concept of *âberu*, embedded in Iranian sociocultural norms, becomes a powerful rhetorical device precisely because it taps into these collective values and expectations.

In conclusion, references to *âberu* in Iranian televised presidential debates serve as versatile rhetorical tools, allowing politicians to assert national and revolutionary pride, challenge opponents' competence, mobilize public support, and manipulate interconnected concepts of *âberu* to achieve specific communicative goals and influence public opinion. These references reflect the intricate interplay between cultural values, political rhetoric, and strategic communication strategies in the context of Iranian electoral competition.

4.6 The sociocultural components (SC) of *âberu*: Influential factors on *âberu*

In Iranian culture, societal norms and values are deeply embedded in both cultural and religious traditions. It is important to note that culture and religion are tightly intertwined in

Iranian society. As a result, distinguishing whether a specific behavior is accepted or rejected by culture, religion, or both can be challenging, as there is no clear-cut separation between religious and cultural values. For instance, showing deference to the elderly is encouraged by both Iranian cultural norms and Islamic religious values. Similarly, Iranians' clothing choices are influenced by both cultural and religious factors. In the following sections, I will explore these aspects in detail.

Sharifian (2007), Koutlaki (2010), and Izadi (2017) suggest that Iranians' *âberu* may be influenced by factors such as age, appearance, and possessions, including their level of education. However, Izadi (2017) argues that a high level of education and considerable wealth serve as indicators of competence that affect one's *âberu*. Any perception of incompetence in the eyes of *mardom* (people) may cause an individual to experience *âberurizi* (shedding *âberu*) or losing *âberu*.

In conclusion, cultural and religious norms and values compel Iranians to consider specific factors to avoid threatening either their own or their interlocutors' *âberu*.

- i. Age
- ii. Appearance and clothing
- iii. Gender
 - a. Sexual relationships: Fornication and adultery
 - b. Gender-related practices: e.g., Men as food bringers
- iv. Social status
 - a. Possession
 - b. Education
- v. Approved verbal and non-verbal behaviors

In respective features, the sociocultural components influencing one's *âberu* adversely or favorably or functioning as a shield to protect one's *âberu* are discussed.

4.6.1 Age

Age, a sociocultural component of *âberu*, is a factor that carries different cultural significance and conceptualizations across societies. In Iranian culture, young people are highly expected to show deference to the elderly, regardless of kinship ties (Koutlaki, 2010). In fact,

respecting elders is considered a social responsibility for younger individuals. For example, younger people offer their seats to older individuals in public spaces or stand up to show respect when an elder enters the room.

In Iranian culture, the elderly earns profound respect due to their advanced age, regardless of whether they are in-group or out-group members. The emphasis on age in social interactions and communication among Iranians is also reinforced by religious teachings. Islam strongly encourages young people to show respect toward older individuals based on their age. In *Al-An'am* Surah, verses 23–24, God commands the youth to respect their parents:

Your Lord has commanded that you worship none but Him and that you be kind to your parents. If one of them or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them a word of disrespect, or scold them, but say a generous word to them. And act humbly to them in mercy, and say, My Lord, have mercy on them since they cared for me when I was small.

Indeed, according to Islamic doctrines, older individuals should be granted honor and *ehterâm* (respect), as the bestowed honor and respect help preserve *âberu* they have accumulated throughout their lives. Ethnographic research in this study indicates that the responsibility of younger individuals toward the elderly extends beyond the deference mentioned in the previous paragraph. The youth consciously respect older people and avoid actions that might threaten their lifelong accumulated *âberu*. Moreover, they feel a strong obligation to respect the elderly to safeguard their own *âberu*, as they are aware that others, or *mardom* (people), will judge them.

The youth are particularly mindful of *harfe mardom* (people's talk) in Iranian culture, where individuals are highly conscious of how they are perceived by others. They recognize that societal judgment can directly protect or endanger their *âberu*. Due to the cyclical nature of *âberu*, younger individuals can enhance their own *âberu* in the public eye by positively attending to *âberu* of their older interlocutors. Consequently, they take care to avoid actions that might threaten *âberu* of the elderly.

In other words, young people acknowledge their interlocutors' advanced age, respect their white hair and beard, and refrain from subjecting them to the phenomenon of *âberu*-loss, which could, in turn, affect their own *âberu*. Certain behaviors associated with *âberu*-loss-such as making public criticisms, accusations, or revealing personal secrets-are strongly condemned by both Islamic values and Iranian cultural norms. Interestingly, Koutlaki (2010) also refers to the act of revealing secrets in her book, *Among the Iranians*. When people's secrets become public, they risk losing their *âberu* in society.

When related to the factor of age, an elder's advanced years function as a shield that protects both their personal *âberu* and the collective *âberu* of their in-group or society. Thus, younger individuals are acutely aware of the importance of safeguarding the lifelong accumulated *âberu* of older people, for instance, by refraining from divulging their secrets.

In this study, Iranian politicians also seek to avoid damaging *âberu* (honor, dignity, and reputation) of their older opponents, as doing so could result in mutual *âberu*-loss for both parties. For instance, consider example [3]: Ahmadinejad, who is significantly younger than his addressee Karoubi, acknowledges Karoubi's white beard-an implicit reference to his advanced age-before accusing him and his network of conspiring against his wife in their newspaper.

[3]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.3

من به شما، لباس شما ریش سفیدتان و به سوابق شما احترام می گذارم. خبر ندارید عکس همسر من را چاپ و به ایشون توهین کردند؟ شما بروید مراجعه و دنبال کنید

(Lit. Trans.) I to you, clothes your, beard white your, and records (background) your respect. You unaware are that photo of wife my published is and to her insulted in newspaper your? Then, go, refer and investigate.

(Com. Trans.) I respect you, your clothes, your white beard, and your records (background). Aren't you aware that they have published my wife's photo and insulted her in your newspaper? Then, go and investigate.

Generally, candidates of advanced age¹ and with an extensive political history benefit from higher social status, which, in turn, enhances their *âberu*. Consequently, younger politicians carefully consider showing deference to their older rivals before launching attacks. While they may still challenge their older opponents' *âberu*, they do so cautiously to avoid threatening their own.

In the context of example [3], Ahmadinejad demonstrates an awareness of sociocultural norms by skillfully avoiding negative judgments from the public, or *mardom*. His statement, "I respect you, your clothes, your white beard, and your records," serves to mitigate his criticism while preserving his own *âberu*. This highlights the significant role of age in communication within Iranian collectivist culture, particularly during presidential debates, where younger interlocutors are compelled to behave more responsibly toward those of advanced age.

4.6.2 Appearance and clothing

According to Sharifian (2007), one's *âberu* can be influenced by their own appearance as well as that of their family members. Consequently, Iranians strive to enhance their appearance to elevate their *âberu*. Similarly, in the ethnographic research conducted for this study, Iranian respondents concur that they and their immediate networks should maintain an appropriate appearance (e.g., dressing, cleanliness), as they are subject to societal judgment. In Iranian society, individuals adhere to specific clothing norms based on age, gender, family background, social status, and position, all of which significantly influence personal attire choices.

For instance, regarding age and clothing, middle-aged individuals tend to avoid wearing pink or red garments due to societal norms associated with their age. Deviating from these norms can lead to embarrassment, particularly within families, as society (*mardom*) may judge them negatively. Furthermore, concerning social status and attire, it is highly unlikely to imagine a teacher—a role model for students—dressing in bold colors or sporting unconventional hairstyles. Such attire would be perceived as inappropriate, as individuals with high social status are expected to dress modestly and conservatively, reflecting their position and responsibilities. Similarly, in terms of gender and clothing, women are expected to cover their hair and dress modestly to avoid exposing their bodies in public. Adherence to Islamic dress codes is essential, and while men may partially expose their arms, they are required to fully cover their legs. Dressing norms vary between men and women within their in-group and out-group interactions. However, in public, everyone is expected to conform to established social and Islamic dress guidelines.

It should be noted that women from religious families take their appearance even more seriously, often wearing a *čâdor*, a full-body veil that covers them from head to toe. The following incident illustrates how wearing a *čâdor* is regarded as a critical component of *âberu* among religious families. A postgraduate female student from a religious family explained that she was taught to wear a *čâdor* from the age of three. She emphasized that wearing a *čâdor* is of great importance in her family and directly influences her family's *âberu*, underscoring the interdependence among Iranian family members. In the context of local connectedness and unity, religious families grant their female members greater family prestige and honor when they wear a *čâdor*. In doing so, these women not only enhance their individual *âberu* but also contribute to their family's collective *âberu*, particularly when their families or groups are perceived as distinct units by *mardom* (people).

Interestingly, although the interviewee personally prefers not to wear a *čâdor*, she feels obligated to do so to uphold her family's collective *âberu*. She adheres to her family's values rather than her personal preferences to ensure that her family is judged favorably by society. This example illustrates how individuals are expected to present themselves in alignment with their immediate group and broader societal expectations to preserve their *âberu*. Whether one enhances or threatens their *âberu* depends on the extent to which they conform to or deviate from their family's, society's, and culture's norms regarding clothing. One's family background-whether religious or secular, conservative or open-minded-plays a crucial role in shaping these expectations.

The above example highlights how individuals are socialized from childhood to maintain an appropriate appearance, fostering both individual and collective *âberu* while ensuring societal approval. In this specific case, women risk severely damaging their family's collective *âberu* by dressing in ways that contradict family norms. In Iranian culture, women's adherence to clothing norms is deeply tied to male family members' *âberu*, to the extent that they are sometimes perceived as their male relatives' Achilles' heel if they fail to conform.

Regarding the relationship between appearance and *âberu*, one of the interviewees, a middle-aged undergraduate woman, described how her family pays careful attention to their appearance when hosting or visiting others. She explained that they wear clean, well-ironed clothes, with women applying makeup and men shaving or trimming their beards or mustaches. In doing so, they both demonstrate respect for their guests or hosts and conceal their physical and mental fatigue, as societal expectations dictate that personal struggles should remain private. She emphasized that *harfe mardom* (people's talk) is highly significant to her and her family, making it essential to maintain a presentable appearance to uphold their *âberu* and practice *âberu-dâri* (the maintenance of *âberu*).

This account aligns with Beeman (1986) and Koutlaki's (2010) findings on the importance of maintaining *zâher* (external appearance) while keeping *bâten* (inner self) concealed. Beeman and Koutlaki argue that when aspects of one's private life (*bâten*) are exposed publicly (*zâher*), *âberu* may be lost. For instance, secrets, family conflicts, antisocial behavior, moral transgressions, and other private matters must remain undisclosed. In the case of the interviewee's family, they conceal their exhaustion and personal issues by dressing well and applying makeup, thereby practicing *âberu-dâri*.

Conversely, failing to maintain an appropriate appearance in the presence of guests or hosts can lead to *âberu-loss*, as *mardom*-the host or other guests-may judge them negatively. The consequences of *âberu-loss* vary in severity. A minor instance, such as failing to trim one's

beard or apply makeup, may result in mild embarrassment. However, more severe violations, such as the public exposure of a female family member's sexual affairs, can lead to extreme consequences, including honor killings, aimed at restoring the family's collective *âberu*. In such cases, *nâmus* (chastity), *heysiyat* (reputation and good name), and *šaraf* (honor and dignity) are all compromised, highlighting how certain transgressions carry particularly devastating implications for *âberu*.

With regard to Iranian politicians' clothing, it is important to note that Islam has profoundly influenced both Iranian culture and its governmental system. As a result, clerical attire enhances *âberu* of clergy politicians within their communities of practice. Clerical robes command significant respect in Iran's non-secular government, serving as a factor that elevates candidates' social status and *âberu*. Clergy members enjoy superior social standing not only because Islam holds them in high regard but also due to the elevated status granted to them by Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Revolution, within the governmental system. Consequently, non-cleric politicians are careful not to insult their clerical opponents or disrespect their revered attire.

Example [3] illustrates how Ahmadinejad begins his statement by expressing respect for his opponent, Karoubi, and his clerical robe before proceeding to question his knowledge and accuse his affiliated newspaper of tarnishing his wife's honor. This demonstrates that clergy members' attire-along with their advanced age and political records-contributes to their political *âberu* and serves to mitigate their opponents' attacks, as seen in example [3].

4.6.3 Gender

It is important to first define gender within the context of Iranian society before discussing gender-related roles or practices that may impact one's *âberu*. According to the Center for Human Rights in Iran, sexual minorities face ostracization by both their conservative families and the theocratic government, and they are often subjected to severe violence. Iranian Islamic law and culture reject intersex individuals and diverse sexual orientations. Sharia (Islamic law) criminalizes homosexuality and other sexual relationships that fall outside traditional Islamic values. Consequently, LGBTQ individuals may face harsh punishment under Islamic law.

In this context, an individual's sexual orientation can significantly influence their *âberu*, both individually and collectively, especially if their sexual practices or gender

expression deviate from socio-religious and cultural norms. Individuals who belong to the LGBTQ community may be rejected by their families and ostracized by their in-group members. As a result, they may feel compelled to hide their sexual identity or gender expression in order to avoid rejection by their immediate social circles and broader society. Indeed, failure to conform to assigned gender roles or sexual norms can lead to negative judgment from *mardom*, particularly conservative and religious segments of society, thereby threatening both their individual and collective *âberu*.

In such circumstances, members of the in-group may distance themselves from the individual, signaling their differentiation in an effort to restore their own collective *âberu*. Therefore, it becomes crucial for individuals to identify themselves according to the sex assigned to them at birth, based on their genitalia, and to adopt practices aligned with their gender role as prescribed by sociocultural and religious expectations. This adherence to prescribed gender norms is essential to protecting both their individual and collectivist *âberu*.

4.6.3.1 Sexual relationships: Fornication and adultery

There are both religious and sociocultural norms that guide social behavior and establish specific practices for Iranian men and women. For example, pre-marital sex (fornication) and sex outside of marriage (adultery) are considered immoral and sinful acts punishable under Islamic law. Allah explicitly prohibits these acts in the Quran, as seen in the Isra Surah, verse 32, where it is stated: “Do not go near adultery or fornication, surely it is an indecency and an evil way.” As a result, Muslims who commit fornication are sentenced to one hundred lashes, while married Muslims who commit adultery may face the death penalty by stoning (as outlined by the International Federation for Human Rights, FIDH, in their report on the death penalty in Iran). In this regard, fornication and adultery are considered *âberu*-threatening behaviors in Iranian society, as both culture and religion strongly condemn them.

However, these acts have a more culturally damaging impact on women’s individual or collective *âberu* when made public. Afary (2009), in her book *Sexual Politics in Modern Iran*, references honor killings as a form of punishment for adultery. Male family members may murder a woman to restore their damaged collective *âberu*. In this way, they seek to preserve their connection to societal norms and values. On the other hand, if an Iranian man commits adultery or fornication and it is exposed, he does not face the same consequences, even though his own *âberu* is compromised. Societal and religious expectations place a much greater

emphasis on women maintaining their chastity, both their virginity before marriage and their purity within marriage, in order to safeguard their individual and collective *âberu*.

4.6.3.2 Gender-related practices: e.g., Men as food bringers

In Iranian society, men are primarily responsible for ensuring the financial stability and well-being of their families. The concept of being the “food bringer” is tied to the metaphor discussed by Koutlaki (2010) and Izadi (2017) in their studies: *surate xod râ bâ sili sorx negah dâştan* (lit. “to keep one’s face red, even with a slap”). This metaphor conveys the idea of maintaining the appearance of financial stability, even in the face of hardship. The phrase suggests that one should not allow others—such as neighbors, relatives, or colleagues—to detect financial difficulties. The *surat* (face) in this expression functions as a metonym for one’s *âberu*, both individual and collective, which must be maintained regardless of circumstances. In this sense, an Iranian may borrow money, akin to “slapping their face,” to uphold their appearance and demonstrate that they can afford a decent life.

Izadi (2017: 212) notes, “Iranians pretend that they are wealthy, concealing their true financial status...to maintain their *âberu*.” He further explains that some Iranians may take on debt to buy a car or other possessions as a way of demonstrating their worth to others. Similarly, Sharifian (2011: 36) argues that *âberu* is not just about an individual’s behavior but also extends to their family’s possessions and appearance. This suggests that Iranians may be judged based on their home, its location, the size of their possessions, and the brand of their car—all symbols of wealth that contribute to their *âberu*. Sharifian claims that those with significant wealth enjoy higher *âberu*.

However, based on ethnographic research conducted for this study, an *âberu*-worthy individual is not necessarily wealthy but is seen as someone who can provide a decent life for their family and possess necessary items without resorting to begging (i.e., *dast-e qod râ joloye kasi derâz nakardan*). In this view, when an Iranian man is able to provide for his family and earn a living through *pul-e halâl* (pure money), he is considered *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*). While Sharifian (2007, 2011), Koutlaki (2010), and Izadi (2017) suggest that outward signs of wealth are critical to maintaining *âberu*, the present study’s ethnographic data shows that the perception of earning a *halâl* income and avoiding public financial disgrace may hold greater weight in determining one’s *âberu*, especially among the working and middle classes.

For an Iranian man, the competence to earn a decent life and pure money—even if it requires borrowing or taking on debt—is an *âberu*-enhancing act. Therefore, when an Iranian is perceived as incompetent or unable to provide for their family, they risk losing their *âberu*, and may cause *âberu*-loss for their family, in line with the observations made by Izadi (2017). Similarly, Lim and Bowers (1991) regard earning a decent life as a competence. Iranian men are expected to develop this competence, as the “food bringer,” to maintain their *âberu*.

In Iranian society, the delicate relationship between one’s *âberu* and financial status plays a crucial role. Politicians are often advised to avoid publicizing individuals’ financial struggles in order to protect their *âberu*. For example, in 2017, Vice President Jahangiri emphasized that even the poor have *ezʔat* (dignity) and should be seen as *âberu-mand* individuals, as seen in example [4]. Therefore, politicians are encouraged not to disclose personal or public financial hardships, as doing so may harm their own and others’ *âberu*. By preserving the dignity of mardom (people), regardless of their financial situation, politicians help maintain a balance between transparency and respect for collective *ezʔat* (dignity).

[4]

05-2017-JHNGR, Debate No.3

آقایان عزت مردم را حفظ کنید، سرزده نروید در خانه فقرا و عکس انتخاباتی بگیرید

(Lit. Trans.) Gentlemen! *Ezʔat* (dignity) people preserve. Knock on, do not go in house poor and photo electioneering take.

(Com. Trans.) Gentlemen! Preserve men’s *ezʔat* (dignity). Do not knock on the poor’s doors to take photos for your electioneering.

Example [4] highlights how, in Iranian culture, failing to build a decent life can challenge one’s *âberu*, making it essential to avoid revealing people’s financial hardships. This cultural sensitivity is evident in Jahangiri’s restraint against his rivals taking photos with the poor for political gain, emphasizing the importance of preserving dignity (*ezʔat*). The use of imperative verbs like “حفظ کنید” (preserve) and “نروید” (do not go) reinforces the ethical responsibility of safeguarding dignity.

Financial legitimacy is crucial to maintaining *âberu* in Iranian society. Politicians are cautious about their rivals’ wealth sources, as questioning one’s income can tarnish *âberu*. Iranians, including politicians, aim to sound populist and ascetic to avoid being judged for wealth accumulation. This aligns with the views of Ayatollah Khomeini, who criticized governors amassing wealth during their tenure, emphasizing that such behavior is inconsistent

with Islamic governance values. Therefore, less wealth can enhance a politician's political status, as they are seen as more aligned with the people.

In Example [5], President Ahmadinejad asserts his *âberu* by claiming his wealth is earned through integrity, while questioning Karoubi's financial sources, threatening his rival's *âberu*. Ahmadinejad's use of both declarative and imperative statements emphasizes his transparency while subtly threatening Karoubi's reputation, highlighting the strategic interplay between *âberu* and political discourse.

[5]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.3

یک سؤال دیگر هم دارم، بالأخره من گفته ام اموال من را اعلام کنند، من خواهش می کنم، آقای کروبی هم اعلام کنند اول انقلاب خانه شان کجا بوده و چقدر بوده و الآن کجاست و چقدر است، ببینیم از کجا آمده است؟

(Lit. trans.) A question another I have. I have said my property they declare; I please Mr. Karroubi also declare first of *Enqelâb* house his where was and how much? And now where it is and how much? See we from where comes it!

(Com. Trans.) I have another request. I have said they should declare my property; I kindly request Mr. Karoubi to declare where his home was at the time of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution), where it is now, and how much it costs. We need investigate where his wealth has come from...

In the context of mediated political discourse, Ahmadinejad's challenge is a strategic move designed to resonate with a broad audience. By publicly questioning the source of his opponent's wealth, Ahmadinejad taps into widespread concerns about corruption and ethical governance, issues that are central to public trust. This tactic makes use of media platforms to ensure that the accusation gains maximum visibility and scrutiny, leveraging the media's power to amplify the challenge.

Ahmadinejad's choice to make this challenge in a televised debate further highlights his understanding of the media's role in shaping political narratives. A televised setting guarantees that the issue becomes part of the public discourse, placing significant pressure on Karoubi to respond and defend his *âberu*. By framing the challenge as a question of integrity and transparency, Ahmadinejad attempts to undermine Karoubi's credibility and reputation, capitalizing on the public's concern with ethical leadership.

This maneuver illustrates the sophisticated use of media not only to influence public opinion but also to shape political outcomes. Through this calculated public confrontation, Ahmadinejad seeks to portray himself as the more trustworthy candidate, while simultaneously using the media to question his opponent's integrity, thus manipulating the political discourse to his advantage.

4.6.4 Social status

In Iranian collectivist culture, both ascribed and achieved social status are pivotal in shaping an individual's reputation, especially regarding their *âberu*. Ascribed status is often based on innate factors such as age, gender, ethnicity, and family connections, which are largely inherited or assigned at birth. In contrast, achieved status is built on personal efforts and achievements, such as education, career success, and the legitimacy of one's income. This achieved status plays a significant role in preserving or enhancing one's *âberu*, which is a central concern in Iranian society.

From the ethnographic findings in this study, it's evident that many Iranians connect their *âberu* to how well they can achieve a decent life and a respected social standing through their individual actions. For example, adhering to dress codes that align with societal and familial expectations and securing an income from unquestionable sources are key ways to maintain *âberu*. This suggests that social status in Iran is often closely tied to maintaining *âberu*, not merely through inherited or ascribed status but through the individual's ability to uphold societal norms and engage in productive, respectable behavior.

One of the intriguing findings from the research is that certain professions carry greater weight in contributing to one's *âberu*. White-collar jobs, especially office positions, are perceived to carry more respect and societal status compared to blue-collar work. However, even within this structure, the ultimate factor for *âberu* is whether one can live with dignity and competence, such as earning pure money (*pul-e halâl*) to sustain their life. This demonstrates that even if someone holds a low-prestige job or has fewer material resources, as long as they can maintain their dignity and live *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*), their social standing remains intact.

The study also highlights how certain professions, such as being a *rouhani* (cleric), confer elevated social status. This is particularly relevant in the context of Iranian politics, where clerics are highly esteemed due to the centrality of Islam in the country's governance. For instance, in example [6], Karoubi, an Iranian politician and cleric, boosts his *âberu* by

emphasizing his career as a *rouhani* and claiming exclusive privileges. By stating “no one else has these permissions,” he not only reinforces his privileged position but also subtly elevates his *âberu* by aligning himself with religious authority. This strategic use of exclusivity highlights the power of one’s religious position in Iranian society, where clerics are seen as both spiritual and political authorities.

In summary, *âberu* in Iranian culture is intricately tied to both ascribed and achieved status, with a clear emphasis on individual effort and adherence to social norms. While certain professions and inherited statuses may grant initial respect, it is ultimately the ability to live with integrity, respect, and competence that solidifies one’s *âberu* in society. The role of religion and clerical status also underscores the significant intersection between social status and political power in Iran, where *âberu* of political figures is closely intertwined with their religious standing.

[6]

6-2009-KRB, Debate No.3

من نیز روحانی هستم و اجازه هایی از امام (ره) دارم که هیچکس این اجازه ها را ندارد

(Lit. Trans.) I also a cleric am, and permissions from the Imam have that no one these permissions has.

(Com. Trans.) I am a cleric and I have permissions from the Imam, that no one has these permissions.

Also, in mediated political discourse, such assertions are crafted to resonate with the electorate, particularly those who revere religious figures and values. By publicly declaring his unique permissions from the Imam, Karoubi not only reinforces his own *âberu* but also aligns himself with the cultural and religious sentiments of the audience. This maneuver exploits the media’s power to broadcast his elevated status, thereby influencing public perception and solidifying his political standing.

In example [7], the speaker, a clergy figure, strategically highlights his career to emphasize his superior social standing compared to his military opponent, a colonel. By stating, “من سرهنگ نیستم” (I am not a colonel), followed by “حقوقدان هستم” (I am a jurist), the speaker contrasts his identity as a legal expert with his opponent’s military background. This rhetorical move not only underscores his qualifications but also implicitly suggests that legal knowledge and expertise in justice are more valuable for public service than military experience, especially when it comes to serving the needs of the people (*mardom*).

The distinction between legal expertise and military power taps into deeper cultural values in Iranian society. Wisdom, intellectual competence, and fairness are highly prized qualities, particularly in leadership roles. By positioning himself as a jurist, the clergy speaker appeals to these values, presenting himself as more capable of addressing the complex issues facing society with fairness and knowledge, rather than relying on force, authority or military mindset. This contrasts with the traditional view that military figures might hold power through strength and hierarchy. Thus, the speaker's profession directly contributes to the individual and collectivist *âberu* (dignity and reputation) he seeks to project.

Politicians in Iran, as illustrated here, often emphasize their professional backgrounds to enhance their *âberu*, particularly in high-stakes elections where public perception plays a crucial role. The clergy speaker's claim to be a jurist not only elevates his status in the eyes of the electorate but also aligns with societal expectations of leadership, which value competence in law and governance. This positioning helps him construct a narrative of trustworthiness, competence, and integrity-qualities that are vital in winning the support of voters.

Moreover, the importance of maintaining *âberu* through career choices highlights a broader trend in Iranian politics: the way in which leaders' professions and qualifications influence their public image and political fortunes. As the speaker contrasts his career with that of his opponent, he highlights a core element of political strategy in Iranian culture-voters are not only influenced by policies but also by the candidate's perceived integrity and social standing, which are often rooted in their professional background.

If politicians fail to project a respectable *âberu*, they risk losing not only elections but also their social credibility and standing within the political community. Thus, in Iranian society, a candidate's *âberu*, shaped by their career, education, and perceived competence, can be as decisive as their policies in determining their success. The jurist in example [7] uses his professional status to strengthen his *âberu* and position himself as the ideal candidate to uphold the rights and well-being of the people.

[7]

6-2013-RHN, Debate No.3

من سرهنگ نیستم، حقوقدان هستم و هیچوقت پادگانی فکر و عمل نکردم

(Lit. Trans.) I am a colonel not, jurist am, and never military thought and action not did.

(Com. Trans.) I am not a colonel. I am a jurist and I have never thought or acted in a military way.

Eventually, according to this research, one's *âberu* is closely tied to their perceived social and political status, which is influenced by factors such as possessions, education, age, rank within an organization, institutional power, and occupation. If an individual fails to achieve an acceptable, *âberu-mandâne* (with *âberu*) social status in society, they may lose their *âberu*, potentially leading to severe consequences, such as electoral defeat in the case of Iranian presidential candidates.

Given the discrepancies between the findings of this ethnographic research and those of Sharifian (2007; 2011), Koutlaki (1997; 2010), and Izadi (2013; 2015; 2016) regarding the correlation between possessions, education, social status, and one's *âberu*, I have dedicated the following two sections to exploring these differences.

4.6.4.1 Possessions

Sharifian (2007) posits that one's *âberu* is closely tied to their possessions, including their house, money, furniture, education, and competence. Furthermore, Izadi (2017) asserts that *âberu* is not only the result of an individual's or their directly related networks' efforts to meet societal expectations, but also the product of both individual and collective possessions. He emphasizes that people can demonstrate their competence to specific *mardom*, thereby maintaining or enhancing their *âberu*.

According to the ethnographic research conducted in this study, one's possessions, such as family, property, and education, play a significant role in shaping their social status. Family, being an inherited possession, forms a fundamental part of an individual's *âberu*, while property, like education, can be non-hereditary but equally influential. As previously indicated, an individual can preserve their *âberu* by belonging to a two-parent family or one with no criminal history. Each family member can profoundly impact their collectivist *âberu*, even through their possessions.

In terms of property, an individual can maintain their *âberu* if they are able to afford shelter (a place to protect themselves and their family from the elements) and uphold the *zâher* (appearance) of their life. For instance, by earning a decent living and acquiring necessary property through *pul-e halâl*, they can maintain their *âberu*. Contrary to the findings of Sharifian (2007), Koutlaki (2010), and Izadi (2017), the relationship between wealth and *âberu*

(honor, dignity, and reputation) is multifaceted. While wealthier individuals may indeed enjoy a higher social status due to elitism, it is crucial not to automatically assume that they are inherently more *âberu-mand* (possessing *âberu* or honor and dignity) than those with fewer material possessions. While wealth may indicate greater competence (in line with Izadi, 2017), competence alone does not guarantee *âberu*. As *âberu* also depends on how one is perceived by others or significant *mardom*, their reputation, and the alignment of their actions with cultural norms and values, it involves more than material wealth. The findings of this study highlight an interesting perspective: *âberu-mand* individuals are those who strive to maintain their honor and dignity by keeping their faces red and earning pure money. The metaphor of “keeping one’s face red” implies the maintenance of pride, dignity, self-respect, and adherence to cultural norms. Therefore, while greater wealth may confer superior status in Iranian society, its absence does not necessarily lead to a loss of *âberu* as long as individuals earn *pul-e halâl* and lead a decent life.

4.6.4.2 Education

Education may be considered an element of possession through which individuals can enhance their *šaxiat* (identity or personality) and social status. Koutlaki (2010) emphasizes that *šaxiat*, one’s identity, is shaped by both education and upbringing, a view that is supported by Sharifian and Izadi. Koutlaki further asserts that when Iranians hold university degrees, it confers upon them greater social status, as their level of education enables them to project more sophisticated social images in the public eye. Interestingly, Izadi (2017: 213) connects education to *âberu*, stating that “being educated, especially at the higher level, is a means to gain *âberu*.” According to him, tertiary education can be an *âberu*-boosting factor in Iranian culture. He adds that Iranians may pursue tertiary education to demonstrate their competence, as a lack of competence could lead to *âberu*-loss. In his study, Izadi (2017) links education to knowledge competence, which is highly valued in Iranian culture, and any criticism of this competence is associated with *âberu*-loss. He explains that individuals may lose or damage their *âberu* if they fail to complete tertiary education, as their competence may be questioned by *mardom* or others. In this context, Iranians may pursue higher levels of education to assert their competence and distinguish themselves as individuals of high standing within the societal hierarchy.

Similarly, in this study, Iranian politicians often attempt to criticize their rivals' knowledge and question their educational credentials to undermine their *âberu*, as will be discussed later.

According to the survey results, it may be interpreted that the higher the level of education, the higher the social status. However, it is important to note that a lack of a university degree does not necessarily lead to *âberu*-loss, but questioning one's educational credentials can pose a threat to *âberu*. Therefore, while an individual may be recognized as having a lower social status due to the absence of a higher education degree, this does not automatically equate to the loss of *âberu*.

Koutlaki (2010: 81) asserts that "Iranians are fond of educational titles and like to be addressed with their full title, especially in business and educational contexts." She emphasizes that Iranians use full titles when addressing others to acknowledge their educational achievements, signifying respect and social prestige. Accordingly, as noted in Koutlaki's (2010) research, Iranians address one another as *Âqâ-ye* (Mr.) *Mohandes* (engineer) or *Âqâ-ye* (Mr.) *Doctor*, or *Khânum-e* (Ms.) *Mohandes* (engineer) or *Khânum-e Doctor*. It is also common for Iranians to extend these titles to their interlocutors' spouses.

As mentioned earlier, in this study, Iranian politicians question the authenticity of their opponents' and their networks' educational credentials or question their education in an effort to challenge their competence and knowledge. For example, in example [8], Mousavi accuses Ahmadinejad of nominating Kordan as his interior minister, despite Kordan's honorary doctorate from Oxford University being denied by MPs.

[8]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

بی اعتنائی اشکار به مدرک جعلی آقای کردان و حمایت و نقض آشکار قانون ممنوعیت تصدی بیش از شغل است. من فکر میکنم که دوستان عوض اینکه پرونده و پرونده سازی کنند و چیزهایی که جواب دارد دنبال این مسایل بروند بهتر است

(Lit. Trans.) Negligence gross to degree forged Mr. Kordan and support and violation evident the law of prohibiting more than one occupation. I think that friends instead of files and file fabricating and things that answers have, pursue these issues better is.

(Com. Trans) ... Gross negligence in Mr. Kordan's forged degree, the support for him, and the evident violation of the law prohibiting more than one

occupation. I think it would be better if friends pursued such issues instead of dealing with files and fabricating files that already have answers.

Example [8] illustrates how one's *âberu* can be threatened if their academic credentials are called into question. In other words, an academic degree can jeopardize one's *âberu* if it is suspected to be fraudulent, rather than enhancing their social status. In Iranian normative society, educated individuals often attain high-status occupations due to their advanced education. As a result, they are highly revered by mardom and others because of their privileged social standing. However, one interviewee in this study highlights that, in certain cases, educated individuals fail to secure relevant or high-status professions. For example, it is not uncommon to find young people or, more generally, individuals with tertiary education working as taxi drivers, a low-status job. Nevertheless, when others recognize them as educated, they still earn respect, despite not holding high-status positions. This observation suggests that while education may elevate one's social standing, the absence of education does not necessarily lead to *âberu*-loss. However, an individual's *âberu* may be damaged or lost if they are accused of possessing fake certificates or if their knowledge or competence does not meet societal expectations.

4.6.5 Approved verbal and non-verbal behavior

As mentioned earlier, in Iranian culture, societal norms are deeply rooted in cultural and religious values. For example, actions such as backbiting, lying, slandering, embezzlement, adultery, robbery, and revealing others' secrets are considered sins in Islam and immoral in Iranian culture. Islamic teachings emphasize that these sins can sow hatred and discord within Muslim communities, ultimately leading to destruction. Islam strongly encourages Muslims to defend their fellow Muslims, as all Muslims are considered to be one body. As stated in the Sahih Muslim Hadith collection: "Muslims are like a single man. If the eye is afflicted, then the whole body is afflicted. If the head is afflicted, then the whole body is afflicted." Similarly, when Iranian Muslims learn that their fellow Muslims have committed sins, they refrain from disclosing or spreading this information in order to protect both their own *âberu* and *âberu* of their religious brothers. As a result, if any Muslim publicly accuses another of violating religious values, both the accuser and the accused may suffer from *âberu*-loss, due to the cyclical nature of *âberu*. One could argue that religion plays a significant role in

communication within Iranian collectivist culture, where adherence to or deviation from religious values affects both one's life and *âberu*.

Every Muslim Iranian bears responsibility in two key ways. On the one hand, they are responsible for establishing, maintaining, and enhancing their own *âberu*, as well as *âberu* of their networks. To avoid endangering their individual or collective *âberu*, they refrain from behaviors prohibited by both their religion and culture. This includes actions such as adultery, theft, usury, cronyism, and embezzlement, all of which are forbidden in both Islam and Iranian culture. On the other hand, they also bear responsibility for protecting *âberu* of their interlocutors, in order to be regarded as moral and honorable individuals by both their interlocutors and the wider *mardom* (people). Consequently, they avoid certain verbal behaviors, such as gossiping, backbiting, lying, self-praising while questioning others' knowledge or competence, and revealing secrets or private information. According to the Quran, Muslims are forbidden from accusing their interlocutors or their networks of engaging in any of the aforementioned sinful behaviors. The following Quranic verses illustrate how Islam evaluates such behavior and why it discourages Muslims from committing these actions.

Humiliating others is considered one of the most disapproved behaviors in both Islam and Iranian culture. Instead of humiliating others, individuals are encouraged to humble themselves. Indeed, humiliating people and accusing them of committing a crime is not only contrary to Iranian cultural norms, but it is also explicitly condemned in Islam. As reflected in the following verse from the Quran, in Surah Al-Hujurat (The Dwellings), Verse 11, Allah advises Muslims not to humiliate their fellow Muslim brothers or sisters:

O you who believe! Let not (one) people laugh at (another) people. Maybe they (the mocked) are better than the others, and neither women (mock) at other women, maybe they (the others) are better than themselves. And do not defame one another, nor call one another by nicknames. Evil is transgressed names after the Faith, and whoever does not repent, then such are indeed wrong-doers.

This behavior is considered sacrosanct and should not be transgressed by other Muslims. Therefore, Iranians avoid humiliation in order to respect morality, maintain a clear conscience, and protect themselves from *mardom*'s negative interpretations, since humiliating others is categorically condemned by both Islamic and cultural values.

In the case of criticism on an individual level, Islam advises Muslims to criticize their Muslim brothers privately, without humiliating them, even if they have committed a wrong action publicly. Public humiliation should be avoided. Thus, such criticism allows individuals to benefit from the feedback without experiencing embarrassment (Sahih al-Bukhari Hadith

Collection). This religious guidance is reflected in the following example, example [9], when Mousavi criticizes his rival, Ahmadinejad, for publicly disgracing other politicians, accusing them of corruption, and smearing their reputation, an act that is considered a sin.

[9]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

این اصل اسلامی است شما از اول کار خودتان شروع کردید گفتن که هزاران مفسد در این کشور است. پرونده را می‌خواهم باز کنم اسامی را می‌خواهم نام ببرم. رییس بانک پارسیان را برداشتید لجن مالش کردید بعد مشاور خودتان کردید و دیگران را همینطور خوب اینها گناه دارد. ما مسلمان هستیم ما متدین هستیم ما به خدا اعتقاد داریم نمیتوانیم افراد را همینطور نام ببریم و متهمشان بکنیم

(Lit. Trans.) This Islamic principle is. You from the beginning of job your started saying that thousands of people corrupt in this country is. File I want to open, and names to say. Head of bank Parsian took and with mud rubbed him. Then, advisor your do and others the same, Ok! these sin have. We muslim are. We religious are. We in God believe, cannot people like this name and accuse them.

(Com. Trans.) This is the Islamic principle. From the beginning of your presidency, you have started announcing that there are thousands of corrupt people in this country, and you have claimed to publicize the names. You dragged the head of the Parsian Bank through the mud, then made him your advisor. You did the same to others. That is a sin. We are Muslims; we are religious. We believe in God; we cannot publicize some names and just accuse them like this.

Indeed, Mousavi understands that neither he nor Ahmadinejad is entitled to publicly criticize one another or others, in accordance with religious and cultural norms. He therefore appeals to Islamic values and the concept of Muslim brotherhood to rationalize his own public criticism, specifically when singling out Ahmadinejad for criticizing others publicly. In other words, in example [9], Mousavi is fully aware of cultural norms that regard public castigation as malevolent behavior, but he mitigates the potential harm of his own actions by invoking religious values.

However, in this research, politicians manipulate the situation to their advantage and attack their opponent's *âberu* when making public accusations or criticisms. They accuse their

adversaries of violating religious values while simultaneously boosting their own *âberu* by claiming they uphold and practice Islamic values like fervent Muslims.

Another forbidden behavior in Islam is telling lies. According to Surah Al-Dhariyat, The Wind That Scatters, Verse 10, lying is prohibited, and liars are cursed. Muslims are expected to avoid telling lies: “Cursed be the liars.” Overall, example [9] incorporates the subtleties of Iranian culture, emphasizing the societal and religious expectations surrounding public behavior and criticism. It highlights how political actors like Mousavi and Ahmadinejad navigate these norms, using religious principles to justify their actions and manipulate public perception.

In fact, telling lies is a sin, and due to its distastefulness, accusing someone of lying can be damaging. Therefore, in example [10], Jahangiri cautiously accuses Qalibaf of lying. Public accusations may threaten both interactants’ *âberu*. As a result, the speaker avoids explicitly accusing his rival, Qalibaf, to prevent being redefined as inconsiderate by the audience. In other words, in this study, Iranian politicians make public accusations with great caution- e.g., implicitly accusing their adversaries of lying-since they fear endangering their own *âberu*. Given that making open accusations goes against religious and cultural norms, Jahangiri’s behavior leads to *âberu*-damage or loss for Qalibaf.

[10]

6-2017-JHNGR, Debate No.3

...من نمی‌گویم دروغ می‌گویید

آقای قالیباف ادب چیز خوبی است و اخلاق چیز خوبی است و صداقت چیز خوبی است رعایت کنید

(Lit. Trans.) ... I not say lie telling you... Mr. Qalibaf! Politeness thing good is, morality thing good is, honesty thing good is. Mind!

(Com. Trans.) ... I do not say you are lying...Mr. Qalibaf! Politeness is a good thing. Morality is a good thing. Honesty is a good thing. Mind them!

As demonstrated in example [10], Jahangiri carefully navigates the cultural and religious landscape by indirectly accusing Qalibaf of dishonesty. He employs linguistic strategies that allow him to maintain his own *âberu* while subtly highlighting Qalibaf’s perceived moral failings. By emphasizing the virtues of politeness, morality, and honesty, Jahangiri implies that Qalibaf lacks these qualities without making a direct accusation. This approach aligns with the cultural and religious expectations in Iranian society, where direct confrontation and open accusations are considered socially and morally inappropriate. In other

words, Iranian politicians manage to express their criticisms while safeguarding their own *âberu*, adhering to the expectations of their audience by accusing their adversaries implicitly.

In example [11], Qalibaf is also acutely aware of Iranian cultural norms and the morality surrounding dishonesty. In Iranian society, both telling lies and accusing others of lying are viewed as highly reprehensible. As a result, the speaker, Qalibaf, initially refrains from directly accusing his rivals of lying. However, he quickly shifts to a collective and explicit accusation, claiming that his opponents are lying, a move that significantly damages their *âberu*.

[11]

6-2017-QLBF, Debate No.3

اینجا بداخلاقی صورت گرفت آقای جهانگیری گفتند من واژه دروغ را به کار نبردم و گفتم خلاف انجام شده اما من بله، می‌گویم که دروغ گفتید و باید در خصوص املاک نجومی و اتهاماتی که زدید پاسخگو باشید شما و شخص آقای روحانی

(Lit. Trans.) Here bad morality faced. Mr. Jahangiri said I word lie use not and said against happened but I yes, say that lie told you and must about properties astronomical and accusations that you hit accountable be, you and the person Mr. Rouhani!

(Com. Trans.) Something against morality has happened. Mr. Jahangiri said something: “I did not use the word lie, and I said it was wrong. However, now I am saying yes, you lied, and you have to be accountable for the astronomical properties and all the accusations: You and Mr. Rouhani!”

As demonstrated, in this example, an act of immorality is addressed. The speaker, Qalibaf, skillfully twists the situation to his advantage when accusing his opponents of lying to the *mardom*, even though they are expected to embody honesty and integrity, in accordance with Ayatollah Khomeini’s worldview. Qalibaf’s strategy reflects an understanding of the cultural and religious importance of honesty in Iranian society, using these values to undermine his opponents. In this study, Iranian politicians frequently accuse one another of deviating from Ayatollah Khomeini’s ideologies and failing to maintain honesty with *mardom* or the public. This discourse underscores the significance of *âberu* and the ethical expectations established by the Islamic Revolution, where leaders are expected to uphold truthfulness and moral conduct.

Interestingly, the following example, [12], highlights how Mousavi utilizes the concept of honesty to implicitly accuse Ahmadinejad of hypocrisy, demonstrating the delicate balance of maintaining one's own *âberu* while challenging that of an opponent.

[12]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

من به شما سه چیز می‌گویم: اولین چیز این است که هر دولتی باید با مردم رو راست باشد.
بزرگترین دارایی امام، کسی که آمد و انقلاب کرد، صداقتش با مردم بود

(Lit. Trans.) I to you three things say; first thing this is that every government should with people honest be. The greatest asset of Imam, who that came and Revolution did, honesty his with people was.

(Com. Trans.) I will say three things to you; the first thing is that every government should be honest with the people. The greatest asset of the Imam, who came and made the *Enqelâb* (Revolution), was his honesty with the people.

This example underscores that Ayatollah Khomeini's ideologies are deeply embedded in Iranian political discourse. Accusations of dishonesty or deviation from these ideologies are particularly potent, as they imply a betrayal of the foundational principles of the Islamic Republic. Example [12] explicitly ties the speaker's criticism to Khomeini's legacy, using it as a benchmark to assess the honesty and integrity of current leaders. By aligning his position with Khomeini's values, the speaker strengthens his own legitimacy while casting doubt on that of his opponents. This tactic may threaten his opponent's political *âberu*.

In addition to lying, Islam prohibits Muslims from spying or backbiting, as stated in Al-Isra Surah, The Journey by Night, Verse 36.

And do not go after that of which you do not know (do not try to get in or explain)! Surely the hearing and the sight and the comprehension, all of these are responsible for that (Taklif).

Al-Hujurat Surah, The Dwellings, Verse 12, also highlights that Muslims are seriously admonished by Allah for spying, gossiping, or backbiting others:

O you who believe (who are *âmenû*)! Keep away from the conjecture very much. Indeed, some conjectures are sins, and do not spy (on the others' mistakes) nor let some of you gossip about others. Does one of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Of course, you dislike it. And have piety towards Allah; surely Allah is the One Who accepts the repentance, the Most Merciful.

As indicated in the Quran, backbiting is equated with eating one's dead brother's flesh, making it firmly rejected. In general, if an individual commits any acts forbidden by cultural and religious norms, or is accused of committing them, they risk losing or damaging their *âberu*. Therefore, in this study, politicians strategically endeavor to accuse their rivals and their networks of committing such transgressions in order to tarnish their *âberu*.

In summary, Iranians adhere to cultural and religious norms, values, rituals, and customs, and exhibit both verbal and non-verbal behaviors that contribute to their own *âberu* as well as that of their interlocutors, in order to avoid being perceived as unthoughtful or inconsiderate by significant *mardom*. However, in Iranian presidential debates, due to the zero-sum nature of such contests, candidates often engage in verbal or non-verbal *âberu*-threatening behavior to attack aspects of their opponents' *âberu*, thus violating religious and cultural norms. In other words, within the zero-sum game of Iranian presidential debates, candidates frequently resort to *âberu*-threatening actions despite cultural and religious prohibitions against such behavior. This dynamic underscores the tension between maintaining individual and collectivist *âberu* and the cutthroat nature of political competition. The strategic accusations not only seek to discredit opponents and damage their *âberu*, but also serve to position the accuser as a true adherent of the Revolution's values, thereby appealing to the electorate's sense of cultural and religious identity.

4.7 Institutional components (IC) of *âberu*: Influential factors on politicians' *âberu* in Iranian presidential debates

Alongside the sociocultural components of *âberu* introduced in Section 4.5, which are common among all Iranians, there are several institutional or localized factors that have a significant impact on politicians' *âberu*, but not on the general public. The institutional factors influencing politicians' *âberu* are listed below based on the current study:

- i. Religion and Islamic values
- i. 1979 Enqelâb (Revolution)
- ii. Endorsement by an authority
 - a. Endorsement by Ayatollah Khomeini
 - b. Endorsement by the Supreme Leader
- iii. Satisfying *mardom* (people)

This study suggests that Iranian politicians can maintain or enhance their (political) *âberu* by practicing Islamic values, adhering to Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview and the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, and receiving the support of both the Supreme Leader and *mardom*. The following sections will explain how these factors contribute to the maintenance and enhancement of *âberu*.

4.7.1 Religion and Islamic values

According to Anchimbe (2018), in most Western societies, religion is merely an alternative to other forms of interaction. However, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is a far more complex phenomenon, as the governmental system is theocratic. The vast majority of Iranians are Shi'a Muslims. Shi'a Islam, one of the main sects of Islam alongside Sunni Islam, is the official religion of Iran. Although Shi'a Muslims represent a minority in the global Muslim population, they form the largest majority in Iran. Sunni Muslims, on the other hand, are considered minorities in Iran, similar to Christians or Bahá'í, and thus, they are not eligible to run for the presidency.

Shi'a Islam bestows a prominent position on its clerics in Iran, making the intersection of Shiism and politics inseparable. In this context, the starting point for debates in Iran is Muslim jurisprudence and practice (Sharia), rather than secular law and civil rights. As Zaman (2015) highlights, God holds absolute sovereignty over political and social life. Therefore, leaders must have a firm understanding of Islam to effectively integrate religion and state within a theocratic framework. In this study, presidential candidates repeatedly assert that they follow Islamic principles and values and are devout Muslims. Conversely, they accuse their rivals of distancing themselves from Islamic values, thereby damaging their political *âberu*.

As a result, politicians can attain social and political status when they are Shi'a Muslims, thereby establishing themselves with greater credibility, reputation, honor, or *âberu*. Thus, in this study, presidential candidates must be Shi'a Muslims to be deemed eligible; otherwise, they will not be vetted, much like minorities who are regarded as outsiders.

Religion and religious values have profoundly shaped Iranian cultural and social norms. One could argue that religion governs social behavior, influencing cultural and societal norms. In other words, Iranian cultural values and societal norms are strongly influenced by religious expectations, to the extent that the boundary between them is often blurred. This entanglement, in turn, shapes social interactions and behavior.

Islam has had a significant impact on the lives and culture of Iranians, particularly since Ayatollah Khomeini emphasized that Islam should govern all aspects of life for Iranians and non-Iranian Muslims alike, without boundaries, including economic, social, political, and cultural spheres, in an effort to unite them. Interestingly, in this research, politicians also frame Iranian culture as Iranian Islamic culture, reflecting how religion has deeply influenced cultural norms and extended into the post-Revolution era, as seen in example [13].

[13]

05-2013-JHNGR, Debate No.2

فرهنگ ایرانی اسلامی سهم بسیار مهمی در اقتدار کشور دارد هم در مسائل بین المللی و هم داخلی
(Lit. Trans.) Culture Iranian Islamic part very important in authority of country
has also in issues international and also domestic.
(Com. Trans.) Iranian Islamic culture has a very important part in the country's
authority, both in international and domestic issues.

Aarabi (2019) asserts that social justice in Iran is realized through the Revolution, which emphasizes Islam and Islamic values. In other words, governors must practice Islamic values to run an Islamic government, a goal that is achieved through an Islamic Revolution. Consequently, Iranian politicians uphold Islam and its values to protect the Revolution and its ideologies. In this study, Iranian politicians frequently declare that a revolutionary government must be Islamic, as the 1979 *Enqelâb* (Revolution) was inherently Islamic. Indeed, fostering an Islamic Revolution is seen as essential to establishing an Islamic government that promotes justice and supports oppressed Muslims. As a result, revolutionary politicians often assert their adherence to Islam and Islamic values, insisting on the adoption of an Islamic lifestyle that aligns with the ideologies of the Revolution's leader. It is clear that Islam holds a strategic position within this system.

Arguably, candidates instrumentalize Islam when elevating their actions by linking them to Islamic values. In doing so, they aim to enhance their political *âberu* or the *IC* (image capital) of their *âberu* by presenting themselves as devout Muslims and steadfast adherents to Islam. However, they simultaneously threaten their rivals' *âberu* by accusing them of failing to practice Islamic values.

This study reveals that Iranian politicians emphasize Islam's concerns because, within this community of practice, adherence to Islamic values serves as a factor that boosts *âberu*. Conversely, presidential candidates claim that their opponents fail to prioritize Islamic

concerns, undermining their ability to promote social justice and thereby threatening their rivals' *âberu*. Example [14] further illustrates the importance of adopting the Islamic lifestyle among Iranian politicians. In the 2017 election, Raisi, on one hand, emphasized the proper consumption of natural resources, unity, and sacrifice, all of which can be achieved within a revolutionary Islamic government. On the other hand, he cautioned against adopting a Western lifestyle, which he argued leads to overconsumption of resources, profitable production at the expense of ethics, and social ruptures. This study underscores the necessity for Iranian politicians to embrace the Islamic lifestyle in order to apply justice in accordance with Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview.

[14]

6-2017-RS, Debate No.2

مصرف منابع حداکثری، تولید سودآور و گسست های اجتماعی از ویژگی های زندگی غرب است .
توصیه ی طبیعت، مصرف بهینه منابع، وحدت، انسجام اجتماعی و ایثار از مشخصه های سبک
زندگی اسلامی است. اگر دولتی انقلابی نباشد اتفاقی نمی افتد

(Lit. Trans.) Consumption of resources maximum, production profitable, and ruptures social the characteristics of life Western is. Development nature, consumption of resources, unity, solidarity social, sacrifice, etc., features life Islamic is. If one government revolutionary not is, happen nothing.

(Com. Trans.) Consumption of maximum resources, profitable production, and social ruptures are the characteristics of Western life. In Islamic life, nature development, optimal resources consumption, unity, social solidarity, sacrifice, etc., are the issues. If an *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) government is not formed, nothing occurs.

In this research, Iranian politicians regard Islam and the Islamic Revolution as sacred due to their significant achievements, such as forging a national identity for Iranians and securing a stable position for Iran in the global arena. They emphasize the Islamic ideologies in Islamic Iran and demonstrate how society, along with the *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) governors, has grown relatively prosperous. Indeed, the *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) politicians follow Ayatollah Khomeini's path to safeguard Iranian Muslims. As a result, they may enhance their *âberu* by accumulating the IC of their *âberu*.

Jalili, one of the candidates in the 2013 election, highlights the stable position of Islamic Iran in the world as one of the Islamic Revolution's key achievements in example [15].

[15]

6-2013-JLL, Debate No.2

با تشکر از انقلاب اسلامی که کشور ما را افتخارمندتر و پیشرفته‌تر از همیشه کرده است. ما باید از آن قدردانی کنیم نقاط قوتی که ما را به اینجا رسانده‌اند را شناسایی کنیم و آن‌ها را تقویت کنیم، و نقاط ضعف را شناسایی کرده و از آن‌ها دوری کنیم

(Lit. Trans.) Thank you for Revolution Islamic that country our prouder and advanced more from ever done has. We should it appreciate, points of strength that we to here brought identify and them boost, and points of weakness recognize and them avoid.

(Com. Trans.) Thanks to the Islamic Revolution that made our country prouder and more advanced than ever before. We should appreciate it, identify and boost the strengths which have brought us here, and recognize weaknesses and avoid them.

There are many instances in which Iranian presidential candidates honor Islam and its significant achievements in Iran since the Revolution. They also frequently emphasize that Iranian governors must adopt Islamic ideologies to ensure justice and protect Muslims. As a result, they challenge the IC of their adversaries' *âberu* by accusing them of distancing themselves from Islamic values or failing to uphold them.

4.7.2 1971 *Enqelâb* (Revolution)

The Iranian Revolution took place in 1979 under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Shi'a Muslim fundamentalists, along with opposition forces, overthrew the monarchical regime of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (Beeman, 1986). The Islamic Revolution marks a pivotal moment in Iranian history, as populist and Islamic economic and cultural policies replaced Iran's rapidly modernizing and capitalist economy. Much of the industry was nationalized, laws and schools were Islamicized, and Western influences were banned to prevent "westoxification." Khomeini's worldview asserted that only clerical rule, following Shi'a law, could establish a just government in the absence of the Prophet and the Imams.

According to the ideologies of the Revolution's leader, people are divided into two categories: the oppressed and the oppressors, with only Islam capable of protecting the oppressed from the oppressors (Aarabi, 2019). Therefore, politicians must practice Islamic

values to protect oppressed Muslims. Interestingly, many of the current politicians in Iran are older *enqelâbiyun* who participated in the Revolution to defend the rights of oppressed Muslims.

Aarabi (2019) identifies seven key themes that form the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, aimed at liberating oppressed Muslims, based on Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview. He organizes these themes into two overarching categories: justice and injustice. According to Khomeini, oppressors commit injustices against the Muslim people by oppressing them. As such, he asserts that governors must practice Islamic values to end oppression and restore justice. Justice is realized in society when the government adheres to the following concepts:

- i. Islamic governance: A government governed by Islamic religious law.
- ii. Velayat-e faqih (clerical guardianship): A system of clerical oversight of the state and the leadership of a supreme clerical figure until the return of the Twelfth Shi'a Imam.
- iii. Pan-Islamism: Solidarity among all Muslims, a global Muslim community.
- iv. *Enqelâbi* (Revolutionary) Shiism: A political and ideological interpretation of Shiism, emphasizing resistance, martyrdom, and the fight for justice.

Aarabi (2019) further argues that Ayatollah Khomeini emphasized injustice occurring when imperialism, the West, the U.S., and Zionism freely colonize and oppress third-world nations. Therefore, having the following mindsets is crucial for Islamic governments to achieve justice:

- ii. Anti-Imperialism and opposition to the West
- iii. Anti-Americanism
- iv. Eradication of Zionism and Israel

Iranian politicians must promote justice for the Iranian nation by adopting and spreading Islamic values and Shiism, while simultaneously resisting injustice by preventing the West, the U.S., and Zionists from achieving their objectives. If Iranian politicians succeed in practicing justice and fighting against injustice, they can build political respect, honor, and credibility for themselves, as this aligns with what Ayatollah Khomeini demands of them. In this way, Iranian politicians can enhance their political *âberu* in the public eye.

In this context, anyone who conforms to the ideologies of the leader of the Revolution is regarded as having an *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) spirit. However, those who participated in

the 1979 Revolution that overthrew the monarchy are known as *enqelâbiyun*. In other words, adopting Ayatollah Khomeini's ideologies is essential to being recognized as an *enqelâbi* person or a person with an *enqelâbi* spirit. Through morphological analysis, the lexeme *enqelâb* (n.) refers to the revolution, *enqelâbi* (adj.) refers to a revolutionary person, and *enqelâbiyun* (adj., pl.) refers to revolutionary people or rebels. Thus, the title *enqelâbi* (the singular form of *enqelâbiyun*) can contribute to a politician's credibility in the post-Revolution era.

In summary, *enqelâbiyun* are participants in the Revolution and adherents to Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview, and their *enqelâbi* character is regarded as an *âberu*-boost factor. Iranian politicians distinguish themselves from *qeyre-enqelâbiyun* (non-revolutionary) and *zede-enqelâbiyun* (anti-revolutionary) individuals by emphasizing their *enqelâbi* character. Similarly, in this study, politicians leverage their *enqelâbi* identity to refute their opponents' accusations and restore or enhance their *âberu*. As shown in example [16], Karoubi stresses his revolutionary or *enqelâbi* personality.

[16]

6-2009-KRB, Debate No.3

من یک شخصیت انقلابی هستم، یک فرد انقلابی با ریشه‌های عمیق و تصمیم‌گیری قاطع. من باور دارم که باید حساب شده حرف بزنیم؛ اگر نسنجیده صحبت کنیم، دشمن تراشی خواهیم کرد

(Lit. Trans.) I a character revolutionary am, a person revolutionary with roots deep and decision decisive. I believe that should calculated speak; if reckless speak, enemies will shape.

(Com. Trans.) I am an *enqlâbi* (revolutionary) character, a deep-rooted and determined *enqlâbi* (revolutionary) person. I believe we should speak thoughtfully; if we speak recklessly, we will create enemies.

As shown in example [16], being a revolutionary character or being *enqelâbi* can augment the IC of the politician's *âberu*. On the contrary, being accused of possessing anti-revolutionary, *zede-enqelâbi*, mindsets can ruin a person's honor, reputation, and credibility, or the IC of their *âberu*. Therefore, in example [17], Ahmadinejad accuses his opponent, Karoubi, of being anti-revolutionary, *zede-enqelâbi*, i.e., acting against the regime. This threatens the addressee's *âberu* tremendously.

[17]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.3

خاطره‌های تاریخی نباید گم شود، زمانی که شما اعلام می‌کنید که در خط دشمن قرار دارید. شما به عنوان یک فرد ضد انقلابی عمل می‌کنید. شما دارید کشور را ویران می‌کنید

(Lit. Trans.) Memories historical not should lost, when that you declare that in line of enemy you are. You as a person anti-revolutionary acting are. You the country destroying are...

(Com. Trans.) The historical memory should not be lost when you said that you are on the enemy's line. You are acting *zed-enqlâbi* (counter-revolutionary). You are toppling the country....

Therefore, adherence to the Revolution and its values is essential, and it is *âberu*-threatening when Iranian politicians are accused of distancing themselves from the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and its values, as seen in example [18].

[18]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.3

در طی سه دوره گذشته، یک ساختار اداری و حلقه‌های مدیریتی شکل گرفتند که خود را از مسیر انقلاب و ارزش‌های انقلاب دور کرده‌اند

(Lit. Trans.) Within three period past, a structure administrative and circles of management shaped were that self from path of *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and values of *Enqelâb* (Revolution) far made.

(Com. Trans.) During the last three periods, an administrative structure and management circles were formed that distanced themselves from the path of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and the values of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution).

This research indicates that Iranian politicians often accuse their opponents of committing injustice. According to Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview, injustice occurs when Iranian politicians endorse the doctrines of the US, the West, and the Zionist regime, which are considered formidable enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran. As a result, politicians question their rivals' and their parties' policies and competence, accusing them of failing to adopt coherent policies against the 'Big Satan,' the US. Indeed, politicians must implement Ayatollah Khomeini's policies to promote Shiism, protect oppressed Muslims, and ultimately safeguard Iran's status against the arrogant powers and their interference and colonization.

In this manner, as shown in example [19], Ahmadinejad claims that his opponent, Mousavi, appeases the arrogant powers, which are filled with injustice and oppose Ayatollah Khomeini's ideas and beliefs. Such accusations threaten the IC of Mousavi's *âberu*. Iranian politicians jeopardize their rivals' *âberu* through public allegations, which are considered forbidden in Iranian culture. They accuse their opponents of deviating from Ayatollah Khomeini's path and his Revolution—one of the most damaging accusations that can be used to attack the IC of a rival's *âberu* in this study.

[19]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

اگر نگاه جناب عالی آقای موسوی این است که ما باید سعی کنیم سه یا چهار قدرت بزرگ را راضی کنیم، این برخلاف نظر امام، برخلاف منطق ایران و استقلال ماست

(Lit. Trans.) If look of the Excellency Mr. Mousavi this is that we should try three or four power big satisfy, this against idea of Imam, against logic of Iran and independence of us is.

(Com. Trans.) If Mr. Mousavi, the Excellency, thinks that we should try to satisfy three or four arrogant powers, this is against Ayatollah Khomeini's ideas and Iran's logic and our independence.

In this study, Iranian politicians must strictly avoid aligning with arrogant foreign powers, and they often associate their opponents with these powers to tarnish the IC of their *âberu*. Indeed, when Iranian politicians succeed in cultivating a sense of justice for Iranian Muslims, they preserve and enhance the IC of their *âberu*. Conversely, when they are accused of failing to deliver justice to *mardom*, they lose their *âberu*. As noted earlier, injustice occurs when politicians shift their positions against the US, the West, and the Zionist regime. Consequently, the worldview of Iranian politicians is almost entirely aligned with the worldview of the Revolution and its leader.

In conclusion, according to Ayatollah Khomeini's principles, the Islamic Revolution seeks to protect oppressed Muslim brothers and provide them with justice. Therefore, Islamic governors must uphold Islamic values to suppress the oppressors and eradicate injustice. As observed in this study, politicians maintain the IC of their *âberu* when asserting that they adhere to the principles of the Islamic Revolution in their pursuit of justice. On the contrary, they accuse their opponents of fostering injustice to undermine the IC of their *âberu*.

4.7.3 Endorsement by an authority

Middle-class individuals, religious protesters, and secular citizens played pivotal roles in overthrowing the monarchy of Reza Pahlavi under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The populace was integral to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, empowering the leader they elected to represent their interests. To formalize this transition, a popular referendum was held to establish an Islamic Constitution and a theocratic republic. In 1979, 98% of the Iranian population voted in favor of an Islamic government, leading to Ayatollah Khomeini's appointment as Supreme Leader.

Following Ayatollah Khomeini, his successor, Ali Khamenei, consolidated absolute authority. As previously mentioned, Iran's governmental system is an Islamic theocracy, where the Supreme Leader exercises both ideological and political control over a system dominated by clerics in the state's primary functions. Consequently, in this study, it is crucial for Iranian politicians to receive verification and appointment from either Ayatollah Khomeini or the current Supreme Leader. Politicians also safeguard their political *âberu* by securing the support of *mardom* through addressing their needs. Several examples in this study illustrate the profound impact of such endorsements on politicians' political *âberu*.

4.7.3.1 Endorsement by Ayatollah Khomeini

In previous segments, it was demonstrated how Ayatollah Khomeini holds a crucial role in the Islamic Republic of Iran and how Iranian politicians align themselves with him, his Revolution, and his Islamic ideologies. In this study, Iranian politicians elevate their political status by asserting that they were assigned positions by Ayatollah Khomeini. This suggests that obtaining a political position signifies a positive vetting by Ayatollah Khomeini—an *âberu*-boosting phenomenon within this community of practice.

Furthermore, Iranian politicians frequently emphasize their obedience to Ayatollah Khomeini's orders and adherence to his worldview. Indeed, they enhance the IC of their *âberu* by aligning with his vision of justice and implementing the Revolution's principles to establish an Islamic utopia and protect oppressed Muslims. For further illustrations, refer to the previous two segments.

Ayatollah Khomeini later appointed *enqelâbiyun* to political positions, further reinforcing this as an *âberu*-boosting factor for politicians. Having a connection to Ayatollah Khomeini carries significant value, while distancing oneself from his principles results in *âberu*

loss. Therefore, in example [20], Karoubi enhances his *šohrat* (reputation), an integral aspect of *âberu*, to strengthen the IC of his *âberu* by highlighting that Ayatollah Khomeini appointed him as the head of a committee.

[20]

6-2009-KRB, Debate No.3

من شدم رئیس کمیته امداد و به تدریج امام پشت سر هم به من احکام دادند و من هم شهرتی پیدا کردم

(Lit. Trans.) I became committee Relief the head and gradually Imam in row to me decrees gave and I also a *šohrat* (reputation) found.

(Com. Trans.) I became the head of the Relief Committee, and Ayatollah Khomeini gradually issued more decrees, and I gained more *šohrat* (reputation).

Indeed, Karoubi enhances his self-credibility, reputation, and honor by emphasizing that the leader of the Revolution personally vetted him for the position. This study demonstrates that politicians who have received Ayatollah Khomeini's support can expect greater respect and honor within their community of practice.

As previously mentioned, according to Islamic norms, public accusations are considered a sin and are strongly condemned. However, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, being endorsed by the leader of the Revolution significantly boosts the IC of a politician's *âberu*. Consequently, Iranian politicians accuse their adversaries of deviating from Ayatollah Khomeini's path, failing to uphold his revolutionary ideologies, or being rejected by the leader himself. Such accusations result in an *âberu*-loss phenomenon, as observed in this study.

4.7.3.2 Endorsement by the Supreme Leader

Another influential figure who can enhance a candidate's credibility, reputation, and honor is the current Supreme Leader. As the highest authority in Iran's governmental hierarchy, the Supreme Leader holds significant power. According to Iran's Constitution, he is responsible for shaping both domestic and foreign policies. Additionally, he serves as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces and oversees Iran's intelligence and security operations, with the authority to declare war.

Furthermore, the Supreme Leader has the power to appoint and dismiss key officials, including the heads of the judiciary, state radio and television networks, and the supreme commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. He also appoints the twelve members

of the Council of Guardians, the influential body that supervises Parliament's activities and determines which candidates are eligible to run for public office.

Politicians frequently highlight their admiration or endorsement by the Supreme Leader to boost their *âberu*. Example [21] illustrates how Jahangiri, the Vice President in 2017, sought to enhance the IC of his *âberu* by emphasizing that the Supreme Leader had praised his honesty.

[21]

6-2017-JHNGR, Debate No.2

ما می‌توانیم مشکلات مهم کشور را حل کنیم؛ من یک جهادی هستم. در جلسات اخیر با رهبر انقلاب و رؤسای سه قوه دولت دیدار کردم، و رهبر انقلاب فرمودند: «آقای جهانگیری یک اصلاح‌طلب است و من او را از روز اول شناختم و ایشان شخص صادق هستند»

(Lit. Trans.) We can problems significant of country solve; I a jihadist am. In meetings recent with the leader of the Revolution and headers of three branches of government meet do, and leader of the Revolution said: Mr. Jahangiri a reformist is and I him from the day first known and he person honest is.

(Com. Trans.) We can solve the most significant problems in the country; I am a jihadist. In the recent meetings with leaders of the three branches of government the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) leader said, "Mr. Jahangiri is a reformist, and I found him as an honest person from the very first day."

Example [22] further illustrates how Jahangiri enhances his *âberu* by emphasizing that he was designated by the Supreme Leader. He reinforces his credibility by highlighting that he was both appointed by the Supreme Leader and approved by the incumbent president. In doing so, he underscores his authority and responsibility as the commander of the resistance economy, a role focused on managing economic challenges. Moreover, by stressing the Supreme Leader's endorsement and the president's approval, he legitimizes his position within the government hierarchy, further strengthening his *âberu*.

[22]

6-2017-JHNGR, Debate No.3

من فرمانده اقتصاد مقاومتی هستم. رهبر معظم با تأیید رئیس‌جمهور من را منصوب کردند

(Lit. Trans.) I commander of economy resistance am. Leader supreme with approval of president me appointed.

(Com. Trans) I am the commander of the resistant economy. The supreme leader appointed me with the approval of the president.

Being obedient to the leader of the Revolution preserves Iranian politicians' *âberu* in high esteem. Similarly, Jahangiri enhances his political *âberu* by asserting his loyalty to the Supreme Leader and his commitment to following orders to protect Iran. In this regard, candidates strengthen the IC of their *âberu* by aligning themselves with the Supreme Leader.

Conversely, presidential candidates attempt to undermine their opponents' *âberu* by claiming they lack the support or approval of the populace or the Supreme Leader. A compelling example of this is found in [23], where Ahmadinejad bolsters his *âberu* during the 2009 election debate by asserting that both the Supreme Leader and *mardom* endorse his policies. He simultaneously attacks his opponent, Mousavi, by declaring that Mousavi holds no position within the Islamic system.

[23]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

شما میگویید نظر نظام آن بوده است. خوب الان نظر نظام این است. شما چرا خودتان را جای نظام مینشانید. بنده موضع گیری کردم علیه ماجرای هولوکاست. رهبری هم تایید کرد. ملت هم تایید کردند
(Lit. Trans.) You say opinion of regime that was, ok, now the opinion of regime this is. You why yourself instead of regime put. I took stance against Holocaust. The leader also approved. The nation also approved.

(Com. Trans)_You say the regime's opinion was one thing before, and now it is something else. So why do you place yourself as the representative of the Islamic establishment? I had my own stance on the Holocaust, and the Leader approved it, as did *mardom*.

In Example [23], Ahmadinejad challenges Mousavi for positioning himself within the Islamic establishment, asserting that the establishment consists of the supreme leader and *mardom*, both of whom have already endorsed his policies. This suggests that Ahmadinejad seeks to emphasize his support from both the supreme leader and *mardom*, thereby enhancing his political *âberu* or the IC of his *âberu*.

As observed in Examples [21-23], politicians enhance their *âberu* when they receive endorsement from *mardom* and the supreme leader. Conversely, they experience a loss of *âberu* when accused of lacking support from either *mardom* or the supreme leader.

4.7.4 Satisfying *mardom* or people

The role of the public is fundamentally defined in the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Ayatollah Khomeini assigns *mardom* (people) a central role in the Islamic State System, emphasizing that the Islamic government cannot exist independently of the people but rather originates from them. He also underscores the fundamental right of every nation to determine its own destiny and choose the form of its government. Similarly, this study highlights that *mardom* plays a crucial role in shaping politicians' trajectories, as they were the driving force behind the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and voted for the Islamic Constitution, thereby being regarded as the true proprietors of the Revolution.

In this context, presidential candidates in this study attribute decisive roles to *mardom* by engaging them in evaluating both their own and their opponents' performances, as well as by calling upon them to bear witness to political situations. In a so-called republic system, assessing politicians' performance is an inherent right of the people, as *mardom* have entrusted politicians with power as their representatives. Arguably, politicians can enhance their credibility, reputation, and honor among the people by recognizing and affirming these rights. Conversely, failing to acknowledge the role and rights of *mardom* may threaten the IC of their own *âberu* and diminish their credibility. Therefore, politicians periodically invoke *mardom*'s oversight as a means of upholding their rights.

However, this study also suggests that politicians strategically involve *mardom* in political discourse to achieve specific objectives. Iranian politicians engage or empower *mardom* primarily to serve their own interests and to challenge their opponents. They mobilize the public to defend them in the face of criticism while simultaneously using *mardom* to scrutinize and undermine their rivals. Politicians call on one another to recognize the people's rights and emphasize the importance of strengthening the bond between *mardom* and the government or regime. Through such rhetoric, Iranian politicians attempt to convince *mardom* that they uphold the principles of an Islamic republic, where the people and their concerns take precedence. Conversely, they accuse their opponents of failing to acknowledge the rights of *mardom*.

As a result, politicians in this study seek to distribute power among the people by engaging them, urging them to witness events, and encouraging them to critique political affairs. In return, politicians may gain *mardom*'s endorsement. The leader of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) has advised Iranian politicians to delegate power to *mardom* as a means of restoring their inherent rights. Accordingly, Example [24], drawn from the 2017 election,

illustrates how politicians publicly advocate for sharing power with *mardom*. In this instance, the speaker, Qalibaf, asserts that power should be in the hands of the people, who should actively participate in political affairs and assess politicians' performances. Arguably, advocating for *mardom*'s rights in this manner can earn politicians *mardom*'s endorsement. Indeed, politicians enhance the IC of their own *âberu* when they address and fulfill the needs of *mardom*.

[24]

6-2017-QLBF, Debate No.2

باید به این توجه کرد. مهم این است که اگر تمرکززدایی هم انجام بدهیم و اختیارات را به خود مردم در استان و شهرستان با هر قومیت و گرایش و سلیقه ای خودشان تصمیم بگیرند

(Lit. Trans.) Must to this attention pay. Important this is that if decentralization do and authorities to *mardom* in provinces and counties with any ethnicity, orientation and preference of them decide.

(Com. Trans.) We must pay attention to this. The important thing is that if we decentralize and empower *mardom* (people) in the provinces and counties, with their own ethnicity, orientation, and preference, they should decide themselves.

As the data analysis shows in chapters five and six, Iranian presidential candidates dispute *mardom*'s rights, understanding, *Beyt al-mal* (*mardom*'s property) or public assets, money, stomachs and lives, skin and flesh, tables, people's pain, expectations, dissatisfaction, religion, choice, and *ez^oat* (dignity). Politicians claim they seek to defend and enhance the ordinary people's interests and rights through the reforms they implement. As a result, Iranian politicians are responsible for fulfilling people's needs. Otherwise, they may be regarded as incompetent politicians, threatening the IC of their *âberu*. In other words, politicians threaten the IC of their own *âberu* when losing *mardom*'s endorsement and being regarded as failed politicians.

In this study, presidential candidates threaten the IC of their opponents' *âberu* when accusing them of not tackling people's issues properly, on the one hand. On the other hand, they enhance or restore the IC of their own *âberu* when claiming they can effectively deal with *mardom*'s issues. Some examples are provided to show how politicians objectify *mardom*'s issues for their own benefit and against their opponents.

Politicians are expected to respect *mardom*'s sense of discernment and wisdom. However, in this study, politicians exploit this wisdom in their favor and against their rivals.

For instance, in example [25], the speaker, Raisi, claims that the incumbent's recent actions were commercial games to win the 2017 election and accuses him of insulting people's understanding. Arguably, Raisi threatens the IC of Rouhani's *âberu* when accusing him of ignoring people's wisdom.

[25]

6-2017-RS, Debate No.3

ای کاش چهار سال همین سه، چهار ماه بود و چه اقداماتی که در این مدت کوتاه انجام نشد اما همه این‌ها را برای کارهای انتخاباتی کردید مردم را عاقل بدانید. مردم عقل دارند و براساس تعقل رای می‌دهند

(Lit. Trans) I wish 4 years the same three or four months was and what actions that within period short done not but all these for tasks of election done, *mardom* wise know. *Mardom* wisdom possess and based on reason vote.

(Com. Trans.) I wish the last four years had been like the past three or four months. What actions were not taken in such a short period? Yet, you did all of this for the sake of the election. Consider that *mardom* (people) are wise. *Mardom* possess wisdom and vote based on reason.

Since politicians are the guardians of *mardom's Beyt al-mal* (*mardom's* property), being accused of stealing from it is severely damaging to the IC of their *âberu*. In example [26], Karoubi exonerates himself from stealing from *mardom's Beyt al-mal* or their assets but accuses others anonymously of embezzlement. It should be noted that, since being accused of stealing seriously harms one's *âberu*, Karoubi endeavors to legitimize his actions by seeking the endorsement of Ayatollah Khomeini and Marja.

[26]

6-2009-KRB, Debate No.3

من تاییدیه از امام و دیگر مراجع برای جمع آوری مبالغ و هزینه کردن آنها بر اساس شریعت دارم. من هیچ پولی از بیت المال مردم نبرده‌ام، در حالی که دیگران میلیاردها گرفته‌اند و مسئول آن نیستند

(Lit. Trans.) I approval from Imam and other Marja for collecting fund and spending those in accordance with *Shari'a* have. I no money from *mardom's beytal-mal*, taken have not while that others billions taken and responsible for that not are.

(Com. Trans.) I have received approval from the Imam and other Marja to collect funds and spend them in accordance with Shari'a. I have not taken any money from *mardom's beytal-mal*, while others have taken billions and are not held accountable for it.

In this study, Iranian politicians frequently assert that *mardom* and *mardom's* concerns are their priorities. They then endeavor to safeguard *mardom's* rights in order to maintain the IC of their own *âberu*. On the contrary, they attack their adversaries' reputation, credibility, honor, grandeur, or the IC of their *âberu* when accusing them of failing to fulfill *mardom's* needs.

In summary, politicians must prove themselves responsive to *mardom's* concerns and needs. In return, they may maintain and enhance their own political *âberu* by receiving *mardom's* endorsement. Recent history shows that *mardom* demonstrates its support through color coding. For instance, people wore green wristbands to support Mousavi in the 2009 election. Later, in the 2013 and 2017 elections, people used small purple flags or wore purple wristbands to support Mr. Rouhani, the moderate politician who rejected red and blue to indicate that he belonged neither to the left nor to the right, but instead was a moderate politician.

4.8 Âberu in mediated political discourse of Iran: navigating institutional and sociocultural factors

In line with Fetzer's (2013) findings, being members of a speech community and sharing procedural knowledge that influences how meaning is constructed and understood within political discourse, Iranian politicians also use their procedural knowledge about *âberu* to navigate political discourse. This includes understanding how to maintain and enhance their own *âberu* while challenging that of their rivals. This procedural knowledge within this community of practice encompasses societal norms, religious values, Islamic Revolution ideologies, and the expectations of *mardom* (people).

In essence, within the complex landscape of Iranian political discourse, the concept of *âberu* encompasses a multitude of factors that shape politicians' reputations, credibility, grandeur, and honor within society. Drawing from both institutional and sociocultural influences, politicians strategically navigate various elements to maintain and enhance their own *âberu* while challenging that of their rivals in mediated political interactions.

Institutional factors, such as religion and Islamic values, serve as foundational pillars in the Iranian political landscape, influencing politicians' actions and their perceptions of *âberu*. As mentioned earlier, Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 Revolution holds significant sway, as politicians who align themselves with its ideals and principles garner legitimacy and support from both religious authorities and the populace. Endorsement by authoritative figures such as Ayatollah Khomeini or the Supreme Leader further enhances politicians' *âberu*, signaling alignment with the revolutionary values and the Islamic Republic's governance structure.

According to the findings of this study, Iranian politicians emphasize their alignment with Islamic principles and their endorsement by religious leaders during televised debates. They position themselves as guardians of the Revolution and champions of Islamic governance. By presenting themselves as devout adherents of religious values, Iranian politicians seek to secure the support and endorsement necessary to maintain their *âberu*.

In addition to institutional factors, sociocultural factors play a crucial role in shaping politicians' interactions and perceptions of *âberu*. Iranian political discourse is deeply embedded in the sociocultural context of *âberu*. Politicians must navigate norms related to age, appearance, gender roles, and social status to maintain their credibility and reputation. Engaging with *mardom*, or the people, is essential, as politicians must demonstrate responsiveness to their needs and concerns to secure their endorsement and maintain their *âberu*. In other words, in line with Fetzer's (2013) emphasis on the importance of sociocultural contexts in shaping discourse practices, Iranian politicians must align with societal expectations to maintain their *âberu*. This alignment ensures that their communication is effective and resonates with the public. Through televised debates and public appearances tailored to meet these sociocultural expectations, politicians actively engage with *mardom*, emphasizing their commitment to addressing societal issues and upholding sociocultural values. By aligning themselves with the interests and concerns of the populace, Iranian politicians seek to enhance their *âberu* and secure the endorsement necessary for political legitimacy.

In navigating the multifaceted landscape of Iranian political discourse, politicians carefully balance institutional endorsement with sociocultural influences to enhance their *âberu*. Applying various strategies to emphasize religious alignment, secure endorsement from authoritative figures, and engage with *mardom* reflects the intersectionality of institutional and sociocultural influences on politicians' perceptions of *âberu*. As a result, Iranian politicians utilize the mediated discourse of televised debates to persuade the public that they are aligned with religious and revolutionary principles, as well as cultural expectations, while accusing

their rivals of deviating from these expected principles and values to tarnish their *âberu*. In other words, Iranian politicians strategically employ various tactics, such as disclaimers and Speaker Response-Seeking Questions (SRSQ) (See Chapters Five and Six), to navigate and manipulate *âberu*, emphasizing religious values while appealing to *mardom* to enhance their *âberu*. Iranian politicians seek to strengthen their credibility, reputation, and honor within Iranian society by navigating the complexities of institutional and sociocultural influences.

This study highlights that Iranian political discourse directly aligns with Lauerbach and Fetzer's (2007) emphasis on the importance of cross-cultural perspectives in political discourse. While their work provides a broad framework for understanding how culture influences political communication across various contexts, Lauerbach and Fetzer highlight the role of media and cultural context in shaping political discourse. This research adds another layer by emphasizing the significance of sociocultural factors such as age, appearance, gender roles, and social status in shaping politicians' strategies in Iran. Iranian politicians must navigate these sociocultural norms to maintain their *âberu*, demonstrating that cultural values and expectations are not just peripheral but central to effective political communication. This enhances the understanding of how political discourse is tailored to fit cultural contexts, as suggested by Lauerbach and Fetzer (2007).

In conclusion, the concept of *âberu* in mediated political discourse in Iran is shaped by a complex interplay of institutional and sociocultural influences. Lauerbach and Fetzer (2007) discuss how politicians adapt their discourse to media platforms to connect with the public. In the same manner, Iranian politicians strategically balance institutional and sociocultural influences to maintain their *âberu*. By using rhetorical strategies that align with societal expectations, Iranian politicians aim to manipulate public perception and secure legitimacy. This reinforces the idea that political actors must be acutely aware of both institutional and cultural contexts to craft effective communication strategies. The strategic use of language in Iranian political discourse also aligns with Fetzer's (2013) findings on how procedural knowledge shapes political communication. Iranian politicians' use of culturally specific strategies to enhance their *âberu* reflects a deep understanding of their speech community's norms and expectations. As seen within the media discourse, Iranian politicians can manage their *âberu*, since the media serves as a crucial space for them where procedural knowledge about cultural norms is enacted and contested.

4.9 Conclusion

The ethnographic survey reveals that *âberu* is acknowledged at two levels: individual and collectivist. *Âberu* is both the most individualistic and the most collective precious possession. *Âberu* of the group is embedded in *âberu* of its individuals, and it is the center of their security and pleasure. Each individual can enhance or stain their collectivist *âberu* once their individual *âberu* has been either preserved or damaged. Indeed, *âberu* is on loan to individuals either from their in-group members, when accepted as worthy members, or from out-group members, when positively evaluated as a valuable unit of society. Therefore, individuals must adhere to their group's norms and societal values; otherwise, they may lose their *âberu* in the public eye or among significant *mardom* (people). In Iranian culture, Iranians are also expected to maintain *âberu* of their interlocutors and their networks, due to the cyclical nature of *âberu*.

Âberu is a relational and interactional phenomenon, established, enhanced, or damaged in relationships with others. People and their networks may gain or lose it in the eyes of in-group members or the rest of society when their *âberu* is either enhanced or threatened in an interaction. Indeed, Iranians interpret each other's behavior based on whether it adheres to or deviates from sociocultural norms. For instance, *mardom* (people) assess whether one's behavior results in *kasb-e-âberu* (earning *âberu*) or *âberu-rizi* (shedding *âberu*), and they may immediately relate their judgment to the individual's directly associated group. In this fashion, "harfe *mardom*" or "people talk" plays a significant role in Iranians' lives. Iranians are cautious about the evaluation of significant *mardom* if they interpret their *âberu* positively or negatively. Iranians may lose or boost their *âberu* if they ignore or acknowledge the sociocultural components (SCP) of *âberu*, including age, clothing and appearance, gender-related practices, possessions, approved verbal and non-verbal behaviors, and social status. Interestingly, the SCPs in terms of *âberu* can overlap, e.g., gender-related practices and clothing/appearance. Each gender should dress according to societal norms and maintain their appearance, or "*zâher-râ hefz kardan*," based on sociocultural and religious expectations. If they fail to meet social expectations, they may threaten both their individual and collectivist *âberu*.

It should be noted that a clash of expectations, norms, and beliefs leads Iranians to *âberu*-loss phenomenon. However, the consequences of *âberu*-loss can vary depending on how severely it is evaluated. For instance, in the case of adultery or fornication, if committed by females, honor-killing may be the consequence in order to restore the damaged collectivist *âberu*.

This research also shows that *âberu* encompasses institutional components (IC) that are only acknowledged among Iranian politicians. This means there are localized or institutional factors, along with cognitive factors, that specifically impact Iranian politicians' *âberu*. Iranian politicians maintain their *âberu* when adhering to Shi'a Islam and practicing its values based on Ayatollah Khomeini's demands. They enhance their *âberu* due to their participation in the 1979 *Enqelâb* (Revolution), being regarded as *enqelâbiyun* (revolutionaries) who cooperated with Ayatollah Khomeini to topple the monarchy. It is worth mentioning that they accuse their opponents of distancing themselves from Ayatollah Khomeini and the principles of the Islamic Revolution, which damages their *âberu*. They label their rivals as *qeyre-enqelâbi* (non-revolutionary) or accuse them of acting *qeyre-enqelâbi*.

Iranian politicians also boost their political *âberu* by claiming that they enjoy the endorsement of the Supreme Leader and the *mardom*.

Chapter 5

The Individual *Âberu*-Threatening Act (IÂDA)

5.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the frequency of the concept of *âberu* and its related notions, such as *efteqâr* (the sense of being proud of something or somebody), *ezwat* (dignity), and *ehterâm* (respect), to highlight their significance among Iranian politicians. It then focuses on how Iranian politicians attack their opponents' individual *âberu* to achieve their institutional goals. Candidates employ various strategies to maintain, enhance, or restore their own individual *âberu* while simultaneously undermining or damaging that of their rivals. The data analysis below reveals that Iranian politicians use a range of threatening strategies to challenge the sociocultural components of their opponents' *âberu*, thereby influencing their *âberu*. In other words, they bolster their individual *âberu* by embracing *âberu*-boosting factors. One of the most common ways to achieve this is by asserting their unwavering adherence to Ayatollah Khomeini and the ideologies of his Revolution. At the same time, they threaten their opponents' individual *âberu* by employing *âberu*-threatening strategies, particularly when challenging the sociocultural (SC) or institutional components (IC) of their opponents' *âberu*. A key tactic for initiating an *âberu*-threatening act is to accuse political rivals of failing to uphold the Islamic principles of the Revolution.

This chapter, with the support of examples, explores the specific sociocultural strategies employed by Iranian presidential candidates to inflict *âberu* damage on their opponents' individual *âberu*.

The following section presents the frequency of *âberu* and its interwoven elements as utilized by Iranian politicians, demonstrating the importance of *âberu* among Iranian presidential candidates in this study.

5.2 *Âberu* and related concepts

According to O'Shea (1999), Sharifian (2007, 2011), Koutlaki (2010), Izadi (2017), Sharifian and Tayebi (2017), and Hosseini et al. (2017–2018), *âberu* is one of the key concepts in Iranian collectivist culture. In the same vein, this study demonstrates that *âberu* holds

significant importance among Iranian politicians, as they either implicitly refer to it or explicitly apply it. As discussed in Chapter Four, *kerâmat* (honor, dignity), *e 'tebâr* (credibility), *arj* (high social position), *ez^oat* (dignity), *šohrat* (reputation), *heysiyat* (honor or dignity), *efteqâr* (the sense of respect and esteem), *hormat* (the sense of respect and dignity), *šaraf* or *šerafat* (honor or dignity), *nâmus* (chastity or purity), and *qadr* or *ša'an* (the sense of merit) are closely related to the concept of *âberu*. Dehkhoda et al. (1991) identified these as the most relevant concepts associated with *âberu*.

Figure 2 illustrates that Iranian politicians applied the concept of *âberu* and its interwoven elements 146 times in the electoral debates of 2009, 2013, and 2017. As shown in Figure 2, *efteqâr* (the sense of respect and esteem), with 26.02% (38 tokens), and *ezwat* (dignity), with 23.28% (34 tokens), are the most frequently used terms, while *âberu*, with 4.79% (7 tokens), ranks sixth.

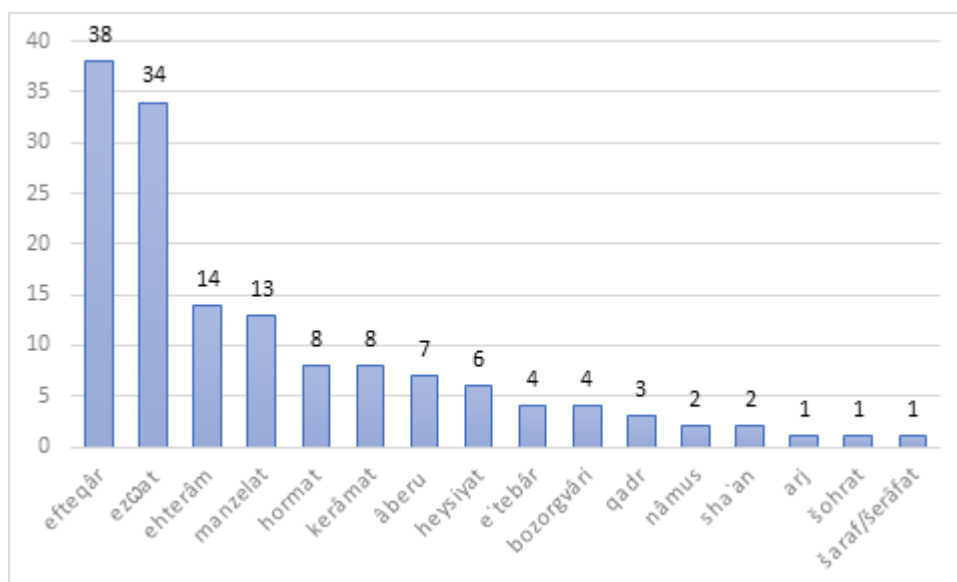


Figure 2. The frequency of *âberu* and its interwoven elements

Iranian politicians not only enhance their own *âberu* but also link it to Iran's reputation, viewing themselves as responsible for improving and preserving the country's *âberu*, as illustrated in Example [27], extracted from the 2009 election. In general, Iranian politicians place a high priority on Iran's *âberu* within the research. This study reveals that if Iranian politicians succeed in fulfilling this commitment, protecting and enhancing Iran's *âberu*, they strengthen the institutional component (IC) of their own *âberu*, thereby affirming their competence. Conversely, they challenge their adversaries by questioning whether they are capable of safeguarding and elevating Iran's *âberu* under their leadership. In doing so, they undermine the IC of their opponents' *âberu*.

During the 2009 debates, Mousavi frequently accused Ahmadinejad of damaging Iran's *âberu* and emphasized the need to enhance the country's *âberu* in various international arenas.

[27]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

ما دوست داشتیم که ایران یک نقشی داشته باشد به عنوان قدرت اول منطقه در همه شئون علمی و اقتصادی، آبرو داشته باشد، الگویی باشد برای همه جهان، پس انقلاب کردیم برای اینها انقلاب کردیم که ایران بزرگ بشود،... اثر گذار باشد و پیام خودش را به همه جهان برساند ایران اسلامی بزرگ باشد

(Lit. Trans.) We wished Iran a role as power leading of region in aspects of scientific and economics to be and *an âberu* have and role model for world be. Then, we Revolution did for all these we Revolution did that Iran to greatness come, influential be and message its to the whole world convey. Iran Islamic great become.

(Com. Trans.) We wanted Iran to be the leading power in the region in all scientific and economic aspects, to hold *âberu*, and to serve as a role model for the entire world. That's why we carried out an *Enqelâb* (Revolution). We did *Enqelâb* (Revolution) for these-to make Iran great, to make it influential, and to convey its message to the whole world-a great Islamic Iran to be.

In Example [27], *âberu* signifies high status and rank, bringing reputation and esteem to Iran due to its leading power and potential influence in the region. Here, Iran serves as a metonym for the Iranian people or the nation as a whole. The thesaurus-based approach reveals that *âberu* is used to highlight the national objective of attaining a prominent international status. This aligns with thesaurus definitions, which describe *âberu* as a concept encompassing prestige and honor-qualities that politicians seek to enhance by linking Iran's progress to national glory.

The speaker, Mousavi, also asserts that the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) took place to bring *âberu* to Iran and its people. Indeed, the Revolution is framed as a means of elevating Iran's *âberu* on the global stage, illustrating how the concept is strategically employed to evoke national pride and historical significance.

Example [28] indicates that not only are Iranian politicians expected to enhance Iran's *âberu*, but they also have to protect it. In addition, in this instance, *âberu* refers to status-related prestige, respect, honor, reputation, or a good name for Iran which should be protected by

politicians. Therefore, the incumbent Ahmadinejad in the 2009 election asks his opponents if they could protect Iran's *âberu* when Mr. Bush plotted Iran on an axis of evil. It is a must for politicians to safeguard Iran's *âberu* since it can bring more credibility, esteem, and reputation to Iran in the region among other Middle East countries.

[28]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

آقای بوش بعد از این همه همکاری در افغانستان و در موضوع هسته ای اعلام کرد ایران محور شرارت است تعجب میکنیم انجا آبروی ایران نرفت. ایران را تهدید کرد به حمله نظامی کرد

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Bush, after from this all cooperation in Afghanistan and in issue of nuclear announced Iran axis of evil is. Surprised we are, there *âberu* of Iran not gone. (He) Iran threaten to attack military did.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Bush, after all this cooperation in Afghanistan, in nuclear issue announced that Iran is an axis of evil. We are surprised that Iran's *âberu* was not lost in that situation! He even went on to threaten Iran with a military attack.

Example [28] highlights that *âberu* is not limited to individual Iranians but can also extend to the nation, particularly in the context of its international reputation and prestige. This reinforces the continuum from individual to collectivist *âberu*. In this example, *âberu* reflects both a nation's standing in the eyes of others and its own self-perception. The thesaurus definitions of *âberu*-which associate it with honor and respect-are employed here to frame the attack on Iran's *âberu* as a serious offense. This illustrates how Iranian politicians use *âberu* to condemn perceived threats to the nation's dignity and reputation, emphasizing its significance in national security and international relations.

Similarly, in Example [29], Mousavi links *âberu* to the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) led by Ayatollah Khomeini, the most influential figure in Iran. Thus, beyond Iran's *âberu*, the *Enqelâb*'s *âberu* holds great importance for Iranian politicians, which is why they feel compelled to maintain, enhance, and protect it as part of their collective identity.

[29]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

ما امیدواریم که جمهوری و انقلاب اسلامی امام خمینی آبرومندباقی بماند

(Lit. Trans.) We hope that republic and Islamic Revolution Islamic of Imam Khomeini *âberu* with stay.

(Com. Trans.) We wish Ayatollah Khomeini's republic and Islamic Revolution remain *âberu-mand* (stay respectful).

As seen in Example [29], *âberu* is closely tied to the legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution. The thesaurus-based understanding of *âberu* includes concepts of high regard and esteem, which are essential for upholding revolutionary ideals and national identity. Iranian politicians use *âberu* to invoke respect for the nation's historical and ideological foundations, reinforcing their role in preserving national values and continuity.

From Example [29], it is evident that politicians are expected to safeguard the *Enqelâb's* (Revolution's) *âberu* by demanding that it be respected and held in high esteem. Iranian politicians, therefore, view *âberu* or prestige of the Revolution as an asset that must be protected. Successfully doing so strengthens the institutional component (IC) of their own *âberu*.

Furthermore, Example [30], drawn from the 2009 election, suggests that politicians may exploit not only the concept of *âberu* but also its interconnected elements, such as *ezwat*—which signifies dignity, honor, and esteem.

[30]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

اتفاقاً ما در زمینه سیاست خارجی هم عزت ملت خودمان را مخدوش کردیم و لطمه زدیم آبروی کشور خودمان را بردیم و هم توسعه داخل کشور خودمان را با مشکل مواجه کردیم، تنش وسیعی با کشورها ایجاد کردیم

(Lit. Trans.) Actually, in area of policy foreign also *ez^wat* of the nation ourselves tarnish did we and damaged, *âberu* of the country of ourselves take and also development inside country ourselves to obstacle faced we, tension widespread with countries created we.

(Com. Trans.) Actually, in terms of foreign policy, we have tarnished the *ez^wat* (dignity) of our nation and damaged *âberu* of our country. We have also caused obstacles for our country's domestic development, and created widespread tension with other countries.

The speaker, Mousavi, claims that Ahmadinejad's diplomacy has threatened the nation's *ez'at* (dignity) and Iran's *âberu*, which in turn threatens the institutional component (IC) of the rival's *âberu*. In other words, in Example [30], Mousavi asserts that the high status and prestige of Iranians and Iran were threatened by incoherent diplomatic actions. Indeed, this example highlights that protecting *âberu* of Iranians and Iran is the ultimate responsibility of Iranian politicians. In this regard, politicians enhance the IC of their own *âberu* when they succeed in safeguarding national prestige and proving their competence. The thesaurus-based analysis further shows that these terms are deeply connected to national honor and prestige. The criticism of the damage done to *ez'at* and *âberu* illustrates how politicians frame their evaluations of policies in terms of preserving or enhancing the nation's reputation and standing, strategically aligning with the concepts of dignity and prestige.

In Example [31], also extracted from the 2009 election, Ahmadinejad does not explicitly use the term *âberu*, but he refers to one of its interwoven concepts, *ez'at* (manifesting dignity, honor, or grandeur to achieve high status or rank). Ahmadinejad conveys that mardom (people) can gain *ez'at* (honor) by participating in the vote. He equates *ez'at* (honor) with progress, which he argues should be achieved.

[31]

6-2009-AMDNJD, Debate No.1

انتخابات عرصه بسیار مهم سرنوشت است، انتخابات در کشور ما فقط انتخاب یک فرد نیست بلکه انرژی گرفتن ملت برای پرشهای بلند به سمت قله های عزت و پیشرفت است

(Lit. Trans.) Election arena very important to destiny is, election in country our just election of one person not is but energy getting nation for leaps high towards peaks of *ez'at* and progress is.

(Com. Trans.) Elections provide an important arena for destiny. In our country, elections are not just to elect one person, but they are to energize the nation to make great leaps towards the peaks of *ez'at* (honor) and progress.

Here, *ez'at* (honor) is used to frame elections as a means to achieve both national and personal progress. The thesaurus-based concept of *ez'at* aligns with honor and high status, illustrating how politicians leverage the concept to inspire and mobilize voters. By linking elections to *ez'at*, they emphasize the importance of political participation in achieving both collective and individual honor.

It should be noted that finding an exact English equivalent for the concept of *ezʔat* (honor) is difficult. However, Persian native speakers easily understand the message, as they have a more homogeneous interpretation due to their shared cultural schemata (Sharifian 2007).

As seen in Example [31], in which *âberu* relates to nation, the country, and the Revolution (*Enqelâb*) and its leader's reputation, honor, credibility, esteem, or dignity, its interwoven concepts-such as *ezʔat* (dignity)-can be related to the same ideas. Example [32] shows that *heysiyat* (relating to honor, dignity, respect, reputation, or esteem) can be enhanced or damaged, much like *âberu*. In Example [32], Mousavi accuses Ahmadinejad of damaging nation's *ezʔat* (dignity) through his misguided foreign policies. By doing so, Mousavi challenges the institutional component (IC) of Ahmadinejad's *âberu* when he accuses him of damaging nation's *ezʔat* due to his incompetence.

It should also be noted that Mousavi uses the inclusive pronoun "we" to avoid damaging his own *âberu*, thus mitigating potential damage to his interlocutor's *âberu* as well. Public accusations can threaten both participants' *âberu*, reflecting the cyclic nature of *âberu*.

[32]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

اتفاقاً ما در زمینه سیاست خارجی هم، عزت ملت خودمان را مخدوش کردیم و لطمه زدیم

(Lit. Trans.) Actually, we in area of policy foreign also *ezʔat* of nation ours tarnish and harm caused.

(Com. Trans.) Unfortunately, in terms of foreign policy, we have also damaged the *ezʔat* (dignity) of our nation and caused harm.

As seen in Example [32], *ezʔat* (dignity) and *âberu* are used to critique the impact of foreign policy on national respect. The thesaurus definitions link *ezʔat* with concepts of honor and reputation, aligning with the strategic use of these terms to highlight failures in maintaining national prestige. This framing demonstrates how *ezʔat* serves as a proxy for national dignity and underscores the responsibility of politicians to safeguard it.

This study has found that *âberu* and *ezʔat* (dignity) are invaluable assets attributed to Iran, its citizens, and the *Enqelâb* (Revolution), which must be maintained, enhanced, and protected by Iranian politicians. As a result, Iranian politicians can contribute to the institutional component (IC) of their *âberu* if they act as successful guardians of Iran, the Iranian people, and the *Enqelâb*'s (Revolution's) *âberu*, *ezʔat* (dignity), and other related

concepts. As seen in the speaker's use of the plural pronoun "we," there is an emphasis on the collective responsibility of politicians.

In Example [33], extracted from one of the most controversial debates in 2009, *manzelat* (grandeur) and *ez^oat* (dignity) are highlighted as key characteristics of both a president and the nation. A president is expected to gain, enhance, and safeguard his *manzelat* (grandeur), as he represents his nation. It is worth noting that *manzelat* (grandeur) is one of the interwoven concepts of *âberu*, which should be preserved and enhanced.

[33]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

رییس جمهور ما که مسئولیتش و منزلتش متعلق به خودش نیست متعلق به مردم است و متعلق به شما مردم است آمد از آنها خداحافظی کرد و با یک مراسم که حتی برای سران کشور های دیگر هم انجام ندادیم آنها را راه انداختند و رفتند البته بعد از نهبی که ما از انگلستان داشتیم. آیا این عزت ملت ما را حفظ کرد من فکر میکنم نه. اینجور چیزها هم خسارت می آورد از نظر امنیت ذهنی مردم ما و هم از نظر عزت آنها

(Lit. Trans.) President our that responsibility whose and *manzelat* (grandeur) belong to him not, belong to *mardom* is and belong to you *mardom* is, came and to them said goodbye and with a ceremony that even for the heads of countries other also have done not, they were left and went, of course after fear that we from England had. Is this *ez^oat* of the nation preserved? I think No. Such things also damage bring, from the point of view security of mind of people our and also from *ez^oat* their.

(Com. Trans.) Our president's responsibility and *manzelat* (grandeur) do not belong to him but *mardom* (people). We let them (hostages) abandon the country with a ceremony, which we did not even hold for the leaders of other countries, because of our fear of England. Does this uphold our nation's *ez^oat* (dignity or honor)? I do not think so. Such issues bring damage to *mardom*'s mental security and their *ez^oat* (dignity).

In this example, *manzelat* (grandeur) and *ez^oat* (dignity or honor) are discussed in the context of the president's actions and their impact on national dignity. The thesaurus definitions show that *manzelat* refers to high status and respect, which aligns with the critique of the president's failure to uphold national prestige. This highlights how the strategic use of *manzelat* and *ez^oat* frames political actions as directly affecting national honor and respect. Indeed,

example [33] illustrates that it is the politicians' responsibility to protect the *mardom's manzelat* (grandeur) and *ez^oat* (dignity), as these are invaluable assets.

Similarly, example [34] emphasizes that politicians are responsible for safeguarding the *mardom's ehterâm* (esteem), *kerâmat* (honor), and *ez^oat* (dignity). The concepts of *ehterâm* (esteem), *kerâmat* (honor), and *ez^oat* (dignity) shape the overall concept of *âberu* in this example. They also underline the interplay between individual responsibility, collective identity, and national *âberu*.

[34]

05-2013-HDDADL, Debate No.3

من هیچ وعده‌ای به مردم فراتر از اختیارات اجرایی نداده‌ام. باید از تمام ظرفیت‌های کشور استفاده کنیم؛ مردم شریف، نخبگان و کارشناسان برای توسعه کشور و دستیابی به رفاه. باید احترام و کرامت و عزت مردم و حقوق تمام اقشار حفظ شود

(Lit. Trans.) I no promise to people beyond the executive's authority have given. We must from all the capacities of the country use; the virtuous *mardom* (people), the elites, and the experts, for development of the country and achievement of welfare. *Ehterâm* (esteem) and *kerâmat* (honor) and *ez^oat* (dignity) of the people and rights of all strata preserved be.

(Com. Trans.) I have not promised anything to people beyond the executive's authority. We must use all the country's capacity; the virtuous *mardom*, the intellectuals, and the experts, to develop the country and achieve prosperity. *Mardom's ehterâm* (esteem), *kerâmat* (honor), or *ez^oat* (dignity), and rights from all strata should be preserved.

In example [34], the strategic use of *ehterâm* (esteem), *kerâmat* (honor), and *ez^oat* (dignity) reflects a broader political discourse centered on safeguarding the respect, honor, and dignity of the people. The alignment with thesaurus definitions shows that these terms are used to frame political responsibilities and objectives in terms of preserving essential societal values. This approach demonstrates how politicians leverage these concepts to emphasize their commitment to protecting and enhancing the collective esteem and dignity of society.

Indeed, all examples from [30] to [34] indicate that *âberu* is perceived as a veil woven from all the concepts listed in Figure 2, such as *heysiyat* (dignity), *ez^oat* (honor), *manzelat* (grandeur), *ehterâm* (esteem), *kerâmat* (honor), etc. Furthermore, *âberu* and its interwoven

concepts are acknowledged as the most invaluable possessions, which must be gained, enhanced, and protected. Therefore, politicians must safeguard *âberu* of Iran, Iranians, the Revolution, and its leader in the global arena. If they succeed in this respect, they enhance the IC of their own *âberu*.

5.3 Individual *Âberu*-Threatening Act: Sociopragmatic strategies

Politicians use various sociocultural *âberu*-threatening strategies to tarnish their opponents' *âberu*. Some of these strategies are common in Iranian presidential debates and other political or non-political discourses, similar to Culpeper's (2011) context-spanning strategies, which are likely to be face-threatening in any context. Culpeper (2011) contrasts context-spanning strategies with context-tied strategies, which could be neutralized or even face-enhancing in other situations. However, in this study, politicians employ linguistic strategies that are not inclined to neutralize or enhance their opponents' *âberu*. Instead, some strategies-such as accusations, sarcasm, and criticism-are *âberu*-threatening when challenging the components of a politician's *âberu*.

In line with Kádár's (2017) concept of *fringing*, which refers to decorative behaviors within rituals, the use of sarcasm, accusations, and criticisms in Iranian political debates can also be seen as *fringing* behaviors. These actions are emotively charged and strategically employed to create an impression of competence and integrity for oneself while undermining the opponent. This fits within the larger cultural context, where maintaining *âberu* is not solely about the content of the debate but also about the emotional and social signals conveyed through these ritualistic behaviors.

However, strategies like speaker response-seeking questions and disclaimers can be both *âberu*-threatening and *âberu*-enhancing. These strategies enhance *âberu* of the speaker themselves, but they are *âberu*-threatening for the intended interlocutor due to their specific structures, which I will explain in this chapter.

If politicians adopt the same *âberu*-threatening strategy repeatedly or combine different strategies, the degree of offense may be more severe, potentially damaging the intended politician's *âberu*. However, the combination of *âberu*-threatening strategies may also result in *âberu*-damage for both speakers and addressees due to the cyclic nature of *âberu*. This research also indicates that the linguistic strategies used are never *âberu*-enhancing for politicians' opponents.

The following are the strategies used by politicians to intentionally threaten their opponents' individual *âberu*. Iranian politicians criticize, accuse, belittle, or disgrace their adversaries by adopting the following strategies, intensifying *âberu*-damage to their intended opponents when these strategies are coalesced into one *âberu*-threatening approach. *âberu*-threatening strategies are listed below.

1. Questioning the opponent's competence
 - i. Questioning the opponent's crisis management skills
 - ii. Questioning the opponent's administration management skills
 - iii. Questioning the opponent's policies
 - iv. Questioning the opponent's knowledge
 - v. Questioning the opponent's sense of judgment
 - vi. Questioning the opponent's personality
 - vii. Questioning the opponent's political functions
2. Asking speaker response-seeking questions (SRSQ)
 - i. Rebuffing accusations through SRSQ
 - ii. Revealing obnoxious information about opponents through SRSQ
3. Disclaimers: Accusing or criticizing opponents but without being negatively retypified by *mardom*
4. Disclosure: Revealing opponent's corruption

On one hand, Iranian politicians exploit the strategies mentioned above to disgrace or belittle their adversaries, while simultaneously praising and acclaiming themselves. On the other hand, when opponents perceive the behavior of their adversaries as *âberu*-threatening or *âberu*-offensive, they may react in an *âberu*-defensive or *âberu*-offensive manner to restore their own *âberu*. It should be noted that in most examples, some of the strategies mentioned above are combined. As a result, it is not always easy to classify them under a single specific strategy.

It is important to highlight that the findings of this study show that Iranian politicians use various *âberu*-threatening strategies to tarnish their opponents' *âberu*, as outlined above. This aligns with Fetzer's (2013) concept of procedural knowledge, as these strategies are part of the procedural toolkit that Iranian politicians use to navigate debates and interactions. Politicians are keenly aware of the sociocultural importance of *âberu* and strategically employ these strategies to gain an advantage.

The findings of this study also suggest that the concept of *âberu* is deeply tied to emotional and social investment, a connection emphasized by Kádár (2017) in his work on

rituals. Iranian politicians invest heavily in both their own *âberu* and that of their opponents, understanding that public perceptions of honor and respect can significantly influence their political standing. The strategies they employ are designed to disrupt the emotional and social balance of their opponents' *âberu*, while simultaneously reinforcing their own. According to Kádár, rituals are emotively invested, recurrent actions that reinforce interpersonal relationships. Iranian presidential debates can be seen as ritualistic, where maintaining or damaging *âberu* is crucial. The recurrent use of *âberu*-threatening strategies reflects this ritualistic aspect, with each debate following a formal structure aimed at influencing public perception.

5.3.1 Questioning the opponent's competence

Iranian politicians enhance their political *âberu* while questioning their opponents' abilities, policies, and so on. To achieve this, they frequently praise their own knowledge, experience, policies, and services, thus strengthening the institutional components of their *âberu*. They defend their policies and strategies by associating themselves with the previous and current supreme leaders of Iran, as well as with the ideologies of the Revolution.

Conversely, they simultaneously attack their opponents' and their networks' *âberu* by questioning or downplaying their experience, knowledge, skills, competence, and services. They accuse their opponents of adopting policies that contradict the principles of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Revolution, with the aim of tarnishing their opponents' *âberu*. In response to these *âberu*-threats, the addressees employ *âberu*-defensive or *âberu*-offensive strategies, some of which are discussed below.

5.3.1.1 Questioning the opponent's crisis management skills

Iranian politicians make efforts to challenge the institutional component (IC) of their opponents' *âberu* by questioning their management skills in various areas, thereby questioning their competence. To achieve this, they employ various *âberu*-threatening linguistic strategies. Some examples from the research illustrate how politicians confront their adversaries with an *âberu*-threatening act when challenging their competence.

In example [35], Mousavi criticizes Ahmadinejad's management skills and questions his policies regarding the British marines' case. In 2009, British marines strayed into Iranian waters and were arrested by Iranian forces, which led to a major diplomatic row between Iran and Britain.

[35]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

مسئله آزاد سازی ملوانان انگلیسی را که میدانید، میدانید که ملوانان انگلیسی به آب های ما تجاوز کردند. نیروهای ما سر رسیدند آنان را دستگیر کردند و کار افتخار آمیزی کردند و باید مورد تایید قرار می گرفتند بعد بلافاصله براساس همین چارچوبی که اشاره کردم ما اول گفتیم اینها باید اعدام بشوند. چرا آمدند؟ در سر زمین ما، یک بحران بزرگ جهانی ایجاد کردیم و هم تصمیم گرفتیم به تن آنها کت و شلوار بپوشانیم. بعدا بعد رییس جمهور ما که مسولیتش و منزلتش متعلق به خودش نیست متعلق به مردم است و متعلق به شما مردم است آمد از آنها خداحافظی کرد و بایک مراسم که حتی برای سران کشورهای دیگر هم انجام ندادیم فکر میکنم نه. اینجور چیزها هم خسارت می آورد از نظر امنیت ذهنی مردم ما و هم از نظر عزت آنها و هم اینکه سیاست خارجی ما را دچار یک فراز و نشیبی میکند که نمیتوانیم با هزینه هایی که میپردازیم مشکلاتمان را حل کنیم

(Lit. Trans.) The issue of releasing of marines British that you know. You know that marines British to waters our violated. Forces our arrived and them arrested they. They act honorable did and should be acknowledged. Then, immediately based on the frame that I mentioned, we first said them should be executed. Why came they to land our? A crisis gross global we create, later also decided we to their body coat and trousers to wear. Then, President our that responsibility whose and *manzelat* (grandeur) belong to him not belong to *mardom* (people) is and belong to you *mardom* is, came and to them said goodbye and with a ceremony that even for the heads of countries other also have done not, them were left and went, of course after fear that we from England had. Is this *ez'at* of the nation preserved? I think No. Such things also damage bring, from the point of security of mind of *mardom* our and also from *ez'at* their. And also policy foreign our caused into ups and downs that not can we with costs that we pay issues our solve we.

(Com. Trans) You know of the release of the British marines. You know, the Marines invaded Iranian waters, and then Iranian forces arrested them. It was a honorable act and should certainly be acknowledged. However, we immediately said that we have to execute them. We created a crisis, yet we later decided to

dress them in suits. Then, our president whose status does not belong to himself but to *mardom* (people) went there and said goodbye to them. He then arranged a ceremony that we do not even organize for the heads of other countries. Did it preserve the *ez^oat* (dignity) of our nation? I do not think so.

On the contrary, it inflicted damage on the Iranian nation's *ez^oat* (dignity). It created some ups and downs in our foreign policy, which will be costly. We cannot solve our issues in this manner.

Mousavi publicly questions the incumbent's diplomacy in the case of the British marines. Although he initially uses the collective pronoun "we," indicating collective responsibility and mitigating *âberu*-loss against his opponent, he implies that Ahmadinejad's government ordered the execution of the British sailors for encroaching on Iranian waters. However, they later decided to release them when it led to a crisis. In his subsequent statements, Mousavi emphasizes that the president's status belongs to *mardom* (people), highlighting the collective ownership and the president's significant role as a representative of the *mardom*. By doing so, Mousavi threatens Ahmadinejad's individual *âberu* when publicly criticizing him for implementing incoherent policies and threatening national *âberu*. Indeed, Mousavi challenges the institutional component of his opponent's *âberu* by questioning his skills and competence. As highlighted in detail in the previous chapter, politicians are responsible for ensuring justice and protecting the rights and *ez^oat* (dignity) of the *mardom*. If they fulfill their responsibilities, they may enhance their own political *âberu*. However, Iranian politicians threaten each other's *âberu* when accusing one another of threatening Iran's *âberu* or the *mardom*'s *ez^oat* (dignity). Consequently, Mousavi escalates *âberu*-threatening act against his opponent, the incumbent Ahmadinejad, by asking him whether he could succeed in protecting the *mardom*'s *ez^oat* (dignity), which is the primary responsibility of a president. In [35], he implies that Ahmadinejad's foreign policy failed to maintain the *mardom*'s dignity with his immediate question: "Did it really preserve the *ez^oat* (dignity) of our nation?" Mousavi intensifies the damage to Ahmadinejad's *âberu* by providing his own response: "I do not think so. On the contrary, it inflicted damage on the Iranian nation's *ez^oat* (dignity)." Indeed, Mousavi inflicts more severe *âberu*-damage by using the singular pronoun "I" and publicly expressing his assessment on a televised presidential debate. Mousavi highlights that Ahmadinejad has frequently adopted flawed foreign policies during various crises within his presidency, which, consequently, have threatened Iran's status and the nation's *ez^oat*.

Mousavi threatens Ahmadinejad's *âberu* by challenging the institutional components of his *âberu*, his competence and management skills, through public criticism or accusations, which are strongly rejected by cultural and religious norms. This can lead to Mousavi facing self-*âberu*-loss or damage. As a result, in [35], Mousavi adopts the inclusive pronoun "we," signaling collective identity, shared responsibility, and group decision-making, which mitigates the damage against his opponent while simultaneously avoiding self-*âberu*-damage in his following statements: "However, we immediately said that we have to execute them" or "We cannot solve our issues in this manner."

Mousavi consolidates his arguments by referring to the case of the British marines, thereby influencing public opinion. He succeeds in tarnishing the incumbent's *âberu* as he provokes Ahmadinejad's *âberu*-defensive reaction in example [36]. In response to Mousavi's accusation, and in an attempt to defend himself and, consequently, his *âberu*, Ahmadinejad insists in [36] that his decision was the right one.

[36]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

خیلی متشکرم آقای موسوی! فکر میکنم اگر تمام قضاوت‌های شما براساس آنچه که گفتید باشد باید یک تجدید نظر جدی بکنید. به نظر من یکی از زیباترین کارهای جمهوری اسلامی آزادی ملو آنها بود. آنها بیست و هفت و بیست و هشت سال بود از جمله در دوره خود آقای موسوی ما را ضد انسان، ضد حقوق بشر، خشن و گروگانگیر معرفی میکردند. این دیدگاه جهان درباره ما است. در انجا ما آمدیم مردم انگلیس را از دولت انگلیس جدا کردیم و این کار به نظر من بهترین کار بود

(Lit. Trans.) Very thank I Mr. Mousavi! Think I if all judgments your based on that what you said is, should a revision do. In opinion my one of the beautiful the most actions of Republic Islamic, the release of sailors British was. They 27-28 years were including within term of Mr. Mousavi us anti-human, anti-human right, aggressor, and hostage takers introduced. This world perspective about us is. There we came, people of Britain from government of Britain separated. This act in opinion my the best action was.

(Com. Translation) Thank you very much, Mr. Mousavi! I think if all the judgments you have made are based on what you said, you should revise all of them. One of the best actions the Islamic Republic has taken was releasing those British sailors. For twenty-seven or twenty-eight years, including Mr. Mousavi's term, they called us anti-human, aggressors, and hostage-takers. That

was the world's perspective on us. In that situation, we separated the British people from their government. In my opinion, that was the best action.

Ahmadinejad begins with a sarcastic expression of gratitude toward Mousavi, setting a tone of apparent politeness that thinly veils his critique. This aligns with *ta'arof*, a form of politeness in Iranian culture, which can be strategically employed in political discourse to disarm opponents while launching an attack. Arguably, in his self-defense, the incumbent sarcastically thanks Mousavi, then blames him for passing harsh judgment, immediately following up with a directive speech act, urging him to revise his position. In his counter-attack, Ahmadinejad questions Mousavi's competence and accuses him of failing to exercise proper judgment: "Thank you very much, Mr. Mousavi. I think if all the judgments that you have made are based on what you said, you should revise all of them" [36].

Subsequently, Ahmadinejad connects his decision to the Islamic Republic, whose leadership lies with the supreme leader, in an attempt to legitimize and defend his actions. It is important to note that under the Iranian constitution, no one can publicly question the supreme leader's decisions. In doing so, Ahmadinejad oversteps his governmental authority and ties his actions to the Islamic Republic in order to deflect Mousavi's public criticism. He also highlights his crisis management skills, claiming, "One of the best actions the Islamic Republic has taken was releasing those British sailors" [36].

Ahmadinejad then asserts that Iran had been labeled as 'anti-human,' a 'hostage-taker,' and an 'aggressor' during previous administrations, including Mousavi's term, in order to undermine Mousavi's political *âberu*. He states, "For twenty-seven or twenty-eight years, including Mr. Mousavi's term, they called us anti-human, aggressors, and hostage-takers." In doing so, Ahmadinejad uses negative connotations to portray Mousavi's government unfavorably in the public's eyes. He claims that Iran and Iranians had a bad reputation for a prolonged period, contrary to Ayatollah Khomeini's ideals, because they were labeled as 'anti-human,' 'hostage-takers,' and 'aggressors.' The use of such terms signals a discourse of conflict and identity. Consequently, being accused of damaging Iran's and Iranians' *âberu* is a serious threat to Iranian politicians since it implies failure to uphold the ideals of the Revolution. As such, Ahmadinejad is challenging the institutional component of Mousavi's *âberu*.

It is noteworthy that in this example [36], the accusations are embedded in the strategy of questioning the opponent's competence. Ahmadinejad accuses Mousavi of adopting harmful

policies that led to Iran's notoriety, which he claims contradict Ayatollah Khomeini's vision. Indeed, the *questioning* strategy serves as a vehicle for accusation in this instance.

Furthermore, Ahmadinejad's discourse refers to broader Islamic and revolutionary values that resonate with the electorate's cultural and religious beliefs. By invoking the principles of the Islamic Revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy, he taps into the collective identity of the Iranian people, thereby strengthening his own position while undermining Mousavi's.

In brief, Ahmadinejad employs both *âberu*-defensive and *âberu*-offensive strategies to protect his own *âberu* while threatening Mousavi's. He defends his own policies and *âberu* by positioning himself as the spokesperson for the Islamic Republic of Iran, reassuring mardom that he has the supreme leader's endorsement. At the same time, he offends his rival, Mousavi, by rejecting his policies and questioning his strategies and competence. Ultimately, Ahmadinejad threatens Mousavi's *âberu* by publicly accusing him of damaging Iran's *âberu* and challenging the institutional component of his *âberu*.

5.3.1.2 Questioning the opponent's administrative management skills

In the following example [37], Rezaei questions Ahmadinejad's management skills without directly naming him. Instead, he refers to Ahmadinejad's government and subtly implies that Ahmadinejad and his team travel to provinces to engage in trivial activities.

[37]

6-2009, RZ, Debate No.6

به نظر من، کشور پهناور جمهوری اسلامی ایران نمی‌تواند یک رئیس‌جمهور و هیأت دولت و با
دویدن به این استان و آن استان به بهترین شکل و قوی اداره کند، و ما باید مدیریت قوی در
شهرستان‌ها داشته باشیم تا نخواهیم واسه ی ساختن یک جوب هیأت دولت را به انجا بکشیم. این
خارج از شأن دولت است

(Lit. Trans.) In opinion my, country vast Republic Islamic of Iran not can one
president and cabinet and with running to this province to that province to the
best form and strong govern, and we should management strong in provinces to
have until not want for a brook to build the cabinet to there drag. This beyond
the *ša'an* (prestige) of the government is.

(Com. Trans.) In my opinion, the vast country of the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot be governed properly by only a president and his cabinet while running from one province to another. We need strong management in provinces so that we do not have to drag the government's cabinet around just to build a brook. It is beyond the government's *ša'an* (prestige).

Mohsen Rezaei extols his own knowledge by beginning his statement with the phrase “in my opinion,” and immediately undermines his opponent, Ahmadinejad, implicitly. He asserts that “the vast country of the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot be governed properly by only a president and his cabinet while running from one province to another.” This statement highlights Rezaei's concerns about the management of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He argues that effective governance cannot be achieved solely by the president and cabinet traveling through provinces. This remark can be seen as a ‘preface’ to *âberu*-threatening act, setting the stage for the subsequent threat in his following utterances.

Rezaei threatens Ahmadinejad's *âberu* when he questions his management skills and implicitly accuses him of lacking a sound management structure: “We need strong management in provinces so that we do not have to drag the government's cabinet around just to build a brook.” Arguably, Rezaei provokes skepticism about his opponent's competence, covertly criticizing Ahmadinejad for his low management skills, particularly in relation to his symbolic and superficial gestures, such as traveling to provinces to carry out a minor project like a brook.

As seen, Rezaei uses the collective pronoun “we” in his public accusations, mitigating *âberu*-damage against both himself and his interlocutors due to the cyclical nature of *âberu*. It is worth noting that politicians frequently employ collective pronouns to include themselves and minimize the offense or reduce the impact of *âberu*-threatening act. Moreover, the use of “we” in this context also reflects an emphasis on shared goals, specifically the need for effective provincial management in Iran, which should be approached collectively. In line with Pavlidou's (2014) introduction to “*Constructing Collectivity: ‘We’ across Languages and Contexts*,” which explores how politicians use the pronoun “we” to establish a connection with their audience and express a shared collective perspective, Rezaei may be using the first-person plural pronoun “we” to form an association with *mardom* (people), the distant audience.

Rezaei's final statement escalates *âberu*-threatening act directed at Ahmadinejad when he declares, “This is out of the government's *ša'an* (prestige).” As discussed in earlier chapters, *prestige* or *ša'an* is a key element of *âberu*. Governors are expected to preserve the government's *ša'an*, but according to Rezaei, the current government has failed to do so. By

making this claim, Rezaei turns the situation to his advantage, accusing Ahmadinejad and his cabinet of endangering the government's *prestige* by applying ineffective management strategies, which are counter to Ayatollah Khomeini's directives. In this way, Rezaei challenges the institutional component (IC) of the government's *âberu*, accusing it of incompetence and failing to meet the Revolution's demands. Therefore, his statement is an *âberu*-threatening remark that prompts Ahmadinejad's response in the subsequent turn.

Ahmadinejad's response in [38] illustrates that Rezaei's remarks are *âberu*-threatening. Therefore, he adopts an *âberu*-defensive stance to protect his own *âberu* and simultaneously makes use of an *âberu*-offensive strategy to stain Rezaei's *âberu*.

[38]

6-2009, AHMDNJD, Debate No.6

دولت هیچ وقت برای کشیدن یک جوی آب در یک استان به آنجا سفر نمی کند، اگر آقای محسن رضایی ساختار اداری کشور را می شناخت این طور حرف نمی زد و من این را می گذارم به حساب اینکه شما ساختار بوروکراسی و اداری کشور را نمی شناسید و در سیستم اداری کشور نبوده اید. شما در سپاه بودید و از آنجا هم به مجمع تشخیص مصلحت نظام رفتید و بیشتر در کارهای نظری مشغول بودید و هیچ وقت در کشور مدیریت اجرایی نداشتید تا ساختارها را بشناسید و ببینید دولت وقتی به یک استان سفر می کند چه مفهومی دارد و چه اثری می گذارد

(Lit. Trans.) Government never for stretching a brook of water in one province to there not travel, if Mr. Rezaei the structure administrative of country knew this not would talk. And I take this on a proof of that you the bureaucracy and administration of the country not know you and in system administrative of the country not were you. You in IRGC were and then to Council Expediency went and more in theoretical works engaged you were. And never in country management executive not had you until the structure to know and to understand when a government to a province travel what meaning it has and what impacts it has.

(Com. Trans.) The government never travels to a province just to build a brook. If Mr. Mohsen Rezaei knew the administrative structure of the country, he would not make such a statement. I take this as proof that you are unfamiliar with the country's bureaucratic and administrative system and have never been part of it. You served in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) before joining the Expediency Council, where you were primarily engaged in theoretical work. You have never held an executive management position in the

country to truly understand the administrative structures or the significance and impact of the government's visits to the provinces.

Ahmadinejad's response suggests that he feels offended by Rezaei, as he defends the government collectively by stating, "The government never travels to a province just to build a brook" [38]. He then immediately attacks Rezaei, saying, "If Mr. Mohsen Rezaei knew the administrative structure of the country, he would not make such a statement" [38]. Initially, Ahmadinejad adopts a formal tone by addressing Rezaei by his last name—a nominal term that signifies respect and decorum. However, he then shifts to referring to Rezaei in the third person, as if he were absent from the room, which serves as an indirect snub. Ahmadinejad subtly implies that Rezaei lacks familiarity with the country's intricate administrative structures. Additionally, the phrase "he would not make such a statement" expresses a counterfactual condition, suggesting that Rezaei is misinformed or ill-advised. This reflects a sarcastic deployment of a nominal term.

Ahmadinejad challenges the institutional component (IC) of Rezaei's *âberu* by accusing him of lacking administrative knowledge. He continues this line of attack in the following statement: "I take this as proof that you are unfamiliar with the country's bureaucratic and administrative system and have never been part of it" [38]. By employing the second-person pronoun "you" and intensifying the confrontation, Ahmadinejad assumes a direct confrontational stance against Rezaei, a posture likely reinforced by his position as the incumbent president. Through this direct address, Ahmadinejad distances himself from the accusation he levels at his opponent. In contrast, in a different context (as seen in example [35]), Mousavi strategically employs the inclusive pronoun "we" to mitigate potential self-inflicted damage, recognizing the cyclic nature of *âberu*. His choice of "we" may stem from an awareness of his relative lack of power compared to the incumbent Ahmadinejad.

Ahmadinejad further questions the IC of Rezaei's *âberu* by repeatedly asserting that his adversary lacks bureaucratic and administrative knowledge. He then highlights Rezaei's political positions, which have mostly been non-managerial, stating: "You served in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) before joining the Expediency Council, where you were primarily engaged in theoretical work" [38]. Ahmadinejad likely aims to create a perceptible schism between Rezaei and key administrative roles, thereby insinuating his inadequacy as a prospective presidential candidate. Moreover, the mention of the IRGC and the Expediency Council adds a layer of political context to the attack.

Ahmadinejad then amplifies the damage to Rezaei's *âberu* by explicitly stating: "You have never held an executive management position in the country to truly understand the administrative structures or the significance and impact of the government's visits to the provinces" [38]. The repetition of the phrase "you have never" serves to reinforce Rezaei's lack of experience. Indeed, Ahmadinejad insists that Rezaei is not a qualified presidential candidate due to his lack of administrative expertise. Through this *âberu*-offensive reaction, Ahmadinejad attempts to restore his own damaged *âberu* by undermining his opponent's credibility.

Throughout his turn, Ahmadinejad defends himself and justifies his management strategies while simultaneously questioning Rezaei's knowledge, competence, and the IC of his *âberu*. His reaction confirms that Rezaei was able to threaten Ahmadinejad's *âberu* in the previous exchange. However, Ahmadinejad's attacks also provoke Rezaei's *âberu*-defensive reactions, as seen in example [39].

[39]

6-2009, RZ, Debate No.6

ما در زمان جنگ کشور را اداره کردیم. در ابتدای انقلاب، ما امام‌های جمعه و استانداران را تعیین میکردیم. اطلاعات داخلی من از وزارتخانه‌ها به طور قطع بیشتر از شما در طول ۱۲ سال گذشته است. حتی مخالفان شما در ادارات که نمی‌توانند با شما حرف بزنند، نزد ما می‌آیند. حتی دوستان نزدیک شما و دوستان مشترک من نیز مسائلی را می‌گویند. بنابراین، در جریان ریز مسائل هشتم و خودتان هم توانایی من را در سازمان دهی می‌دانید و اگر مسائل مدیریت را بیشتر از شما ندانم، کمتر نیز نمی‌دانم

(Lit. Trans.) We during time of war the country governed. At the beginning of the Revolution, we Imams of Friday and governors appointed. Knowledge domestic my definitely from ministries certainly more than you within 12 years past is. Even opponents your in offices that not could talk to you to us came. Even friends intimate your and friends mutual also issues sharing. Therefore, about details of issues I am and yourself also capabilities of my in organization know and if issues of management more than you not I know, less also not know.

(Com. Trans.) We governed the country during the war. At the beginning of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution), we appointed the Friday Imams and the governors. My knowledge of domestic affairs and the ministries over the past 12 years certainly

surpasses yours. Even your opponents in government offices, who cannot speak to you directly, come to us. Even your close friends and our mutual acquaintances share matters with us. Therefore, I am well-informed about the details of these issues. Moreover, you are aware of my organizational capabilities. If I do not know more about management than you, I certainly do not know less.

In his defense, Rezaei asserts that the *IRGC* was accustomed to governing the country during the *Iran-Iraq War* and at the outset of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution), stating, “We governed the country during the war. At the beginning of the Revolution, we appointed the Friday Imams and the governors” [39]. The phrase “We governed the country during the war” is an assertive statement that underscores Rezaei and his network’s authority, experience, and collective power. Rezaei also highlights his management experience in response to Ahmadinejad, who repeatedly questions his competence and undermines the IC of his *âberu*. To reinforce his argument, Rezaei references the Iran-Iraq War, emphasizing his role in decision-making when stating, “We appointed the Friday Imams and the governors.” This directive statement reinforces his influence and leadership during that period.

Rezaei continues to assert his superiority while simultaneously diminishing Ahmadinejad’s standing, defending himself by claiming, “My knowledge of domestic affairs and the ministries over the past 12 years certainly surpasses yours....” Here, he subtly establishes an advantage by contrasting “certainly surpasses” with Ahmadinejad’s presumed lack of knowledge. In example [39], Rezaei vigorously defends himself, suggesting that both Ahmadinejad’s opponents and allies confide in him: “Even your opponents in government offices, who cannot speak to you directly, come to us. Even your close friends and our mutual acquaintances share matters with us.” These remarks imply that Rezaei’s influence extends beyond his immediate circle. He asserts his informed perspective, claiming access to a wealth of information, and counters Ahmadinejad’s accusations by stating, “I am well-informed.” Pragmatically, Rezaei seeks to establish *âberu*, credibility and superiority, by reinforcing his expertise and knowledge.

In example [39], Rezaei provides evidence of his managerial experience in direct response to Ahmadinejad’s doubts about his competence. He insists on his expertise in governing the country and reminds Ahmadinejad of his administrative competence: “Moreover, you are aware of my organizational capabilities.” Rezaei then directly compares his management skills with Ahmadinejad’s to defend his competence, declaring, “If I do not

know more about management than you, I certainly do not know less.” Here, Rezaei attempts to strengthen the IC of his *âberu* to present himself as a capable candidate for presidency. To this end, he establishes credibility by claiming superior knowledge, expertise, and organizational ability. Additionally, he appeals to shared connections and trust by referencing Ahmadinejad’s close friends and mutual acquaintances.

As observed, Rezaei frequently employs *âberu*-defensive utterances in response to Ahmadinejad’s earlier *âberu*-threatening statements. This suggests that Ahmadinejad’s remarks effectively threatened Rezaei’s *âberu*.

5.3.1.3 Questioning the opponent’s policies

In example [40], Mousavi directly challenges the incumbent’s foreign and economic policies, arguing that they have endangered Iran’s and Iranians’ *heysiyat*, a dignity that Muslim Iranian politicians are expected to uphold in accordance with Ayatollah Khomeini’s principles.

[40]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

بنده میگویم این سیاست خارجی شما باعث شده که کشور لطمه و حیثیت ما لطمه ببیند و این شیرگران ایرانی را در بند بکند هم سیاست خارجی و اقتصادی شما. برمی گردم به یک مسئله دیگر در رابطه با همبستگی ملی. ما چه کار داریم میکنیم چه بلایی سر دانشگاهایمان و محیطهای جوانان و مردم آوردیم که بنده هر جا میروم اعتراض است هر جا میروم میگویند به ما اهانت شده است. این دانشجو را ستاره دار کردیم آن را دستگیر کردیم آن یکی را دستگیر کردیم آن را از دانشگاه بیرون کردیم

(Lit. Trans.) I am saying this policy foreign your caused that country harm and *heysiyat* (prestige), our damaged and this lion roaring Iranian in shackle make also policy foreign and economic your. Return to one issue other related to solidarity national. We what are we doing? What harm on universities and areas of the youth and people brought, that I wherever go protest is wherever I go, they say to them insulted. This student star-with we made, then arrested we, that other arrested we, that from university expelled we.

(Com. Trans.) I am saying that your foreign and economic policies have caused harm the country and damaged our *heysiyat* (prestige), effectively shackling the roaring Iranian lion. I now turn to another issue related to national solidarity. What are we doing? What harm have we caused to our universities, to the youth, and to the people? Everywhere I go, there are protests. Everywhere I go, people

say they have been insulted. We blacklisted this student, then arrested them. We arrested that one, and expelled another from the university.

In example [40], Mousavi accuses Ahmadinejad of threatening Iran's *âberu* by questioning his policies. In fact, Mousavi questions the institutional component of Ahmadinejad's *âberu*, arguing that he is not competent to protect Iran's reputation, particularly when publicly accusing him of adopting wrong policies and endangering Iranians' *heysiyat* (prestige). Mousavi establishes credibility and authority for himself when he states, "I am saying that your foreign and economic policies have caused harm to the country..." In other words, the speaker positions himself as an informed observer by saying, "I am saying." Indeed, Mousavi endeavors to establish trust with the audience or *mardom*. He also uses the possessive pronoun "your" to direct *mardom*'s attention to Ahmadinejad's foreign and economic policies, emphasizing his role and responsibility. Then, Mousavi selects the term "suffer," conveying emotional weight, i.e., hardship, pain, and negative consequences. He encourages the audience to take his claims seriously. Mousavi intensifies *âberu*-damage to his opponent when mentioning, "and damaged our *heysiyat* (prestige), effectively shackling the roaring Iranian lion" [40]. The use of the verb "damaged" implies an enormous negative impact on Iranian collective *heysiyat* (prestige), a concept that reflects the significance of *heysiyat* (prestige) in the context of *âberu* cultural schema. Mousavi believes that Iran wields considerable power; however, the ramifications of Ahmadinejad's policies have precipitated its decline, akin to an enfeebled lion. Mousavi's statements evoke emotions in the audience while highlighting that Ahmadinejad has failed to fulfill Ayatollah Khomeini's ideals in glorifying Iran, thereby challenging the institutional component (IC) of Ahmadinejad's *âberu*.

Afterwards, in [40], Mousavi asks two unpalatable questions and includes himself in the plural pronouns "we" and "our" in the following utterances: "What are we doing? What harm have we caused to our universities, to the youth, and to the people?" The speaker engages the audience by asking rhetorical questions that encompass critical points expressing frustration and emphasizing the urgency of the situation and the need for collective action. Arguably, he may achieve two goals when asking these questions and involving himself. First, he may be able to mitigate self-*âberu*-damage, due to the cyclic nature of *âberu*, after publicly condemning Ahmadinejad's policy and competence against Iranian cultural and religious norms. Second, Mousavi could be successful in expressing his shared concerns for *mardom* or people, which is an *âberu*-boosting factor in this community of practice. In other words, he enhances his *âberu* when positioning himself as a voice for *mardom*.

Then, Mousavi expresses that there is widespread dissatisfaction among the public: “Everywhere I go, there are protests. Everywhere I go, people say they have been insulted” [40]. In fact, the repetition of the phrase “Everywhere I go” emphasizes pervasive discontent and protest among *mardom*. Such statements negatively shape *mardom*’s opinion of the target opponent. Public discontent confronts the governors with *âberu*-loss and challenges the institutional components (IC) of their *âberu* while they are responsible for satisfying *mardom*’s feelings of contentment. When this fails, they would be regarded as incompetent and unqualified politicians, aggravating the challenge to the IC of their *âberu*.

In Iranian society, students are active political members of society, but they are suppressed or controlled by the government and sentenced to detention or expulsion from universities if they protest against the government. Therefore, Mousavi highlights societal concerns when mentioning universities, youth, and *mardom*. He addresses the critical situation of students at the universities and exemplifies star students’ cases of being assigned stars, then arrested or fired from universities. The juxtaposition of blacklisting (assigning stars) and subsequent arrests underscores power dynamics. Thus, Mousavi intensifies *âberu*-damage to Ahmadinejad when publicly accusing him of suppressing a majority of *mardom* on account of his power, resulting in a challenge to the institutional component of his *âberu*: “We blacklisted this student, then arrested them. We arrested that one, and expelled another from the university” [40]. Blacklisting and arresting students carry negative connotations. They indicate that injustice is occurring at universities due to the government’s wrong policies, damaging Ahmadinejad’s *âberu*. Disclosing such obnoxious information may potentially evoke *mardom*’s sympathy or outrage.

Noticeably, Mousavi repeatedly includes himself when questioning Ahmadinejad’s policies and actions against students and accusing him of suppressing them. Mousavi applies the collective subject pronoun “we” four times in the Persian language to include himself, although two of them are omitted due to ellipsis in the English translation. The use of the first-person plural pronoun “we” creates a sense of unity and shared responsibility between Mousavi and *mardom*, particularly students, in this example. By including himself, Mousavi aligns with *mardom* against the government, and by using the collective pronoun “we,” he implicates himself in the crises and mitigates the impact of *âberu*-loss on his rival, Ahmadinejad. In this way, he prevents himself from being negatively interpreted and regarded as inconsiderate by *mardom*, thus avoiding inflicting his own *âberu*.

It seems that Mousavi succeeds in threatening Ahmadinejad's *âberu* when questioning his competence, policies, and diplomacy. His attacks inspire Ahmadinejad's reaction in which he endeavors to dismiss Mousavi's accusations and criticisms.

In example [41], Ahmadinejad initially expresses his gratitude to the moderator, which is customary in Iranian culture and is considered a ritual courtesy (*ta'arof*) (Sharifian, 2011). Sharifian (2011: 144) states that the cultural schema of *ta'arof* provides "a form of social space for speakers to exercise face work, project certain social personas, and also to provide communicative tools to negotiate and lubricate social relationships."

[41]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

خیلی ممنونم از آقای موسوی اجازه بدهید باز آن حرفم را تکرار کنم. آقای موسوی من بعضی وقتها دلم میسوزد یک اطلاعاتی را شما مطرح میکنید که میدانم از روی بی اطلاعی است. من یک موردش را باز میکنم برای اینکه معلوم بشود که اطلاعات شما از کجاست. دانشجویان ، این ستاره دار از کجا در آمد که آقای موسوی امروز به می‌کوبند در کله این دولت

(Lit. Trans.) Very thank from Mr. Mousavi! Let again that word my repeat. Mr. Mousavi I sometimes feel pity, one information you propose that I know based on ignorance is. I one case open to clear get that information your from where is. Students, this star-with from where it comes that Mr. Mousavi today hit to the head of this government.

(Com. Trans.) Thank you very much. Mr. Mousavi, if you allow me, I will repeat what I have said. Mr. Mousavi, I feel pity sometimes. You raise some questions and some issues that I know are from ignorance. I will present one example to clarify where your information is coming from. Where do the cases of star students come from that Mr. Mousavi now attributes to this government?

In his defense in example [41], Ahmadinejad addresses Mousavi and says, "If you allow me, I will repeat what I have said." Similar to the words of appreciation, the phrase "If you allow me" is a conventionalized expression used to smooth social relations. However, it can be argued whether Ahmadinejad is genuinely seeking permission from Mousavi to repeat his words in this competitive context. Given that he immediately accuses Mousavi of being ill-informed and having superficial knowledge, the phrase "If you allow me" may be sarcastic, especially when considered alongside the sentences that follow it [41]. Ahmadinejad begins by expressing his pity for his rival, Mousavi, before questioning his knowledge: "Mr. Mousavi, I

feel pity sometimes. You raise some questions and some issues that I know are from ignorance” [41]. This expression of pity serves as a rhetorical strategy, subtly undermining Mousavi’s credibility and implying his lack of knowledge or understanding. In this way, Ahmadinejad challenges the IC of Mousavi’s *âberu*, implicitly accusing him of being an incompetent and unqualified candidate due to his lack of (or misinformed) knowledge.

In the following utterance from [41], Ahmadinejad takes personal responsibility for clarifying the source of Mr. Mousavi’s information, using the first-person singular pronoun “I.” Not only does this enhance Ahmadinejad’s credibility and authority among the audience, but it also positions him as the one responsible for providing clarity. As he mentions, “I will present one example to clarify where your information is coming from,” he asserts that he is the one with access to accurate information. Ahmadinejad further discredits Mousavi by claiming that the source of Mousavi’s knowledge is questionable. The incumbent frequently accuses Mousavi of supplying false information, implying a lack of knowledge. In [41], Ahmadinejad uses the issue of star students’ cases to exonerate himself and restore his damaged *âberu*, asking, “Where do the cases of star students come from that Mr. Mousavi now attributes to this government?” Ahmadinejad later links these cases to Mousavi’s friends and patrons. However, in his response, Mousavi focuses on the actions rather than the agents, defending his collectivist *âberu* in [42].

[42]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

ایشان میگوید، ستاره کردن کارزمان آقای معین بوده است. خوب کاری ندارم اگر ایشان هم این کار را کرده باز کار بدی کرده است

(Lit. Trans.) He says, star making job of term of Mr. Moein had been. Ok care not I if he also this job das done, job bad has done.

(Com. Trans.) He (Ahmadinejad) says that assigning stars to the students happened during Mr. Moein’s term. I don’t care who did it before, but if he did it, it was still wrong.

This example, [42], shows that Ahmadinejad threatens Mousavi’s collectivist *âberu* to defend himself and his individual *âberu*-a phenomenon that I will illustrate in the next chapter. In short, example [41] indicates that Ahmadinejad devotes his effort to defending his *âberu* by sarcastically expressing sorrow over Mousavi’s lack of knowledge, pushing back against the accusation made against him, and then acclaiming his own knowledge.

In [43], extracted from the debates in 2013, Saeed Jalili, Iran's chief nuclear negotiator, questions Velayati's earlier policies when he suggests that he could serve as the future foreign minister of Iran again.

[43]

6-2013, JLL, Debate No.3

شما گفتید مسئولیت سیاست خارجی را می پذیرید، شما 16 سال وزیر خارجه بودید و در این مدت 7 دوره گفتگوی انتقادی بعد از جنگ اول خلیج فارس بین ایران و اروپا برگزار شد، دستور این مذاکرات را آنها مشخص کردند که گفتند گفتگوها باید انتقادی باشد و در مورد بعضی موارد نظیر حقوق بشر و حکم اعدام سلمان رشدی و مواردی از این دست باید صحبت شود. هفت دور مذاکره برگزار شد و در نهایت در سال 1997 در بیانیه ای که دادند حکم علیه هاشمی دادند و گفتند: گفتگوهای دوجانبه در سطح وزیران باید تعلیق شود:

بحث دیگر در مورد قرارداد 598 است که اگر به نتیجه رسید به خاطر حمله صدام به کویت بود و در شرایطی بود که صدام دیگر هیچ حامی نداشت و تا قبل از آن ما نتوانستیم از طریق دیپلماسی به نتیجه برسیم. در نتیجه این که بگوییم ما مذاکرات را به نتیجه رسانده ایم کم لطفی به 8 سال دفاع مقدس است. وی خطاب به ولایتی گفت: شما در زمانی که وزیر امور خارجه بودید از فرصت های فروپاشی شوروی و حمله صدام به کویت چه استفاده ای کردید؟

(Lit. Trans.) You said responsibility foreign policy accept you, you 16 years minister foreign affairs were and in this period, 7 rounds talks critical after War first Gulf Persian between Iran and Europe held, order these negotiations them specified that said talks must critical be, and about some issues like rights human and sentence death of Salman Rushdie and issues like these must be discussed. Seven round negotiations held was and in the end in year 1997 in statement that gave they, verdict against Hashemi gave and said talks bilateral at level ministers must be suspended. Issue another about contract 598 is that if result reached because of attack Saddam to Kuwait was and in condition was that Saddam no longer any supporter not had and until before that we not could through diplomacy to result reach. As result this that say we negotiations to result reached, unfair to 8 years defense holy is. You in time that Minister of Affairs Foreign, from opportunities of collapse Soviet and attack Saddam to Kuwait what exploit you did?

(Co. Trans.) You said that you will accept the responsibility of the foreign policy. You were the foreign minister for 16 years. During this period, seven critical talks were held between Iran and Europe after the first Persian Gulf war.

Some issues, such as human rights, the death sentence of Salman Rushdie, and other similar issues, should have been discussed. Seven rounds of talks were held. Finally, in 1997, they condemned Mr. Hashemi and said that bilateral talks must be suspended at the ministerial level.

Another issue is the contract of 598; if it concluded, it was due to Saddam's invasion of Kuwait. Saddam was in a condition that had no supporters. Before that, we could not conclude through diplomacy. As a result, if we say that we concluded through the negotiations, it would be unfair to the eight-year sacred defense during the war.

How did you exploit the opportunities of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Saddam's invasion of Kuwait when you were a foreign affairs minister?

Jalili positions himself strategically against Velayati's proposal to be the future foreign minister and states, "You said that you will accept the responsibility of foreign policy" [43]. He then initiates a critique of Velayati's past policies, characterizing them as ineffective and unsuccessful during his tenure as a minister. Through his immediate examples, Jalili systematically challenges Velayati's track record while serving for 16 years as the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This strategic move by Jalili aims not only to discredit Velayati's past performance but also to potentially undermine his candidacy or disqualify him from future positions of authority within the political landscape. Indeed, Jalili challenges Velayati's competence and questions the IPCIC of his *âberu* to outwit him.

For instance, Jalili claims that the contract of 598 was concluded due to the region's then-situation, but not due to Velayati's coherent policies. Jalili intensifies *âberu*-threatening act toward Velayati by providing additional examples of his ineffective policies and questioning his competence more assertively. He also adopts temporal markers such as "Finally, in 1997" and "before that," expressing his frustration and effectively organizing the discourse chronologically. Through these temporal markers, Jalili provides the audience with a clear timeline of events, contributing to the clarity and comprehension of the argument.

In example [43], Jalili poses a question and rechallenges Velayati's competence and policy: "How did you exploit the opportunities of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Saddam's invasion of Kuwait when you were a foreign affairs minister?" The speaker deliberately chooses lexemes such as 'exploit,' 'opportunities,' 'collapse,' 'Soviet Union,' 'Saddam's invasion,' and 'foreign affairs minister' to question his opponent's actions during a specific period in foreign affairs. This is also an attempt to shape *mardom*'s perception of

Velayati's role in critical geopolitical moments. By applying the direct pronoun 'you,' Jalili creates a sense of direct accountability and challenges Velayati to reply. He confronts his opponent and encourages mardom to reflect on evaluating Velayati's leadership, decision-making, and policy implementation during the critical period mentioned. In other words, Jalili alleges that Velayati could not take advantage of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Saddam's invasion of Kuwait.

Jalili frequently challenges the IC of Velayati's *âberu* by initially providing the distant audience with more notorious examples and then confronting Velayati with an unpalatable question. Indeed, Jalili publicly accuses Velayati of adopting an incoherent policy during his time, implying he was not an efficient minister. Jalili could successfully threaten his rival's *âberu*, as Velayati immediately responds with a defensive orientation in example [44].

[44]

6-2013-VLYT, Debate No. 3

این موضوع که می فرمایند مال بیست سال پیش است و الان وضعیت فرق کرده است ناچارم این موضوع را مطرح کنم که زمانی که هنوز به قطعنامه های شورای امنیت علیه ایران در رابطه با مسئله هسته ای نرسیده بودیم آقای سارکوزی مستقیم توسط سفیر فرانسه دعوت کرد که به پاریس بروم و با آقای سارکوزی مذاکره کنم. بنده با آقای رئیس جمهور صحبت کردم و ایشان گفت که دعوت آقای سارکوزی را بپذیر و من به فرانسه رفتم و با آقای سارکوزی یک ساعت ملاقات کردم و همان صحبتی که در رابطه با آقای لاریجانی گفتم ما با آقای سارکوزی درباره عدد سانتریفیوژها به توافق رسیدیم برای این که غنی سازی را متوقف نکنیم و یک چیز بینابین اتفاق بیفتد و مثلاً هشت هزار سانتریفیوژ ما به چهار تا پنج هزار سانتریفیوژ برسد. این موضوع را آقای سارکوزی قبول کرد و گفت با آقای لویید که نفر دوم ایشان بود مذاکره کنیم.... می شد از این امکانات استفاده کرد و غنی سازی را ادامه داد. در رابطه با روسیه نیز همین اتفاق افتاد و آقای پریماکف اینجا آمد و گفت اگر قول بدهید آقای پوتین به ایران بیايد و دست خالی برنگردد، آقای پوتین را به ایران می آورم. این قول را دادم و آقای پوتین آمدند، اما دو مرتبه در این کار تخریب ایجاد شد این روند به معنی دیپلماسی هسته ای نیست و دیپلماسی این نیست که فقط بنشینند بیانیه بدهند و حرف هایی را بزنند و در آخرین دوری که در آلمانی آقای دکتر جلیلی داشت، آنها پیشنهادهایی به ایران کردند که بر اساس آن می شد کارها را مقداری جلو ببریم و آن پیشنهاد این بود که طرف مقابل 1+5 گفت غنی سازی بیست درصد را متوقف کنید و در کارهای فردو هم مقداری کندی ایجاد شود.... وقتی طرف مقابل حاضر است چند قدم بردارد، باید ما هم انعطاف داشته باشیم و هنر دیپلماسی این است که از این فرصت ها استفاده کند و اصولگرایی به این معنی است که انعطاف پذیر هم باشد.

(Lit. Trans.) This matter, that they say, about 20 years ago is, and now the situation different is, I am forced, this matter, point out, that, when still to

resolutions of the Council Security against Iran regarding the nuclear issue not had received, Mr. Sarkozy directly, through the ambassador French, invited, that to Paris go I, and with Mr. Sarkozy negotiate. I with Mr. President spoke, and he said that the invitation of Mr. Sarkozy accepts, and I to France went, and with Mr. Sarkozy an hour meeting had, and the same talk that about Mr. Larijani said I, we with Mr. Sarkozy about the number of centrifuges agreed, so that enrichment not stop, and something between happens, and for example, eight thousand centrifuges our to 4 to 5 thousand centrifuges reach. This matter Mr. Sarkozy agreed, and said with Mr. Levitte, who his second in-command was, negotiate.... could from these opportunities use, and enrichment continue.... Regarding Russia also the same thing happened, and Mr. Primakov here came and told if promise give, Mr. Putin to Iran come and empty-handed not return, Mr. Putin to Iran bring I. This promise I gave, and Mr. Putin came, but twice in this matter sabotage happened. This process means nuclear diplomacy not is, and diplomacy this not is that just sit, statement give, and in the round last, that in Almaty Mr. Dr. Jalili had, they proposals to Iran made that according to that we could things a little forward take, and that proposal was that the party opposite 5+1 said enrichment 20 percent stop, and in Fordo also some slowness create.... when party opposite ready is some steps take, must we also flexible be and art of diplomacy this is that from these opportunities seize they and fundamentalist to this extent flexible be.

(Com. Trans.) The issues that you have mentioned go back 20 years, and now the situation has changed. I have to point out that, at the time, we had not yet received the Security Council resolutions on the nuclear issue against Iran. Mr. Sarkozy directly invited me through the French ambassador to travel to Paris to negotiate with him. I spoke to the President, and he told me, "Accept Mr. Sarkozy's invitation!" Then, I went to France and met Mr. Sarkozy for an hour. We agreed to negotiate with Mr. Levitte, his second-in-command. It was possible to use these facilities and continue enrichment.

The same thing happened with Russia. Mr. Primakov came here and told me, "If you promise that when Mr. Putin comes to Iran, he will not return empty-handed, I will bring him to Iran." I promised, and Mr. Putin came, but everything was destroyed again.

It is not nuclear diplomacy. Diplomacy is not just about sitting down and making statements. In the last round that Dr. Jalili had in Almaty, they made offers to Iran based on which we could progress. The P5 + 1 proposed stopping the 20% enrichment. Then, there would be some slowdown in Fordow's work...

When the other side is willing to take a few steps, we must be flexible. The art of diplomacy lies in seizing such opportunities, and fundamentalism means being flexible.

In response to Jalili's *âberu*-threatening verbal behavior, questioning Velayati's policies and competency, or accusing him of adopting incoherent policies, Velayati declares, "The issues that you have mentioned go back 20 years, and now the situation has changed" [44]. Velayati then publicizes that he and his team have adopted clear and coherent policies on France and Russia's cases. Arguably, Velayati applies the plural pronoun 'we' rather than the singular pronoun 'I' to emphasize the veracity of their adopted strategy and the collective agency and unity of 'we.' By ascribing his actions to a collective of politicians or the leadership within his team, he stands to accrue greater recognition. In other words, Velayati enhances the veracity and credibility of his policies by adopting the plural 'we.' He also persuades the audience, including his opponents and the *mardom*, of the legitimacy and effectiveness of his stance. In doing so, he seeks to restore his *âberu*: "We agreed to negotiate with Mr. Levitte, his second-in-command. It was possible to use these facilities and continue enrichment" [44]. The speaker refers to Mr. Levitte, who is closely associated with Mr. Sarkozy, and acknowledges his importance in their diplomatic exchange. Indeed, he consolidates his argument to defend his actions and decisions. In his defense, Velayati accuses Jalili's team of not supporting him in that case. As a result, Jalili's conservative team squandered the golden opportunity to ease the sanctions on the *mardom*. In other words, Velayati tries to extend his team's failure to Jalili and his network in order to mitigate the self-*âberu*-damage.

Velayati tries to defend his political *âberu* by asserting that he adhered to lucid policies during his tenure. He endeavors to prove his competence to *mardom* and restore the damaged IC of his *âberu*. In his defense, Velayati expounds on diplomacy to Jalili: "The art of diplomacy lies in seizing such opportunities," implying that Jalili and his team missed crucial opportunities. Velayati counterattacks Jalili when rejecting his diplomacy in Almaty, saying, "It is not nuclear diplomacy. Diplomacy is not just about sitting down and making statements." Velayati threatens Jalili's *âberu* when rejecting his diplomacy in Almaty when the P5 + 1 was

proposed. This indicates that Velayati attempts to question his opponent Jalili's competence and efficiency and stains the IC of his *âberu*. Velayati's public accusations or criticisms invoke Jalili's *âberu*-offensive response when questioning Jalili's knowledge in example [44].

5.3.1.4 Questioning the opponent's knowledge

In his self-defense, Jalili challenges Velayati's knowledge, and consequently, his competence and the IC of his *âberu* through public accusations and criticisms.

[45]

6-2013, JLL, Debate No.3

اگر همین نکته ای را که آخر اشاره کردید به نظرم خیلی خوب است. اگر اطلاعات دیگران مثل این اخبار سومی باشد که وایلاست، چون کاملاً غلط هست. نوار گفت وگوهای آلماتی موجود است آپلود شده و خدمت آقا تقدیم شده است.... نکته دومی که وجود دارد، اتفاقاً من برای مردم بگویم در آلماتی چه خبر بود؟ در آلماتی آنها همین بحث را که ایشان می گوید، ما بیاییم بیست درصد را در ازای دو تحریمی که بعداً می خواهد انجام بشود، بدهیم. در برابر آب نبات.... «لویت» نفر دوم فرانسه است؟ آقای لویت کارشناسی در الیزه است. کجا نفر دوم فرانسه است؟ این را که دنیا می شناسد.... کاملاً غلط است. نوار آلماتی موجود است و پیاده شده. اینجا به مردممان عرض کنم. آنجا بحث شد که ما به آنها گفتیم ما حاضریم گام های متقابل برداریم

(Lit. Trans.) If this point that at the end made you to me good seems. If information other yours like this news third is, Catastrophe! that completely wrong is. Tape chat Almaty existing is uploaded and to Supreme leader bestowed is....

Point second that exists, actually I for people to say in Almaty what news was? In Almaty the same argument that he says, we come 20 percent in exchange for two sanctions that later wants be done, give for two lollipops....

Levitt! second person France is? Mr. Levitt expertise in Elizeh is. Where second person France is? This that world knows.... completely wrong is. Tape Almaty exists and uploaded. Here to people ours express I. There discussion was that we to them told we ready steps reciprocal take....

(Com. Trans.) I think the last point you made is a good example. If all your information is like the last one, it would be a catastrophe, because it is totally

wrong. An Almaty chat tape is available, uploaded, and bestowed to the supreme leader....

The second point that happened, I also intend to tell the people what happened in Almaty. It was the same argument; giving 20% to prevent the two future sanctions that they wanted to impose on us. It is like rewarding with a lollipop....

...Levitte is the second person in France? Mr. Levitte, an Elysée expert. He is the second person in France? the world knows this...What you said about Almaty is entirely wrong. Almaty tape is available and uploaded. Let me tell our *mardom*; we discussed that we are ready to take reciprocal steps....

Example [45] indicates that Jalili has been offended by Velayati's last statement. He then applies Velayati's example against Velayati but in his favor. Therefore, Jalili can defend himself and protect his political *âberu*. Indeed, when Velayati expresses that Jalili's diplomacy was ineffective in Almaty, Jalili offers his critical evaluation and sarcastically accuses Velayati of giving false information to the *mardom*, saying, "I think the last point you made is a good example..." Being accused of spreading false news challenges the IC of Velayati's *âberu*. Jalili explicitly aggravates *âberu*-threatening act toward Velayati by disgracing him publicly and accusing him of misinforming the *mardom*: "If all your information is like the last one, it would be a catastrophe, because it is totally wrong." Jalili employs evaluative language when using the term 'catastrophe' to emphasize the severity of the potential outcome of Velayati's action. In fact, in [45], Jalili questions his rival, Velayati's, knowledge and competency, and consequently threatens his *âberu* to defend his own. In his defense, Jalili pinpoints the Almaty case to dispel the doubts and justify that he implemented the right diplomacy at that time since he believes Iran could not win a concession.

Jalili continues to question Velayati's knowledge and intensifies the damage to the IC of his *âberu* more seriously when sarcastically asking Velayati the following declarative question and answering it himself: "...Levitte is the second person in France? Mr. Levitte, an Elysée expert. He is the second person in France? The world knows this..." [45]. Jalili asks the same declarative question twice, likely to highlight Velayati's alleged ignorance. In other words, by pretending to seek information about Levitte's status, he indirectly mocks Velayati's supposed lack of knowledge. Jalili humiliates his opponent, Velayati, deeply and casts doubt on Velayati's awareness when he claims that the whole world knows who Mr. Levitte is. By saying "the whole world knows," Jalili appeals to a broader audience, including the *mardom*.

He thereby undermines Velayati's credibility while elevating his own position. In this manner, in his defense, Jalili challenges the IC of Velayati's *âberu* and accuses him of a shortage of knowledge. It should be noted that the speaker accuses his opponent via declarative questions, instead of directly accusing him, framing his challenge as an innocent inquiry to avoid potential self-*âberu* damage in the eyes of the *mardom*.

In the end, Jalili reveals that Velayati has reported false news when he says, "What you said about Almaty is completely wrong. The Almaty tape is available and uploaded" [45]. Jalili refers to available tapes, which can be accessed or obtained, to appeal to transparency and reject the accusations leveled against him. Since Jalili produces his offensive reaction to the same issue twice-once at the beginning of the extract and once at the end-it confirms that Velayati successfully threatened Jalili's *âberu*. Therefore, Jalili endeavors to exonerate himself or restore his damaged *âberu* by referring to the tapes accessible to the audience.

5.3.1.5 Questioning the opponent's sense of judgment

In example [46], Mousavi questions Ahmadinejad judgment in selecting his ministers.

[46]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

یکی از دلایل این مشکلاتی که دولت فعلی پیدا کرده همین نوع رفتارهاست وقتی که مقاومت هم کارسازی ندارد یک وزیر اخراج بعد یک وزیر دیگر مطرح میشود که هنوز پرونده ی باز مالی دارد... برخلاف خط و روشی که حضرت امام ترسیم کرده بود که وزیران را از بین چه کسانی انتخاب بکنید اینها برای ما و هزینه های گزافی دارد

(Lit. Trans.) One of the reasons for this problems that the government current has found is this types of behaviors; when resistance also not work, one minister dismissed is, then one minister other with an open financial case appointed is... Against the criteria that Imam Khomeini had set for ministers, from which ones to choose, these have for us exorbitant expenses.

(Com. Trans.) One of the problems in this government is that when resistance no longer works, it dismisses one minister and appoints another who still has an open case of financial (corruption).... This goes against the criteria set by Ayatollah Khomeini for selecting ministers, and it costs us a lot.

According to the Iranian constitution, it is within the president's authority to choose his ministers. In this example, Mousavi criticizes Ahmadinejad for not being resourceful in selecting his cabinet members. Indeed, he challenges the IC (institutional component) of Ahmadinejad's *âberu* by questioning his sense of judgment. In [46], Mousavi claims that the incumbent Ahmadinejad appointed some politicians as his ministers but then dismissed them when their corruption was publicized: "...it dismisses one minister and appoints another who still has an open case of financial corruption...." In this utterance, 'it' refers to Ahmadinejad's government. The phrase "dismisses one minister and appoints another" employs parallelism for emphasis, and the adverb 'still' signifies the widespread corruption in the current government and the lack of diligence in the government's selection process. Indeed, Mousavi communicates that old ministers were dismissed because of corruption, but were still replaced with corrupt ones, which goes against Ayatollah Khomeini's principles-the normative standards for minister selection: "This goes against the criteria set by Ayatollah Khomeini for selecting ministers" [46]. In this fashion, Mousavi challenges Ahmadinejad's IC, the institutional components of his *âberu*, by accusing him of not being able to satisfy the leader of the Revolution's expectations regarding the selection of the most qualified ministers.

In other words, Ayatollah Khomeini orders the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran to select the most fervent and qualified ministers, signifying two matters. First, the president enhances the IC of his *âberu* by meeting the leader of the Revolution's demands. Second, satisfying Ayatollah Khomeini's demands results in proving one's competence in their political position, which in turn enhances the IC of their *âberu*. In summary, by referring to Ayatollah Khomeini's principles, the speaker appeals to a revered figure in Iranian politics, attempting to establish a moral high ground for his argument.

Mousavi continues to criticize Ahmadinejad's performance by attributing his actions to negative consequences: "It costs us a lot," highlighting the negative consequences for mardom (people). The speaker also appeals to public concern and accountability when mentioning this phrase, as the government's decisions have financial, ethical, or political repercussions. In brief, Mousavi succeeds in tarnishing his opponent's *âberu* in example [47].

[47]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

اما من سوآل میکنم گزینشها را امام در زمان چه کسی منحل کرد در زمان ما یا زمان شما؟

(Lit. Trans.)... But I question the committees admission Imam in whose time annul, during time our or time your?

(Com. Trans.) ... but I am asking you! When did Imam annul the admission committees? In your government or our government?

In response to Mousavi's criticisms, Ahmadinejad directly addresses Mousavi and emphasizes his question when saying, "but I am asking you!" The speaker uses the conjunction 'but,' indicating a contrast or disagreement with his opponent's earlier statements, and then inquires, "When did Ayatollah Khomeini annul the admission committees?" [47]. The question is straightforward, seeking information about when Ayatollah Khomeini annulled the admission committees. Indeed, Ahmadinejad endeavors to push back against Mousavi's accusations with his assertive and challenging tone when mentioning that Ayatollah Khomeini annulled his committee. Being approved by Ayatollah Khomeini indicates his endorsement and is considered an *âberu*-boost factor for Iranian politicians, while losing Ayatollah Khomeini's support is an *âberu*-loss. Ahmadinejad seeks to challenge the IC of Mousavi's *âberu* due to the loss of Ayatollah Khomeini's endorsement. At the same time, he aggravates the threat to the IC of Mousavi's *âberu* by accusing him of being incompetent in selecting his committee, thus implying that Ayatollah Khomeini had to intervene to solve the problem.

In example [47], Ahmadinejad presents Mousavi with two choices in his next utterance: "In your government or our government?" suggesting a distinction between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi's affiliations and hinting at a division or disagreement between them. The question leads to Mousavi standing accused of forming an inappropriate committee due to a lack of resourcefulness. In his defense, Ahmadinejad turns the accusation back on Mousavi, calling him an unqualified prime minister who could not adopt a coherent policy to establish his cabinet. Ahmadinejad's response indicates that Mousavi could successfully tarnish the incumbent's *âberu* in the previous example [46].

5.3.1.6 Questioning the opponent's personality

In the presidential debates between Ahmadinejad and Karoubi in 2009, both candidates frequently challenged each other's personality and competence publicly to threaten one another's *âberu*. Due to the zero-sum nature of presidential debates, candidates threaten their rival's *âberu* while enhancing, maintaining, or defending their own.

In example [48], Karoubi threatens Ahmadinejad's *âberu* by questioning his personality and strategies. Afterwards, Ahmadinejad reacts to Karoubi's *âberu*-threatening behavior in order to restore his own *âberu* in example [49].

[48]

6-2009-KRB, Debate No.3

ما هم به دوستان آقای احمدی نژاد و هم به خودشان اشکال اصولی داریم و در اداره کشور کاملاً نارسایی و ضعف می بینیم. ما هم به شخص و هم به شیوه اداره کردن اشکال داریم و اشکالات مهم به شخص آقای احمدی نژاد است. اطلاعاتی که آقای احمدی نژاد می دهند قاعدتاً یا اطلاعات غلط به ایشان می دهند یا باید بگوییم که آقای احمدی نژاد خلاف می گوید، از این دو حالت بیرون نیست

(Lit. Trans.) We also to friends of Mr. Ahmadinejad and also to themselves problems fundamental have, and in management of country completely inadequacy and weakness see we. We also to person and also to method of managing problems major have we, and problems significant to person Mr. Ahmadinejad is. Information that Mr. Ahmadinejad gives definitely or information wrong to him gives or must we say that Mr. Ahmadinejad contrary speaks, out of these two situations not is.

(Com. Trans.) We have fundamental problems with Mr. Ahmadinejad's friends and himself. We are witnessing complete weakness and inadequacy in the administration of the country. We have significant problems with Mr. Ahmadinejad himself and his governing method. The information that Mr. Ahmadinejad gives may be based on misinformation; he may be misinformed, or we have to say that Mr. Ahmadinejad is contradicting himself. It must be one of these two cases.

In example [48], Karoubi intentionally uses the collective pronoun 'we,' instead of the singular pronoun 'I,' to expand the number of Ahmadinejad's opponents: "We have fundamental problems with Mr. Ahmadinejad's friends and himself." Karoubi uses the collective pronoun 'we' three times in this example to challenge his opponent and his administration. The speaker creates a collective identity by adopting 'we,' suggesting that he shares concerns with other candidates and even with the general public (*mardom*). Specifically, the speaker frames the issues as 'fundamental problems' and strategically positions the criticism as central to the governance and administration of the country.

Next, Karoubi, on behalf of his allies, critiques Ahmadinejad's administrative skills by using negative terms such as 'weakness' and 'inadequacy' to describe the current government: "We are witnessing complete weakness and inadequacy in the administration of the country" [48]. In other words, Karoubi publicly questions the institutional competence (IC) of Ahmadinejad's *âberu* by accusing him of being unfit to govern. Then, Karoubi questions

Ahmadinejad's character by stating, "We have major problems with Mr. Ahmadinejad himself and his governing method" [48]. This implies that serious issues exist with both Ahmadinejad's personality and his administration.

Telling lies is vehemently prohibited in Iranian culture and regarded as a sin in Islam, so it's important to avoid directly accusing someone of lying, as it could also threaten one's own *âberu*. As shown in example [48], Karoubi strategically accuses Ahmadinejad of giving incorrect information but stops short of accusing him of lying: "The information that Mr. Ahmadinejad gives may be based on misinformation; he may be misinformed." The use of 'may be' introduces uncertainty and functions as hedging, allowing the speaker to express criticism while maintaining a degree of caution. Karoubi claims that Ahmadinejad is misinformed and, as a result, misleads *mardom*. This accusation challenges Ahmadinejad's institutional competence and, by extension, the IC of his *âberu*.

Furthermore, Karoubi implies that Ahmadinejad is not being truthful with *mardom*, even though, according to Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary ideology, he is expected to be honest with the public. Therefore, Karoubi challenges the IC of Ahmadinejad's *âberu* when he states: "...or we have to say that Mr. Ahmadinejad is contradicting himself. It must be one of these two cases." The statements open two possibilities regarding Ahmadinejad's information-sharing: either he is misinformed or he is deliberately providing contradictory information. This ambiguity allows Karoubi to criticize Ahmadinejad without making a direct accusation. He also implies a lack of trust and casts doubt on Ahmadinejad's integrity and honesty.

As seen in [48], Karoubi avoids directly accusing Ahmadinejad of lying. Instead, he chooses alternatives such as claiming Ahmadinejad is contradicting himself or is misinformed. However, either option damages Ahmadinejad's *âberu*, as he is expected to be well-informed and honest with *mardom* in order to strengthen the IC of his *âberu* as a competent, revolutionary president.

Therefore, example [48] shows that Karoubi threatens Ahmadinejad's *âberu* by candidly questioning his personality and strategies and accusing him of providing *mardom* with wrong information. It's also worth noting that Karoubi refers to a taped story in which Ahmadinejad claims to be a "sacred person." While this is not included in [48], Ahmadinejad briefly addresses it in his response.

Finally, in example [49], Ahmadinejad formulates both defensive and offensive *âberu* responses to defend himself.

[49]

6-2009, AHMDNJD, Debate No.3

وقتی ادعا می کنیم روش اداره کشور غلط است باید این اطلاعات را مقایسه کنیم در غیر اینصورت ، اینکه چه کسی در کجا چه حرفی شد، که حرف نمی شود ؛ آقای کروبی یک مقدار متاسفم. ایا با این حرفها کشور را می شود اداره کرد؟ اینکه یک نوار دیده ام ، فلانی چه گفته است، کسی را دیده ام و یک حرف دیگری زده است ؛ با این حرف ها که نمی شود کشور را اداره کرد

(Lit. Trans.) When claim make we method of governing of country, wrong is must this information compare we, if not, that who, in where, what word said, that mere word not count; Mr. Karoubi a little disappointed. Can with these words country govern? This, that a tape have seen I, someone what said, someone have seen I, one word someone else said; with these words not country run.

(Com. Trans.) When we claim that the method of governing the country is wrong, we must compare the relevant information. Otherwise, who said what and where is not a valid argument. Mr. Karoubi, I must say, I'm a little disappointed. Can a country be governed with such words? That I saw a tape, and someone said something, then I met someone else, and he said something else-this is not how a country is run.

In his defense, the incumbent Ahmadinejad alleges that Karoubi's claims are unfounded since they are not based on documents or evidence: "When we claim that the method of governing the country is wrong, we must compare the relevant information" [49]. Ahmadinejad applies the collective pronoun 'we,' suggesting a collective voice and implying that he aligns himself with a group or a larger societal perspective. He may seek the power of collective authority to level his critiques against his opponent. The choice of terms such as 'the method of governing the country is wrong' and 'information' indicates a desire for accountability and a focus on evidence-based claims, resonating with audiences seeking credible information and trustworthy leadership.

In response to Karoubi's allegations that Ahmadinejad has claimed he is a sacred religious man, Ahmadinejad asserts that no one can make claims based on gossip: "...Otherwise, who said what and where is not a valid argument" [49]. Indeed, the incumbent Ahmadinejad refutes Karoubi's earlier accusations and prevents him from questioning his personality. It should be noted that the phrase 'who said what and where' underscores the

importance of relying on credible sources of information rather than unsubstantiated rumors or gossip.

In his later utterance in example [49], Ahmadinejad expresses pity for Karoubi, implying that he may be a superficial person who relies on rumors: “Mr. Karoubi, I must say, I’m a little disappointed. Can a country be governed with such words? That I saw a tape, and someone said something, then I met someone else, and he said something else.” Ahmadinejad’s expression of regret, “I am a little disappointed,” could soften his criticism of Karoubi. However, he follows it with an unpalatable question: “Can a country be governed with such words?” This rhetorical question reflects a pragmatic concern about the efficacy of mere rhetoric without concrete actions or evidence to support governance. In other words, Ahmadinejad criticizes the reliance on rhetoric over substantive policies and actions.

Ahmadinejad articulates the phrase ‘such words’ twice, emphasizing that his rival, Karoubi, is not qualified to argue based on authentic documents. Indeed, he questions the IC of Karoubi to restore his own damaged *âberu*. The incumbent Ahmadinejad employs a ‘questioning strategy’ to publicly accuse his opponent, Karoubi, of lacking profound knowledge. By posing unpalatable questions, he seeks to persuade the audience to dismiss anecdotal information as inadequate for governance. He purportedly exposes the weakness in his opponent’s personality. Ahmadinejad’s *âberu* defensive and offensive reactions confirm that Karoubi successfully threatened his *âberu* in his turn.

5.3.1.7 Questioning the opponent’s political functions

In 2017, the incumbent Hassan Rouhani, his first Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, Tehran Mayor Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, member of Iran’s Expediency Council Mostafa Aqa-Mirsalim, the custodian of the Holy Shrine of Imam Reza (PBUH) Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi, and former Vice President Mostafa Hashemi-Taba participated in the televised presidential debates.

As part of the rules, candidates were required to outline their economic plans and agendas during the final debate. The debate begins in earnest with Jahangiri being drawn to present his strategies for restricting smuggling and reducing imports. Following his remarks, the other candidates respond by either expressing their views or criticizing him within a set time frame.

In summary, Jahangiri praises the performance of the current government, in which he serves as Vice President, and claims that the smuggling rate has declined. He then criticizes his rivals for merely chanting slogans instead of developing coherent programs, which, according to him, has led to a struggling economy.

[50]

6-2017-JHNGR, Debate No. 3

زمانی که ما دولت را تحویل گرفتیم میزان قاچاق کالا بر اساس آمار اعلام شده حدود بیست و پنج میلیارد دلار بود. خوشبختانه طی سه سال گذشته با برنامه‌ریزی که انجام گرفته میزان قاچاق در مقطع فعلی به میزان دوازده میلیارد دلار کاهش یافته است. آنچه که مهم است این است که در یک مقطع از تاریخ موضوع مبارزه با قاچاق به سمت شعار دادن حرکت کرد و به جای اینکه موضوع به طور اساسی برطرف شود با شعار به آن پرداخته شد. قاچاق به همین دلیل افزایش پیدا کرد و فساد نیز رو به فزونی گذاشت و اقتصاد کشور به سمت فروپاشی رفت. امروز نمایندگان همان تفکر در صحنه رقابت‌ها هستند و می‌خواهند با همان روش‌ها با مسائل کشور روبرو شوند. کاندیداهایی که امروز به صحنه آمده‌اند باید برنامه‌هایی را ارائه بدهند در حالی که ما هنوز چیزی ندیده‌ایم. یک ماه قبل از ثبت‌نام، آقای رئیسی گفت که هنوز تصمیمی برای حضور در انتخابات نگرفته است. سپس، در آخرین مناظره، جزوهای را نشان داد و ادعا کرد که این برنامه‌ای است که شش ماه روی آن کار کرده است، اما تا این لحظه، ما هیچ برنامه‌ای ندیده‌ایم. کاندیداها نباید از سابقه خود بترسند، بلکه باید بگویند در گذشته چه کار کرده‌اند اظهار کرد: آقایان بیایند و بگویند ما در ناجا بودیم یا در قوه قضائیه بودیم و این کارهای مهم را انجام داده‌ایم. آقای رئیسی در طول دوران طولانی بیش از 30 سال در قوه قضائیه مسئولیت داشته است بیاید و پاسخگوی فعالیت‌هایش در آن دوره باشد. ایشان در طول دوران بلندی مسئولیت مبارزه با قاچاق کالا را در قوه قضائیه داشته‌اند امروز بیایند و بگویند که چه کرده‌اند. یکی از مسئولیت‌های مهم قوه قضائیه، مبارزه با فساد و قاچاق کالا است. اگر هر گونه نقصی وجود داشته باشد، باید مسئول آن باشد. آقای قالیباف نیز به مدت طولانی مسئولیت مبارزه با قاچاق بود. ایشان هم باید کارهای خودشان را در این زمینه توضیح بدهد و بگوید که چه کاری انجام داده است

یک ماه قبل از ثبت‌نام، آقای رئیسی گفت که هنوز تصمیمی برای حضور در انتخابات نگرفته است. سپس، در آخرین مناظره، جزوهای را نشان داد و ادعا کرد که این برنامه‌ای است که شش ماه روی آن کار کرده است، اما تا این لحظه، ما هیچ برنامه‌ای ندیده‌ایم

(Lit. Trans.) Time when we government took handover, rate of smuggling commodities statistics reported according to about 25 billion dollars was. Fortunately through three years past, with planning that performed rate smuggling in period current to about 12 billion dollars dropped is. What

important is this is that in a period of history, the subject of fighting with smuggling towards sloganeering moved and instead of that subject fundamentally resolved with rhetoric empty to it paid attention. Smuggling for this reason increased and corruption also on to rise put and economy of country towards collapse went. Today representatives of same mindset in scene competitions are and want with same methods with issues of country face. Candidates that today to scene have come must programs present while we still anything not seen. One month before registration, Mr. Raisi said that still decision not taken has for presence in elections. Then, in the debate last, a pamphlet showed and claimed that this program his is that six months on it worked has, but we until this moment no program seen have not. Candidates not should from records past own fear have, rather should say in past what work done have stated. Gentlemen! come and say we in NAJA were or in the judiciary were and these works important done have we. Mr. Raisi during period long more than 30 year in judiciary responsibility had, come and responsible for activities his in that period be. They in during period long responsibility fighting with smuggling of commodities in judiciary had come, today come and say that what done have they. One of responsibilities important judiciary, fight with corruption and smuggling commodity is. If any shortcomings exist, should responsible for it be. Mr. Qalibaf also for period long responsibility fighting with smuggling had. They also should their works in this area explain and say that what work have done they.

(Com. Trans.) When we took over the government, the estimated value of smuggled goods was around \$25 billion, according to official reports. Fortunately, with the planning implemented over the past three years, this figure has now dropped to \$12 billion.

What is important is that at a certain point in history, the fight against smuggling shifted toward mere sloganeering. Instead of addressing the issue in a fundamental way, it was reduced to empty rhetoric. As a result, smuggling increased, corruption spread, and the country's economy moved toward collapse. Today, the representatives of that same mindset are once again competing in this election, and they intend to approach the country's challenges using the same methods.

Candidates who have stepped forward must present programs, yet we have seen nothing so far. A month before the registration, Mr. Raisi said that he had not yet decided to run in the election. Then, in the last debate, he showed a pamphlet and claimed that it was his program, which he had worked on for six months. However, up until now, we have not seen any programs. Candidates should not fear their past records. They must state what they have done. Gentlemen! come forward and say we were in the police force or the judiciary-and tell what major contributions they have made.

Mr. Raisi has held positions in the judiciary for over 30 years, including responsibility for overseeing anti-smuggling efforts. Now, he must be held accountable for his record in that role. Fighting corruption and commodity smuggling is one of the judiciary's key responsibilities, and if there have been any shortcomings, those responsible must be answerable.

Similarly, Mr. Qalibaf was in charge of combating smuggling for an extended period. He, too, must explain his actions in this area and clarify what steps he has taken.

The Vice President initially discusses the change in smuggling rates after a change in government and uses quantitative data-smuggling rates: \$25 billion to \$12 billion-to emphasize the impact: "When we took over the government, the estimated value of smuggled goods was around \$25 billion, according to official reports. Fortunately, with the planning implemented over the past three years, this figure has now dropped to \$12 billion." Temporal markers such as 'when' and 'now' help the speaker structure the discourse chronologically, providing clarity and aiding in understanding the sequence of events.

He then claims that the economy collapsed in the previous term due to the government's focus on chanting slogans rather than acting. Jahangiri suggests a shift from substantive issues to rhetoric by referring to sloganeering. Phrases like 'smuggling increased,' 'corruption spread,' and 'the country's economy moved toward collapse,' used by Jahangiri, employ vivid language to convey a sense of urgency and severity regarding the country's situation. Jahangiri warns the audience: "Today, the representatives of that same mindset are once again competing in this election" [50], implying the continuity of critical issues. Indeed, he indirectly targets conservative candidates, who were the main body of the previous government. Therefore, Jahangiri endeavors to refute accusations against the current government while attributing the fragile economy to the poor functioning of the previous government.

Jahangiri calls for candidates to propose their programs, indicating a pragmatic concern for transparency and accountability in political discourse: “Candidates who have stepped forward must present programs....” Afterwards, Jahangiri questions Raisi’s program, saying, “A month before the registration, Mr. Raisi said that he had not yet decided to run in the election. Then, in the last debate, he showed a pamphlet and claimed that it was his program, which he had worked on for six months. However, up until now, we have not seen any programs” [50]. Jahangiri adopts the temporal marker ‘a month before’ and creates a timeline that adds a dimension of consistency and commitment to his critique. The speaker names his opponent directly, Mr. Raisi, using a pragmatic strategy to hold him accountable and demanding explanations for his actions and policies. Jahangiri also refers to Mr. Raisi’s pamphlet to underscore the lack of transparency, immediately following with “up until now, we have not seen any programs,” pointing to unfulfilled promises.

As seen, Jahangiri not only challenges the veracity of Raisi’s program but also implicitly accuses him of lying. A month before the election, Raisi had expressed doubts about attending, but suddenly in the last debate, he claimed to have developed a coherent plan after six months of effort. As indicated in the previous chapter, accusing someone of lying is against cultural and religious values and threatens Iranian Muslims’ *âberu*. According to Jahangiri, one of the significant factors in distinguishing a competent candidate is their ability to present a well-laid-out plan. Therefore, Jahangiri seeks to question Raisi’s plans and accuses him of not developing any. In [50], Jahangiri attacks the IC of Raisi’s *âberu* by questioning his competence in developing sound plans.

Afterwards, Jahangiri criticizes some candidates anonymously: “Candidates should not fear their past records. They must state what they have done. Gentlemen! come forward and say we were in the police force or the judiciary-and tell what major contributions they have made” [50]. On one level, the critique of candidates’ records and calls for transparency align with political discourse strategies aimed at promoting accountability and integrity in leadership. On another level, Jahangiri seeks to influence public perception of candidates’ qualifications and suitability for office by emphasizing the importance of their past actions and responsibilities. As indicated in chapter four, politicians enhance their *âberu* when they have reliable records. Since Jahangiri believes his opponents do not have satisfactory records on smuggling, he asks them to set the record straight.

Indeed, Jahangiri directly addresses Qalibaf and Raisi because they have held administrative positions in the police force and judiciary, respectively. He claims they are responsible for smuggling, implicitly accusing them of being incompetent politicians in the

fight against smuggling, and challenges the IC of their *âberu* publicly. Jahangiri seeks to discharge the current government from the poor control of commodity smuggling by incriminating his rivals.

In example [50], Jahangiri explicitly and publicly accuses Raisi of failing in his position and questions his thirty-year policies, functions, and competence regarding smuggling when stating: “Mr. Raisi has held positions in the judiciary for over 30 years, including responsibility for overseeing anti-smuggling efforts. Now, he must be held accountable for his record in that role. Fighting corruption and commodity smuggling is one of the judiciary’s key responsibilities, and if there have been any shortcomings, those responsible must be answerable.” Jahangiri claims Raisi has failed to manage corruption and smuggling, despite his extended tenure in charge. Jahangiri thus challenges Raisi’s accountability and, with his critical and evaluative tone, highlights that Raisi is not qualified for the presidency due to his poor performance, which threatens the IC of his *âberu*. He also encourages the audience to scrutinize candidates’ records, actions, qualifications, and past achievements.

The Vice President also claims that Qalibaf is the second person responsible for controlling smuggling: “Similarly, Mr. Qalibaf was in charge of combating smuggling for an extended period. He, too, must explain his actions in this area and clarify what steps he has taken” [50]. In this respect, Jahangiri questions Qalibaf’s actions, challenging the IC of his *âberu*, as Qalibaf was in the police force for a long time. The focus on specific responsibilities such as the ‘judiciary’ and ‘smuggling’ aligns with political discourse related to governance, accountability, and national welfare. The mention of Mr. Raisi and Mr. Qalibaf in this context makes them central figures in the discourse, holding them accountable for their roles in the government.

In response to Jahangiri’s *âberu*-threatening behavior, Raisi produces both *âberu*-defensive reactions to defend his damaged *âberu* and *âberu*-offensive reactions to threaten Jahangiri’s *âberu* and outwit him.

[51]

6-2017-RS, Debate No. 3

از روزی که من وارد عرصه انتخابات شدم از نظرات کارشناسانه دانشگاهیان استفاده کردیم و آنها زمان بسیاری را صرف این کرده‌اند و این‌ها پایه علمی برنامه‌های ما هستند. علاوه بر این، ما توانستیم از تجربیات همه استفاده کنیم و برنامه مدونی داریم که تمام کاندیداهای محترم و برزگوار میتوانند ببینند و نظر دهند.... آیا میتوانیم از قاچاق کالا پیشگیری کنیم بلکه دولت میتواند. اما کدام

دولت؟ دولتی که وزیر آن در بخش خصوصی نباشند و در عرصه کار برای مملکت باشند اما اگر خودشان در بخش خصوصی مسئولیت داشته باشند و کار دولتی هم بکنند قطعاً انجام نمیشود.

(Lit. Trans.) From the day I entered the election arena, the opinions expert of university academics used we, and they a lot of time on this spent, and these foundations scientific of programs our are. Additionally, we could experience of everyone use and have a program comprehensive that all candidates honorable and esteemed can see and feedback give on. Can we smuggling of goods prevent? Yes, the government can. But which government? A government that in which ministers its in the sector private not is and in arena of work for the country is, but if themselves in sector private responsibilities have and work governmental also do, definitely not be done.

(Com. Trans.) Since the day I entered the election arena, we have used the expert opinions of university academics, and they have spent a lot of time on this. These are the scientific foundations of our programs. Additionally, we were able to make use of everyone's experiences, and I have a comprehensive program that all the honorable and esteemed candidates can see and give their feedback on. Can we prevent the smuggling of goods? Yes, the government can. But which government? A government in which its ministers are not involved in the private sector and are focused on working for the country. But if they themselves have responsibilities in the private sector and also carry out government work, it definitely will not be done.

As can be seen in [51], Raisi defends his program to assert his qualifications as a presidential candidate with a well-rooted platform for the country's future well-being. He states, "Since the day I entered the election arena, we have used the expert opinions of university academics, and they have spent a lot of time on this." Raisi begins his statement with a clear temporal reference, "Since the day I entered the election arena," not only placing his words in a specific time frame but also emphasizing his proactive approach. By invoking 'expert opinions' and 'academics,' he aims to underline the authority and credibility supporting his political platform, presenting himself as someone who values informed, evidence-based policymaking.

As previously discussed, Iranian political discourse often revolves around maintaining âberu (honor or reputation) of both the individual politician and the political system. By presenting his platform as grounded in scientific and expert-driven principles, Raisi strengthens

his *âberu* by aligning himself with respected academic authorities. This framing ensures that his policies are seen as thoughtful, well-researched, and aligned with the country's revolutionary ideals. Thus, in presenting his program in this way, Raisi seeks to preserve his *âberu*, highlighting his competence as a political leader committed to the practical demands of governance.

In response to Jahangiri's accusation that Raisi's program is underdeveloped, Raisi states in [51], "They have spent a lot of time on this. These are the scientific foundations of our programs." The plural pronoun "they" refers to the academic experts, while the demonstrative pronoun "these" highlights the expert opinions based on society's concerns. Raisi emphasizes "the scientific foundations" of his program, underscoring its reliance on expertise and evidence-based policymaking. In this manner, he aims to enhance the perceived quality of his program before the eyes of mardom (people). Through this defense, Raisi seeks to refute Jahangiri's allegation while presenting his platform as a product of thorough research and expert consultation.

After defending himself, Raisi shifts his focus to attack the current government's poor management of smuggling. He begins by posing the question, "Can we prevent the smuggling of goods? Yes." Raisi's immediate affirmation asserts his belief in the government's ability to combat smuggling. However, he quickly raises a critical question: "But which government?" This invites reflection on the qualities and responsibilities expected of a government in addressing societal issues such as smuggling. Raisi's question calls for a critical evaluation: *Which government meets the necessary criteria to effectively combat smuggling?* He continues, "A government in which its ministers are not involved in the private sector and are focused on working for the country." Raisi uses rhetorical questions to engage the audience and highlight the issue of smuggling. His parallel structure in the phrases "A government in which its ministers are not involved in the private sector" and "(ministers) are focused on working for the country" enhances the clarity and emphasis of his argument.

Raisi accuses the current government of corruption, asserting that smuggling will not be prevented if ministers are involved in the private sector. He elaborates, "But if they themselves have responsibilities in the private sector and also carry out government work, it definitely will not be done." Using a conditional clause, Raisi articulates a hypothetical scenario and its potential consequences. He underscores the distinction between public and private roles, implying that smuggling persists because ministers have divided their attention between the public and private sectors. He argues that effective governance depends on ministers focusing exclusively on public duties, such as combating smuggling. By framing the

issue in this way, Raisi critiques the current government's structure, suggesting that it undermines *âberu* and effective governance.

Furthermore, Raisi implicitly questions Jahangiri and other ministers' involvement in the private sector, which he suggests contradicts Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic directives. In doing so, Raisi not only critiques the government's structure but also attacks his political opponents' credibility and *âberu*. This attack serves as a public challenge to the integrity of Jahangiri and his team, which I will elaborate on in the coming chapter.

Smuggling and corruption are central issues in Iranian political discourse, often framed as critical concerns that should be addressed by presidential candidates. These issues are portrayed as being in the public interest, with candidates expected to present solutions.

In his turn, Jahangiri criticizes both Raisi and Qalibaf. In [52], Qalibaf, the current mayor of Tehran and former officer of the police force, defends himself against accusations by redirecting them toward the current government. He accuses the government and its ministers of corruption, particularly highlighting their involvement in illegal imports, arguing that such actions prevent effective control of smuggling. By criticizing the current government's corruption, Qalibaf attempts to restore his own *âberu* and defend his record.

[52]

6-2017- QLBF, Debate No. 3

آقای جهانگیری! مبارزه‌ای علیه قاچاق وجود ندارد. شرط اول مبارزه، جلوگیری است. بعضی از اعضای دولت و وزرا حقوق و پاداش‌هایی می‌گیرند مانند خودتان. معلوم شده است که ایشان پاداش‌های چند میلیون دلاری برای خود و همکارانش در طول دوره وزارتی خود دریافت کرده است. در حالی که یک کارگر هشتصد هزار تومان دریافت میکند. البته مقداری به حقوق این کارگران اضافه شده است. بعد وقتی شاهد می‌شوید که یک وزیر فرهنگی هفته گذشته کالاهایی را به صورت غیرقانونی، وارد کرده است، چگونه انتظار دارید که وزرا جلوگیری از قاچاق کنند؟ شما می‌توانید از قاچاق جلوگیری کنید؟ وظیفه شما جلوگیری است.

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Jahangiri! Against smuggling fight no exists. The first condition of fight, prevention is. Some of the members of the government and ministers salaries and bonuses receive like yourself. It became known that he bonuses multimillion-dollar for himself and his colleagues during ministerial term his received. While a worker 800,000 Tomans receives. Of course, some slight amount to the salaries of these workers added has been. Then, when you see that a minister cultural week last goods illegally has imported, how do you

expect that ministers to prevent form smuggling? Can you from smuggling prevent? Duty your prevention is.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Jahangiri! There is no fight against smuggling. The first condition of the fight is prevention. Some government members and ministers, like yourself, receive (huge) salaries and bonuses. It has come to light that he received multimillion-dollar bonuses for himself and his colleagues during his term in office. Meanwhile, a worker receives only 800,000 Tomans. Of course, there has been a slight increase in their salaries. Then, when you see that a cultural minister illegally imported goods last week, how do you expect ministers to prevent smuggling? Can you prevent smuggling? Your job is to prevent it.

In his defense, Qalibaf accuses the current government of failing to take action against smuggling and criticizes it for its ineffective approach to combating this issue: “Mr. Jahangiri! There is no fight against smuggling. The first condition of the fight is prevention” [52]. By addressing his opponent using nominal terms, Qalibaf creates a respectful yet confrontational tone. This is further emphasized by his declarative statements, which assert that there has been no genuine effort to combat smuggling.

Qalibaf then directly accuses Jahangiri and his team of corruption: “Some government members and ministers, like yourself, receive (huge) salaries and bonuses” [52]. Qalibaf uses the indefinite determiner “some” to refer to unspecified government members and ministers who receive substantial compensation. However, he immediately shifts to the pronoun “yourself,” directly addressing Jahangiri, thereby implying that he is one of those who benefit from large salaries and bonuses. The use of “yourself” adds a confrontational tone, accusing Jahangiri of personally reaping the rewards of these perks.

Earning high salaries contradicts Ayatollah Khomeini’s Islamic directives, and accusing a Muslim politician of such behavior directly threatens their *âberu* (honor or reputation). Qalibaf intensifies the attack on Jahangiri by making a stark comparison: “Meanwhile, a worker receives only 800,000 Tomans” [52]. The conjunction “meanwhile” serves to highlight the disparity between the salaries of government officials and workers, underscoring the perceived injustice. By juxtaposing the salary of a worker with that of a government official, Qalibaf appeals to the sense of injustice or discontent among the public, or *mardom*. Arguably, this comparison aims to sway public opinion by exposing alleged

corruption and inefficiency within the government, potentially garnering voter support for Qalibaf.

It is an *âberu*-threatening act when Iranian politicians, due to corruption, fail to fulfill their responsibilities for the welfare of the people. Neglecting their duties and facing accusations of corruption directly challenges the integrity of their *âberu*. Politicians' competence and their adherence to Islamic values and Ayatollah Khomeini's principles are often called into question in such circumstances.

Qalibaf further strengthens his attack by revealing an alarming incident involving one of the current ministers: "Then, when you see that a cultural minister illegally imported goods last week, how do you expect ministers to prevent smuggling?" By discussing specific incidents, such as the alleged involvement of the cultural minister in smuggling, Qalibaf aims to stir public outrage and call for accountability. He then argues that a corrupt government cannot effectively combat corruption and smuggling: "How do you expect ministers to prevent smuggling?" In other words, he highlights the hypocrisy of the government and questions the ability of its ministers to take effective action against smuggling, given such incidents.

Overall, Qalibaf's statements in [52] serve as a political attack aimed at discrediting Mr. Jahangiri and his government, likely for his own political gain. By doing so, Qalibaf seeks to restore his damaged *âberu* in the eyes of *mardom*.

Based on the defensive and offensive reactions of Raisi and Qalibaf, it can be argued that Jahangiri could succeed in tarnishing his opponents' *âberu* by questioning their competence.

British politicians engage in similar tactics, as illustrated in Bull's (2009) study. When given a platform, they defend themselves to enhance or restore their own reputations while simultaneously attacking their rivals to damage their faces. However, in this study, Iranian politicians not only defend their policies, competencies, and services to protect their individual and collective *âberu*, but they also attack their opponents' character, policies, competencies, and judgment to damage both aspects of their rivals' *âberu*. They disclose unpleasant information and publicly accuse or criticize their opponents in ways that challenge sociocultural and religious norms, all in an effort to win the election.

5.3.2 Speaker Response-Seeking Questions (SRSQ)

Bousfield (2008: 132) defines challenges as follows: "Challenge – ask h a challenging question, question h's position, stance, beliefs, assumed power, rights, obligations, ethics, etc."

He generally categorizes them into *rhetorical challenges* and *response-seeking challenges*. According to Bousfield (2008: 242), a rhetorical question is “partly giving vent to the speaker’s anger and frustration and partly attacking the challenge-using interactant’s interlocutors.” He then identifies two types of response-seeking challenges. The first type allows “the intended addressee a chance to explain, or account for, their actions, beliefs, appearance, etc. (Bousfield 2008: 243).” However, “the second type of response-seeking challenge is that of the ‘Verbal Trap.’ The response which may be offered to a verbal trap type of challenge is simply an exercise in accepting a form of face damage, as the respondent will self-inflict face damage irrespective of the/any response given (Bousfield 2008: 243).” Culpeper (2011) also refers to these as *unpalatable questions or presuppositions* and classifies them within the category of conventionalized formulae of impoliteness triggers. It should be noted that while Bousfield (2008) and Culpeper (2011) conceptualize challenges as face-work, in this study, Iranian politicians adopt challenges specifically to threaten their rivals’ *âberu*.

In the research of Iranian presidential debates analyzed in this study, Iranian candidates ask both *rhetorical* and *response-seeking* questions. However, this research focuses on questions posed by a speaker and immediately answered by the speaker themselves. The findings indicate that presidential candidates use response-seeking questions to restore their own damaged *âberu* or to threaten their opponents’ *âberu*. These are referred to as *Speaker Response-Seeking Questions* (SRSQs), as they are both proposed and answered by the speaker to either restore the pragmatic components of their *âberu* or challenge those of their adversaries. The study reveals that candidates use questions to emphasize the importance of the information they intend to disclose as a response. Asking a question beforehand appears to capture the attention of both interlocutors and audiences, prompting them to focus more on the forthcoming response. Consequently, Iranian politicians in this study strategically pose and answer their own questions to achieve specific goals, such as raising awkward issues about their adversaries. Indeed, their interest does not lie in eliciting a response from their interlocutor but rather in challenging their opponent’s (political) *âberu*. They, therefore, provide sharp, immediate responses, often revealing unpleasant information to criticize, accuse, or disgrace their adversaries publicly. The behavior is considered *âberu*-threatening in Iranian (Islamic) culture.

It is worth noting that the format of Iranian presidential debates allows candidates to pose embarrassing questions and immediately answer them themselves while their opponents must remain silent until it is their turn to speak. Interestingly, in the 2021 televised presidential

debates, when one candidate speaks, the microphones of the other candidates are automatically turned off.

In the following sections, I examine how politicians use awkward questions to threaten their rivals' *âberu*, although in some cases, they also use them to restore their own *âberu*-which is not the focus of this research. Data analysis predominantly indicates that the *Speaker Response-Seeking Questions* (SRSQ) strategy is *âberu*-threatening, as it embeds various *âberu*-threatening strategies within. This combination intensifies *âberu*-threatening act due to its cumulative effect.

5.3.2.1 Rebuffing accusations through SRSQ

In the 2009 election, Mousavi accused Ahmadinejad of being responsible for the country's ongoing problems, directly challenging the IC of Ahmadinejad's *âberu*. In response, the incumbent Ahmadinejad employed SRSQ to counter Mousavi's accusations, as demonstrated in example [53].

[53]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

شما چند تا سفر کردید متوجه شدید که در کشور مشکلات هست، آیا این مشکلات در چهار سال ایجاد شده است پس بیست و چهار سال چه؟ یعنی یک گلستانی را دوستان جنابعالی متحدان جنابعالی به من بنده تحویل دادند و بنده این را تبدیل کردم به یک خرابه هیچ اتفاق مثبتی هم نیفتاده است تازه معلوم شده که بیکاری هست مشکل کشاورزی هست؟ شما چهار تا شهرستان و استان رفتید بنده همه ایران را دیده ام اگر بنا باشد از مشکلاتی که مردم دارند صحبت کنم تمام وقت این مناظره را هم اختصاص بدهیم باز وقت کم میآوریم. تازه معلوم شده است! در گذشته ما بیکاری نداشتیم، اعتیاد نداشتیم، کارگاهها مشکل نداشتند، مشکلات اقتصادی و کشاورزی نبود؟ مشکل صنعت نبود؟ همه اینها در این دوره؟ ای کاش شما برنامه ارایه میدادید

(Lit. Trans.) You some travels taken, realized that in country problems exist whether these problems in four years created are, then, the 24 years what? means a paradise friends esteemed allies esteemed your to me handed over and I this into turned ruin, no positive event also not has happened. Now became known that unemployment is, problem of agriculture is? You four cities and provinces went, I all Iran seen have if be the problems that people have talk I, all time this debate also dedicate I, again time short is. Just now became known! In the past,

we unemployment not had? addiction not had? workshops problem not had, difficulties economic and agricultural not exist? Problem industry not exist? All of these in this period? I wish you a plan present.

(Com. Trans.) You traveled a few times and realized that there are problems in the country. Were all these problems created in just the past four years? What about the previous 24 years? Are you saying that your esteemed allies and esteemed friends handed me a paradise, and I turned it into ruins, with nothing positive happening? Have you only now realized that we have unemployment and agricultural problems? You have visited just a few cities and provinces, but I have traveled across all of Iran. If I were to talk about all the problems people are facing, even if we dedicated this entire debate to them, we would still run out of time. So, have you just now realized these problems exist? We have no unemployment in the past? No addiction? No issues in workshops and factories? No economic or agricultural difficulties? No industrial problems? Were all of them created only in this administration's term? I wish you had presented a plan instead.

Example [53] is the incumbent's reaction to Mousavi's gradual accusations within his turns, attributing the country's problems to Ahmadinejad's government. Indeed, Mousavi challenges the IC of Ahmadinejad's *âberu* by claiming that these problems have not been adequately addressed during his presidency. Mousavi frequently accuses Ahmadinejad of inefficiency and failure in fulfilling his executive duties.

In Example [53], Ahmadinejad consistently uses the direct pronoun "you" throughout his statements, conveying a sense of directness and confrontation. This rhetorical choice suggests that Ahmadinejad is holding his interlocutor personally accountable for perceived governance failures. By repeatedly directing his remarks toward "you", he distances himself from responsibility for the issues raised and shifts the blame onto Mousavi. Ahmadinejad then sarcastically bombards Mousavi with a series of rhetorical and response-seeking questions. He criticizes both Mousavi and previous governments with the following questions: "Were all these problems created in just the past four years? What about the previous 24 years?" [53]. Ahmadinejad employs implicature to suggest that these problems are not solely attributable to the current administration but have deeper historical roots, referencing a 24-year time frame. Arguably, the initial question qualifies as an SRSQ if the second question is interpreted as an indirect response. Ahmadinejad asks the first question to examine the root of the problems;

however, he is not genuinely seeking a response from Mousavi, as he immediately links the issues to previous administrations in his follow-up question.

Ahmadinejad employs past-tense verbs such as *realized*, *created*, *handed*, and *turned*. These verbs imply a chronological sequence of events and reinforce his skepticism regarding the longstanding nature of these issues. Additionally, they associate the country's problems with previous administrations, prompting questions about their awareness, competence, and accountability. On the one hand, Ahmadinejad presupposes that past governments should be held responsible for the current problems, as their origins lie in the past. On the other hand, he explicitly criticizes and accuses Mousavi and his political allies of prolonged inefficiency. These confrontational questions serve as a medium for criticism and accusation, directly challenging the IC of his opponent's *âberu*. *Âberu*-threatening act intensifies when multiple strategies, such as accusation and criticism, are embedded within a single approach (SRSQ). The combination of these strategies reinforces one another, as Culpeper et al. (2003: 1561) state: "The cumulative effect of using mutually reinforcing impoliteness strategies is to boost the impoliteness" [53]. In this study, the cumulative effect of combining these strategies heightens *âberu*-threatening act against the target interlocutor. To defend himself, Ahmadinejad intertwines multiple *âberu*-threatening strategies to confront Mousavi with *âberu*-loss while simultaneously restoring his own damaged *âberu*.

In Example [53], Ahmadinejad persistently raises questions: "Are you saying that your esteemed allies and esteemed friends handed me a paradise, and I turned it into ruins, with nothing positive happening?" He sarcastically employs the honorific terms "esteemed allies and esteemed friends" while posing both polar and declarative questions. These questions, in and of themselves, expose unpleasant information. As such, they may be regarded as responses to an implicit question, given that Ahmadinejad introduces new information within the sequence of subsequent questions. Ahmadinejad does not expect Mousavi to respond. Instead, he uses rhetorical questions to vent his frustration, as Mousavi continuously holds him accountable for all the country's problems. Within these questions, Ahmadinejad assesses Mousavi and his allies' performance as poor and expresses frustration over their failure to acknowledge his contributions: "With nothing positive happening?" He then poses a chain of sarcastic questions, each containing or revealing unfavorable information. Arguably, each question conveys a critical remark that may serve as a partial answer to previous questions. Ahmadinejad constructs a sequence of questions in which he systematically exposes damaging information about Mousavi. This approach suggests that Ahmadinejad is responding to his earlier questions through subsequent ones.

In the following declarative question, Ahmadinejad explicitly questions Mousavi's awareness and insight: "Have you only now realized that we have unemployment and agricultural problems?" [53]. Arguably, Ahmadinejad implies that if Mousavi has just now recognized these issues, it is late-he should have identified them long ago. On one level, this is not a genuine question expecting a response but rather a sarcastic, confrontational remark intended to mock Mousavi publicly. On another level, Ahmadinejad challenges the IC of Mousavi's *âberu* by accusing him of incompetence in recognizing and addressing problems in a timely manner. To further belittle Mousavi, Ahmadinejad states: "You have visited just a few cities and provinces, but I have traveled across all of Iran..." [53].

Ahmadinejad then escalates his criticism, posing another sarcastic question: "So, have you just now realized these problems exist?" The adverb *just now* functions similarly to *now* in the previous utterance, sarcastically implying a delay in Mousavi's realization. Ahmadinejad asks this question in response to Mousavi's previous accusation that the incumbent is responsible for the country's problems. On one hand, Ahmadinejad frames a sarcastic question as a prelude to unveiling further accusations, embedding a list of issues within a chain of questions: "We had no unemployment before? No addiction? No issues in workshops and factories? No economic or agricultural difficulties? No industrial problems?" On the other hand, he uses these questions to push back against Mousavi's claims and reject accusations directed at his administration.

Ahmadinejad then raises several declarative questions aimed at restoring his damaged *âberu*. He explicitly criticizes Mousavi by asking: "Were all of them created only in this administration's term?" Here, the pronoun *them* refers to the aforementioned problems. Ahmadinejad poses this question as a defense mechanism, asserting that these issues are rooted in previous administrations. By employing SRSQs, Ahmadinejad also appeals to public sentiment regarding accountability, governance competence, and the necessity of addressing longstanding issues comprehensively. He persistently refutes allegations of incompetence, shifting responsibility for the problems onto past governments while protecting the IC of his *âberu*.

In Example [53], Ahmadinejad structures declarative questions with falling intonation, likely intending not only to assert his viewpoint but also to evoke a sense of exclamation. This aligns with Quirk et al.'s (1985) findings, which indicate that rising-tone tags seek verification, while falling-tone tags signal confirmation and function as exclamatory rather than genuine inquiries.

Thus, the frequent juxtaposition of sarcastic questions serves as a response to the very first question: “Were all these problems created in just the past four years?” [53]. Ahmadinejad answers his initial question through his subsequent questions, shaping his audience’s perception or directing media discourse toward a favorable interpretation—namely, that he is not the sole person responsible. In other words, through SRSQs, Ahmadinejad appeals to public sentiment on accountability, competence, and the need for structural reforms. Overall, Ahmadinejad responds to his first question by framing the country’s problems as systemic and historically rooted, rather than merely the outcome of his administration’s policies. Arguably, the first question functions as a Speaker Response-Seeking Question, followed by a series of sarcastic questions serving as responses.

Finally, in his defense, Ahmadinejad accuses Mousavi of failing to propose a viable plan, stating: “I wish you had presented a plan instead.” The use of *wish* likely conveys Ahmadinejad’s regret and emphasizes the expectation that candidates should present solutions during debates. He strategically employs the SRSQ strategy to deflect accusations against himself and safeguard his *âberu* from further threats.

5.3.2.2 Revealing obnoxious information about opponents through SRSQ

In the 2017 election, Qalibaf, Tehran’s mayor, frequently accuses the current president and his Vice President of corruption. Therefore, in the following example, [54], in his defense, Jahangiri, the Vice President, reveals obnoxious information about Qalibaf by formulating unpalatable questions.

[54]

6-2017- JHNGR, Debate No.3

شما با املاک مردم چه کردید؟ دو هزار و دویست میلیارد تومان اموال مردم را بخشیدید. آپارتمان دو میلیارد تومانی را دویست میلیون تومان بخشیدید. مجلس خواست تحقیق و تفحص کند رفتید لابی کردید و جلوی را گرفتید. چرا جلوی تحقیق و تفحص از شورای شهر را گرفتید؟ چرا کسی که افشا کرد را سه ماه در سلول انفرادی انداختید؟

(Lit. Trans.) You with properties *mardom* what did? 2,200 billion Tomans properties *mardom* granted away. Apartment 2 billion Tomans 200 million Tomans handed over. Parliament wanted investigation and examination do, you went lobbied and in front of it blocked. Why investigation and examination from

City Council away took? Why someone who revealed, 3 months in solitary confinement threw?

(Com. Trans.) What did you do with *mardom*'s (people's) properties? You granted away 2,200 billion Tomans of *mardom*'s properties. You handed over an apartment worth two billion Tomans for just 200 million Tomans. When Parliament wanted to investigate, you lobbied against it and blocked the inquiry. Why did you prevent an investigation into the City Council? Why did you throw the whistleblower into solitary confinement for three months?

According to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iranian politicians serve as guardians of public assets, *mardom*'s (people's) properties, or *beyt al-mal*, and they must ensure an equitable distribution of wealth. Consequently, Iranian politicians can enhance the IC of their *âberu* if they successfully fulfill this duty.

In example [54], Jahangiri strategically raises this issue to his advantage by asking Qalibaf, "What did you do with *mardom*'s (people's) properties?" By framing the matter as a question about *mardom*'s collective assets, Jahangiri appeals to public sentiment and implies that Qalibaf has betrayed the people's trust. However, Jahangiri is not genuinely seeking a response. Instead, he immediately answers his own question: "You granted away 2,200 billion Tomans of *mardom*'s properties. You handed over an apartment worth two billion Tomans for just 200 million Tomans." [54]

By citing "2,200 billion Tomans" and "an apartment worth two billion Tomans for just 200 million Tomans," Jahangiri substantiates his accusations against Qalibaf with specific figures, making them more concrete and compelling. In doing so, he directly challenges the IC of Qalibaf's *âberu*. As seen in [54], Jahangiri first poses an unpleasant question and then immediately follows it with damaging revelations about Qalibaf. In effect, Jahangiri accuses his opponent of embezzlement, favoritism, or corruption through an immediate utterance that functions as a response to his own question. In other words, Jahangiri questions the IC of Qalibaf's *âberu* by portraying him as an untrustworthy guardian of *mardom*'s properties or public assets, thereby holding him accountable for his actions.

Jahangiri then escalates his accusations by claiming that Qalibaf lobbied and obstructed an official investigation into his actions—an assertion that implies coercion (coercive speech act) and an attempt to silence dissent. He further unveils additional damaging information through rhetorical questions: "Why did you prevent an investigation into the City Council? Why did you throw the whistleblower into solitary confinement for three months?" [54]

On one level, Jahangiri reveals that Parliament and the City Council were unable to investigate the case. On another level, he suggests that Qalibaf actively blocked the investigation and silenced the source, potentially explaining why these institutions failed to act. In [54], Jahangiri presents the audience with incriminating information through his rhetorical questions and immediate elaborations, which directly threaten Qalibaf's *âberu*.

This study highlights the pivotal role of safeguarding *beyt al-mal* (*mardom*'s properties) or public assets as a fundamental duty and an *âberu*-boosting factor in the governance of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, when politicians face allegations of embezzlement or corruption, this responsibility shifts from an asset to a liability—a direct threat to their *âberu*. As a result, in an effort to deflect scrutiny and bolster their own standing, politicians often attempt to undermine their rivals by questioning their ability to protect *mardom*'s property—an expectation reinforced by the esteemed leader of the Revolution.

As Fetzer (2013) argues, political communication is deeply influenced by a society's shared cultural knowledge and norms. In the context of Iranian presidential debates, references to *beyt al-mal* serve not only as a means to enhance a politician's *âberu* but also as a rhetorical device that resonates with the audience's collective understanding of integrity and governance. By appealing to this shared cultural value, politicians seek to align themselves with public expectations and moral principles, thereby reinforcing their credibility and strengthening their political *âberu*. In other words, the interplay between safeguarding *beyt al-mal* and maintaining *âberu* in Iranian political discourse exemplifies Fetzer's assertion that cultural norms and ideologies are central to the construction and interpretation of political rhetoric. By aligning their rhetoric with these shared values, Iranian politicians navigate the complex landscape of public opinion and electoral competition.

In his defense, in [55], Qalibaf initially employs defensive strategies to restore his damaged *âberu*. He immediately retaliates by accusing Jahangiri and Rouhani of embezzlement, shifting the attack onto their *âberu*.

[55]

6-2017- QLBF, Debate No.3

در موضوع املاک نجومی من خودم نامه به دادستانی کل کشور نوشتم که موضوع را بررسی کنند و ایشان جواب دادند که جرمی رخ نداده است. تخلفات بانکی مسئولش دولت است. چرا از بانک گردشگری که متعلق به برادر خودتان است شروع نمی‌کنید و با آن برخورد نمی‌کنید. شما مثل آقای روحانی اینجا می‌ایستید و به مردم نگاه می‌کنید و دروغ می‌گویید. شما در همین دولت سیصد و پنجاه

متر زمین در ونک به قیمت صد و چهل هزار تومان گرفتید آن وقت ما که بر اساس مصوبه و قانونی به رفتگران و زحمتکشان زمین می‌دهیم خلاف کرده‌ایم؟

(Lit. Trans.) Regarding case properties astronomical, I myself a letter to the General Attorney of the country wrote that the matter investigate! and they replied that crime not had committed. Violations bank, responsibility of it the government is. Why from bank tourism, which belongs to brother your, you not start and action not take. You like Mr. Rouhani here standing and to people looking and lie telling. You in this government 350 square meters of land in Vanak at the price of 140,000 Tomans got. Yet, we who according to the resolution and lawfully to sweepers and laborers land distribute, wrongdoing has done?

(Com. Trans.) Regarding the astronomical properties case, I personally wrote a letter to the country's Attorney General, requesting an investigation, and they responded that no crime had been committed. Banking violations are the government's responsibility. Why don't you start with Tourism Bank, which belongs to your own brother, and take action against it? You stand here, looking at *mardom* (people), and lie-just like Mr. Rouhani. In this very government, you acquired 350 square meters of land in Vanak for just 140,000 Tomans. And yet, when we lawfully distribute land to sweepers and laborers based on resolutions, we are accused of wrongdoing?

In response to Jahangiri's accusation, Qalibaf asserts that he has taken significant action regarding astronomical properties to restore the IC of his *âberu*, stating, "Regarding the astronomical properties case, I personally wrote a letter to the country's Attorney General, requesting an investigation, and they responded that no crime had been committed" [55]. By using the subject pronoun 'I,' Qalibaf emphasizes his accountability in initiating an investigation into alleged wrongdoing. However, the authorities' response rejecting his request suggests a pragmatic act of denial or deflection. In other words, while his letter can be interpreted as a request for an investigation, the Attorney General's response serves as a declaration of innocence. Ultimately, Qalibaf attempts to refute Jahangiri's accusations.

Qalibaf then shifts the focus, holding the government responsible for banking violations and collectively attacking Jahangiri's *âberu* by accusing his brother of financial misconduct, a topic explored in the next chapter. In [55], he further accuses Jahangiri and Rouhani of deceiving *mardom*: "You stand here and look at *mardom* and tell lies like Mr. Rouhani" [55].

By using the direct address “You stand here...,” Qalibaf suggests a public or mediated setting, while his reference to Rouhani implies a broader political landscape involving the reformists. Since politicians are expected to be truthful and serve *mardom*, Qalibaf challenges the IC of their *âberu* by accusing them of dishonesty.

Qalibaf then deflects the accusations against himself by stating, “You acquired 350 square meters of land in Vanak for just 140,000 Tomans” [55]. His mention of specific locations such as ‘Vanak’ and the currency ‘Tomans’ adds local context and lends specificity and concreteness to his allegations. By accusing Jahangiri of corruption—an act that contradicts Islamic values and the principles of the Islamic Revolution—Qalibaf directly challenges the IC of his *âberu*.

Defending his own actions, Qalibaf continues, “And yet, when we lawfully distribute land to sweepers and laborers based on resolutions, we are accused of wrongdoing?” Here, he contrasts the collective pronoun ‘we’ with ‘you’ to highlight perceived disparities in treatment and to present himself as a politician committed to justice. His rhetorical question conveys exasperation, reinforcing his argument through a self-incriminating admission. Arguably, this serves as an attempt to restore the IC of his damaged *âberu* by demonstrating adherence to legal procedures.

Qalibaf’s defensive and offensive responses indicate that Jahangiri has effectively succeeded in threatening his *âberu*.

5.3.3 Disclaimers: Accusing or criticizing the opponent but without being negatively retypified by *mardom*

Overstreet and Yule (2001: 45) propose a basic structure for a formulaic construction in English called prospective disclaimers, which follows the form “not X or anything but Y.” This construction serves to project a potential offense that could lead to a negative retypification for the speaker unless disavowed in advance. Later, Tayebi and Parvaresh (2014) examine both prospective and retrospective disclaimers, highlighting their pragmatic functions, including the expression of modesty and the clarification of negative interpretations in Persian.

In the research, presidential candidates also utilize disclaimers, but in a way that functions as both *âberu*-threatening and *âberu*-defending or enhancing strategies, regardless of whether the disclaimers follow prospective or retrospective patterns. However, disclaimers in Western studies are typically employed solely as face-enhancing strategies.

As previously discussed, politicians enhance or protect their individual and collectivist *âberu* while simultaneously attacking their adversaries' *âberu*. In this context, disclaimers are used with a specific structure to serve particular goals. Candidates exploit disclaimers in two ways: (i) to disclaim an unwanted negative interpretation, safeguarding their own *âberu* and justifying themselves as considerate or thoughtful, and (ii) to damage their opponent's *âberu* by saying something problematic or unpleasant, thereby enacting an *âberu*-threatening act.

Iranian politicians employ disclaimers to avoid potential communication issues in line with Overstreet and Yule's (2001) findings. They use disclaimers to prevent their identity from being redefined as an "unthinking, irrational, or irresponsible member of society...who either does not know the rules or does not care about them" (McLaughlin, cited in Overstreet & Yule 2001: 49). Consequently, in this study, Iranian politicians mitigate the potential for negative outcomes when saying phrases like "I do/did not want to mention/express/disclose," explicitly stating their intention and then offering unpleasant information against their target. By doing so, they signal their awareness of moral codes and popular beliefs before attacking their rival's *âberu*. These disclaimers are often paired with statements like, "but you made me tell," "but I have to tell," or similar phrases, which allow them to shift blame onto their interlocutor when disclosing embarrassing information to accuse or disgrace them publicly. In essence, candidates disavow responsibility for potential negative retypifications by *mardom* or third parties whose evaluations may affect their political future.

This study demonstrates that disclaimers function as preemptive clarifications, signaling the speaker's desire for directness and transparency. While this strategy can be damaging to the speaker's own *âberu*, it is used to directly threaten the opponent's *âberu* as well.

In this study, Iranian politicians use disclaimers to indirectly accuse, criticize, and humiliate their rivals by disclosing undesirable information. However, it is important to note that they primarily use disclaimers to threaten their opponents' *âberu* while protecting their own, due to the cyclical nature of *âberu*.

This study does not focus on the specific formulaic structures of disclaimers. Instead, it examines the contrast between the (but)-preceding and (but)-following parts of the sentence, which allows us to observe how disclaimers fulfill their pragmatic functions. These functions help to preserve the speaker's *âberu* while simultaneously threatening the interlocutor's *âberu*.

I use the "but"-preceding sentence as a substitute for 'X' and the "but"-following sentence as a replacement for 'Y,' avoiding the exact formulaic structure of "not X or anything but Y" or its variations. Politicians typically use the "but"-preceding part to mitigate the threat

of being negatively retypified, thus avoiding *âberu* loss. However, they employ the “but”-following part of disclaimers to threaten their opponents’ *âberu* and intensify the damage by combining various *âberu*-threatening strategies. It should be noted that the conjunction ‘but’ may sometimes be absent at the surface level in some examples, but its presence can be inferred through the marked contrast between the sentences.

In this study, Iranian politicians often adopt a more direct communication style through disclaimers. Rather than using disclaimers to soften the potential harm to their opponents’ *âberu*, they use them to protect their own *âberu* and mitigate the risk of being misinterpreted by *mardom*. Iranian presidential candidates may choose to address issues directly, deliberately damaging or threatening their opponents’ *âberu* in their pursuit of office. In contrast, disclaimers in Western contexts are typically employed to downplay assertiveness and emphasize social harmony. As Overstreet and Yule (2001) note, disclaimers in Western contexts tend to be more indirect and polite, often involving hedging or softening language such as ‘I’m afraid,’ ‘perhaps,’ or ‘if I may,’ in order to avoid harming the interlocutor.

It is worth mentioning that the public nature of televised debates necessitates that Iranian politicians engage in strategic communication such as disclaimers. They must strike a balance between assertiveness and respect, as overly aggressive tactics could backfire and damage their *âberu*. On the other hand, they must also avoid appearing weak or overly deferential, as this could undermine their perceived strength and leadership.

Mousavi frequently criticizes Ahmadinejad’s foreign policies, which he argues endanger Iran’s *âberu* and its political standing in the Middle East and the West during the 2009 electoral debates. In response to Mousavi’s claims, Ahmadinejad uses IÂDA as his primary *âberu*-threatening strategy to discredit Mousavi in the following example [56].

[56]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

خیلی جالب است آقای موسوی در همین عربستان رابطه ما الان چطور است رابطه آقای موسوی چطور بوده؟ من نمیخواهم بگویم در دوره جناب آقای موسوی از گذرنامه و فرودگاه، ایشان چه بردند انجا و دستگیر شد و چه بساطی علیه کشور راه افتاد، اما همین مقدار می گویم که رابطه ما با آنها قطع شد. یعنی طوری عمل کردند در دوره آقای موسوی که رابطه از اساس قطع شد با عربستان (Lit. Trans.) Very interesting is Mr. Mousavi in this Saudi Arabia, relationship our now how is? Relationship of Mr. Mousavi how has been? I not want to say, in the period of Mr. Mousavi from passport and airport, they what took there and arrested and what a mess against country created was, this much I say that

relationship our with them severed was. Means acted in such a way in period of Mr. Mousavi that relationship from foundation severed with Saudi Arabia.

(Com. Trans.) It's very interesting, Mr. Mousavi! How is our relationship with Saudi Arabia now? How was the relationship during Mr. Mousavi's time? I don't want to say about passport and the airport during Mr. Mousavi's time, what he had taken there, he was arrested, what a mess was created against the country. I will say just this much that our relationship with them was severed. In other words, they acted in such a way during Mr. Mousavi's time that the relationship with Saudi Arabia was completely severed.

Ahmadinejad claims that his government could foster a better relationship with Saudi Arabia in comparison to Mousavi's. As such, the incumbent Ahmadinejad asks unpalatable questions to compare his period with Mousavi's: "How is our relationship with Saudi Arabia now? How was the relationship during Mr. Mousavi's time?" [56]. The speaker engages the audience or *mardom* and provokes thought when asking the above questions, tackling a significant diplomatic issue-the relationship with Saudi Arabia-within the context of Iranian politics. Ahmadinejad seeks to influence public opinion or shape the discourse surrounding diplomatic relations. The use of direct language and implicit accusations serves to capture attention and generate discussion among *mardom* or media consumers. Arguably, Ahmadinejad may shape public opinion in his favor to buy *âberu* for himself when claiming his government is more successful in foreign affairs.

In example [56], Ahmadinejad begins by explicitly stating his intention not to mention certain events, suggesting a reluctance to delve into potentially contentious or sensitive topics. By prefacing his remarks with "I do not want to say," he strategically distances himself from directly accusing his opponent to disavow or distance himself from *mardom*'s negative judgment. Although the incumbent Ahmadinejad claims that he does not intend to disclose any information against Mousavi, he reveals that Mousavi was arrested at the airport when saying, "I don't want to say about passport and the airport during Mr. Mousavi's time, what he had taken there, he was arrested, what a mess was created against the country." [56]. Ahmadinejad confronts Mousavi with public scandal and *âberu*-loss. Indeed, Ahmadinejad challenges Mousavi's stance on diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and highlights perceived failures or controversies during his tenure. Ahmadinejad's use of direct language and refusal to engage in circumlocution suggests a confrontational approach aimed at making a strong statement.

At first glance in [56], it may be difficult to assign this instance to a disclaimer strategy since the conventional discourse marker, ‘but,’ is absent at the surface level, and it is complicated to spot the but-preceding and but-following sentences. However, the contrast in the meaning between the sentences is noticeable. Ahmadinejad claims that he does not wish to reveal any obnoxious information, but he divulges that something awkward has happened at the airport; Mousavi was detained. Ahmadinejad implies the adverse consequences of this scandal negatively influencing Iran’s status. He knows that publicly disclosing unpleasant information is forbidden in Iranian culture and Islamic values, and it threatens his own and his interlocutor’s *âberu* due to the cyclical nature of *âberu*. As a result, Ahmadinejad manifests his concerns about moral norms and masks his true intention when initiating his words with “I do not want to say.” In other words, he attempts to maintain his *âberu* or avoid self-*âberu*-threatening acts when articulating the above utterance. Nonetheless, the utterance “I do not want to say” functions as a ‘preface’ to *âberu*-threatening act against the intended interlocutor, Mousavi. Then, against cultural norms, Ahmadinejad immediately publishes that the airport police apprehended Mousavi and confronts him with public scandal. Indeed, the incumbent Ahmadinejad threatens Mousavi’s *âberu* when he repeatedly divulges discrediting information within wh-phrases: “...during Mr. Mousavi’s time, what has he taken there, he was arrested, what a mess was created against the country.” [56]. The use of the phrase ‘during Mr. Mousavi’s time’ implies a historical context, indicating that the events in question occurred during the time when Mousavi held a position of power or authority. This temporal distancing serves to soften the impact of the subsequent remarks by framing them as a reflection on past occurrences rather than immediate criticisms. Indeed, Ahmadinejad intensifies *âberu*-damage to his opponent but attempts to protect his own.

As seen in [56], the incumbent discloses that Mousavi was arrested at the airport, threatening Iran’s status. At a deeper level, Ahmadinejad threatens the IC of Mousavi’s *âberu* when accusing him of putting Iran’s status at risk. Therefore, Ahmadinejad intensifies *âberu*-threatening act to his addressee when revealing more obnoxious information about him within the disclaimer strategy: initially disavowing himself and then accusing Mousavi of being an incompetent politician.

It is worth mentioning that Ahmadinejad also creates a sense of mystery or intrigue, inviting mardom to speculate about diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia without explicitly asking them. Indeed, the disclaimer allows Ahmadinejad to convey his message, accusing Mousavi and criticizing him for wrongdoing, while minimizing the risk of backlash or legal repercussions against himself. Subsequently, the incumbent continues to criticize Mousavi’s

tenure as prime minister, particularly highlighting his policies that led to the severing of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Ahmadinejad asserts, "...I will say just this much, that our relationship with them was severed" [56]. In this statement, Ahmadinejad reveals a crucial and damaging piece of information-the severing of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

We can break this statement into two distinct segments:

1. "... (but) I will say just this much,"
2. "that our relationship with them was severed."

Ahmadinejad's use of the phrase "I will say just this much" serves as a disclaimer, signaling his intent to avoid providing further, more damaging details. This is a strategic choice, as revealing additional embarrassing or unpleasant information could hurt both his and Mousavi's *âberu* (honor), considering the cyclical nature of *âberu* in Iranian political discourse. Consequently, the first segment of his statement functions as a defensive maneuver to safeguard the speaker's *âberu*.

Although the conjunction "but" is absent at the surface level, Ahmadinejad's phrase "just this much" still conveys an implicit contrast between what he could say and what he chooses to disclose. This indicates his concern about mitigating any potential *âberu*-damage to himself. By focusing on the fact that the relationship was severed, Ahmadinejad avoids discussing the broader consequences of Mousavi's actions that might further tarnish both of their *âberus*.

In other words, the phrase "...I will say just this much" emphasizes that Ahmadinejad intentionally limits the scope of his statement to avoid implicating Mousavi further. While the intention is to be direct, Ahmadinejad still feels the need to soften the impact of his words to minimize self-inflicted *âberu*-damage, as well as to prevent further damage to Mousavi's *âberu*. In this way, Ahmadinejad maintains his own *âberu* and adheres to cultural norms by reducing the potential *âberu*-damage to his opponent, Mousavi.

The phrase "just this much" serves to minimize the threat of negative interpretations by the audience. Ahmadinejad essentially narrows down the discussion, revealing only a portion of the damaging information, which limits the extent of *âberu*-threatening act. By doing so, he seeks to avoid the audience's negative judgment of himself and Mousavi, offering a partial defense against potential *âberu*-loss.

The core message of Ahmadinejad's statement, "that our relationship with them was severed," comes after the disclaimer, making it clear that this is the main point of his criticism. The disclaimer works to preemptively mitigate any potential negative repercussions for

Ahmadinejad while still delivering a strong accusation about the severed diplomatic ties, which ultimately damages Mousavi's *âberu*.

Thus, the disclaimer allows Ahmadinejad to protect his own *âberu* and avoid immediate *âberu*-loss, while still making a pointed critique of Mousavi's policies toward Saudi Arabia. The disclaimer functions as a tool to deflect any negative interpretations of his own character, while simultaneously attacking Mousavi's competence and decision-making. In this way, Ahmadinejad targets Mousavi's *âberu* by questioning his policies, accusing him of missteps, and highlighting the negative outcomes of those decisions, such as the severing of ties with Saudi Arabia.

As seen in [56], Ahmadinejad uses a blend of *âberu*-threatening strategies within the framework of the disclaimer, intensifying the damage to Mousavi's *âberu* while safeguarding his own.

According to the United States of Peace, the Iran Primer website, the largest population of Iran consists of youth, young activists, and students who have influenced the Islamic Republic's political agenda since 1997. The youth, including students, were also the biggest bloc involved in the sustained 'people power movement for democratic change' after the 2009 presidential election. Therefore, in the election of 2013, Qalibaf frequently accuses Rouhani of suppressing university students to challenge the *IC* of his *âberu*. In his defense, Rouhani pushes back the accusations against Qalibaf.

[57]

05-2013-RHN, Debate No.3

آقای قالیباف! خیلی دلم نمی خواست بگویم اما شما مرا ناچار کردید، آنجا بحث این بود که شما می گفتید دانشجویان بیایند تا ما گاز انبری برنامه داریم تا کار را تمام کنیم. ما می گفتیم راه این نیست که مجوز بدهیم بعد گاز انبری آنها را دستگیر کنیم، راه این است که از ابتدا به آنها بگوییم یا مجوز نیست یا اگر هست

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Qalibaf! Very heart my not wanted say but you me forced, there, argument was that you said students come untill we gas plier plan have to job finish. We said way this not is that permission give then gas plier them arrest, way this is that from beginning to them tell or permission not is or if is... (Com. Trans.) Mr. Qalibaf! I really didn't want to say this, but you've forced me to. The issue there was that you were saying students should come, and then we have a clampdown plan to finish the job. We were saying that this is not the

way: to give permission and then arrest them with a clampdown. The way is to tell them from the beginning, either there is no permission, or if there is, ...

Example [57] reverberates with tension and urgency. In this example, Rouhani applies disclaimers to avoid negative interpretation by the electorate or *mardom* when publicly disclosing unpleasant information about Qalibaf and challenging the integrity of his *âberu*. Before attacking Qalibaf, Rouhani highlights that his rival, Qalibaf, has forced him to speak against him: “I really didn’t want to say this, but you’ve forced me to.” [57]. Rouhani uses the honorific ‘Mr.’ when addressing Qalibaf, which signals respect and formality on one hand. On the other hand, he directly addresses Mr. Qalibaf, indicating that the utterance is directed towards him and serves to communicate a message. Rouhani then reveals his reluctance, a tension between his personal conviction and external pressure, when articulating the above utterance. The pragmatic force lies in the admission of constraint, implying that circumstances compelled him to speak. Indeed, Rouhani tries to justify his behavior, which not only damages his rival’s *âberu* but also puts his own *âberu* at risk. Rouhani blames his damaging behavior on Qalibaf before disclosing unpleasant facts or information, saying “but you forced me to.” Afterwards, Rouhani attacks Qalibaf’s *âberu* by revealing his strategy to arrest rebellious students.

In example [57], Rouhani spins the case of the students to his advantage when accusing his opponent, Qalibaf, of adopting a clampdown strategy to arrest students. The suggestion of using such a method to arrest protesting students sparks an ethical debate. Rouhani protects his own political *âberu* when claiming that he always insists on being honest with this sensitive class of society, as in his following utterances: “The issue there was that you were saying students should come, and then we have a clampdown plan to finish the job. We were saying that this is not the way: to give permission and then arrest them with a clampdown. The way is to tell them from the beginning, either there is no permission, or if there is, ...” Pragmatically, this statement underscores transparency and ethical communication. It challenges the conventional approach of withholding information until after actions are taken. Rouhani effectively employs a directive speech act when he instructs Qalibaf: “The way is to tell them from the beginning.” This directive serves as a pragmatic move, aiming to elicit a response from Mr. Qalibaf in his subsequent turn.

The incumbent Rouhani threatens Qalibaf’s *âberu* when he publicly discloses Qalibaf’s intention to detain rebellious students. However, at the beginning of this example, he disavows himself initially to avoid any negative retypification by *mardom* before threatening Qalibaf’s

âberu. Afterwards, Rouhani immediately enhances the integrity of his own *âberu* by claiming that he is a moderate politician and asserting students' rights.

In [57], the phrase “you forced me to” functions as an assertive speech act. It carries the weight of external pressure, implying that circumstances compelled Rouhani to disclose unpleasant information. Indeed, Rouhani justifies his *âberu*-offensive move, and the pragmatic importance lies in the tension between reluctance and necessity. The phrase “you forced me to” lies between an *âberu*-defensive expression “I really didn't want to say this” and *âberu*-offensive utterances like “The issue there was that you were saying students should come, and then we have a clampdown plan to finish the job.” Indeed, the phrase “you forced me to” is still part of an *âberu*-defensive structure. Rouhani needs to assure himself that he can mitigate the audience's negative interpretation before threatening Qalibaf's *âberu* when stating, “The issue there was that you were saying students should come, and then we have a clampdown plan to finish the job” [57]. If we remove the in-between phrase, “you forced me to,” the contrast between the reluctance to disclose information and the immediate disclosure becomes evident: “I really didn't want to say this, but you've forced me to. The issue there was that you were saying students should come, and then we have a clampdown plan to finish the job” [57]. Therefore, Rouhani extends his *âberu*-defensive utterances to avoid self-*âberu* damage when inserting the phrase “you forced me to” between the “but”-preceding and “but”-following sentences.

In short, the incumbent Rouhani adopts a disclaimer strategy, allowing him to distance himself from the forthcoming revelation while threatening the integrity of Qalibaf's *âberu*. The speaker may succeed in swaying public opinion or influencing perceptions of Mr. Qalibaf's actions.

Qalibaf's *âberu*-defensive response in [58] also confirms that Rouhani could have succeed in damaging Qalibaf's *âberu*. However, disclaimers are among the most solid *âberu*-threatening strategies, regardless of the intended interlocutors' responses, due to the cumulative effect of various linguistic strategies. As a result, Tehran's mayor, Qalibaf, insists on maintaining an excellent relationship between the police and students, since the youth comprise the largest electorate population.

[58]

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بهترین رابطه و ارتباط بین پلیس و دانشجو در زمان تصدی مسئولیت بنده بود یک نمونه شما بگویید
که پلیس آن موردی که شما آن را گاز انبری می نامید انجام داده باشند

(Lit. Trans.) Best relationship and connection between police and student in time tenure mine in office was, an example you tell that police that situation you it gas pliers calling have done.

(Com. Trans.) The best relationship between the police and students was during my tenure in office. Can you give me an example of a situation where the police did what you call a clampdown?

As seen, Qalibaf's statement is a defensive strategic move when he asserts that the best relationship between the police and students occurred during his tenure as head of the police. By emphasizing his time in office, he positions himself as a bridge-builder, fostering positive associations with law enforcement. Moreover, Qalibaf's choice of words, such as "best" and "during my tenure," carries pragmatic weight. It subtly conveys authority, competence, and a sense of order under his leadership.

On one level, Qalibaf's response serves as self-presentation. By highlighting his past role, he constructs an image of a capable leader who can navigate complex dynamics. On another level, his response may indirectly critique the current administration's handling of police-student relations, with the unstated message that he could do better. As a result, he may succeed in tapping into collective memory, suggesting that things were better under his watch.

Based on the current study, candidates use disclaimers to intensify *âberu*-threat to their rivals and turn the electorate's opinion against them in order to emerge as the clear winner of the election. However, they must show that they are abiding by cultural, societal, and religious norms. Therefore, they initially disavow themselves to avoid being retypified as indiscreet or *âberu-bar* (someone who frequently threatens others' *âberu*). Iranians are expected to enhance each other's *âberu*; otherwise, they risk threatening their own *âberu* as well. In this respect, Iranian politicians adopt disclaimers to defend their own *âberu* before damaging their opponents' *âberu*. Disclaimers are strategies through which Iranian politicians can protect their own *âberu* while attacking their opponents' *âberu*, rather than adding to their opponents' *âberu*, as would be expected by Iranian cultural norms. Indeed, the adoption of disclaimers by Iranian politicians reflects a calculated move. By preemptively disavowing negative traits, they shield their *âberu* from potential attacks.

In the 2017 presidential debates, Qalibaf and Raisi attacked Rouhani, his first Vice President, Jahangiri, and his government on their performance. In his defense, Rouhani accuses Qalibaf of corruption, as seen in example [59].

[59]

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من برخی نکات را نمی‌خواهم و مایل به مطرح کردن آن نیستم پرونده سال هشتاد و چهار آقای قالیباف دست من بود و نگذاشتم منتشر شود. و با بعضی‌ها در دبیرخانه دعوا کردم تا این پرونده در هنگام انتخابات منتشر نشود من اگر آن روز مردانگی نکرده بودم شما اینجا نبودید

(Lit. Trans.) I some points not want and inclined to raising them not am, file year 84 of Mr. Qalibaf hand my was and not allow I it published be. And with some in secretariat argued I so this file in time of elections not published be, I if that day integrity not done had I, you here not would be.

(Com. Trans.) I do not want to mention some points, and I am not inclined to raise them. The file from 1384 regarding Mr. Qalibaf was in my hands, and I did not allow it to be published. I argued with some people in the secretariat that this file was not published during the elections. If I had not acted with integrity that day, you would not be here.

The incumbent Rouhani won reelection to his second term in 2017. In example [59], Rouhani is aware that revealing unpleasant information publicly can also damage his own *âberu*. He therefore employs the disclaimer strategy to distance himself from the revelation, claiming that he does not wish to bring up unpleasant matters before accusing Qalibaf of corruption. By saying, “I do not want to mention some points, and I am not inclined to raise them,” he shields his *âberu* and prevents a negative retypification by the third party, or the *mardom*.

In other words, Rouhani’s opening statement in example [59], “I do not want to mention some points, and I am not inclined to raise them,” is a calculated choice. By withholding certain information, he maintains a stance of discretion. However, the curtain lifts when he reveals that Mr. Qalibaf’s case was in his hands back in 1984. The unspoken implication is that Qalibaf may have a hidden scandal in his past.

From a linguistic perspective, while the conjunction “but” is absent on the surface, its presence is implied, as the two sentences stand in stark contrast semantically: “I do not want to mention some points, and I am not inclined to raise them. (but) The file from 1384 regarding Mr. Qalibaf was in my hands, and I did not allow it to be published.” Rouhani’s magnanimity becomes evident when he admits to suppressing the case during the election. The implied message to his audience could be: *I spared you from scandal, Mr. Qalibaf*. Rouhani then escalates *âberu*-threatening act when he expresses the potentially dire consequences of

publishing Qalibaf's case: "If I had not acted with integrity that day, you would not be here." It seems that had Qalibaf's case been investigated, it could have led to his disqualification from the election, thus threatening the integrity of his *âberu*.

Rouhani perceives that publicizing harmful information against Qalibaf would also harm his own *âberu*, and thus, he strategically uses the disclaimer to protect his reputation. By withholding the publication of Qalibaf's case, Rouhani avoids potential backlash. He mitigates any potential self-*âberu* damage when he adds, "I argued with some people in the secretariat that this file should not be published during the elections. If I had not acted with integrity that day, you would not be here."

On one hand, Rouhani aims to present himself as a moral person who previously spared Qalibaf's *âberu*. On the other hand, he is shaping public opinion against his rival, Qalibaf. There is a distinct contrast between Rouhani's words throughout this passage. While he threatens Qalibaf's *âberu*, he simultaneously works to protect his own *âberu* by portraying himself as magnanimous in Qalibaf's case.

As seen in examples [57] and [59], Iranian politicians use disclaimers to reveal unpleasant information about their opponents, thereby threatening their *âberu*, but first protect their own *âberu*.

5.3.4 Disclosure: Revealing opponent's corruption

Politicians disclose offensive or degrading information about their opponents, which can be inherently shameful or damaging. The intent behind this disclosure is multifaceted: it can tarnish the opponent's reputation or political *âberu*, weaken their position, or sway public opinion against them.

As mentioned in the previous segment (5.3.3), revealing information that is meant to be kept secret often leads to bilateral *âberu* damage due to cultural norms. Iranian politicians threaten both their opponents' *âberu* and their own when violating *âberu* cultural schema. Consequently, Iranian politicians often use disclaimers to protect their own *âberu* first and then attack their opponents' *âberu*. As a result, they accuse, criticize, humiliate, and disgrace their adversaries through a disclaimer strategy when revealing secrets or unpleasant information. In other words, Iranian politicians conceal their actions with disclaimers when unveiling uncomfortable truths. These linguistic maneuvers soften the impact, shielding their own *âberu*.

However, due to the zero-sum nature of presidential debates, Iranian politicians also adopt a disclosure strategy, revealing confidential information without being overly concerned

about negative judgment from the *mardom*. Still, they typically begin with rhetorical questions to blame their opponents and justify themselves when disclosing offensive information. This approach serves as a preface to raise uncomfortable issues in the audience's mind, exacerbating *âberu* loss of their interlocutors. Politicians publicize displeasing information to disgrace their opponents. In fact, they reveal awkward details to accuse, criticize, or deflect accusations against them.

There is a distinction between disclosure and disclaimer strategies: Iranian politicians intentionally disclose information to damage their rivals' political *âberu* when using disclosures. However, they strategically soften the impact of the disclosure on their own *âberu* when using disclaimers. Arguably, disclosure risks backlash, potentially resulting in *âberu* damage, while disclaimer mitigates this risk. Iranian politicians likely consider the cyclical nature of *âberu* damage when employing these strategies. In summary, disclosure is more aggressive and *âberu*-damaging, whereas disclaimer is more protective and *âberu*-defensive. These strategies, like twin blades, cut through Iranian political discourse, revealing hidden truths, protecting *âberu*, and shaping public perception.

The following examples, from [60] to [65], are extracted from televised presidential debates in 2017. In example [60], Qalibaf discloses that Rouhani and his government are corrupt.

[60]

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وقتی حدود هشتصد متر زمین را در سال هفتاد دو و نیم میلیون تومان می‌گیرید حتما نمی‌توانید برخورد کنید. سیصد و هشتاد و پنج متر زمین را در دهه هشتاد به متری صد و هشتاد هزار تومان از مردم گرفتید. بعد به ما می‌گویند املاک نجومی. شما چرا آنها را به مردم نمی‌دهید آن هم به نقد و قسط. شما می‌خواهید با فساد مبارزه کنید؟ اینها درد مردم ماست
من مدارکی دارم که اثبات می‌کند این دو فرد محترم اراضی دارند

(Lit. Trans.) When almost 800 square meters land in year 82 two and half million tomans take definitely not can fight. 385 square meters land in decade 80 per meter 180 thousand tomans from *mardom* took. Then to us say properties astronomical. You why them to people not give, that too in cash and installments. You claim with corruption fight? these pain *mardom* our are. I documents have that prove this two people esteemed lands have.

(Com. Trans.) In 1991, you took almost 800 square meters of land for just two and a half million Tomans. Clearly, you can't fight (corruption). In the 80s, you

took 385 square meters of *mardom*'s (people's) land at a rate of 180,000 Tomans per square meter. And then, (they are) accusing us of owning astronomical properties! Why don't you give the land back to the people, either in cash or installments? You are claiming to fight corruption? These are the pains of *mardom* (people).

I have the documents to prove that these two esteemed people own lands.

In example [60], Qalibaf discloses or claims that Rouhani has confiscated *mardom*'s land, which are their statutory rights: "In 1991, you took almost 800 square meters of land for just two and a half million Tomans. Clearly, you can't fight (corruption). In the 80s, you took 385 square meters of *mardom*'s (people's) land at a rate of 180,000 Tomans per square meter." Qalibaf aims to lend credibility to his accusations by referring to specific numbers (e.g., 800 meters) and temporal references (e.g., in 1991). These specifics create an illusion of accuracy and bolster his argument. Such a claim or disclosure, regardless of its veracity, can threaten Rouhani's *âberu*, as he is expected to be the guardian of *mardom*'s rights. Indeed, Qalibaf challenges the integrity of Rouhani's *âberu*. Additionally, in his assertive tone, Qalibaf conveys that Rouhani cannot combat corruption.

Rouhani and his Vice President, Jahangiri, frequently accuse Qalibaf of earning astronomical salaries and huge bonuses during the debates. After divulging obnoxious information and threatening their opponents' *âberu*, Qalibaf turns the accusation back onto the incumbent and his Vice President to defend his own *âberu*, surprisingly mentioning, "And then, (they are) accusing us of owning astronomical properties!" In [60], Qalibaf accuses his intended interlocutors, Rouhani and Jahangiri, of confiscating people's properties or *Beyt al-mal* and not returning them in an unpalatable question: "Why don't you give the land back to the people, either in cash or installments?" Indeed, Qalibaf does not seek a response but insists on revealing that Rouhani's government is corrupt when he subsequently questions the current government's competency and sarcastically expresses, "You are claiming to fight corruption?" [60] Qalibaf claims that Rouhani and his team are involved in corruption and, therefore, cannot effectively fight it. In other words, Qalibaf aims to expose perceived hypocrisy by highlighting the discrepancy between his rivals' past actions (confiscating land) and present accusations against himself (owning astronomical properties). In this manner, in [60], he refers to their inefficacy as *mardom*'s pain in his subsequent utterance: "These are the pains of *mardom* (people)." Qalibaf appeals to emotion by describing the situation as "the pains of *mardom*,"

evoking empathy and indignation. Arguably, Qalibaf challenges the integrity of Rouhani's *âberu* by accusing him of being an incompetent and corrupt politician.

Qalibaf continues to accuse the incumbent Rouhani and his Vice President of embezzlement when claiming that he has documents to substantiate his allegations: "I have the documents to prove that these two esteemed people own land." [60]. On one hand, Qalibaf accuses the current government of corruption, claiming he has the documents to back up his assertions. On the other hand, he sarcastically discloses that the two honorable politicians illegally possess extra land. It should be noted that the terms 'corruption' and 'land' provide context for understanding the accusations. Generally, Qalibaf seeks to raise awareness, challenge authority, and evoke empathy among the public.

As seen in [60], disclosure and unpalatable questions serve as mediums for accusation and intensify public disgrace and *âberu*-loss for the intended opponents, Rouhani and Jahangiri. In his defense, Rouhani also divulges awkward information and moves forward with further accusations against Qalibaf in example [61].

[61]

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من اگر آن روز مردانگی نکرده بودم شما اینجا نبودید، طرح شما همیشه لوله کردن بود. شما که هر وقت به دبیرخانه می آمدید می گفتید بگذارید من دانشجویان را دو ساعته لوله می کنم. اگر ما مخالفت نکرده بودیم همه دانشگاه های ایران پر از لوله بود شما ریاکاری می کنید اگر من تخلف کردم بهتر است شکایت کنید، اگر بحث زمین است اگر من اضافه داشتم تماما متعلق به شما باشد و اگر تخلف کردم شکایت کنید و ناراحتید بهتر است به املاک طرقله نیز که در دست اقوام شما است رسیدگی شود.

(Lit. Trans.) If I that day not acted integrity, you here not would be, plan your always piping was. You that every time to secretariat came said let me students two-hourly pipe do. If we opposit not, all universities of Iran full of pipes would be.

You hypocrisy do if I violation did better is complaint do, if discussion land is, if I excess had entirely belong to you be and if violation did complain and if upset you, better is to properties Torqaba also that in hand of relatives your is investigated be.

(Com. Trans.) If I had not acted with integrity that day, you would not be here. Your plan was always to 'pipe' (the students). Every time you came to the secretariat, you would say, 'let me deal with (pipe) the students within two

hours.’ If we hadn’t opposed it, all the universities in Iran would have been full of ‘pipes.’

You are being hypocritical. If I have violated the rules, it is better to file a complaint. If it’s about the land, if I have extra, it all belongs to you. And if I have violated the rules, file a complaint. If you are upset, it is better to investigate the properties in Torqabeh, which are in the hands of your relatives.

Rouhani begins his statement with an assertive speech act: “If I had not acted with integrity that day, you would not be here.” This conveys information about a hypothetical situation, implying that Qalibaf owes his political presence to Rouhani’s benevolence. Additionally, Rouhani employs a vocative speech act by directly addressing his opponent: “Mr. Qalibaf!” This signals his focus and intensifies the personal nature of his remarks.

In [61], the incumbent first applies an *âberu*-offensive strategy by exposing Qalibaf’s alleged inhumane policy against students and their right to protest. He states: “Every time you came to the secretariat, you would say, let me deal with (pipe) the students within two hours.’ Rouhani ironically accuses Qalibaf of suppressing student demonstrations. The word “pipe” (لوله کردن / *lule kardan*) in Persian slang metaphorically refers to subjugating or forcefully controlling someone, and in this context, it likely implies arresting or suppressing students’ protests. By making this claim, Rouhani distances himself from Qalibaf’s alleged actions and threatens the institutional component (IC) of Qalibaf’s *âberu* by portraying him as authoritarian. In doing so, he challenges Qalibaf’s standing among students, a politically active demographic that constitutes a major portion of the electorate. As a result, Rouhani’s accusation may erode Qalibaf’s support among students, thereby diminishing his political *âberu*.

After attacking Qalibaf’s *âberu*, Rouhani shifts to an *âberu*-defensive strategy to protect his own reputation. He counters Qalibaf’s accusations of corruption by stating: “You are being hypocritical. If I have violated the rules, you should file a complaint. If it’s about land, if I own extra, it is all yours. And if I have broken the law, then take legal action.” [61]. By accusing Qalibaf of hypocrisy, Rouhani highlights perceived inconsistencies between Qalibaf’s accusations and his own conduct. Furthermore, Rouhani challenges Qalibaf to take legal action if any wrongdoing has occurred. This rhetorical move serves to restore his damaged *âberu* by asserting his innocence and presenting himself as transparent and law-abiding. He then reinforces his credibility by stating that he possesses no extra land, even going so far as to sarcastically offer it to Qalibaf, further attempting to assure the audience of his integrity.

Finally, Rouhani escalates the attack by delivering a final blow against Qalibaf's *âberu* by implicating him and his associates in corruption: "If you are upset, it is better to investigate the properties in Torqabeh, which are in the hands of your relatives." Here, Rouhani shifts from self-defense to offense, challenging Qalibaf's collectivist *âberu* (See Chapter Six). By extending his accusations beyond Qalibaf to his network of relatives, Rouhani intensifies *âberu*-threatening act and puts Qalibaf on the defensive.

In response to Rouhani's *âberu*-threatening strategy, Qalibaf defends his own *âberu* in the following example [62].

[62]

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شما گفتید: قالیباف! بابا دنبال دردمری؟ ول کن بگذار دو روزی بیایند و بروند

(Lit. Trans.) You said: Qalibaf! Man! after trouble you are? Come on! Let two days come they and go they.

(Com. Trans.) You said: Qalibaf! Are you looking for trouble? Forget it! Let them come and go for two days.

In his defense, in [62], Qalibaf employs an assertive speech act when stating, "Are you looking for trouble?" This conveys information about Rouhani's intentions while being challenged. In his following utterances, Qalibaf then adopts a directive speech act, saying, "Let them come and go for two days," which suggests a course of action (allowing something to happen) while also asserting authority and control. The extract highlights a confrontation or disagreement between Qalibaf and Rouhani.

As seen, Qalibaf claims that Rouhani advised him to ignore student demonstrations, implying an irresponsible approach by Rouhani toward student affairs. By publicly disclosing their private conversation, Qalibaf puts Rouhani's political *âberu* at risk, confronting him with the possibility of being retypified as an irresponsible leader.

Rouhani's immediate response in [63] indicates that Qalibaf has successfully threatened the IC of his *âberu*. In the context of the Islamic Republic, politicians are expected to be responsible for the entire nation, particularly the poor and the youth, including students. Consequently, the incumbent retaliates against Qalibaf, responding with:

[63]

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آیا من این موضوع را مطرح کردم؟ سندش کجاست؟ من همان مطلبی را گفتم که قبلا نیز به آن اشاره کردم؛ گفتم اگر می خواهید اینها را بیاورید در خیابان سپس آنها را گازانبری محاصره کنید برایشان پرونده بسازید این کار را انجام ندهید اگر هم می خواهید آزاد بگذارید آزاد بگذارید

(Lit. Trans.) I this matter brought up? Evidence its where is? I the same said that before also mentioned, I said if want you these bring in street, them with gas plier surround, case for them fabricate, this action not do if also want you free, set free.

(Com. Trans.) Did I bring up this matter? Where is the evidence? I said the same thing I had mentioned before. I said, if you want to bring them into the streets, then surround them with a clampdown and fabricate cases against them-don't do it. But if you want to let them be free, then let them be free.

In example [63], in his defense, Rouhani employs straightforward language, articulating concise and direct statements. He first poses a speaker response-seeking question (SRSQ) in surprise, then immediately provides his own answer to defend his damaged *âberu*: “Did I bring up this matter? Where is the evidence? I said the same thing I had mentioned before. I said, if you want to bring them into the streets, then surround them with a clampdown and fabricate cases against them—don’t do it. But if you want to let them be free, then let them be free.”

The initial SRSQ serves as an assertive question, emphasizing Rouhani’s point. His follow-up question, “Where is the evidence?” functions as an imperative, challenging Qalibaf to present proof. This underscores the need for concrete evidence to substantiate the accusation.

When Rouhani immediately follows up with “I said the same thing,” he reaffirms that he has previously expressed the same position, emphasizing consistency in his stance. Then, through conditional instructions (“if you want to bring them into the streets...”), he describes a specific course of action, highlighting the apprehension of students, their containment through a clampdown, and the fabrication of cases against them.

Rouhani’s final statement is *âberu*-threatening, as terms such as ‘apprehension,’ ‘clampdown,’ and ‘fabricate cases’ imply force or urgency, particularly in relation to student protests. However, he concludes by advocating leniency with “let them be free,” implying that the students should be released without legal consequences.

As observed in [62], Qalibaf successfully prompts Rouhani to respond immediately in [63] to defend or restore his damaged *âberu*. In other words, Qalibaf effectively threatens the

IC of Rouhani's *âberu* by publicly revealing their private conversation, regardless of its accuracy.

In example [64], in response to Qalibaf's *âberu*-offensive behavior, Jahangiri retaliates by divulging incriminating information to threaten Qalibaf's *âberu*.

[64]

05-2017-JHNGR, Debate No.3

شیوه برخورد شما با ما فرق دارد شما روحیه نظامی‌گری دارید و می‌خواهید با آن شیوه کشور را اداره کنید.... امروز شما خود را طرفدار خود و شش درصدی می‌دانید و بنده طرفدار چهار درصدی شدم در زمان تحریم‌ها وقتی که مردم به دنبال دارو می‌گشتند شما بستنی چهار صد هزار تومانی را برای چه کسانی در برج میلاد سرو می‌کردید؟ بنده با تمام وجود از بخش خصوصی دفاع می‌کنم اما با هیچ یک از عوامل بخش خصوصی سر و سری ندارم و نداشتم

(Lit. Trans.) Approach handling your with us differs. You spirit militaristic have, and seek you with that approach country govern.... Today yourself as supporter 96 percent regard, and I supporter 4 percent became. In times of sanctions, when people for medicine searching, ice cream 400 thousand tomans for whom at Milad Tower served you? I with wholeheart from private sector defend, but with none of the agents of private sector a dealings covert not have and not had.

(Com. Trans.) Your approach to handling matters is different from ours. You have a militaristic spirit (mindset) and seek to govern the country in that manner.... Today, you regard yourself as a supporter of the 96%, while I have been reduced to a supporter of the 4%. During the sanctions, when people were searching for medicine, for whom were you serving 400,000-Toman ice cream in Milad Tower? I wholeheartedly defend the private sector, but I have never had, nor do I have, any covert dealings with its agents.

Qalibaf frequently divides society into two categories: the 96% group and the 4% group. According to his perspective, 96% of the population struggles to afford their daily lives, while the remaining 4% are aristocratic. Qalibaf claims that he has been advocating for the rights of the 96%, whereas Rouhani and his Vice President have been empowering the 4% group. Indeed, Qalibaf targets the IC of Jahangiri's *âberu* by accusing him of endorsing aristocracy.

The prevailing view is that, in example [64], Jahangiri accuses Qalibaf of having a militaristic spirit and running his affairs with that same mindset. Interestingly, Rouhani also

frequently portrays Qalibaf as a suppressor due to his military background in the police force. Consequently, Jahangiri attempts to disqualify Qalibaf from the presidential race on the grounds of his militaristic approach, thereby challenging the IC of his *âberu* and distancing the current government from him when stating: “Your approach to handling matters is different from ours. You have a militaristic spirit (mindset) and seek to govern the country in that manner.”

By asserting, “Your approach to handling matters is different from ours,” Jahangiri implies a critical evaluation of the contrasting approaches between his party and his opponent. He then characterizes Qalibaf’s approach through the following words: “You have a militaristic spirit (mindset).” Indeed, in [64], Jahangiri questions Qalibaf’s competence.

Jahangiri further accuses Qalibaf of hypocrisy, exposing his dealings with a prominent private sector figure at Milad Tower through a pointed and unpalatable question in [64]: “When people were searching for medicine, for whom were you serving 400,000-Toman ice cream in Milad Tower?” By mentioning “400,000-Toman ice cream in Milad Tower,” Jahangiri references a specific incident known to the audience, emphasizing the stark contrast between economic hardship and extravagance. The mention of expensive ice cream during a time of sanctions serves as a powerful symbol of indulgence, excess, and insensitivity to the struggles faced by *mardom* (people). It also suggests hypocrisy or a disconnect between political leaders and the everyday concerns of *mardom*, resonating emotionally with the audience.

Jahangiri threatens his opponent’s *âberu* by illustrating that, while the people were suffering under sanctions, Qalibaf was more concerned with catering to a private sector elite. Although public disclosure is inherently damaging to one’s *âberu*, Jahangiri goes further by publicly accusing Qalibaf of corruption. In doing so, he refutes Qalibaf’s claim of being a staunch advocate for the 96% population. In other words, the Vice President communicates that Qalibaf is not a genuine supporter of the populace but rather a corrupt politician. By posing an unpalatable question and embedding unpleasant information within it, Jahangiri leverages this rhetorical strategy as a means of disclosure.

Iranian politicians frequently exploit framing questions to expose damaging information about their opponents. In this study, framing questions serve as a strategic tool for revealing unpalatable truths.

In response to Jahangiri’s *âberu*-threatening behavior, Qalibaf also discloses certain information in an attempt to restore his own *âberu* while simultaneously attacking Jahangiri’s *âberu* in the following example [65].

[65]

05-2017-QLBF, Debate No.3

تخلفات بانکی مسئولش دولت است. چرا از بانک گردشگری که متعلق به برادر خودتان است شروع نمی‌کنید و با آن برخورد نمی‌کنید. شما مثل آقای روحانی اینجا می‌ایستید و به مردم نگاه می‌کنید و دروغ می‌گویید. شما در همین دولت سیصد و پنجاه متر زمین در ونک به قیمت صد و چهل هزار تومان گرفتید آن وقت ما که بر اساس مصوبه و قانونی به رفتگران و زحمت‌کشان زمین می‌دهیم خلاف کرده‌ایم؟ مجلس تحقیق و تفحص در املاک نجومی را وارد ندانسته چون سیاسی کاری شده شورا هم همچنین. همه کارها را به سیاست ربط می‌دهید. آنهایی که نجومی می‌خورند اسنادش موجود است و مردم باید بدانند برای همین من اسناد آن را منتشر خواهم کرد

(Lit. Trans.) Violations bank, responsibility of it the government is. Why from bank tourism, which belongs to brother your, you not start and action not take. You like Mr. Rouhani here standing and to *mardom* looking and lie telling. You in this government 350 square meters of land in Vanak at the price of 140,000 Tomans got. Yet, we who according to the resolution and lawfully to sweepers and laborers land distribute, wrongdoing has done? Parliament investigation and inspection in properties astronomical not allowed because politicized been, council too the same. Everything to politics relate you. Those who astronomical eat (benefit) documents their exist and people must know for this I documents its publish will.

(Com. Trans.) The government is responsible for banking violations. Why don't you start with the Tourism Bank, which is owned by your brother, and take action against it? You stand here like Mr. Rouhani, looking at *mardom* and lying. In this government, you purchased 350 meters of land in Vanak for 140,000 Tomans. Then, we, who are lawfully giving land to the sweepers and laborers, are accused of wrongdoing? The parliament could not investigate the astronomical properties because the issue had been politicized. The council did the same. You relate everything to politics. There are documents about those benefiting from astronomical earnings, and *mardom* needs to know. So, I will publish the documents.

In his defense, Qalibaf initially points to the government's responsibilities and then reveals the nepotism within the current government through an unpalatable question, since the Vice President's brother oversees one of the private banks. Indeed, he adopts a directive speech act to accuse Jahangiri's network when asking, "Why don't you start with the Tourism Bank,

which is owned by your brother, and take action against it?” He also contextualizes his accusation within specific incidents (e.g., the Tourism Bank). In this manner, Qalibaf challenges the IC of his opponent’s *âberu*. Indeed, Qalibaf threatens Jahangiri’s *âberu* via the Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening act (CÂTA strategy), which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Qalibaf directly accuses Jahangiri of lying to *mardom* and extends the accusation to Rouhani: “You stand here like Mr. Rouhani, looking at *mardom* and lying.” Qalibaf combines assertive (describing) and expressive (emotional) speech acts. As indicated in Chapter 3, telling lies is considered a sin in Islam, which Muslims must strictly avoid. In example [65], Qalibaf accuses his rivals, Rouhani and Jahangiri, of lying to the *mardom*. Such an accusation carries emotional weight; “looking at the *mardom*” suggests that Rouhani observes *mardom* but does so with deception, and “and lie” implies deliberate dishonesty or manipulation. This can threaten the IC of their *âberu*.

Afterwards, Qalibaf reveals information in which he accuses the current government, Rouhani, and Jahangiri of corruption to push back against accusations against him: “In this government, you purchased 350 meters of land in Vanak for 140,000 Tomans.” Qalibaf tries to shift attention away from allegations against himself by highlighting the purchase of land in Vanak in the current government. Then, in [65], in his defense, while being accused of land confiscation, Qalibaf victimizes himself to restore his damaged *âberu* and asks, “Then, we, who are lawfully giving land to the sweepers and laborers, are accused of wrongdoing?” From a linguistic perspective, the posed question is declarative-“a type of question identical in form to a declarative statement, except for the final rising intonation” (Bull & Fetzer, 2010). Interestingly, this question is also conductive, based on Quirk et al.’s (1985: 83) definition, “...the speaker is predisposed to the kind of answer he has wanted or expected.” In other words, in [65], Qalibaf expects to shape his favorable answer in the remote audience’s mind, for instance, “No, you should not be accused of corruption when supporting the poor and sweepers.” He endeavors to control his interlocutor’s mind and activate the audience’s mind for his benefit when asking a declarative question. Consequently, he may achieve his main goal-restoring his damaged *âberu*, blaming Rouhani in the public eye, and threatening the IC of his *âberu*.

Qalibaf strategically discloses that the current government politicizes every issue to control the parliament, or arguably, he may accuse the government of politicizing unfavorable issues. As seen in [65], *âberu*-threatening strategies are inextricably blended. Thus, it is difficult to discern whether Qalibaf intends to divulge detrimental information or if he accuses

the government of politicizing issues to threaten their *âberu*. Example [65] indicates that relating everything to politics may turn against politicians. Qalibaf then attacks Rouhani and Jahangiri when claiming, “The parliament could not investigate the astronomical properties because the issue had been politicized. The council did the same. You relate everything to politics.” This is an assertive speech act conveying information about the parliament’s inability to investigate astronomical properties. It implies that politicization hindered the investigation. Qalibaf claims that political considerations prevented an objective investigation and then criticizes the tendency to view all matters through a political lens. Qalibaf challenges the IC of their *âberu* and attacks their political *âberu* when accusing them of corruption and politicizing the issues.

In response to Jahangiri’s and Rouhani’s accusations that Qalibaf and his team received astronomical salaries, Qalibaf claims, “There are documents about those benefiting from astronomical earnings, and *mardom* needs to know. So, I will publish the documents.” Qalibaf commits to future action when claiming to publish the documents via a commissive speech act. Indeed, he pushes back against the accusations from the current government and threatens them with publishing relevant documents. However, Qalibaf is aware of cultural norms, in which revealing secrets is an *âberu*-threatening behavior and is refuted. Therefore, he focuses on the *mardom*’s rights in this republic system to justify his detrimental behavior. As example [65] indicates, Qalibaf applies both *âberu*-offensive and *âberu*-defensive strategies to threaten his rivals’ *âberu* and restore his damaged one.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Iranian presidential candidates threaten their rivals’ *âberu* by attacking the sociocultural or institutional components (S/IC) of their *âberu*. They use various linguistic strategies, such as accusing, criticizing, humiliating, mocking, and disqualifying their opponents, to publicly disgrace them in opposition to Islamic values and societal norms. To mitigate self-*âberu* damage, they employ *âberu*-defensive strategies, as maintaining one’s own *âberu* while enhancing that of others’ is culturally expected.

Fetzer’s (2013) concept of procedural knowledge further illuminates the systematic and strategic use of these *âberu*-threatening strategies. Iranian politicians adeptly navigate the cultural landscape, leveraging their sociocultural understanding of *âberu* to manipulate public perception. This procedural knowledge reflects a sophisticated grasp of sociocultural dynamics, encompassing actions that are both culturally resonant and politically advantageous.

Kádár's (2017) work on rituals provides a crucial framework for understanding these interactions. The actions of Iranian politicians are ritualistic and emotionally charged efforts to reinforce their own *âberu* while attacking their opponents. This is evident as they invoke Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview and the ideologies of the Revolution, aligning themselves with the supreme leader and the public (*mardom*) to enhance their *âberu*. In contrast, they accuse their opponents of straying from these doctrines, thus threatening their opponents' *âberu* by questioning their management skills, competence, performance, policies, and judgment.

Chapter Five also demonstrates that Iranian politicians employ Speaker Response-Seeking Questions (SRSQs) and disclose unpleasant information about their adversaries to accuse or criticize them. They use SRSQs to counter accusations from their rivals and undermine their political standing. However, this strategy carries the risk of backlash and negative interpretation by the public. Yet, it serves the purpose of damaging their opponents' *âberu*.

Additionally, Iranian politicians use disclaimer strategies to reveal unfavorable information about their opponents while protecting their own *âberu*. For instance, when accusing them of embezzlement or incompetence, they use disclaimers to soften the impact of the disclosure on their own *âberu*. This tactic mitigates potential damage to their own *âberu* when attacking their opponents. Despite the risk of backlash, the strategic use of disclosure is effective in undermining rivals, as the potential reward of damaging an opponent's *âberu* often outweighs the risk. This calculated risk-taking reflects an understanding of the delicate balance between attacking an opponent and maintaining one's own reputation.

Chapter 6

The Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening Act (CÂTA)

6.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the collectivist aspect of *âberu* and the collectivist *âberu*-threatening act. As indicated in previous chapters, in Iranian normative society, enhancing *âberu* awards individuals a higher social status and more respect, while losing it has dire consequences for both the individuals and those directly related to them. The analysis shows that when an Iranian politician's network respects or contravenes cultural and societal norms, they influence the sociocultural component (SC) of the target politician's *âberu*. Additionally, if they adhere to the values of the Islamic Revolution and its leader's ideologies, they positively impact the institutional component (IC) of the intended politician's *âberu*. In other words, when politicians' significant others or their relevant parties display acceptable or unacceptable behavior, they not only enhance or threaten their own *âberu*, but also boost or threaten the target opponent's *âberu* by extension.

By "significant others," reference is made here to politicians' family members and relatives, political party members, their core supporters, colleagues, and others. Therefore, when a presidential candidate applies various strategies to threaten the *âberu* of his adversary's network, he intentionally violates *âberu* cultural schema. This phenomenon is called the Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening Act (CÂTA). In other words, candidates destroy their opponents' collectivist *âberu* when they intentionally attack the *âberu* of networks or significant others. It is intentional behavior, as the nature of presidential debates is a zero-sum game. Conversely, Iranian politicians try to enhance the collective *âberu* of their own network or significant others in order to maintain, restore, or add to the IC or SC of their own *âberu*.

This chapter illustrates how Iranian politicians question the IC or SC of their rivals' collectivist *âberu* when challenging influential aspects of their *âberu*. It shows that Iranian politicians question the policies, personalities, ideologies, credentials, and competence of their adversaries' significant others and political parties in order to threaten their intended rivals' *âberu*. They exploit various linguistic *âberu*-threatening strategies such as questioning, asking Speaker Response-Seeking Questions (SRSQs), using disclaimers, or making disclosures, often combining some of these to publicly threaten their adversaries' collectivist *âberu*.

6.2 Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening Act: Sociopragmatic strategies

Before analyzing the examples extracted from the data, it is worth mentioning that defending the *âberu* of one's network would be meaningless if it has no impact on one's own *âberu*. Ahmadinejad, the incumbent in 2009, frequently accuses the supporters of candidates Hashemi and Mousavi of plotting a coup against his government and blames Mousavi for collectively cooperating with Hashemi. In response to Ahmadinejad's attacks, Mousavi provides a defensive reaction to protect his supporters' *âberu* and re-establish his own damaged *âberu* in example [66]. In other words, Mousavi defends his network's *âberu* against accusations and insults; failing to do so would threaten his own credibility, reputation, honor, grandeur, or *âberu* as an individual. He therefore condemns the act of publicizing people's names and making false accusations without giving them a chance to defend themselves. The mention of publicizing names without due process raises ethical questions. Hence, Mousavi applies an assertive speech act and a directive one when respectively stating his opinion: "I think it is against..." and expressing prohibition: "It is a crime to mention..." Furthermore, he criticizes the incumbent Ahmadinejad for attaching others to him in the following example [66], when trying to convey his message through an expressive speech act: "You are attacking people who are not present here, and you are intertwining them with my, apparently you could not find anything against me." Indeed, example [66] accentuates the role of one's network on their *âberu* and illustrates how one's *âberu* can be threatened when their affiliated network is accused of committing crimes. The accusation of connecting Mousavi to previous governments implies a negative judgment.

In example [66], Mousavi addresses his opponent, Ahmadinejad, and a broader audience to position himself as unfairly accused, then seeks validation from the audience.

[66]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.2

من فکر می‌کنم این برخلاف شان دولت است که کسانی را که محکوم نشده اند در قوه قضاییه نام آنها مطرح شود. این جرم است ما اینجا نام ببریم بدون اینکه قدرت دفاع از خودشان را داشته باشند. شما یک افرادی را دارید مورد حمله قرار می‌دهید که در این صحنه حضور ندارند و آن را قاطی سرنوشت بنده می‌کنید، ظاهراً چیزی از بنده نداشتید آمدید وصل کردید من را به دو دولت قبل. آقای هاشمی و آقای خاتمی اشخاص بزرگی هستند که خودشان با آقای دکتر باید مناظره کنند و جواب خودشان را بدهند

(Lit. Trans.) I think this against *sha'an* (the dignity) of the government is that people who not been condemnd, their names in the judiciary be pulicized. This crime is we mention names without that power of defense themselves have. You people have you attacking who in this scene present not and intertwining fate my, apparently anything from me you had not, connected me to the two previous governments. Mr. Hashemi and Mr. Khatami figures great are that they themselves with Mr. Doctor should debate and answers their give.

(Com. Trans.) I think it is against *sha'an* (the dignity) of the government to publicize the names of people who have not been condemned by the judiciary. It is a crime to mention their names without giving them power to defend themselves. You are attacking people who are not present here, and you are intertwining them with my, apparently you could not find anything against me. You connect me to the two previous governments. Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mr. Khatami are significant figures, and they themselves should engage in a debate with Dr. Ahmadinejad to provide their responses to the points raised.

As seen in [66], attacking or defending one's network's *âberu* can directly influence one's own *âberu*. Therefore, in this chapter, Iranian candidates threaten their opponents' party's *âberu* by utilizing the following linguistic strategies:

1. Questioning the source of income and the property of the opponent's party
2. Accusations:
 - i. Accusing the opponent's party of breaking laws and corruption, e.g., favoritism, nepotism, embezzlement, and holding fraud certificates.
 Accusing the opponent's party of violating the Islamic ideologies of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution): iii. Accusing the opponent's party of distancing themselves from the values of the Islamic Revolution iv. Accusing the opponent's party of widening the gap between *mardom* and the government
3. Criticizing or questioning the opponent's party's competence, e.g., functions, strategies, and policies.

Iranian politicians also adopt the following strategies to threaten their rival's and their party members' family members or relatives' *âberu*.

1. Questioning the opponent's family relations' credentials
2. Accusations:

- i. Accusing the opponent or their party member's family relations of corruption, e.g., banking violations, smuggling or lawlessness

Iranian politicians exploit or combine various *âberu*-threatening strategies to challenge, damage, and threaten the IC or SC of their rivals' collectivist *âberu*. At times, there is no clear-cut distinction between these *âberu*-threatening strategies, as they are used together or coalesce into a single strategy, such as disclaimers and disclosures.

As the analysis indicates, it constitutes an *âberu*-threatening behavior when presidential candidates challenge or threaten the IC or SC of their opponents' *âberu*, either individually or collectively. By doing so, they violate *âberu* cultural schema, an act that is negatively evaluated in Iranian culture, thereby resulting in an *âberu*-threatening act.

6.3 Threatening *âberu* of the opponent's party

In this section, the examples illustrate how politicians attack their intended opponents' *âberu* by questioning their parties' financial status, competence, skills, or function, in an attempt to accuse them of corruption or incompetence. Indeed, they target the IC of their opponents' parties' *âberu*. The presidential candidates employ various *âberu*-threatening strategies to achieve this institutional goal.

6.3.1 Questioning the source of income and property of the opponent's party

In accordance with the insights presented in Chapter Four, it is incumbent upon Iranians to lead an honorable existence in order to attain the esteemed status of *âberu-mand* (a person with *âberu*). Furthermore, the custodianship of *mardom's* (people's) property or assets, commonly referred to as *beytal-mal*, rests squarely upon the shoulders of Iranian politicians. In this regard, Ayatollah Khomeini has prevented Iranian politicians from building luxurious lives and allocating the government budget to themselves and their relatives. Consequently, Iranian politicians frequently question the source of their rivals' income and the assets of their networks, collectively accusing them of favoritism and embezzlement. In doing so, they implicitly accuse their adversaries of distancing themselves from Ayatollah Khomeini's principles. During debates, presidential candidates often threaten their rivals' *âberu* whenever they demand that their opponents reveal the source and amount of their own income, as well as that of their networks.

Accordingly, Example [67] is provided to highlight the significant role of one's network's property and income source in their credibility. As explained in Chapter Four, Iranians and their close associates must earn *pure money* or *pul-e halal* to sustain their lives. If the source of income or property of one's directly related networks or significant others is questionable, the IC of their *âberu* has been challenged, thereby threatening their *âberu*. In other words, one's collectivist *âberu* is threatened when the IC of their *âberu* is questioned by raising doubts about the sources of their network's income and property.

[67]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

من اموال خود و خانواده ام را اعلام کرده ام اگر در زندگی من، همسر و فرزندانم مشکلی هست آن را بدون اجازه من منتشر کنند تا همه بدانند. من پیشنهادی دارم که شما بفرمایید آن را قبول دارید یا خیر؟ کسی که کاندیداست اموالش را اعلام کند و بگوید از کجا آورده است و خانواده و اعضای ستادش، من گفته ام همه اینها اموالشان را اعلام کنند و بعد تعهد کند اگر اموالی را پنهان کردند و قوه قضائیه آن را کشف کرد در اختیار مردم قرار دهد

I properties my and family's my declared have. If in life my, wife's, and children's my any issue is, it without permission my publish they so that everyone knows. I suggestion have that you say it accept or not? Anyone who candidate is, properties his declare and say from where acquired them is and family and members of headquarters his. I have said all of them properties their declare should and then commit that if any properties hid they and judiciary it uncovers, available to *mardom* (people) put.

(Com. Trans.) I have declared my properties and those of my family. If there is any issue regarding my life, my wife's, or my children's, it can be published without my permission so that everyone knows. I have a suggestion; you may choose to accept it or not. Anyone who is a candidate should declare their properties and explain how they acquired them. I have instructed that all members of their families and headquarters do the same. Then, they must commit that if any properties are hidden and the judiciary uncovers them, they will be made available to the people.

In Example [67], Ahmadinejad declares his properties and those of his family members using assertive and direct language: "I have declared my properties and those of my family."

In his subsequent statements, Ahmadinejad employs verbs such as ‘declare,’ ‘explain,’ and ‘hide,’ which convey a legal and formal tone. He also uses possessive pronouns, such as ‘my,’ ‘my wife’s,’ and ‘my children’s,’ emphasizing his ownership and personal connection. Indeed, Ahmadinejad aims to promote transparency and accountability among political candidates.

As observed in the presidential debates analyzed here, candidates enhance their collectivist *âberu* by asserting that their family members, relatives, and networks obtained their wealth through legal means. Earning clean money, or *pul-e halal*, is strongly endorsed by Islamic principles and the leadership of the Revolution. Consequently, Iranian politicians, in alignment with the speaker, affirm their ability to produce documents validating their claims. In contrast, they accuse their opponents and affiliated networks of possessing or acquiring illicit properties during their tenure in political positions, which contradicts Ayatollah Khomeini’s ideals.

Indeed, questioning the source of income and property of an ordinary Iranian challenges the SC of their *âberu*. However, in this institutional context, Iranian politicians challenge the IC of their adversaries’ *âberu* when questioning their properties, specifically, whether they earned *pul-e halal* and did not exploit their political position to amass wealth, in accordance with Ayatollah Khomeini’s principles.

Iranian politicians may suggest that they possess clean financial records by insisting on the public declaration of collective properties. In this way, they enhance their *âberu* by exonerating themselves from acquiring vast wealth during their tenure, while threatening their opponents’ *âberu* by implicitly accusing them of illicitly amassing wealth when demanding that they declare their properties.

6.3.2 Accusations

The presidential candidates use accusations during the debates to achieve various goals, some of which are illustrated in the following sections.

6.3.2.1 Accusing opponent’s party of breaking laws and corruption, e.g., favoritism, nepotism, embezzlement, and holding fraud certificates

During the 2009 electoral campaign, the incumbent president, Ahmadinejad, leveraging his considerable authority, publicly leveled serious allegations against his political adversaries.

These accusations encompassed a range of transgressions, including embezzlement, nepotism, and corruption. With calculated anticipation, he would repeat his infamous catchphrase, ‘Should I say?’-a rhetorical prelude to revealing the names of specific politicians and their alleged involvement in acts harmful to the country. In one notable instance documented as [68], President Ahmadinejad directed his accusatory focus toward Mousavi’s associates, accusing them of favoritism and nepotism, thereby deepening the already contentious political landscape.

[68]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.2

فهرست بلندی است من نمیخواهم اینجا اسم ببرم شما میگویید میلیادر شدند، خوب پسرهای آقای هاشمی چه کار میکنند در کشور؟... این هزینه سنگین تبلیغاتی شما از کجا میآید. آقای موسوی من دوست دارم شما را، این چه نحوه هزینه کردن است؟ از کجا می آید؟

(Lit. Trans.) List long is. I not want here names to mention. you say became billionaires, well! sons of Mr. Hashemi what do in country?... This heavy cost of advertising your from where comes. Mr. Mousavi! I like you, this what kind of spending is? From where comes?

(Com. Trans.) There is a long list. I don’t want to mention names here. You say they became billionaires. Well, what are Mr. Hashemi’s sons doing in the country? ...Where does the heavy cost of your advertising come from? Mr. Mousavi, I like you, but what kind of spending is this? Where does it come from?

As seen at the beginning of Example [68], the incumbent Ahmadinejad claims that there is a long list of corrupt people he does not intend to reveal: “There is a long list. I don’t want to mention names here.” This statement effectively provokes curiosity and skepticism among the public. In his following utterance, Ahmadinejad asserts, “You say they became billionaires,” in which the plural subject pronoun “they” suggests that certain unnamed figures, presumably associated with his campaign, have amassed wealth. He then immediately names Hashemi and his sons, asking, “Ok, what are Mr. Hashemi’s sons doing in the country?” By naming specific individuals and questioning whether their activities are transparent or concealed, Ahmadinejad implies suspicion-despite having previously stated that he does not wish to reveal names. Ahmadinejad thus applies a disclaimer strategy, revealing Hashemi and

his sons' names and accusing them of corruption within the context of a question. In other words, Ahmadinejad is questioning the actions of Mousavi's allies.

A closer look at the previous utterance in Example [68], "You say they became billionaires," indicates that the subject pronoun "You" refers to Mousavi, while "they" refers to Ahmadinejad's headquarters or party. Therefore, Ahmadinejad redirects the accusation back toward Hashemi's sons in order to defend his own party. Indeed, it is an *âberu*-threatening behavior when Mousavi points an accusing finger at Ahmadinejad's associate, since accusing one's party with amassing great wealth contradicts Islamic values and Ayatollah Khomeini's principles, thereby threatening the IC of their *âberu*.

In his later utterances in Example [68], Ahmadinejad questions how Mousavi's costly campaign is funded, asking, "Where does the heavy cost of your advertising come from?" Here, the speaker alludes to the substantial expenses incurred during the campaign. Propaganda, in this context, encompasses messaging, advertising, and image-building. Ahmadinejad challenges the origin of the funds: where does the money fueling the campaign come from? He implicitly accuses his adversary, Mousavi, of corruption and patronage, suggesting that his campaign is financially supported by corrupt allies. Initially, Ahmadinejad accuses Hashemi and his sons of creating substantial wealth through nepotism, and then he alleges that Mousavi's campaign is supported by corrupt figures such as Hashemi and his sons. Ahmadinejad explicitly questions Mousavi's financial base in Example [68] when he asks, "Mr. Mousavi, I like you, but what kind of spending is this? Where does it come from?" He invites the public to read between the lines, uncover hidden narratives, and question the financial underpinnings of political campaigns.

As seen, Ahmadinejad challenges the IC of Mousavi's *âberu* when accusing him and his network of amassing great wealth. Indeed, they have been accused of earning illegal money and engaging in corruption. Failing to earn *pul-e halal* threatens the SC of any common Iranian's *âberu*, and being accused of amassing huge properties within the community implies corruption, thereby damaging the IC of a politician's *âberu*.

Example [68] illustrates that Ahmadinejad accuses Hashemi and his sons of nepotism, while also questioning their vast wealth and its source, thereby hinting at the concept of *pul-e halal* and challenging the IC of their collectivist *âberu*.

In the 2017 election, the most controversial interactions occurred between the incumbent Rouhani and the head of the Judiciary, Raisi. These two candidates represented opposing political poles. It is worth noting that Rouhani's government frequently attributed the roots of existing problems to the preceding administration led by Ahmadinejad, whose former

governors are now part of Raisi's current cabinet. As a result, Rouhani accuses Raisi of hiring the same unqualified politicians who were responsible for exacerbating the country's problems. In response to President Rouhani's allegations, Ebrahim Raisi asserts that an individual's social standing should not serve as a cover for corruption. As detailed in Chapter Three, the sartorial choices of clerics hold significant influence over their social standing and the IC of their *âberu*. In the religious community, the attire worn by clergy members acts as a potent marker, distinguishing them from their secular counterparts. Given the respect accorded to clerics in Shi'ite Islam, particularly by Ayatollah Khomeini, Raisi implores Iranian politicians not to exploit their religious positions to conceal corruption within their ranks or perpetuate favoritism.

[69]

6-2017-RS, Debate No.3

یکی از مهمترین اقدامات، انتخاب افراد صالح برای امور است، اگر یک دستگاه نظارتی گزارش فساد دارد باید با حساسیت برخورد کرد. فرقی نمی‌کند این فساد زیر عمامه من یا آقای روحانی یا کت آقای جهانگیری یا قالیباف باشد. باید حساسیت داشته باشیم. اولین کسی هم که باید حساسیت داشته باشد رییس دولت است، در این دولت اگر اعلام می‌کنند نزدیک ترین فرد به رییس جمهور فساد داشته، نه تنها حساسیت ندارند بلکه دفاع هم می‌کنند

(Lit. Trans.) One of the most important actions selection individuals' righteous for responsibilities is. If a body supervisory corruption report has, should with sensitivity deal with. It matters not this corruption under turban my or Mr. Rouhani's or coat of Mr. Jahangiri's or Mr. Qalibaf's is. Must sensitivity have we. First person that should sensitivity has, the head of government is. In this administration, if announce they, the closest person to president has corruption, not only sensitivity lack they, but also defend they.

(Com. Trans.) One of the most important actions is selecting righteous individuals for responsibilities. If a supervisory body reports corruption, it should be dealt with sensitivity. It does not matter whether this corruption is under my turban, Mr. Rouhani's, Mr. Jahangiri's coat, or Mr. Qalibaf's. We must be sensitive. The first person who should be sensitive is the head of the government. In this administration, if it is announced that the closest person to the president is involved in corruption, not only do they show no sensitivity, but they also defend them.

In Example [69], Raisi directs a pointed critique at Rouhani, the incumbent president, accusing him and his network of corruption. Raisi underscores the importance of a “clean supervisory body” in ensuring that only the most qualified and morally upright individuals are entrusted with public office. By emphasizing the role of oversight in curbing corruption, Raisi implicitly questions the effectiveness of Rouhani’s governance, especially in selecting competent leaders.

When Raisi asserts, “One of the most important actions is selecting righteous individuals for responsibilities. If a supervisory body reports corruption, it should be dealt with sensitivity,” he is, in essence, challenging Rouhani’s leadership record, which, according to Raisi, has failed to act with the necessary integrity or sensitivity when it comes to corruption. This statement directly questions the IC of Rouhani’s *âberu*, suggesting that his government has not lived up to the moral and ethical standards expected of public officials.

Raisi’s criticism can be interpreted as an attempt to undermine Rouhani’s *âberu* by implying that the current administration has not handled corruption reports with the required seriousness or transparency. In the context of *âberu*, this not only questions the integrity of Rouhani and his network but also tarnishes the public perception of their political legitimacy and moral standing.

In example [69], Raisi distinguishes himself and his clerical opponent, Rouhani, by highlighting their religious status. However, he quickly eliminates any disparity between clerical and non-clerical candidates when it comes to corruption, asserting that no one should escape justice due to their religious background. Raisi declares, “It does not matter whether this corruption is under my turban, Mr. Rouhani’s, Mr. Jahangiri’s coat, or Mr. Qalibaf’s,” [69], emphasizing that all politicians must be held accountable for corruption, regardless of their religious or social status.

From a linguistic perspective, Raisi uses parallelism to create balance and emphasize equality among all politicians in terms of responsibility. Through this parallel structure, Raisi indirectly accuses Rouhani of hiding corruption under the guise of his clerical attire. He extends this criticism to include Rouhani’s Vice President, Mr. Jahangiri, subtly threatening their collectivist *âberu*. Raisi’s statement suggests that politicians should not be allowed to shield corruption behind the symbols of their office, such as religious attire (which signifies religious power) or suits (which communicate a sense of belonging to the elite). These remarks set the stage for a more direct attack on the integrity of his political opponents and serve as a ‘preface’ to the forthcoming *âberu*-threatening actions.

Raisi is aware of the potential repercussions of making public accusations and criticisms. To avoid damaging his own *âberu*, he includes himself in his critique, stating, “We must be sensitive. The first person who should be sensitive is the head of the government” [69]. This strategic inclusion of the plural “we” serves to mitigate any potential *âberu*-damage to himself, while still holding others accountable. Raisi’s earlier directives, such as “be dealt with sensitivity,” and later, “be sensitive,” underscore the importance of vigilance and leadership responsibility in addressing corruption. Though he alludes to figures such as Rouhani, Jahangiri, and Qalibaf, Raisi avoids directly naming the president, choosing instead to address him by title. This cautious approach helps preserve the *âberu* of both himself and his interlocutor, Rouhani.

From a linguistic standpoint, Raisi employs a disclaimer strategy to distance himself from any potential *âberu*-damage. Although the conjunction ‘but’ is not used explicitly, his assertion that “the first person who should be sensitive is the head of the government” implicitly accuses Rouhani of failing to address corruption within his administration. By involving himself with the plural pronoun “we,” Raisi alleviates some of the blame from his own *âberu* while still holding Rouhani accountable for his inaction. Raisi’s statements reflect a delicate balancing act between defending his own *âberu* and threatening that of his opponent.

Due to the cyclic nature of *âberu*-loss, Raisi’s initial remarks function as a self-defensive strategy. By using “we” and sharing responsibility, he softens the blow to Rouhani’s *âberu*. However, his subsequent statements shift into *âberu*-offensive behavior. Raisi’s claim that the president should be the most sensitive and vigilant figure effectively damages Rouhani’s *âberu*, suggesting that he is failing in his leadership responsibilities.

In [69], Raisi asserts that the president’s cabinet is corrupt and involved in covering up corruption within their ranks. He claims, “In this administration, if it is announced that the closest person to the president is involved in corruption, not only do they show no sensitivity, but they also defend them.” Raisi uses a hypothetical scenario to implicate the entire administration, accusing them of attempting to conceal corruption. Whether he is disclosing or accusing the government, his statement threatens the IC of their collectivist *âberu*, as he emphasizes the government’s responsibility for corruption and lack of transparency. This line of attack, which focuses on accountability, can be interpreted as an explicit public accusation that Rouhani is involved in favoritism, undermining the IC of his *âberu* and aligning it with corruption, which runs contrary to Islamic Revolution values.

In response to Raisi’s accusations, Rouhani attempts to defend his *âberu* in example [70] by invoking his religious background. He insists that Raisi should show respect for his

clerical roots, particularly on a significant religious day. Rouhani's response signals his attempt to repair any damage to his *âberu* by clarifying that no undue favoritism has been shown within his administration. However, it is noteworthy that Rouhani initially employs an *individual âberu*-threatening strategy, addressing Raisi's attack on his personal integrity before launching his own counter-attack on Raisi's *âberu*.

Example [70] suggests that Raisi has successfully threatened Rouhani's *âberu*. Rouhani is compelled to defend himself by distancing himself from any corrupt actions within his administration. This indicates that Raisi's allegations have caused enough damage to trigger a defense from Rouhani, who must clarify his position to restore his *âberu*. However, Rouhani's response, although aimed at defending his personal *âberu*, also reveals the deep political dynamics at play, where each candidate is constantly working to protect their own reputation while simultaneously challenging their opponent's integrity.

[70]

6-2017-RHN, Debate No.3

امروز جشن میلاد امام زمان است و من و شما هم لباس هستیم آقای ریسی! شما که مدعی هستید که با قانون هستید و ادعا می‌کنید حقوق خوانده‌اید اما گویا از قانون اطلاعات خوبی ندارید. شما تهمت می‌زنید و می‌خواهید رئیس جمهور هم بشوید؟ شما باید از حقوق ملت ایران دفاع کنید. چرا بدون دلیل اتهام و تهمت می‌زنید. ما با کسی عقد اخوت نبسته‌ایم. هر کس تخلف کرده باید اشد مجازات شود، شما کار انتخاباتی می‌کنید، شما که با فساد مخالف هستید تخلف ۱۲ هزار میلیاردی که یک طرف آن قاضی‌ای بود که عزل شد و همکار شما هم بود و فرار کرده است و یک طرف هم مقام دولتی است که در ستاد شما حضور دارد. اگر با فساد مخالف هستید چرا با آنها برخورد و مخالفت نمی‌کنید؟

(Lit. Trans.) Today the celebration of Imam Zaman's birth is. I and you are same attire clerical, Mr. Raisi! You, who claim to be with the law and assert to have studied law, but apparently from law not have knowledge good. You accuse and aspire to become the president? You must from the rights of people Iranian defend. Why without reason accuse and slander? We with somebody not have formed a brotherhood pact. Whoever committed an offense must punishment severest face. You electoral campaigning doing. You who with corruption oppose, embezzlement 12 trillion that one side of that a judge was who dismissed was and colleague your also was and fled he, and the side other, an

official government that in headquarters campaign your present is. If you with corruption oppose, why with them not action taken and not oppose?

(Com. Trans.) Today marks the celebration of Imam Zaman's birth, and you and I wear the same clerical attire, Mr. Raisi! You claim to uphold the law, assert that you have studied it, yet it seems you lack sufficient knowledge of it. You accuse others and still aspire to become president? You must defend the rights of the Iranian people. Why do you make baseless accusations and slanders? We have not formed a brotherhood pact with anyone. Whoever has committed an offense must face the severest punishment. Yet, you are engaging in electoral campaigning. You claim to oppose corruption, yet in the 12-trillion-toman embezzlement case, one party was a judge, who was later dismissed, was also your colleague, and has now fled, and the other was a government official who is currently part of your campaign headquarters. If you truly oppose corruption, why have you not taken action against them?

The third debate of the 2017 election coincided with the birth of Imam Zaman, the Shi'a's promised ultimate savior of humankind, who will lead the world under a unique religion. In this context, Ayatollah Khomeini strongly advised Iranian governors to protect the young Islamic government from its enemies in order to deliver it to its natural successor, Imam Zaman, the lord of time. Rouhani highlights this religious occasion and emphasizes both his and his opponent Raisi's clerical background to enhance their *âberu*. Arguably, in [70], Rouhani objectifies this significant Shi'a event to his own advantage, demanding that dominant values be associated with his clerical attire: "Today marks the celebration of Imam Zaman's birth, and you and I wear the same clerical attire, Mr. Raisi!" He employs formal, direct language, reflecting a serious tone, and directly addresses Mr. Raisi, emphasizing their shared identity as clerics. Rouhani then quickly employs an individual *âberu*-threatening act strategy within a disclaimer strategy to target Raisi's *âberu*: "You claim to uphold the law, assert that you have studied it, yet it seems you lack sufficient knowledge of it" [70]. Rouhani continues attacking Raisi by frequently using the pronoun "you" and addressing him directly. In this way, he challenges Raisi's credibility and competence: "You accuse others and still aspire to become president? You must defend the rights of the Iranian people. Why do you make baseless accusations and slanders?" Rouhani calls on Raisi to defend the rights of the people, while simultaneously questioning his silence on corruption, and criticizes him for spreading false information.

In his defense against accusations of favoritism, Rouhani asserts: “We have not formed a brotherhood pact with anyone. Whoever has committed an offense must face the severest punishment.” Rouhani uses formal language, emphasizing seriousness, and conveys legal and ethical connotations through terms like “brotherhood pact,” “committed an offense,” and “the severest punishment.” By denying a “brotherhood pact,” Rouhani implies fairness and adherence to rules. He also stresses his impartiality, initiating his next sentence with “whoever.” In [70], Rouhani seeks to restore the IC of his *âberu* by refuting favoritism, which is prohibited by Islamic rules and the leader of the Islamic Revolution. As shown, he uses an assertive speech act to vigorously counter the allegations of favoritism, positioning himself as a steadfast enforcer of rules, appealing to both the discerning public and prospective voters.

In [70], Rouhani accuses Raisi of concealing corruption in the previous administration, delivering this claim through an assertive speech act. He escalates his attack by exposing the 12-trillion-toman embezzlement case, directly linking it to Raisi’s associates. This revelation acts as an *âberu*-threatening act, challenging the IC of Raisi’s *âberu* and undermining his credibility in the fight against corruption. Rouhani states: “You claim to oppose corruption, yet in the 12-trillion-toman embezzlement case, one party was a judge who was later dismissed, was also your colleague, and has now fled, and the other was a government official who is currently part of your campaign headquarters” [70].

Here, Rouhani is not merely criticizing Raisi’s stance but exposing incriminating details as a performative speech act, his act of disclosure serves as an accusation. By listing Raisi’s direct connections to corrupt individuals, Rouhani leaves no room for denial, subtly positioning Raisi as either complicit in or negligent toward corruption. The use of negatively charged lexical items, such as “embezzlement” and “fled,” reinforces the severity of the allegations, amplifying the damage to Raisi’s *âberu*.

Rouhani constructs a layered accusation against Raisi by listing incriminating details in a cumulative manner, “a judge who was later dismissed, was also your colleague, and has now fled,” followed by “a government official who is currently part of your campaign headquarters.” This cumulative structure builds momentum, reinforcing the idea that Raisi is not merely surrounded by corrupt individuals but has failed to hold them accountable. The sequencing of these details strengthens Rouhani’s claim that Raisi’s network is inherently compromised, as it moves from past corruption (the judge’s dismissal) to ongoing political affiliation (the government official in Raisi’s campaign). By structuring his statement this way, Rouhani effectively frames Raisi as complicit in enabling corruption rather than combating it, intensifying *âberu*-loss.

In this instance, Rouhani uses a rhetorical question to point out a serious inconsistency in Raisi's stance on corruption: "If you truly oppose corruption, why have you not taken action against them?" By asking this question, Rouhani accuses Raisi of hypocrisy. The question does not seek an answer; instead, it highlights Raisi's failure to take decisive action against corruption, despite his public stance against it. Rouhani subtly exposes the contradiction between Raisi's words and his lack of concrete steps to combat corruption.

The phrase "why have you not taken action against them?" sharply suggests that Raisi's inaction is not mere negligence but complicity in allowing corruption to continue unchecked. It casts doubt on Raisi's credibility and undermines his image as a strong opponent of corruption. Rouhani's question challenges Raisi's leadership and exposes his lack of effectiveness, ultimately damaging his *âberu* by revealing the gap between what Raisi claims and what he has actually done.

Through this rhetorical move, Rouhani forces Raisi into a defensive position, showcasing his failure to act and revealing his inconsistencies, thereby striking a blow to Raisi's reputation. Rouhani aims to undermine Raisi's authority and portray him as ineffective in addressing the very issue he claims to oppose.

The analysis reveals that Iranian politicians' *âberu* is significantly shaped by the integrity of their cabinets, where the presence of clean, competent members can enhance their *âberu*, while corrupt affiliations risk damaging it. In this instance, Rouhani effectively combines IÂTA and CÂTA strategies, employing a range of sociopragmatic tactics to target the sociocultural component of Raisi's *âberu* while simultaneously attempting to restore his own. By strategically blending accusation, criticism, and disclosure in his questions, Rouhani not only strengthens the cumulative impact of his rhetorical moves but also intensifies *âberu*-threatening behavior, ultimately challenging Raisi's credibility and asserting his own moral and political superiority.

After President Rouhani's initial *âberu*-defensive reaction, where he clarified that he had no fraternal ties with his ministers, he swiftly transitioned into an *âberu*-offensive against his rival, Ebrahim Raisi. In a bold move, Rouhani disclosed that Raisi had been officially informed by the Attorney General and the First Deputy in his office about corruption allegations involving individuals close to him. This revelation cast a shadow over Raisi's integrity. Consequently, Rouhani levels a serious accusation that Raisi was complicit in concealing the corrupt practices of his cabinet members. The tension escalated as Raisi, in a defensive retaliation, sought to protect his *âberu*. This high-stakes exchange underscores the power dynamics at play, with Rouhani effectively threatening Raisi's *âberu*. The political

chessboard remains in flux, and the outcome will reverberate through Iran's corridors of power in [71].

[71]

6-2017-RS, Debate No.3

آقای روحانی من را می‌شناسد من روحیه قضایی دارم. این را دادستان کل کشور و معاون اول در دفتر شما به شما گفتند که مدارک و اسنادی دارند از نزدیکترین افراد به شما که دچار این مشکلات هستند. تشکیک در این مسائل با روحیه کسی که در راس دولت است هم خوانی ندارد

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Rouhani, me knows. I, spirit judicial have. This, Attorney General country and deputy first in office your to you informed that documents and evidence, possess from closest individuals to you who involved in these issues. Doubting in these matters with spirit someone who at head of government fitting not have.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Rouhani knows me; I have a judicial spirit. The Attorney General of the country and the First Deputy in your office have informed you that they possess documents and evidence regarding those closest to you who are involved in these issues. Doubting these matters is not fitting for someone who is at the head of the government.

Raisi initially exalts himself and invites Rouhani to approve of his strong character when he says, "Mr. Rouhani knows me. I have a judicial spirit." Indeed, he enhances the IC of his *âberu* by boosting his character and prompting Rouhani to confirm it. Then, he refers to the Attorney General of the country and Rouhani's First Deputy, mentioning leaked documents implicating Rouhani's inner circle in corruption: "The Attorney General of the country and the First Deputy in your office have informed you that they possess documents and evidence regarding those closest to you who are involved in these issues." Raisi discloses that Rouhani is implicated in covering up corruption among his cabinet members.

Afterwards, Raisi assesses Rouhani's behavior as detrimental to the morale of the head of the government. Raisi criticizes Rouhani for undermining the presidency's moral standing. He also implies that 'those closest to you' are corrupt, accusing Rouhani's network of corruption without naming specific individuals. Through this, Raisi anonymously accuses Rouhani's network of corruption via an assertive speech act, collectively damaging the IC of the incumbent's *âberu*.

Raisi then criticizes and threatens Rouhani's *âberu* individually by accusing him of covering up corruption. By using disclosure strategies, Raisi amplifies the damage to Rouhani's *âberu*. The overall tone of this example is serious and accusatory.

In the intense presidential debates of 2009, both Ahmadinejad and Karoubi engaged in heated verbal sparring. Their exchanges, documented in Examples [72-74], reveal a fascinating interplay. Each candidate strategically targeted the other's *âberu*—those intricate networks of collective influence and power. By leveling accusations of embezzlement against one another's collectivist entities, they skillfully undermined the very foundations of their opponent's political support. These confrontations were not mere clashes of words; they were calculated moves to threaten the sociocultural components of their rival's *âberu*. The stakes were high, and the battle for dominance played out through these charged interactions.

[72]

6-2009-KRB, Debate No.3

می گویند به دستور حضرت عالی چهل میلیارد تومان به آقای محصولی وام دادند... می گویند مدارک و اسناد درباره این وام زنده و موجود است، نمی توانم اسم ببرم، آیا بیان این اسامی اینجا درست است؟... بگویند این سیصد میلیارد تومان از بودجه شهرداری چه شده است؟ همه اینها باید معلوم بشود، آیا اینها نباید مشخص شود؟ ما مسئول مردم و مسئول اموال مردم هستیم

(Lit. Trans.) Say they with order of Excellency your, 40 billion Tomans to Mr. Mahsouli loan given is.... Say they documents and evidence about this loan active and available is, I not can name, Is it appropriate to mention these names here?... Say, this 300 billion Tomans from budget of municipality what become is? All these should clarified be. Not Should these specified be? We responsible of *mardom* (people) and responsible of properties of *mardom* (people) are.

(COM. Trans.) They say that by your order, 40 billion Tomans were loaned to Mr. Mahsouli... They say there are documents and evidence about this loan, still active and available. I cannot name names; is it appropriate to mention them here? Tell us, what happened to the 300 billion Tomans from the municipality's budget? All of this needs to be clarified. Shouldn't these things be made clear? We are responsible to the people and for their property.

One of the foremost issues in the Iranian banking system is the provision of Islamic, interest-free basic loans to *mardom* (people). This mechanism allows politicians and their

networks to help *mardom* acquire property and, consequently, lead a decent life. When politicians succeed in this respect, they can enhance or protect the IC of their *âberu*.

In example [72], Karoubi is well aware of the cultural norms and religious values that view public accusations as immoral and a grave sin. He also understands that violating these societal norms may threaten his own *âberu* due to its cyclical nature. Therefore, from a linguistic perspective and based on lexeme choices, he uses the unknown third plural pronoun “they” instead of the known first singular pronoun “I” to protect his *âberu* through indirect communication when making subsequent accusations: “They say that by your order, 40 billion Tomans were loaned to Mr. Mahsouli... They say there are documents and evidence about this loan, still active and available. I cannot name names.”

At the end of example [72], Karoubi also avoids mentioning names, signaling that he wishes to appear considerate or moral. This illustrates how the protection or enhancement of one’s *âberu* can influence linguistic choices. He discloses or accuses Ahmadinejad’s network of corruption and indirectly questions the collectivist IC of Ahmadinejad’s *âberu*. Since the veracity of the leaked information is in question, it is difficult to definitively categorize Karoubi’s approach as either an accusation or a disclosure strategy. However, both linguistic strategies damage the rival’s *âberu* since favoritism has been exposed. In this case, Karoubi accuses Sadegh Mahsouli, Ahmadinejad’s Minister of the Interior (2008-2009) and Minister of Welfare and Social Security (2009-2011), of receiving large loans. Accusing politicians of favoritism challenges the IC of their *âberu*, and Karoubi strategically exploits this accusation to undermine Ahmadinejad’s reputation.

In his later utterances in [72], Karoubi explicitly accuses Ahmadinejad of embezzlement, commanding him: “Tell us, what happened to the 300 billion Tomans from the municipality’s budget?” Karoubi alleges that Ahmadinejad’s team in the municipality is corrupt by demanding that Ahmadinejad provide details. He seeks clarification for both *mardom* and himself by using the collective object pronoun “us.” After threatening the IC of Ahmadinejad’s *âberu* collectively, Karoubi stresses that “All of this needs to be clarified. Shouldn’t these things be made clear?” He insists on transparency. In [72], Karoubi does not expect a response when posing this unpalatable question, as he has already stressed that the budget’s allocation must be illuminated in his earlier utterance. Arguably, he asks this question because he needs public confirmation to justify his *âberu*-threatening behavior. He claims that politicians, including himself, are responsible for *mardom* and their property, in line with the late Imam Khomeini’s teachings. Karoubi seeks to achieve a specific goal when stating, “We are responsible to the people and for their property.”

Karoubi aims to distance himself from any *âberu*-loss by protecting his own *âberu* after making public accusations. He has tarnished Ahmadinejad's *âberu* by confronting him with the violation of social and cultural norms, thus putting himself at risk of self-*âberu* loss. Consequently, Karoubi shifts the audience's attention to their absolute rights, using this moment to his advantage. He stresses that politicians are required to protect the *mardom*'s property and adhere to the budget. Politicians, he claims, must balance their interests in the service of public duty. This example reinforces the role of religious and ethical values, as well as Ayatollah Khomeini's ideologies, in shaping Iranian political discourse.

In response to Karoubi's *âberu*-threatening behavior, Ahmadinejad adopts an *âberu*-defensive reaction to restore *âberu* of his ministers and protect their collectivist *âberu* (his government, his cabinet of ministers, etc.) in example [73]. However, he later shifts to an *âberu*-offensive stance to challenge Karoubi's *âberu* in return.

[73]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.3

شما گفتید 40 میلیارد تومان به دستور من به محصولی (وزیر کشور) وام داده اند ، این اسناد را به قوه قضائیه بدهید و حتی اگر یک ریال محصولی در عمرش از بانکی وام گرفته است همه آن مال کربوبی و تیمش، چه رسد به چهل میلیارد تومان ؛ این بازی های تبلیغاتی است. من گفته ام کسی که کاندیداست اموالش را اعلام کند و بگوید از کجا آورده است و خانواده و اعضای ستادش همه اینها اموالشان را اعلام کنند و بعد تعهد کند اگر اموالی را پنهان کردند و قوه قضائیه آن را کشف کرد در اختیار مردم قرار دهد. من هیچ کس را به فساد متهم نمی کنم اما آقای کربوبی شما که نیروی انقلابی هستید چرا از شهرام جزایری پول گرفتید؟ به من نیز اگر کسی پولی داده است سندش را منتشر کنید تا همه بدانند در حالی که شما یکبار 300 میلیون تومان و یک بار 200 میلیون تومان از شهرام جزایری پول گرفتید. چرا شهرام جزایری به شما این پول را داد ؟ شما آدم سیاسی هستید، سؤال نکردید که چرا به شما این پول را داد و با چه هدفی ؟

(Lit. Trans.) You said 40 billion Tomans to Mahsouli, with my order, loaned, these documents to the judiciary submit, and even if a single Rial Mahsouli from a bank in lifetime his loaned, all of that for Karoubi and teams his, let alone 40 billion Tomans; these stunt publicity are.

I said anyone who a candidate is, properties his declare and say from where aquired them is and family and members of headquarters his. I have said all of

them properties they declare should and then commit that if any properties hid they and judiciary it uncovers, available to *mardom* (people) put.

I nobody to corruption accuse, but Mr. Karroubi, you that a figure *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) are, why from Shahram Jazayeri money taken? Me too if someone money given is, their proof publish so that everyone knows, meanwhile you once 300 million Tomans and another time 200 million Tomans from Shahram Jazayeri money took. Why Shahram Jazayeri to you this money gave? You a figure political are, question not asked that why he to you this money gave and for what purpose?

(Com. Trans.) You said that 40 billion Tomans were loaned to Mahsouli on my orders. Go ahead and submit these documents to the judiciary. And if Mahsouli has ever taken even a single Rial in loans from a bank in his lifetime, then all of it belongs to Karroubi and his team, let alone 40 billion Tomans! This is nothing but a publicity stunt.

I have said that Anyone who is a candidate should declare their properties and explain how they acquired them. I have instructed that all members of their families and headquarters do the same. Then, they must commit that if any properties are hidden and the judiciary uncovers them, they will be made available to the people.

I am not accusing anyone of corruption, but Mr. Karroubi, you are an *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) figure, so why did you take money from Shahram Jazayeri? If anyone has ever given me money, let them publish the proof so everyone knows. Meanwhile, you took 300 million Tomans from Shahram Jazayeri once and 200 million Tomans another time. Why did he give you that money? You are a political person. Did you never question why he was giving it to you and for what purpose?

In his initial utterances, Ahmadinejad dismisses Karroubi's claims as publicity stunt. He challenges Karroubi to sue Mr. Mahsouli if relevant documents are available, emphasizing the need for transparency and verification. Furthermore, he asserts that if his colleague has ever received a loan from a bank, Karroubi and his team are free to seize it. Ahmadinejad, as the incumbent, strives to demonstrate that his ministers are clean. As seen in [73], he employs a defensive strategy to restore his network's damaged *âberu* and, by extension, protect his own. His choice of verbs such as 'say,' 'submit,' and 'loan' reflects his assertiveness and direct

language. By using the pronoun “you” and explicitly naming *Mr. Mahsouli* and *Mr. Karoubi*, Ahmadinejad assigns individual responsibility.

After defending his own collectivist *âberu*, Ahmadinejad proceeds to attack Karoubi’s *âberu*. In this study, Iranian politicians frequently assert that they have led modest lifestyles and upheld Islamic values and Ayatollah Khomeini’s principles to protect or enhance the IC of their *âberu*. Within the political discourse of the Iranian Islamic Republic, politicians are expected to live modestly and serve the underprivileged to be regarded as *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*), signifying high credibility. Ahmadinejad, as the incumbent, insists on the declaration of assets to undermine the IC of his rivals’ *âberu*, implicitly accusing them of corruption and failing to earn *pul-e halâl* (pure money). He states: “I have said that anyone who is a candidate should declare their properties and explain how they acquired them. I have instructed that all members of their families and headquarters do the same. Then, they must commit that if any properties are hidden and the judiciary uncovers them, they will be made available to the people.”

In [73], Ahmadinejad escalates beyond an individual *âberu*-threatening act by involving not only the candidates themselves but also their families and campaign staff, compelling them to disclose their assets in the interest of public transparency. In doing so, he threatens his opponents’ collective *âberu* by questioning the legitimacy of their financial networks. Essentially, Ahmadinejad publicly accuses his rivals of collective corruption, thereby challenging the IC of their *âberu* in the public sphere.

Additionally, Ahmadinejad employs a disclaimer strategy while simultaneously threatening Karoubi’s *âberu*. He states: “I am not accusing anyone of corruption, but you are an *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) figure, so why did you take money from Shahram Jazayeri?” In example [73], Ahmadinejad challenges Karoubi’s *enqelâbi* character by associating him with a known corrupt figure. In this study, Iranian politicians often present themselves as *enqelâbi* to maintain or restore the IC of their *âberu*. Conversely, they accuse their opponents of being *zede-enqelâbi* (anti-revolutionary) or *qeyr-e enqelâbi* (non-revolutionary), arguing that their policies contradict the principles of Ayatollah Khomeini’s Revolution, thereby threatening the IC of their *âberu*. In this instance, Ahmadinejad weaponizes Karoubi’s *revolutionary* identity against him, questioning his integrity by implying that a true revolutionary figure would strictly avoid corruption.

In brief, the concept of being *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) holds substantial weight in Iranian political discourse. It evokes historical memories of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the subsequent establishment of the Islamic Republic. Politicians who identify as *enqelâbi*

often appeal to revolutionary ideals, emphasizing their commitment to social justice, anti-imperialism, and the vision of the late Imam. This ideological label shapes their rhetoric, enabling them to frame their messages in ways that resonate with a populace deeply connected to the Revolution's legacy. Thus, *enqelâbi* functions as a powerful rhetorical tool, invoking collective memory and reinforcing political narratives.

Subsequently, in example [73], Ahmadinejad employs the disclaimer strategy to distance himself from direct accusations, stating: "I am not accusing anyone of corruption" However, his immediate follow-up contradicts this claim, as he directly accuses Karoubi. The competitive nature of the debate compels Ahmadinejad to persist in discrediting Karoubi, further revealing: "... but you are an *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) figure, so why did you take money from Shahram Jazayeri?" In this instance, Ahmadinejad poses an unpalatable question, embedding a serious accusation within a disclaimer structure. The disclaimer strategy, in this context, serves as both a medium for accusation and a mechanism for disclosure. Notably, there is no clear-cut distinction between accusation and disclosure in this example.

It is worth considering whether Ahmadinejad intends to genuinely persuade his audience of the sincerity of his disclaimers or whether he strategically manipulates them, subtly leading the audience to infer implicit accusations. Arguably, *mardom* (people) may associate Karoubi with Shahram Jazayeri, a notorious figure convicted of embezzlement. As noted earlier, association with corrupt individuals significantly threatens the IC of a politician's *âberu*.

In his later utterances in [73], Ahmadinejad intensifies *âberu*-loss inflicted upon Karoubi by providing more specific details regarding the sums of money involved. He then poses further unpalatable questions: "Why did he give you that money? You are a political person. Did you never question why he was giving it to you and for what purpose?" By framing the issue in this manner, Ahmadinejad directly accuses Karoubi of accepting bribes from Shahram Jazayeri, which severely threatens the IC of Karoubi's *âberu*. Consequently, Karoubi's actions appear to contradict societal expectations and undermine his *enqelâbi* and political character. Ahmadinejad's accusations gain further significance within a political landscape where corruption allegations hold substantial weight.

Ahmadinejad ultimately succeeds in threatening his opponent's collective *âberu*, as evidenced by Karoubi's subsequent defensive response in [74]. In an attempt to restore his damaged *âberu*, Karoubi invokes his past affiliation with Ayatollah Khomeini, emphasizing that Khomeini personally vetted him and entrusted him with several official positions. By aligning himself with the Revolution's founder, Karoubi seeks to reinforce the IC of his *âberu*.

Furthermore, he defends his actions by borrowing *âberu* from the supreme leader's credibility, highlighting that Ayatollah Khamenei has also endorsed his performance.

[74]

6-2009, KRB, Debate No.3

در مسئله جزایری که آقای احمدی نژاد دو سه بار روی آن تاکید کردند... من نیز روحانی هستم و اجازه هایی از امام(ره) دارم که هیچکس این اجازه ها را ندارد... کمیته امداد برای اقشار آسیب پذیر و برای خانواده مجروحان و شهدا بود... من شدم مسئول کمیته امداد و امام نیز به تدریج احکام دیگری به من داد و من شهرت پیدا کردم.

درباره آقای جزایری هم افرادی آمدند پیش من و جزایری را آوردند او دو مرتبه به من پول داد که سیصد میلیون تومان بود، دویست میلیون تومان هم نیست حتی اگر یک میلیارد تومان هم بود، می گفتم چون صداقت دارم. آقای جزایری چیزی از من نخواست. یک پولی به من دادند و من خرج مردم کردم.

با اینکه آیت الله شاهرودی اعتراض کردند رهبری به ایشان نامه به خط خودشان نوشتند: آقای شاهرودی این چه شیوه کاری است که کسی پول بدهد به فردی و آن فرد هم پول را در کارهای معمول خرج کند موجه هم هست نه او چیزی خواسته و نه این چیزی خواسته است در شان قوه قضائیه نیست که این کار را بکند.

(Lit. Trans.) Regarding the case of Jazayeri, which Mr. Ahmadinejad two or three times emphasized ... I also a cleric am, and permissions from the Imam have that no one these permissions has... Committee Relief for groups vulnerable and for the families of the injured and martyrs was... I became committee Relief the head and gradually Imam in row to me decrees gave and I also a *šohrat* (reputation) found.

About Mr. Jazayeri also people came to me and Jazayeri brought to me, he twice to me money gave that 300 million Tomans was 200 million Tomans also not is, even if one billion Tomans had been I said would because honesty have I. Mr. Jazayeri something from me not asked. A sum of money to me they gave and I spent for *mardom* (people).

Although Ayatollah Shahrudi objected, the leadership to him wrote a letter with their own handwriting: Mr. Shahrudi, this what kind of approach is that someone money gives to a person and that person the money in ordinary matters spend justified also is, neither that anything asked for nor this anything wanted is, in *ša'an* (dignity) of the judiciary not is that this intertwinement do.

(Com. Trans.) Regarding the Jazayeri case, which Mr. Ahmadinejad emphasized two or three times... I am a cleric and I have permissions from the Imam, that no one has these permissions.

... The Relief Committee was established for vulnerable groups and for the families of the injured and martyrs... I became the head of the Relief Committee, and Ayatollah Khomeini gradually issued more decrees, and I gained more *šohrat* (reputation).

Concerning Mr. Jazayeri, some people came to me and brought (Jazayeri) with them. He gave me money twice-once 300 million tomans-it was not even 200 million tomans. Even if it had been one billion tomans, I would have said it openly because I am honest. Mr. Jazayeri did not ask anything of me. A sum of money was given to me, and I spent it for *mardom* (people).

Although Ayatollah Shahroudi objected, the Leader wrote him a letter in his own handwriting: Mr. Shahroudi, what kind of approach is this, that someone gives money to a person, and that person spends it on ordinary matters in a justified manner? Neither did the giver ask for anything, nor did the recipient seek anything in return. It is beneath the *ša'an* (dignity) of the judiciary to intervene in such matters.

It is often regarded as an absolute disgrace when Iranian politicians are publicly accused of corruption and embezzlement. In example [74], Karoubi seeks to restore his damaged *âberu* by stating, "I am a cleric, and I have permissions from the Imam that no one else has...." As illustrated in Chapter 4, being a cleric and being endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini are factors that significantly boost *âberu*. Therefore, in [74], Karoubi works to repair his tarnished *âberu* by reminding *mardom* of his religious status and political history. In other words, he asserts his legitimacy by emphasizing his position as a clergyman, whose authority and credibility were granted by Ayatollah Khomeini. Karoubi aims to restore his *âberu* to regain both legitimacy and authority. He continues to purchase credibility, reputation, grandeur, and honor when he declares that the leader of the Revolution appointed him as head of the Relief Committee: "I became the head of the Relief Committee, and Ayatollah Khomeini gradually issued more decrees, and I gained more *šohrat* (reputation)." Indeed, Karoubi is actively working to solidify his position.

In [74], Karoubi attempts to vindicate his actions and protect his *âberu* from accusations of associating with corrupt individuals. He states, "Concerning Mr. Jazayeri, some people came

to me and brought him with them. He gave me money twice-once 300 million tomans, it was not even 200 million tomans. Even if it had been one billion tomans, I would have said it openly because I am honest. Mr. Jazayeri did not ask anything of me. A sum of money was given to me, and I spent it for *mardom* (people).” He portrays Mr. Jazayeri’s actions as a legitimate donation. Furthermore, he strengthens the validity of his own actions by asserting that the funds were used to assist the less fortunate. These statements reflect the delicate balance Karoubi must maintain between personal integrity, public perception, and political survival.

In addition, Karoubi seeks to enhance his *âberu* by emphasizing his honesty as a defining trait, stating, “... it would have been said openly because I am honest” [74]. Interestingly, at one point, Karoubi avoids directly mentioning Jazayeri’s name again, opting instead to employ passive voice: “Mr. Jazayeri did not ask anything of me. A sum of money was given to me, and it was spent for *mardom* (people).” In this section of example [74], Karoubi may mitigate the negative effects of associating with a corrupt figure by refraining from explicitly naming Jazayeri and instead using passive constructions that depersonalize the action, focusing on the transaction rather than the agent.

In short, in [74], Karoubi emphasizes his identity as a cleric and highlights the endorsement of Ayatollah Khomeini to restore his damaged collectivist *âberu*. Karoubi strategically aligns himself with religious and political authorities to enhance his power and credibility, or his political *âberu*-leveraging the late leader’s endorsement to justify his actions. However, Shahram Jazayeri’s case occurred after Ayatollah Khomeini’s death. Karoubi continues to restore his damaged collectivist *âberu* by referencing the supreme leader, the absolute power of the Islamic Republic of Iran, who had endorsed his actions and criticized the then head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Shahroudi. As seen in [74], Karoubi legitimizes his actions by stating, “Although Ayatollah Shahroudi objected, the Leader wrote him a letter in his own handwriting: Mr. Shahroudi, what kind of approach is this, that someone gives money to a person, and that person spends it on ordinary matters in a justified manner? Neither did the giver ask for anything, nor did the recipient seek anything in return. It is beneath the *ša’an* (dignity) of the judiciary to intervene in such matters.” Indeed, Karoubi purifies himself, legitimizes his actions, and exonerates himself from corruption by invoking the name of the supreme leader for his own benefit.

In brief, example [74] underscores the pivotal role that clean connections play in Iranian presidential debates, as they significantly influence *âberu* of Iranian politicians, either enhancing or tarnishing it. Within this context, Iranian politicians often accuse their rivals of maintaining associations with corrupt individuals or harboring unscrupulous networks, actions

that are perceived as detrimental to their collective *âberu*. This highlights the emphasis placed on moral integrity and ethical conduct within Iranian political discourse, where the perception of one's associations can profoundly affect their standing and reputation, or *âberu*, among both voters and peers.

In examples [75-79] from the 2017 election, Qalibaf, the current mayor of Tehran, and Jahangiri, the Vice President, accuse each other of corruption and embezzlement, threatening one another's collectivist *âberu*.

[75]

6-2017- QLBF, Debate No. 3

جناب آقای جهانگیری ما اگر بحث ۴ درصدی‌ها را می‌گوییم به همین دلیل است، هیچ مبارزه‌ای علیه قاچاق وجود ندارد. شرط اول مبارزه پیشگیری است. بعضی از اعضای دولت حقوق و پاداش‌هایی می‌گیرند، در حالی که یک کارگر هشتصد هزار تومان دریافت می‌کند. البته مقداری به حقوق این کارگران اضافه شده است. ولی وزرای آن پایه‌گذار حقوق و پاداش‌های چند میلیاردی می‌شوند و برای خودتان از آن‌ها بهرمند می‌شوید

شما دیدید در هفته گذشته وزیری که کار فرهنگ دارد خودش دست به این کار می‌زند. چگونه انتظار دارید این وزرا مانع قاچاق شوند؟ آیا فکر می‌کنید که می‌توانید از قاچاق جلوگیری کنید؟ در حالیکه شما باید پیشگیری از قاچاق کنید

جناب آقای روحانی شما کسی را مدیر گذاشتید که رئیس بانک را مشخص می‌کند، بیش از ۴۰۰ میلیارد تومان را در حساب دیگر جا به جا می‌کند، در اینصورت حتما قاچاق کالا صورت می‌گیرد پیشگیری وظیفه شما است

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Jahangiri, if we about the 4% speak, for same reason is, no fight against smuggling exists. The condition first of the combatting prevention is. Some of the members of the government and ministers salaries and rewards receive like yourself. It became known that they rewards multimillion-dollar for themselves and their colleagues during term ministerial term their received. While a worker 800,000 Tomans receives. Of course, some slight amount to the salaries of these workers added has been. However, ministers its, the foundation of salaries and bonuses billion-dollar set, and from them yourselves benefit.

You saw in week last a minister that affair of culture has, himself hand in this practice has. How you expect these ministers from smuggling prevent? Do you think if you can from smuggling prevent? While you must from smuggling prevent.

Mr. Rouhani, you someone as a head appointed who the head of the bank determines, over 400 billion Tomans to account another transfer. In this case, definitely smuggling occurs. Prevention responsibility your is.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Jahangiri, when we speak about the “4 percenters,” it is for this reason: there is no fight against smuggling. The first condition for combatting it is prevention. Some members of the government receive salaries and bonuses. Meanwhile, a worker receives only 800,000 Tomans. Of course, there has been a slight increase in their salaries. However, the ministers set the foundation for multi-billion Tomans salaries and bonuses, and you benefit from them.

Last week, you saw a minister in charge of cultural affairs who himself engages in this practice. How do you expect these ministers to prevent smuggling? Do you think you can stop smuggling, while you must prevent smuggling?

Mr. Rouhani, you appointed someone as a manager who determines who the head of the bank should be, and transfers more than 400 billion Tomans to other accounts. In this case, smuggling will definitely occur. Prevention is your responsibility.

In example [75], Qalibaf categorizes Jahangiri and his team as the 4% of society, implying that they belong to a privileged elite, and accuses them of benefiting from huge bonuses and astronomical salaries. He openly accuses the current government and its ministers of corruption and failure to address smuggling. He then reveals alarming information, or merely accuses Jahangiri: “Some members of the government receive salaries and bonuses, while a worker receives only 800,000 Tomans. Of course, there has been a slight increase in their salaries. However, the ministers set the foundation for multi-billion Tomans salaries and bonuses, and you benefit from them” [75]. Qalibaf attacks Jahangiri’s *âberu* both individually and collectively, explicitly accusing him of corruption and extending the corruption to his network. His choice of words such as ‘salaries,’ ‘bonuses,’ and ‘multi-billion Tomans’ creates a vivid image of financial misconduct, threatening the IC of Jahangiri’s *âberu*.

Making accusations or revealing sensitive information is strongly forbidden by Iranian cultural norms and Islamic values, as it can threaten any Muslim Iranian’s *âberu*. In this context, Qalibaf attempts to stir public sentiment against Jahangiri in a populist manner by stating, “Meanwhile, a worker receives only 800,000 Tomans.” This comparison stigmatizes the current government for failing to raise workers’ salaries and deliver justice, in contradiction

to Ayatollah Khomeini's principles. By challenging Jahangiri's *âberu*, Qalibaf positions himself as a moral authority, contrasting the alleged corruption of the government with the plight of workers. His populist reference to a worker's salary resonates with ordinary Iranians, highlighting income disparities.

As seen in [75], Qalibaf repeatedly challenges the IC of Jahangiri's *âberu*. He adds, "Of course, there has been a slight increase in their salaries," a sarcastic remark that underscores the inadequacy of the increase. The use of the adjective 'slight' before 'increase' adds irony to the statement, further emphasizing the ministers' failure to provide substantial relief.

Qalibaf also poses a series of questions after accusing the current ministers of corruption: "How do you expect these ministers to prevent smuggling? Do you think you can stop smuggling...?" Through these questions, Qalibaf not only accuses the ministers but also implies that they are ineffective in their roles. He does not require a response from Jahangiri, as he has already made clear that the government's ministers are corrupt and unqualified.

In [75], Qalibaf further encourages the audience to form a negative opinion about the government's ability to combat smuggling. He provides an example involving the cultural minister's daughter, who allegedly imported goods illegally from Turkey: "Last week, you saw a minister in charge of cultural affairs who himself engages in this practice. How do you expect these ministers to prevent smuggling?" By personalizing the issue and presenting the specific case, Qalibaf makes the situation more relatable to the audience. He frames the question to make it difficult for the government to defend itself, highlighting the hypocrisy of the government's anti-smuggling rhetoric.

Qalibaf strategically builds his case by presenting information that serves as evidence to support his accusations. His question "Do you think you can stop smuggling?" and the example of the cultural minister create a narrative of incompetence, positioning Jahangiri's government as incapable of tackling smuggling due to its corruption. Ultimately, he reinforces the power dynamic by stating, "Your job is to prevent it first," reminding Jahangiri of his responsibility and emphasizing Qalibaf's position as a moral authority capable of dictating expectations.

Finally, Qalibaf directs his criticism at President Rouhani, accusing him of mismanagement when appointing corrupt individuals: "Mr. Rouhani, you appointed someone as a manager who determines who the head of the bank should be and transfers more than 400 billion Tomans into other accounts. In this case, smuggling will definitely occur. Prevention is your responsibility." Qalibaf addresses two issues: first, Rouhani's incompetence in appointing corrupt individuals to sensitive positions, which threatens the IC of his *âberu*; second, the

development of a corrupt network, further undermining Rouhani's *âberu* and that of his network. By using rhetorical devices and implicature, Qalibaf strengthens his narrative and reinforces his political stance

Example [76] demonstrates that Qalibaf succeeded in threatening his opponent's *âberu*, as Jahangiri initially responds defensively and later attacks Qalibaf's *âberu* individually.

[76]

6-2017- JHNGR, Debate No. 3

ما در سه سال موفق شدیم که قاچاق را به نصف تقلیل دهیم؛ اما دولت ایده آل شما با ۲۵ میلیارد دلار قاچاق دولت را تحویل داد و هر کسی که می‌شنود باید شرم‌منده باشد نه اینکه طلبکار. جناب قالیباف شما عادت کرده‌اید به حرف خلاف واقع گفتن. ملت ایران اگر من نه چند میلیارد پاداش اگر چند صد میلیارد پاداش گرفتم، بقیه صحبت‌های قالیباف را قبول خواهم کرد.

(Lit. Trans.) We in three years succeeded that smuggling to half reduce; however, government ideal your with 25 billion dollars smuggling government handed over and anyone who hears should ashamed be not demander. Mr. Qalibaf, you accustomed to talk contrary truth. Nation Iran! if I not few billion bonuses if few hundred billion bouses received, rest statements of Qalibaf accept will I...

(Com. Trans.) In three years, we succeeded in reducing smuggling by half; however, your ideal government handed over the government with \$25 billion in smuggling, and anyone who hears this should be ashamed, not demanding anything. Mr. Qalibaf, you have become accustomed to saying things that are not true. The Iranian nation! if I had received not just a few billion in bonuses, but several hundred billion, I would accept the rest of Qalibaf's statements.

In the above extract, Jahangiri's choice of words, such as 'ashamed' and 'not true,' evaluates Qalibaf's statements on a moral level. The term 'ashamed' implies that anyone who believes Qalibaf's accusations should feel embarrassment, signaling not only the falsity of the claims but also their ethical flaws. Similarly, by stating that Qalibaf's statements are 'not true,' Jahangiri directly challenges their veracity, framing the accusations as both inaccurate and morally questionable. This use of evaluative language serves to undermine Qalibaf's credibility while reinforcing the idea that his accusations are unjustified.

Jahangiri further emphasizes the moral weight of his response by asserting, “Anyone who hears this should be ashamed, not demanding anything.” This statement strengthens his earlier point by highlighting that those who support Qalibaf’s claims are complicit in accepting something shameful. By positioning Qalibaf’s criticisms as not only false but also morally inappropriate, Jahangiri seeks to delegitimize both the content of the accusations and those who endorse them.

This approach aligns with the *IÂTA* strategy. Jahangiri employs it to deflect the accusations against Qalibaf. By subtly shifting the focus away from his own alleged corruption, he frames Qalibaf as someone who consistently makes false statements. Jahangiri’s suggestion that Qalibaf ‘habitually’ speaks untruths casts doubt on the validity of the accusations, weakening their impact and protecting his own *âberu*. In doing so, Jahangiri not only defends his credibility but also indirectly challenges the integrity of his opponent.

By addressing the public as ‘the Iranian nation!’, Jahangiri seeks to gain their support and enhance his *âberu* by portraying himself as the defender of truth and justice. He implies that if he were truly corrupt, he would accept Qalibaf’s other claims, inviting the public to judge the validity of the accusations. This tactic weakens Qalibaf’s position by questioning his honesty and consistency.

In summary, Jahangiri’s defensive reaction demonstrates that Qalibaf’s attack was perceived as a threat to his *âberu*. Through his rhetorical strategies and evaluative language, Jahangiri works to discredit Qalibaf’s accusations, reinforcing his own reputation and shifting the focus back to Qalibaf’s purported dishonesty.

6.3.2.2 Accusing the opponent’s party of distancing themselves from the values of the Islamic Revolution

Fetzer (2013) examines how political actors use language to shape narratives, construct identities, and influence public perception. The situation described in the 2009 Iranian election, where Ahmadinejad accuses preceding governments of deviating from revolutionary ideals, exemplifies the type of political discourse Fetzer discusses. Ahmadinejad’s accusations can be seen as strategic discourse aimed at redefining the revolutionary identity by contrasting his government with those of his predecessors. By framing previous administrations as collectivist entities that strayed from the Revolution’s core principles, such as theocracy, anti-Western sentiment, and social justice-Ahmadinejad engages in a discursive practice that seeks to realign

public understanding of these principles with his own political agenda. This aligns with Fetzer's analysis of how political discourse is not merely about communication but about constructing social reality and influencing the ideological foundation of society.

In this context, Ahmadinejad's rhetoric can be interpreted as an attempt to position himself as the true defender of the Revolution's ideals, thereby legitimizing his leadership and discrediting his political opponents. This use of political discourse to shape the narrative of legitimacy and authority mirrors Fetzer's work. His narrative directly challenges the IC (institutional component) of presidential candidates' *âberu*, especially those who had held positions in administrations viewed as ideologically divergent. By implicating these candidates' associations with past governments, Ahmadinejad strategically sought to sway public opinion and reinforce his own political *âberu*.

[77]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.6

در طی سه دوره گذشته یک ساختار اداری و حلقه های مدیریتی شکل گرفت که از مسیر انقلاب و ارزشهای انقلاب فاصله گرفت، نه اینکه در این سه دوره خدماتی نشد، چرا شد، اما آرام آرام یک جریانی شکل گرفت که خود را مالک ملت، مالک انقلاب، حاکم بر مردم و دست خودش را در بیت المال و مسایل کشور باز میدید.

(Lit. Trans.) Within three period past, a structure administrative and circles of management shaped were that self from path of *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and values of *Enqelâb* (Revolution) far made. Not that in these three periods services provided not. But gradually, a current developed that itself the owner of the nation, the owner of the *enqelâb* (Revolution), ruling over *mardom* (people), and hand own in affairs of country and *Beyt al-mal* (people's properties) open saw.

(Com. Trans.) During the last three periods, an administrative structure and management circles were formed that distanced themselves from the path of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and the values of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution). It's not that no services were provided during these three terms. But gradually, a current developed that saw itself as the owner of the nation, the owner of the *enqelâb* (Revolution), the ruler over *mardom* (people) and felt entitled to freely access the *Beyt al-mal* (people's properties) and national affairs.

In his initial utterances in [77], Ahmadinejad discusses events that took place during the last three government terms, accusing them of creating administrative structures and managerial hierarchies that distanced themselves from the values of the Islamic Revolution. He states: “During the last three periods, an administrative structure and management circles were formed that distanced themselves from the path of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and the values of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution).” Ahmadinejad refers to various entities, such as ‘government’ and ‘Revolution’ or ‘*Enqelâb*,’ creating a network of meaning that connects these elements within Iranian political discourse. By invoking this imagery, he accuses Mousavi and his patrons collectively through a disclosure strategy. This serves as a major collectivist *âberu*-loss for Mousavi and his party, as they are charged with detaching themselves from the fundamental aims of the Revolution. As discussed in chapter four, accusing adversaries of abandoning Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolutionary principles is a tactic commonly used to challenge their *âberu* in the Islamic system. In this context, adherence to Khomeini’s ideals is considered an *âberu*-boosting behavior, as those who align themselves with his Revolution are perceived as *enqelâbi* (revolutionary) individuals.

In his subsequent utterances in [77], Ahmadinejad employs a disclaimer strategy, downplaying the services of previous presidents and accusing them of serious crimes. By doing so, he aims to protect his own *âberu*. Since public disgrace is a bilateral *âberu*-threatening behavior, attacking Mousavi’s *âberu* also risks damaging Ahmadinejad’s own reputation. To avoid being perceived as ungrateful, Ahmadinejad uses the phrase “It’s not that no services were provided during these three terms. But...,” before criticizing the previous administrations. This tactic helps him mitigate potential damage to his own *âberu* while still advancing his attack.

Ahmadinejad then launches a collective attack on Mousavi’s *âberu*, stating: “But gradually, a current developed that saw itself as the owner of the nation, the owner of the *Enqelâb* (Revolution), the ruler over *mardom* (people).” The term ‘current’ constructs a collective identity, uniting Mousavi and his allies as part of a single political movement. This ‘current’ is depicted as a faction that gradually strayed from revolutionary ideals, positioning itself as entitled to control the nation, the Revolution, and the people. Ahmadinejad implicitly accuses Mousavi’s allies, such as Hashemi and Khatami, of fostering a managerial hierarchy that sought to dominate national affairs, including government resources. By associating Mousavi and his political faction with this ‘current,’ Ahmadinejad frames them as a self-serving group that sought to consolidate power for their own benefit. This collective attack

threatens *âberu* of Mousavi and his supporters, attempting to discredit their integrity and portray them as authoritarian figures.

Ahmadinejad continues his collective accusations, stating, "...felt entitled to freely access the *Beyt al-mal* (people's properties) and national affairs." He accuses Mousavi and his allies of misusing their power by manipulating the country's budget and *Beyt al-mal* (*mardom's* property), further damaging their *âberu*. By addressing Mousavi and his supporters collectively, Ahmadinejad tarnishes Mousavi's collectivist *âberu* through repeated disclaimer strategies. The recurrence of these accusations intensifies the *âberu*-threatening effect. Mousavi's defensive reaction indicates that his *âberu* was indeed threatened. In other words, Ahmadinejad succeeded in threatening Mousavi's *âberu*.

As previously discussed, the reference to the 'Islamic Revolution' situates Iranian political discourse within a specific historical and cultural framework, as the Revolution represents a pivotal moment in Iran's history, marked by significant social and political change.

In response to Ahmadinejad's *âberu*-threatening behavior, Mousavi defends his patrons by calling them significant figures, seeking to restore his own collectivist *âberu*.

[78]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.6

آقای هاشمی و آقای خاتمی اشخاص بزرگی هستند که خودشان با آقای دکتر باید مناظره کنند و جواب خودشان را بدهند. بنده یک مشکلاتی با دولت دارم و به خاطر خطری وارد این صحنه شدم که درمورد آن صحبت خواهم کرد و وارد دوران آقای هاشمی و خاتمی نخواهم شد.

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Hashemi and Mr. Khatami figures great are that they themselves with Mr. Doctor should debate and answers their give. I issues some with the government have and because of a danger entered this arena became that about it speak will I and delve into era of Mr. Hashemi and Khatami not will become.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mr. Khatami are significant figures, and they themselves should engage in a debate with Dr. Ahmadinejad to provide their responses to the points raised. I have some issues with the government, and because of a (certain) danger, I have entered this arena, which I will speak about. I will not delve into the era of Mr. Hashemi and Mr. Khatami.

In response to Ahmadinejad's *âberu*-threatening behavior, Mousavi defends his patrons, Mr. Hashemi and Mr. Khatami, by referring to them as significant figures, which

serves to restore his own collectivist *âberu*. By emphasizing their importance, Mousavi seeks to reassert their credibility and status, positioning himself as aligned with these reputable figures.

In example [78], Mousavi explains his participation in the election by stating that he entered the political arena because he believes that Iran and its people are in danger: “I have some issues with the government, and because of a (certain) danger, I have entered this arena, which I will speak about.” This statement not only frames his involvement as a response to national peril, but it also implicitly challenges Ahmadinejad’s leadership and competence. By claiming that the country is in jeopardy, Mousavi questions the current administration’s ability, thus challenging the IC of Ahmadinejad’s *âberu*.

Furthermore, by stating that he will not delve into the era of Mr. Hashemi and Mr. Khatami, Mousavi avoids direct confrontation with Ahmadinejad’s accusations regarding his political allies. This tactical shift redirects the debate away from his own past associations, instead focusing on his opposition to the current government and the perceived threats to Iran’s well-being under Ahmadinejad’s leadership. This strategic positioning not only shields his own *âberu* but also seeks to delegitimize Ahmadinejad’s criticisms while reinforcing his role as a defender of the nation’s values.

Thus, Mousavi’s response can be seen as an attempt to maintain his political credibility by distancing himself from Ahmadinejad’s negative portrayal of his allies and highlighting the dangers of the current regime. Through this rhetorical maneuver, Mousavi preserves his collectivist *âberu* and reasserts his political identity as a leader concerned with the future of Iran.

6.3.2.3 Accusing the opponent’s party of widening the gap between *mardom* and the government

As elaborated in chapter four, within Iranian political discourse, the term *mardom* (people) holds profound significance, representing the collective identity of Iranian citizens beyond mere individuality. Deeply rooted in Iran’s historical and cultural fabric, *mardom* reflects communal bonds, shared experiences, and national aspirations. It serves as both a symbol of unity and a repository of the nation’s struggles and hopes. The 1979 Islamic Revolution further cemented its importance, as diverse social and political groups rallied under this banner in their resistance against the monarchy.

When post-revolution Iranian politicians invoke *mardom*, it carries strong emotional resonance. They strategically wield this term to establish a connection with the masses, presenting themselves as representatives of the people's will. Simultaneously, *mardom* becomes a rhetorical tool for legitimizing their policies and reinforcing their authority. Consequently, accusing political opponents of alienating *mardom* or widening the gap between the government and the people is a common strategy in Iranian political discourse. Such accusations not only emphasize societal divisions but also serve to mobilize public sentiment against adversaries. Conversely, Iranian politicians skillfully employ *mardom* to align themselves with the broader population, framing their actions as serving the collective good. In this way, *mardom* functions both as a rallying cry and a shield of legitimacy within Iranian politics.

In example [79], Qalibaf frames the sitting government and its ministers as an elite 4% of society—an affluent minority that has enriched itself through astronomical salaries and bonuses, allegedly facilitated by the support of Jahangiri and Rouhani. This accusation directly threatens the IC of any Iranian politician's *âberu*, as it contradicts the foundational values of the Islamic Revolution and its leader's vision. Within the ideological framework of the Revolution, political figures are expected to uphold social justice and remain aligned with the economic struggles of *mardom*. Therefore, if politicians accumulate wealth through inflated salaries drawn from *mardom*'s budget or *Beytal-mal*, they not only grow richer at the expense of ordinary citizens but also deepen socioeconomic inequalities. This widening gap between the ruling elite and *mardom* undermines their credibility, making them vulnerable to *âberu*-threatening narratives that paint them as detached from the people they claim to represent.

[79]

6-2017- QLBF, Debate No. 3

مشاور شما آقای نجفی در جلسه‌ای پیشنهاد دادند تا املاک نجومی را معادل سازی کنید تا جلوی کثافت کاری که در حقوق‌های نجومی شده گرفته شود. این همان روحیه چهار درصدی‌ها است که آنقدر پررو هستند که دست به این کارها می‌زنند. تخلفات بانکی مسئولش دولت است. اینجا بد اخلاقی صورت گرفت آقای جهانگیری گفتند من واژه دروغ را به کار نبردم و گفتم خلاف انجام شده اما من بله، می‌گویم که دروغ گفتید و باید در خصوص املاک نجومی و اتهاماتی که زدید پاسخگو باشید شما و شخص آقای روحانی.

(Lit. Trans.) Advisor your, Mr. Najafi, in a meeting proposed to properties astronomical adjusted to against corruption that in salaries astronomical cover

up. This the same mentality as the 4% is who so audacious are that hand in such actions have. Violations banking responsible government is.

Here misconduct has occurred. Mr. Jahangiri said, I the word lie not used and said I the wrongdoing has been committed. But I yes say, you lied and must about properties astronomical and accusations made you, accountable held, you and Mr. Rouhani.

(Com. Trans.) Your advisor, Mr. Najafi, suggested in a meeting that astronomical properties be adjusted to cover up the corruption in astronomical salaries. This reflects the same mentality of the 4%, those who are so audacious that they engage in such actions. The government is responsible for banking violations.

There was misconduct here. Mr. Jahangiri said, "I did not use the word 'lie'; I only said wrongdoing had been committed." But I say, yes, you lied, and you must be held accountable for the issue of astronomical properties and the accusations you made, both you and Mr. Rouhani.

As discussed in this study, public accusations against a politician or their network regarding excessive salaries often lead to corruption scandals, threatening the IC of their *âberu*. In example [79], Qalibaf employs this tactic, asserting that 96% of society comprises the working class, deprived of justice, in contrast to the privileged 4% who have accumulated wealth and power. By making this comparison, Qalibaf underscores socio-economic disparities and positions the current government as a faction that has distanced itself from *mardom*, an action explicitly condemned by Ayatollah Khomeini. Consequently, his accusation serves as an *âberu*-threatening act, targeting the government's credibility and legitimacy.

Qalibaf strategically utilizes terms such as 'astronomical properties,' 'the mentality of the 4%,' and 'banking violations' to emphasize his criticisms and cast the government in a negative light. He labels the government as the '4%' and interchangeably employs the terms 'government' and '4%' to implicate Rouhani and his cabinet. His direct claim, "The government is responsible for banking violations" [79], reinforces this accusation, challenging the IC of Jahangiri and Rouhani's *âberu* collectively by portraying them as incapable of addressing financial misconduct.

Beyond collective accusations, Qalibaf intensifies his attack on Jahangiri's individual *âberu* by publicly accusing him of dishonesty. He states: "Mr. Jahangiri said, 'I did not use the word lie; I only said wrongdoing had been committed.' But I say, yes, you lied, and you must

be held accountable for the issue of astronomical properties and the accusations you made, both you and Mr. Rouhani.” Initially, Qalibaf highlights Jahangiri’s denial of using the word ‘lie’ but then directly accuses him of deception and corruption, portraying him as dishonest. This explicit confrontation constitutes an *âberu*-threatening act that undermines Jahangiri’s credibility.

Notably, Qalibaf employs both Individual *âberu*-Threatening Acts (IÂTA) and Collective *âberu*-Threatening Acts (CÂTA) to amplify *âberu*-loss phenomenon. His accusations resonate strongly, compelling Jahangiri to respond in defense, a reaction that signifies the effectiveness of Qalibaf’s *âberu*-threatening strategy. However, as shown in the following example [80], Jahangiri retaliates by targeting Qalibaf’s individual *âberu*, escalating the political confrontation.

[80]

6-2017-JHNGR, Debate No.3

آقای قالیباف! برادر عزیز گویی این دفعه برای تخریب آمدید ولی به شما اطلاعات غلط می‌دهند. من نمی‌گویم دروغ می‌گویید هر چیز جز خانه‌ای که دارم، مال آقای قالیباف. آقای قالیباف ادب چیز خوبی است! اخلاق چیز خوبی است! صداقت چیز خوبی است. امروز با افتخار عرض می‌کنم، زندگی من از این کاغذ سفیدتر است. خیریه هم درست نکردم که در پوشش آن اموال بدهم به کسی.

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Qalibaf! Brother dear! It seems this time for destruction you had come, but to you false information they give. I not say lie telling you. Everything except the house I own belongs to Mr. Qalibaf. Mr. Qalibaf! Politeness thing good is, morality thing good is, honesty thing good is. Today with pride I say, life my than this paper whiter is. Charity also not created I that under guise its assets give to anyone.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Qalibaf! Dear brother! It seems you had come for destruction this time, but they give you false information. I do not say you are lying. Everything I have, except my house, is in Mr. Qalibaf’s hands. Mr. Qalibaf! Politeness is a good thing. Morality is a good thing. Honesty is a good thing. Today I proudly say, my life is ‘whiter than paper.’ I did not create a charity to give assets to anyone in its guise.

Jahangiri employs a tone of ironic politeness when addressing Mr. Qalibaf, referring to him formally as ‘Mr.’ and using expressions like ‘Dear.’ Rather than genuinely showing

respect, these remarks are sarcastic in nature, subtly implying that Qalibaf himself lacks true politeness or moral integrity. This rhetorical strategy allows Jahangiri to undermine his opponent while maintaining a façade of civility, giving the impression of politeness while actually attacking Qalibaf's character.

In his discourse, Jahangiri also strategically deploys terms like 'destruction,' 'false information,' 'politeness,' 'morality,' and 'honesty' to achieve two main objectives: discrediting Qalibaf and reinforcing his own moral standing. These terms are far from neutral; they are used with specific intentions that reflect the strategic nature of Jahangiri's speech: i. destruction: This term is not merely a general criticism; it refers to what Jahangiri perceives as the damaging consequences of Qalibaf's actions or policies. By invoking 'destruction,' Jahangiri paints Qalibaf's conduct as not only morally corrupt but also as causing harm to society and the country as a whole. II. False information: Jahangiri's accusation of spreading 'false information' is a direct attack on Qalibaf's credibility. In this context, Jahangiri positions himself as the truth-teller, contrasting this with the portrayal of Qalibaf as a deceiver, undermining the latter's integrity and trustworthiness. III. Politeness: Although the term may initially seem like a compliment, it is used sarcastically to imply that Qalibaf does not practice the level of politeness he claims. Jahangiri contrasts his own respectful discourse with what he suggests is Qalibaf's rudeness or hypocrisy, thus indirectly attacking Qalibaf's moral character. IV. Morality: The term 'morality' plays a critical role in Jahangiri's discourse, aiming to position himself as a politician who adheres to high ethical standards. He contrasts this with the moral failings he attributes to Qalibaf, portraying himself as the defender of ethical conduct while painting Qalibaf as morally corrupt. V. Honesty: Similarly, the term "honesty" is used to reinforce Jahangiri's image as someone who is transparent and truthful in contrast to Qalibaf, whom he accuses of dishonesty. This appeal to honesty helps Jahangiri to distinguish himself from Qalibaf and to claim the moral high ground.

Through the strategic use of these terms, Jahangiri not only attacks Qalibaf's integrity and moral standing, but also positions himself as the more ethical and truthful figure. This rhetorical approach serves two purposes: it challenges Qalibaf's political *âberu* and simultaneously restores Jahangiri's own *âberu* by portraying him as a man of virtue in contrast to his opponent's perceived corruption.

In example [80], Jahangiri shifts from indirect criticism to a direct attack on Qalibaf as he seeks to defend or restore his threatened *âberu*. In doing so, he presents himself as someone with an unblemished personal and financial record, likening his life to a white paper—a metaphor that connotes purity and transparency. This symbolic reference to a 'white paper' serves as a

powerful visual metaphor for Jahangiri's claimed innocence and cleanliness in his actions, particularly in contrast to the corruption he attributes to Qalibaf.

Jahangiri further strengthens his claim by asserting that he has always earned *pul-e halâl*-lawful and ethically earned money, positioning himself as ethically superior and distancing himself from the accusations of financial corruption. By emphasizing the importance of honesty and ethical conduct, he successfully navigates the delicate line between public criticism and his own moral integrity as a political leader.

Explicitly stating, "Today I proudly say, my life is 'whiter than paper.' I did not create a charity to give assets to anyone in its guise," Jahangiri not only defends himself against accusations of corruption but also implicitly challenges Qalibaf's integrity. Through this statement, he positions himself as a model of virtue and transparency, qualities that he argues are crucial for any political leader.

In this way, Jahangiri appeals to shared values of honesty and justice to persuade the audience, or *mardom* (people), of his righteousness, while simultaneously discrediting Qalibaf's accusations. By aligning himself with the ideals of truth and morality, Jahangiri seeks to bolster his own standing in the eyes of the public while undermining the legitimacy of his opponent.

6.3.3 Criticizing or questioning the functions, strategies, and policies of the opponent's party

In this study, one common strategy employed by Iranian politicians to challenge the integrity of their opponent's collective *âberu* is the criticism or questioning of their party's performance, functions, strategies, and policies. For instance, in example [81], Mousavi directly questions the effectiveness of Ahmadinejad's government, as well as the policies and strategies it has implemented. By doing so, he seeks to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of Ahmadinejad's administration, casting doubt on its ability to govern and fulfill its promises.

[81]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.6

بنده هر جا ما چه کار داریم میکنیم چه بلایی سردانشگاهایمان و محیطهای جوانان و مردم آوردیم که میروم اعتراض است هر جا میروم میگویند به ما اهانت شده است. این دانشجو را ستاره دار کردیم آن را دستگیر کردیم آن یکی را دستگیر کردیم آن را از دانشگاه بیرون کردیم.

(Lit. Trans.) We what are we doing? What harm on universities and areas of the youth and *mardom* (people) brought, that I wherever go protest is wherever I go, they say to them insulted. This student star-with we made, then arrested we, that other arrested we, that from university expelled we.

(Com. Trans.) What are we doing? What harm have we caused to our universities, to the youth, and to *mardom* (people)? Everywhere I go, there are protests. Everywhere I go, people say they have been insulted. We blacklisted this student, then arrested them. We arrested that one, and expelled another from the university.

In this study, criticizing or questioning the performance, functions, strategies, and policies of an opponent's party is a frequent strategy used by Iranian politicians to challenge the integrity of their collective *âberu*. In example [81], Mousavi critiques the policies and strategies of Ahmadinejad's government, casting doubt on its effectiveness.

The lexicon in example [81], which includes terms like 'universities,' 'youth,' 'protest,' 'insulted,' 'assigned stars (blacklisted),' 'arrest,' and 'expelled,' powerfully encapsulates the speaker's profound concerns and pointed critique. Through this strategic use of language, Mousavi aligns himself with the collective 'we' and 'our,' holding Ahmadinejad's administration accountable. His pointed question, "What are we doing? What harm have we caused to our universities, to the youth, and to *mardom* (people)?" implicates not only the governors but also subtly acknowledges Mousavi's own shared responsibility, which helps to mitigate the cyclical nature of *âberu*-damage.

Iran functions as a republic, where *mardom* (people) are regarded as the true owners of the nation, and politicians serve as their representatives. Therefore, Iranian politicians and governors must be accountable for effectively managing the affairs of *mardom*. In example [81], Mousavi accuses the current government of inefficiency, pointing out that its actions have led to widespread dissatisfaction: "Everywhere I go, people say they have been insulted." By making this accusation, Mousavi challenges the credibility and competence of Ahmadinejad and his cabinet. He directly questions the IC (integrity) of Ahmadinejad's and his government's *âberu*, casting doubt on their ability to govern and fulfill the needs of *mardom*. In this way, Mousavi plays a key role in influencing public opinion and shaping the broader Iranian political discourse.

In his later statements, Mousavi, a prominent figure in Iranian politics, shifts focus to the youth-the most dynamic segment of society during Ahmadinejad's presidency. His

revelations are both poignant and alarming: “We blacklisted this student, then arrested them. We arrested that one, and expelled another from the university.” Mousavi’s words go beyond mere descriptions of arbitrary arrests; they highlight a systematic suppression that stifled the aspirations of young people who had once played a pivotal role in overthrowing the monarchy.

As a republic, the Iranian government bears the responsibility of representing *mardom* (people). Among various societal segments, students form a key demographic whose education, dreams, and voices shape the nation’s future. When politicians fail to address the needs of this group, they risk undermining the very essence of their legitimacy, which directly threatens their *âberu*. In this context, Mousavi’s accusations reverberate through the political arena as he criticizes Ahmadinejad’s government for failing to meet the needs of students. By holding Ahmadinejad and his cabinet collectively accountable, Mousavi not only questions their competence but also challenges their commitment to the well-being of *mardom*. His critique is not merely about individual failures; it targets the functions, strategies, and policies of the government, questioning how their decisions have negatively affected millions of Iranians, including students. In short, Mousavi’s critique highlights that politicians who fail to address the needs of this crucial segment of society threaten their *âberu*, while those who succeed in fulfilling these needs strengthen it. Through this approach, Mousavi directly questions the performance and policies of Ahmadinejad’s government, attacking its ability to serve *mardom* effectively.

In this context, Iranian politicians frequently accuse each other of suppressing the youth in order to challenge the integrity of their adversary’s *âberu*. In response to Mousavi’s collectivist *âberu*-threatening actions, Ahmadinejad counters by treating Mousavi and his allies as a unified entity—a strategic move. By accusing Mousavi of being complicit with Mr. Moein, Ahmadinejad shifts the blame, linking their past associations to the current political failures. Their shared history and alliances become a liability, further damaging their collective *âberu* and reinforcing the narrative of incompetence.

[82]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.6

من یک موردش را باز می‌کنم برای اینکه معلوم بشود دانشجویان ستاره چیست. چگونه اتفاق افتاد؟ از کجا آمدند؟ که امروز می‌کوبند در کله این دولت و من نمی‌دانم چرا. دانشجویان ستاره تقریباً هشت سال پیش در دوره آقای معین اتفاق افتاد. او در کابینه دوستان آقای موسوی بود. او دوست آقای موسوی است.

(Lit. Trans.) I one case open to clear get that information your from where is. Students, this star-with from where it comes? How happened it? that Mr. Mousavi today hit to the head of this government and I not know why. The star students almost eight years ago occurred during Mr. Moein's tenure. He in the cabinet of Mr. Mousavi's friends was. He is Mr. Mousavi's friend.

(Com. Trans.) I will present one example to clarify where your information is coming from. Where do the cases of star students come from? How did it happen? That Mr. Mousavi now attributes to this government. And I do not know why. (The issue of) star students occurred nearly eight years ago during Mr. Moein's tenure, when he was part of Mr. Mousavi's cabinet. He is a friend of Mr. Mousavi.

In response to Mousavi's accusations that Ahmadinejad's cabinet is responsible for the dissatisfaction among various social groups, including students, Ahmadinejad attempts to clarify the issue of star students. In [82], he emphasizes his knowledge and authority by using the subject pronoun "I," stating, "I will present one example to clarify where your information is coming from. Where do the cases of star students come from?" By doing so, he positions himself as an authoritative source. Ahmadinejad follows this with two speaker-response-seeking questions (SRSQs): "Where do the cases of star students come from? How did it happen?" In posing these questions, he directs the audience's attention and arouses curiosity, but he does not expect an answer from Mousavi. Instead, he intends to provide the forthcoming information as a response, making it clear and noticeable.

He then reveals that Moein, a minister in Khatami's cabinet, was responsible for creating the issue of star students: "(The issue of) star students occurred nearly eight years ago during Mr. Moein's tenure, when he was part of Mr. Mousavi's cabinet. He is a friend of Mr. Mousavi." Given that both Khatami and Mousavi belonged to the same political faction, Ahmadinejad targets their relationship and accuses Mousavi collectively. This connection, along with the reference to Moein's term, serves as a strategic example of how media narratives significantly influence public perception.

By posing speaker-response-seeking questions, Ahmadinejad threatens the credibility of Mousavi's supporters' *âberu*, then discloses potentially embarrassing information in response to the questions. This rhetorical tactic positions the ensuing revelation as a direct rebuttal to Mousavi's criticisms. Notably, Ahmadinejad is also defending his own *âberu*,

shifting the blame back onto Mousavi and his party. His reaction in [82] indicates that Mousavi successfully posed a threat to Ahmadinejad's *âberu* in the earlier exchange.

During the 2013 and 2017 electoral debates, a stark contrast emerged in how candidates engaged with each other. Rather than explicitly naming their rivals, candidates opted for a more indirect approach. They skillfully directed threats, insults, and challenges at perceived collectivist entities, namely the political parties themselves. This strategy aimed to undermine the collective credibility (or *âberu*) of their opponents' political factions.

The deliberate avoidance of party names allowed politicians to navigate discourse without directly implicating specific individuals. Instead, they used generalized terms like 'fundamentalists,' 'conservatives,' 'reformists,' and 'moderates.' These broad labels encapsulated the ideological leanings and policy positions of each party, allowing politicians to avoid directly naming opponents. This rhetorical move blurred the lines between individual politicians and their party affiliations, shifting the focus from personal attacks to ideological confrontations. This approach reinforced the notion that political parties represented distinct worldviews, resonating with voters and contributing to the polarization of the political landscape.

In summary, by deliberately avoiding the use of individual names and instead employing generalized terms, politicians engage in strategic discourse that subtly undermines the collectivist *âberu* of their opponents. This rhetorical approach allows for more nuanced political attacks, as seen in examples [83] and [84], where politicians target the credibility of parties rather than specific individuals.

[83]

6-2013, HDDADL, Debate No.3

با آقای دکتر عارف موافقم که کشور باید با شایسته سالاری اداره شود، ولی ایشان مشکلات امروز کشور را گردن اصولگرایان می اندازند که چرا آمدند اصلاح طلبان را کنار گذاشتند. عرض می کنم بعد از اینکه آقای خاتمی به ریاست جمهوری رسیدند، دولت را از آقای هاشمی گرفته بودند، چه پاییز برگ ریز اصلاحاتی در کشور شروع شد که آمدند گویی جلوی پنجره ، مملکت را مثل یک گونی تکاندند همه را بیرون ریختند. حتی در برخی وزارتخانه ها تا آبدارچی فقط باقی ماند. مساله این بود که در برخی وزارتخانه ها می گفتیم چرا این تغییرات را می دهید؟ می گفتند هر کس به آقای خاتمی رای نداده باید برود. واقعیت بود.

آقای دکتر عارف! من و شما که با هم رفیقیم، هر دو هم دانشگاه تهرانی هستیم. شما رییس دانشگاه تهران بودید و من هم عضو هیات علمی دانشگاه. در مجلس اصلاحات با بنده چه کردند؟ بنده اهل تندروی بودم، یا تفریط، یا اهل شعار بودم یا به دانشجو لطمه زده بودم؟ چه کرده بودم؟ یک مساله دیگر این است که آقای دکتر عارف می گویند مشکلات امروز کشور همه زیر سر اصولگرایان حاکم است... مثالی می زنم. گفتند وقتی خانه کسی را دزد زد. صبح آمد ناراحت بود، همسایه ها جمع شدند. هر کس شروع کرد به صاحبخانه ایراد گرفتن. یکی گفت چرا قفل محکم نزدی؟ چرا شب تا صبح مواظب نبودی؟ همه صاحبخانه را ملامت می کردند. بالاخره این بدبخت بیچاره این وسط گفت بابا! بالاخره یکی هم حرفی به این دزد بزند. دزدی هم در کار بوده که دزدی کرده است. لطفا محض رضای خدا یکی بگوید آن دشمن خارجی که ما را تحریم کرده، آن هم مقداری مقصر است. حالا ما اصولگرایان نمی گوئیم تقصیر نداریم.

(Lit. Trans.) I with Mr. Doctor Aref agree that the country should with meritocracy govern, but they problems today of the country on the neck of fundamentalist put that why come reformists sidelined.

I point out after that Mr. Khatami to presidency reached, government from Mr. Hashemi taken had, what autumn leaf shedding of reforms in country started that came as if front of window, nation like a sack shaken, all out emptied. Even in some ministries only janitors remained. The issue this was that in some ministries we said why these changes you give? They said anyone to Mr. Khatami not voted should go. Reality was.

Mr. Doctor Aref! I and you that with each other friends are, both two university of Tehran are. You president of university of Tehran were and I too member of faculty of university. In parliament reforms with me what did? I person of extremism was, or negligence, or from slogan was, or to student harm done had? What had done I?

One issue other this is that Mr. Doctor Aref say problems today country all under head of fundamentalist ruled is... Example give I. Said they when house of someone robbed was. Morning came he upset was, neighbors gathered. Everyone started to homeowner criticism. One said why lock strong not put? Why night till morning careful not were you? All homeowner criticized. Finally, this unfortunate poor in middle said; come on! Finally, someone some word to this thief say. Thief too was that robbery done has. Please for satisfaction of God someone acknowledge that enemy foreign that us sanctions done, that too bit guilty is. Now we fundamentalist not say faultless are.

(com. Trans.) I agree with Dr. Aref that the country should be governed based on meritocracy. However, he blames today's problems on the fundamentalists, saying they sidelined the reformists.

I must point out that after Mr. Khatami became president and took over the government from Mr. Hashemi, what a "fall of reforms" began-like autumn leaves shedding. It was as if they shook the country like a sack in front of a window and emptied everything out. In some ministries, only the janitors remained. The issue was that when we asked why these changes were happening, the response was: "Anyone who didn't vote for Mr. Khatami must leave." And that was the reality.

Dr. Aref! You and I are friends; we both belong to the University of Tehran-you were its president, and I was a faculty member. But tell me, what did they do to me during the reformist parliament? Was I an extremist? Was I negligent? Did I resort to slogans? Did I harm the students? What had I done?

Another point, Dr. Aref says all of today's problems stem from the ruling fundamentalists. Let me give an example: A man's house was robbed. The next morning, he was upset, and the neighbors gathered around. Everyone started blaming him-one said, "Why didn't you use a stronger lock?" Another asked, "Why weren't you more careful overnight?" Everyone was criticizing the homeowner. Finally, the unfortunate poor man said, "For God's sake, can someone at least say something about the thief? After all, there was a thief, and he did steal!"

So, please, for the sake of fairness, acknowledge that the foreign enemy who has sanctioned us also shares some of the blame. Now, we fundamentalists are not claiming to be faultless.

In [83], Hadad Adel expresses his frustration over the reformists' accusations that fundamentalists are responsible for all the country's current problems. While he does not mention any individual by name, he refers to the parties collectively. His statements highlight the ongoing conflict between the two major political factions and how they have systematically sidelined one another when in power. Hadad Adel questions the IC of his opponents' parties' *âberu* when criticizing their policies and actions.

It should be noted that in the 2013 election, Dr. Aref, the reformist candidate, criticized the fundamentalists for adopting flawed policies, entirely excluding reformists from the

political structure, and disempowering them. This posed a threat to the IC of the fundamentalists' collectivist *âberu*. Aref specifically questioned the fundamentalists' policies of eliminating politicians based on party affiliation rather than meritocracy.

Example [83] demonstrates that Hadad Adel rebukes his reformist rival, Dr. Aref, for holding fundamentalists accountable for the country's current challenges: "... he blames today's problems on the fundamentalists, saying they sidelined the reformists." In defense of his party, Hadad Adel immediately discloses what he perceives as the reformists' misconduct: "After Mr. Khatami became president and took over the government from Mr. Hashemi, a 'fall of reforms' began-like autumn leaves shedding. It was as if they shook the country like a sack in front of a window and emptied everything out. In some ministries, only the janitors remained."

First, the conservative politician questions Mr. Khatami's leadership by referring to the "fall of reforms." In [83], Hadad Adel collectively challenges Aref's party's performance through a strategic rhetorical stance. He then amplifies his criticism of the previous government's actions, portraying them negatively within his immediate remarks: "like autumn leaves shedding. It was as if they shook the country like a sack in front of a window and emptied everything out. In some ministries, only the janitors remained." Through this metaphor, he implies that the reformists' policies led to disorder and inefficiency. Consequently, in [83], Hadad Adel frames his party's actions as justified while countering the accusations against fundamentalists. In other words, he attempts to restore his damaged collectivist *âberu* by reciprocating the attack.

In example [83], Hadad Adel continues to rebuke Aref collectively through his subsequent question and response: "The issue was that when we asked why these changes were happening, the response was: 'Anyone who didn't vote for Mr. Khatami must leave. And that was the reality.'" Here, Hadad Adel challenges the reformists' approach to governance, questioning their diplomacy and competence in dismissing previous officials. By doing so, he directly threatens the IC of their *âberu*. He further escalates this challenge by revealing: "...Anyone who didn't vote for Mr. Khatami must leave. And that was the reality." In this instance, Hadad Adel accuses Aref's party of favoritism, thus undermining the IC of their collectivist *âberu*.

It is also worth noting that the reference to Mr. Khatami's presidency (2005–2013) underscores the ongoing power struggle between reformists and fundamentalists. Hadad Adel strategically raises an uncomfortable question but does not expect Aref to respond. Instead, he collectively threatens Aref's *âberu* through both the question and his immediate response.

Indeed, Hadad Adel challenges the reformists' diplomacy and political strategy by accusing them of failing to advance democracy and meritocracy-an inherently *âberu*-threatening act.

In [83], Hadad Adel further portrays himself as a victim by comparing his own experience to that of his reformist counterpart, highlighting how his circumstances deteriorated under Khatami's administration solely due to his political affiliation: "Dr. Aref! You and I are friends; we both belong to the University of Tehran-you were its president, and I was a faculty member. But tell me, what did they do to me during the reformist parliament? Was I an extremist? Was I negligent? Did I resort to slogans? Did I harm the students? What had I done?" [83].

On the one hand, Hadad Adel seeks to restore his damaged collectivist *âberu* by emphasizing his friendship with Aref and attempting to bridge the political divide. On the other hand, he highlights how he was marginalized due to his right-wing affiliation, while his reformist rival, Dr. Aref, was highly regarded despite their shared academic background. By publicly accusing Aref and his party of favoritism, Hadad Adel directly threatens the *IC* of their *âberu*.

Additionally, he critiques the reformist party's actions collectively to discredit Aref individually: "Was I an extremist? Was I negligent? Did I resort to slogans? Did I harm the students? What had I done?" [83]. Through these rhetorical questions, Hadad Adel seeks to absolve himself of earlier accusations that fundamentalists had dismissed reformist politicians based on party affiliation. He persistently accuses the reformists of favoritism and challenges the *IC* of their *âberu*. Arguably, he employs self-victimization as a strategy to restore his damaged collectivist *âberu*.

In his final remarks in [83], Hadad Adel uses a metaphorical anecdote to illustrate the blame game and the complexities of assigning responsibility. He presents the landlord-thief analogy to argue that while internal political actions may have contributed to the country's problems, external forces-specifically U.S. sanctions on Iran-also play a role: "For God's sake, can someone at least say something about the thief? After all, there was a thief, and he did steal!" In this way, Hadad Adel counters Aref's accusations against fundamentalists by introducing an external factor, partially absolving his party of responsibility and defending its *âberu*.

As seen in [83], political candidates actively engage in defending their party's *âberu* to safeguard their collectivist *âberu*. The excerpt also reflects a broader pattern of social projection, as Hadad Adel's statements exemplify the larger political rivalry between

fundamentalists and reformists. His use of “we” (fundamentalists) and “they” (reformists) underscores the adversarial nature of their relationship.

Furthermore, example [84] demonstrates the impact of Hadad Adel’s *âberu*-threatening discourse on Dr. Aref’s collectivist *âberu*, as Aref subsequently presents counterexamples to refute Hadad Adel’s accusations.

[84]

6-2013, ARF, Debate No.3

در زمان مسئولیتم در وزارت پست و تلگراف من یک معاون راست داشتم و برخی ها هم اصولگرا بودند و در زمان مدیریت سازمان مدیریت هم جریان اصولگرایی در کنار سایر همکاران فعالیت می کرد. آقای خاتمی از وزیری استفاده کرده بود که علاوه بر اینکه رقیب انتخاباتی او بود به او هم رای نداده بود. بنا نیست اینجا از همه عملکرد اصلاحات دفاع کنم بلکه سعی ام بر ایناست که منش اصلاح طلبی را مطرح کنم. بحث من این است که شرایط کشور به گونه ای است که باید از همه توانایی ها استفاده کنیم و نباید توانایی ها را محدود کنیم.

(Lit. Trans.) In time tenure my in at Ministry of Post and Telegraph I one deputy rightist had, and some people too fundamentalist were, and in time of management of Organization of Management also current of fundamentalist alongside other colleagues work. Mr. Khatami from minister used had that besides this rival electoral his was, to him too not voted. Basis not here from all aspect of performance reforms defend I but intention my on this is that principles reformism the idea bring up.

Argument my this is that conditions country in such is that must from all abilities utilize and not must potentials limit.

(Com. Trans.) During my tenure at the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, I had a right-leaning deputy, and during my tenure as the head of the Management and Planning Organization, some of my colleagues were also fundamentalists. Likewise, during my time at the Organization of Management, fundamentalist members worked alongside other colleagues. Mr. Khatami even appointed a minister who was not only his electoral rival but who had also not voted for him. My intention here is not to defend every aspect of the reformists’ performance but rather to highlight the principles of reformism. My argument is that given the current state of the country, we must utilize all abilities and should not limit our potential.

In his defense in [84], Aref reflects on his experience during his tenure in the Ministry of Post and Telegraph to dismiss the accusations when stating that reformists and fundamentalists were cooperating closely in his term; “During my tenure at the Ministry of Post and Telegraph, I had a right-leaning deputy, and during my tenure as the head of the Management and Planning Organization, some of my colleagues were also fundamentalists.” Indeed, the speaker endeavors to emphasize unity between the parties rather than accentuating their differences. However, the inclusion of terms like ‘right-leaning’ and ‘fundamentalists’ subtly hints at the ideological diversity within the organization.

In alignment with Ayatollah Khomeini’s counsel, which urges Muslims to fortify their bonds of brotherhood and eschew division, Iranian presidential candidates castigate their opponents’ party for exacerbating a significant rift between governmental figures and political factions. This division, they argue, undermines the crucial national and international solidarity among Muslims.

In [84], Aref defends his party when declaring that “Mr. Khatami even appointed a minister who was not only his electoral rival but had also not voted for him.” Aref emphasizes the minister’s opposition in Khatami’s time to defend reformists’ collectivist *âberu* in response to his opponent’s, Hadad Adel, accusations that biased reformists excluded all fundamentalists from the system because they did not vote for them in [83]. He strategically defends his party by pointing out the internal dynamics and potential conflicts within the reformist camp. Indeed, Aref refutes favoritism to restore the IC of his collectivist *âberu* when maneuvering his affiliated party’s performance. However, in [84], he declares that “My intention here is not to defend every aspect of the reformists’ performance but rather to highlight the principles of reformism.” Arguably, Aref may contribute to the IC of his *âberu* when declaring he has a reformist approach. He brings unity between reformists and fundamentalists and bridges the gap between the parties when applying the plural pronouns ‘us’ in his following utterances in example [84]; “My argument is that given the current state of the country, we must utilize all abilities and should not limit our potential.” Aref’s claim that the country requires utilizing all capabilities, regardless of party affiliations, underscores his commitment to national interests, transcending partisan boundaries. Therefore, he may be able to refute the former accusations that he and his party are against fundamentalists. In [84], Aref states that Iranian politicians must apply all their capabilities regardless of their party affiliations.

Dr. Aref employs a range of strategic maneuvers to defend his collectivist *âberu* but threatens his fundamentalist rival’s collectivist *âberu*. He eloquently extols his party’s

competence and adept diplomacy, all in service of preserving the integrity and influence of his party's *âberu*.

6.4 Threatening *âberu* of the opponent's family relations

In Iranian collectivist culture, familial and kinship ties are exceptionally strong. On the one hand, Iranians adopt societally sanctioned behaviors that help them maintain or enhance their individual *âberu*, thereby simultaneously safeguarding their collectivist *âberu* as members of a family. On the other hand, they are also deeply committed to protecting *âberu* of their in-group members to preserve their social status and reinforce their collectivist *âberu*. Therefore, personal responsibility for adhering to appropriate verbal and nonverbal behavior-aligned with societal norms, cultural expectations, and religious values-is of paramount importance, as an individual's actions directly reflect on their collectivist *âberu*. In other words, a loss of *âberu* for an individual negatively impacts their family's or group's collectivist *âberu*, while an enhancement of *âberu* for an individual positively reinforces the standing of their family or group. Consequently, Iranians are responsible for maintaining and enhancing both their own *âberu* and, by extension, the collectivist *âberu* of their family or social group. It is important to note that an individual's *âberu*-both personal and collectivist-can be either strengthened or undermined based on their treatment of their interlocutors' *âberu*.

However, in Iranian presidential debates, candidates seek to enhance their own individual and collectivist *âberu* while simultaneously undermining that of their rivals. This dynamic aligns with Levinson's (1979: 91) zero-sum games theory, which describes communicative situations where "one party's losses are the other party's gains." In other words, this theory applies to contexts where two opposing sides are engaged in a competition, and any advantage gained by one side directly translates into a disadvantage for the other. Iranian presidential debates are not merely an exchange of ideas; rather, they represent a zero-sum contest in which each candidate's gain is directly proportional to their opponent's loss. Candidates strategically manipulate every situation to their advantage in a bid to emerge as the absolute victor. They attack their opponents' *âberu* and extend these attacks to their opponents' social networks, thereby threatening their collectivist *âberu*. These networks often include family members and relatives of the targeted politician or their party affiliates. Conversely, candidates work to enhance *âberu* of their own family members and close relations to strengthen their institutional standing and attract undecided voters.

This study demonstrates that Levinson's zero-sum game theory strongly resonates in Iranian presidential debates. Every rhetorical move, every strategic attack, and every carefully crafted defense is a calculated maneuver aimed at shifting the balance of power in favor of one candidate while diminishing the credibility of their opponent. In televised Iranian presidential debates, a candidate's gain in credibility, popularity, or political *âberu* directly erodes their opponent's standing. Iranian political discourse mirrors this zero-sum nature, with candidates skillfully maneuvering to maximize their own gains while minimizing their losses.

According to Fetzer (2007), political discourse is an institutional discourse. Iranian presidential candidates, in their capacity as politicians, pursue specific institutional goals. To achieve these objectives, they employ various *âberu*-threatening strategies designed to discredit their opponents and tarnish *âberu* of their rivals' family members and associates in the eyes of *mardom* (people). Indeed, Iranian presidential candidates perform for a mass media audience by disclosing damaging information, making public accusations, issuing harsh criticisms, and disgracing their adversaries' family connections. The analysis in this section illustrates how presidential candidates utilize the following strategies to attack *âberu* of their opponents' family members.

6.4.1 Questioning the credentials of the opponents' family relations

In example [85], Ahmadinejad threatens Mousavi's collectivist *âberu* by questioning the credentials of Mousavi's wife. In doing so, the incumbent Ahmadinejad directly challenges the SC of her *âberu*, which, in turn, negatively impacts Mousavi himself and threatens the IC of his *âberu*.

[85]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.6

من اینجا پرونده‌های دارم برای یک خانم. شما می‌شناسید در تبلیغات انتخاباتی کنار شما می‌نشینند، برخلاف همه قوانین کشور همزمان که کارمند بوده دو تا رشته فوق لیسانس خوانده در دانشگاه آزاد دکتر گرفته بدون کنکور و بعد در رشته غیر مرتبط دانشیار شده استادیار شده بدون اینکه شرایطش را داشته باشد رییس دانشگاه شده اینها بی قانونی است من با اینها مخالفم من می‌گویم با رانت بازی و باند بازی و این جور چیزهایی که یک عده ببرند بقیه محروم باشند من با اینها مخالفم جناب آقای موسوی نه با قانون، بنده تابع قانونم و دولت ما قانون مدارترین است.

(Lit. Trans.) I here files have for a lady. You know in advertisements campaign beside you sit. Contrary to all laws country, while employee she was, two fields Master's degree studied she, in University Azad doctorate obtained without exam entrance and then in unrelated field professor assistant become without qualifications its having, president of university become, these lawlessness is. I with these oppose, I say with favoritism, corruption, cronyism and such things that some benefit others deprived are. I with these disagree Mr. Mousavi! Not with law, I abide to law am and government ours law-abiding most is.

(Com. Trans.) I have a file here on a (certain) lady. You know her, as she sits beside you in campaign advertisements. Contrary to all the country's laws, while being a government employee, she simultaneously pursued two master's degrees. She then obtained a PhD from Azad University without taking the entrance exam. Later, she became an assistant professor in an unrelated field without meeting the necessary qualifications, and eventually, she was appointed university president. This is a case of lawlessness. I oppose such actions. I am against favoritism, corruption, and cronyism, practices that allow a select few to benefit while depriving others of opportunities. My opposition, Mr. Mousavi, is not to the law itself. I abide by the law, and our government is the most law-abiding.

In example [85], Ahmadinejad initially refers to a woman anonymously but then reveals documents with a photo attached, stating: "I have a file here on a (certain) lady. You know her, as she sits beside you in campaign advertisements." The phrase "you know her" assumes shared knowledge between the speaker and his interlocutor, establishing a direct link between Mousavi and the woman in question. By explicitly mentioning her presence in campaign advertisements, Ahmadinejad not only signals that she is closely affiliated with Mousavi but also places her within the public domain, making her subject to scrutiny. This strategic move intensifies *âberu*-threat, as it shifts the matter from a vague accusation to a targeted, highly visible attack on Mousavi's credibility.

Ahmadinejad's verbal and non-verbal behavior is inherently offensive and immediately provokes Mousavi's reaction, with Karoubi responding later in the subsequent debate. As discussed extensively in Chapter Four, Iranian cultural norms dictate caution when referencing an interlocutor's female family members or close associates, as women play a sensitive role in maintaining *âberu* in Iran's patriarchal society. Given this cultural context, Ahmadinejad's

reference to Mousavi's female associate-especially in a setting where she is publicly seen beside him-implicitly challenges not only her qualifications but also Mousavi's judgment, moral integrity, and *âberu*.

By framing his attack through the image of the woman sitting beside Mousavi in campaign advertisements, Ahmadinejad reinforces a highly public and symbolic association between Mousavi and the alleged misconduct, making *âberu*-threat even more potent. The implication is not only one of nepotism or corruption but also one of compromised moral integrity-an accusation that resonates deeply within the Iranian sociocultural context. However, it is important to note that her presence in the campaign is not illegal.

Then, the incumbent Ahmadinejad discloses damaging information about Mousavi's wife, accusing her of engaging in illegal activities and threatening the IC of Mousavi's collectivist *âberu*: "while being a government employee, she simultaneously pursued two master's degrees." The use of 'while' highlights the simultaneity of her employment and academic pursuits, implicitly suggesting a potential conflict between her professional responsibilities and her educational advancement.

As seen in [85], Ahmadinejad continues to divulge further unfavorable details, accusing Mousavi's wife of benefiting from favoritism. He intensifies *âberu*-threat against Mousavi's collectivist *âberu* through an assertive speech act: "She got a PhD without attending the university entrance exam. Now she is an assistant professor without having the necessary qualifications. She is now heading a faculty." By employing lexemes associated with academic and professional credibility-such as 'file,' 'campaign,' 'law,' 'Master's degrees,' 'PhD,' 'assistant professor,' and 'faculty'-Ahmadinejad directly questions his opponent's wife's competence, thereby threatening her *âberu* and, by extension, Mousavi's collectivist *âberu*. In other words, by challenging the IC of her *âberu*, Ahmadinejad simultaneously threatens *âberu* of Mousavi and his family.

Ahmadinejad deliberately and unmitigatedly attacks *âberu* of his opponent's family-Mousavi and his wife-by persistently revealing additional adverse information. Moreover, he strategically sways public opinion by raising concerns about fairness and the merit-based system, contrasting meritocracy with favoritism.

Publicly disclosing such information, regardless of its accuracy, violates *âberu* cultural schema and is generally viewed negatively. Arguably, Ahmadinejad brandishes numerous documents as supposed proof of his claims, likely to justify his overt *âberu*-threatening behavior and mitigate potential negative perceptions by *mardom*, given the cyclical nature of *âberu*-threatening discourse.

Interestingly, Koutlaki (2010: 34) also highlights how revealing confidential information and exposing unpleasant facts can lead to *âberu*-loss for the person making the disclosure.

Face loss may occur when facts that were meant to remain secret are revealed, or when adverse or negative facts about one's character or actions become known. Keeping up appearances (*zâher-râ hefz kardan*), keeping secret facts that should be kept a secret, and not revealing information that may cast an unflattering light on someone are all part of maintaining people's face and that of their social group. This sentiment has a strong bearing on Iranians' behavior, deportment, and relationships (Koutlaki 2010: 34).

In [85], the incumbent Ahmadinejad threatens Mousavi's *âberu* by either revealing damaging facts, exposing information that was meant to remain confidential, or making unfounded accusations against his wife. Iranian cultural and societal norms, as well as religious values, discourage public disclosure and accusations, particularly regarding personal and family matters. However, in example [85], it is difficult to distinguish between accusation and disclosure strategies. Nonetheless, whether Ahmadinejad is revealing information or making accusations, his actions ultimately damage Mousavi's reputation, credibility, and collectivist *âberu*.

After accusing Mousavi of breaking the law and involving his wife in the electoral campaign-thus damaging the IC of his *âberu*-Ahmadinejad distances himself from Mousavi and his alleged lawlessness, stating: "This is a case of lawlessness. I oppose such actions." Indeed, in [85], Ahmadinejad presents himself as a man of integrity, thereby enhancing the IC of his own *âberu*. Conversely, he accuses Mousavi's network of favoritism, declaring: "I am against favoritism, corruption, and cronyism, practices that allow a select few to benefit while depriving others of opportunities." By contrasting those who benefit from privilege with those who are deprived, Ahmadinejad expands his critique beyond Mousavi's family, framing it as a broader societal issue concerning equity and justice.

Since Ahmadinejad repeatedly accuses Mousavi's family members of favoritism, his use of the determiner 'some'-which refers to an unspecified and anonymous group-implicitly includes Mousavi's wife. Ahmadinejad then strengthens the IC of his own *âberu* in subsequent statements by positioning his government as law-abiding and intolerant of social injustice, aligning himself with Ayatollah Khomeini's principles: "I am opposed to these. I am law-abiding; my government abides by the law more than anyone else" [85]. In other words, he

attempts to enhance his *âberu* and that of his party by emphasizing his government's adherence to the law and its efforts to combat injustice and favoritism-values explicitly endorsed by Ayatollah Khomeini. Ahmadinejad's emphasis on lawlessness aligns with broader political discourse on governance and the rule of law. Indeed, in example [85], he elevates his own network while simultaneously discrediting Mousavi's, including his family relations.

Ahmadinejad violates *âberu* cultural schema and threatens Mousavi's collectivist *âberu* by persistently disclosing damaging information about his wife and accusing her of corruption. In example [85], he intensifies *âberu*-threatening act by employing multiple *âberu*-threatening strategies that reinforce one another.

Ahmadinejad's attack proves effective, as evidenced by Mousavi's response in [86], where he complains to the debate moderator about Ahmadinejad's behavior and subsequently provides *mardom* with more precise information to refute the allegations and restore his and his family's damaged collectivist *âberu*.

[86]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.6

جلوی بنده عکس خانم بنده را میگیرد که این را اینجوری کردن اینجوری کردن. ایشان
مهمترین روشنفکر زن این کشور هست ده سال برای دکترای علوم سیاسی زحمت کشیده
سندهايش هست مدارکش هست، سایتهای مرتبط با شما برگشتند علیه ایشان جوسازی
کردند، ایشان قرآن پژوه است بله ایشان افتخارش این است که فوق لیسانس رشته هنر هم
دارد دکترای علوم سیاسی هم فوق لیسانس علوم سیاسی هم دارد.

(Lit. Trans) In front of me, picture wife myself holding up, that this has done she and that this has done she. She prominent most woman intellectual of this country is. Ten years for doctorate science political hard worked-documents its are, credentials her are. Websites affiliated with you against her campaign smear launched. She Quran scholar is. Yes, she pride her this is that Master's degree art field also holds, doctorate science political also Master's degree science political also has.

(Com. Trans.) He holds up a picture of my wife in front of me, saying she did this and that. She is one of the most prominent intellectual women in this country. She worked hard for ten years to earn her PhD in political science-her documents and credentials are all there. Yet, websites affiliated with you have launched a smear campaign against her. She is also a scholar of the Quran. Yes,

she takes pride in the fact that she holds a master's degree in art, as well as both a PhD and a master's degree in political science.

As indicated in Chapter Four, women can be treated as a man's Achilles' heel to threaten their collectivist *âberu*. In [86], Mousavi's initial critical remarks indicate that Ahmadinejad's behavior is *âberu*-threatening: "He holds up a picture of my wife in front of me, saying she did this and that." In this example, *âberu* is closely tied to *nâmus*, and the incumbent Ahmadinejad attacks Mousavi's *nâmus*, his wife, to damage his *âberu*.

In his subsequent statements, Mousavi adopts an *âberu*-offensive stance in response to Ahmadinejad's accusations regarding his wife's educational records. While a high level of education can serve as an *âberu*-boosting factor by projecting a more sophisticated social image, questioning its validity constitutes an *âberu*-loss factor. Therefore, when Ahmadinejad challenges the credibility of Mousavi's wife's academic credentials, Mousavi counters by providing specific details about her achievements and emphasizing the effort she invested in earning her PhD: "She is one of the most prominent intellectual women in this country. She worked hard for ten years to earn her PhD in political science-her documents and credentials are all there." He strategically employs lexemes and phrases such as "intellectual," "PhD in political science," and later "a scholar of the Quran" to underscore his wife's academic accomplishments and expertise. Mousavi's statements emphasize the significance of her achievements, reinforcing her credibility and restoring the *IC* of her *âberu*-an essential step in recovering his own collectivist *âberu*.

Mousavi then shifts to an accusatory stance, blaming Ahmadinejad for fostering a hostile environment against his wife: "Yet, websites affiliated with you have launched a smear campaign against her." [86] Arguably, this statement constitutes an accusatory speech act, as Mousavi directly attributes the smear campaign to Ahmadinejad, framing him as responsible for the attacks.

In [86], Mousavi further capitalizes on his wife's field of research to enhance their collectivist *âberu*. He strengthens her credibility and political *âberu* by emphasizing how her academic credentials and honors contribute to her expertise. In Iran's theocratic system and its religious community of practice, Islam holds a central role, and the Quran commands deep respect. Consequently, those who have studied Islamic or Quranic sciences, alongside clergies, can build greater self-*âberu*. In this context, Mousavi highlights his wife's religious scholarship to reinforce and elevate her *âberu*: "She is also a scholar of the Quran." He further boosts her social standing by underscoring her diverse educational background: "Yes, she takes pride in

the fact that she holds a master's degree in art, as well as both a PhD and a master's degree in political science." As demonstrated in [86], Mousavi restores his wife's *âberu* as a means of restoring his own. He reframes the situation to his advantage by glorifying her high educational level and its diversity, both of which serve as *âberu*-boosting factors in Iranian culture. Additionally, by highlighting her academic background, Mousavi seeks to sway public opinion in their favor.

Ahmadinejad's actions, holding up a stack of papers with a small black-and-white photo of a woman attached to the front, also provoke Karoubi's reaction in the following debate. The incumbent Ahmadinejad threatens Mousavi's *âberu* by revealing that the file belongs to his wife, a highly accomplished figure who holds two advanced degrees (MA and PhD). In doing so, Ahmadinejad deliberately targets one of Mousavi's pillars of strength-his wife's high level of education, which is traditionally regarded as an *âberu*-boosting factor. By claiming that her academic achievements are fraudulent, Ahmadinejad directly threatens the IC of her *âberu*.

Example [87] further demonstrates Karoubi's defense of Mousavi's wife, confirming that Ahmadinejad's actions were indeed *âberu*-threatening.

[87]

6-2009-KRB, Debate No.3

حضرتعالی یک مقدار جرات و شجاعت زیادی داریدو اسم می برید اما من نمی توانم اسم افراد را ببرم و شما یک دفعه مثلا به آقای مهندس می گویی یک خانمی هست، بگویم؟ بگویم؟ زهرا رهنورد نام و نشانش قبل از انقلاب از خود مهندس موسوی بیشتر بود، دو تا کتاب داشت، برو وبیایی داشت، اهل فکر و اندیشه بود. بعد از انقلاب، سال 65 که امام طرح شاهد را در همان فروردین برای من تنظیم کرد که از بخش های علوم و آموزش و پرورش و همه چیز بیایند، تنها خانمی که ما به همراه یک مجموعه فرهنگی دعوت کردیم خانم زهرا رهنورد بود که آمد و چقدر موثر بود.

(Lit. Trans.) Your Excellency a bit of courage and boldness have, and name mention you whereas I not can name individuals. But then, you once, for instance, to a gentleman like engineer you say a lady is, should I say? Should I say? Zahra Rahnvard name her and reputation her before *enqelâb* (revolution), from himself Engineer Mousavi greater was. Two books written had she, a website had she, person of thought and intellect was. After *enqelâb* (revolution), in year 1365 when Imam plan of Shahid in same Farvardin for me assigned, that from sections of science and

education and everything together bring, only woman that we with a group cultural invited was Mrs. Zahra Rahnavard who came and how impactful was.

(Com. Trans.) Your Excellency, you show quite a bit of courage and boldness in mentioning names, whereas I cannot name individuals. But then, for instance, when speaking to someone like the engineer, you say, ‘There is a lady... Should I say her name? Should I say it?’ Well, Zahra Rahnavard, her name and reputation before the *enqelâb* (revolution), were even greater than Engineer Mousavi’s. She had written two books, had a strong presence, and was a person of thought and intellect. After the *enqelâb* (revolution), in the year 1365 (1986), when Imam (Khomeini) assigned me the Shahid Plan that April, bringing together different sectors, including science, education, and more, the only woman we invited, along with a cultural group, was Mrs. Zahra Rahnavard. She came, and how impactful she was!

In [87], Karoubi begins by directly criticizing Ahmadinejad’s boorish behavior through an *IÂTA* strategy: “You show quite a bit of courage and boldness in mentioning names...” [87]. He then refers to Mousavi as ‘Mr. Engineer’ to enhance the SC of his *âberu*, aligning with Koutlaki’s (2010) findings that Iranians address one another by their job titles, such as *Âqâ-ye* (Mr.) *Mohandes* (Engineer), to confer a superior status. Karoubi publicly lambasts Ahmadinejad’s behavior while elevating Mousavi’s status, remarking: “You suddenly say to a gentleman like Mr. Engineer Mousavi, ‘There is a lady... Should I say her name? Should I say it?’”

He continues to promote Mousavi’s wife in an effort to restore her damaged *âberu* and reinforce their shared, collectivist *âberu*: “Zahra Rahnavard, her name and reputation before the *enqelâb* (revolution) were even greater than Engineer Mousavi’s. She had written two books, had a strong presence, and was a person of thought and intellect” [87]. Karoubi underscores Rahnavard’s achievements through lexemes such as ‘intellectual,’ ‘books,’ and ‘impactful,’ implying that her renown surpasses that of Mousavi, thereby highlighting her prominence.

In example [87], Karoubi preserves the IC of his own *âberu* while enhancing Rahnavard’s *âberu* and, consequently, Mousavi’s collectivist *âberu* by stating that Zahra Rahnavard was the only woman who actively collaborated on a project initiated by Ayatollah

Khomeini. By identifying Rahnavard as an intellectual, he reinforces her identity as an influential woman. Thus, Karoubi restores Mousavi's collectivist *âberu* by exalting his wife and emphasizing her association with Ayatollah Khomeini. In [87], Karoubi employs an *âberu*-defensive strategy to enhance a rival's collectivist *âberu*, ultimately leading to a self *âberu*-boost.

6.4.2 Accusing the opponent or their party member's family relations of corruption, e.g., banking violations, smuggling or lawlessness

In [88], Qalibaf threatens Jahangiri's collectivist *âberu* by insinuating that his brother is involved in a banking violation at the Tourism Bank, which the brother owns. He extends this alleged wrongdoing to include Jahangiri himself, implicitly associating him with a broader group of banking violators. In doing so, Qalibaf directly accuses them of corruption and nepotism.

[88]

6-2017- QLBF, Debate No. 3

تخلفات بانکی مسئولش دولت است. چرا از بانک گردشگری که متعلق به برادر خودتان است شروع نمی‌کنید و با آن برخورد نمی‌کنید. شما مثل آقای روحانی اینجا می‌ایستید و به مردم نگاه می‌کنید و دروغ می‌گویید.

(Lit. Trans.) Violations bank, responsibility of it the government is. Why from bank tourism, which belongs to brother your, you not start and action not take. You like Mr. Rouhani here standing and to people looking and lie telling.

(Com. Trans.) Banking violations are the government's responsibility. Why don't you start with Tourism Bank, which belongs to your own brother, and take action against it? You stand here, looking at *mardom* (people), and lie, just like Mr. Rouhani.

In [88], Qalibaf highlights a banking violation by claiming that the government is responsible for it: "Banking violations are the government's responsibility." He then immediately poses a rhetorical question to communicate with *mardom*, suggesting that the Vice President's brother is involved in financial misconduct at the Tourism Bank: "Why don't you start with Tourism Bank, which belongs to your own brother, and take action against it?" [88].

By naming a specific bank, Qalibaf strengthens his argument. He further reinforces his claim by using terms such as ‘banking violations’ and ‘Tourism Bank’ emphasizing the gravity of the issue.

It is important to note that this rhetorical question serves as an *âberu*-threatening strategy since Qalibaf is not genuinely seeking an explanation from his interlocutor but rather attempting to sway public opinion. Instead of inviting a response, he implicitly accuses Jahangiri of nepotism by revealing his brother’s alleged involvement in banking violations. This indirect accusation challenges Jahangiri’s integrity, as Qalibaf strategically links him to corruption to undermine his credibility and political *âberu*.

Qalibaf threatens the Vice President’s collectivist *âberu* by accusing his brother of financial corruption, thereby challenging the IC of his *âberu*. As seen in [88], Qalibaf does not expect an answer to his rhetorical question; rather, he aims to convince *mardom* that Jahangiri is deceitful and complicit in corruption despite his official role in combating it: “You stand here, looking at *mardom* (people), and lie-just like Mr. Rouhani.” In other words, Qalibaf accuses the Vice President of falsehood and hypocrisy, suggesting that while his brother violates banking regulations, he pretends to fight against corruption.

Later in [88], Qalibaf escalates his *âberu*-threatening act by directly addressing Jahangiri and accusing him of lying to *mardom*: “You stand here, looking at *mardom* (people), and lie-just like Mr. Rouhani.” His use of *âberu*-threatening language and accusatory rhetoric reflects an aggressive stance, aiming to assert dominance and discredit his political opponents. His attacks on both Jahangiri and Rouhani also reveal internal power struggles, as he seeks to weaken their positions and consolidate his own influence by collectively accusing them of corruption.

As discussed in chapter four, lying is considered a sin, and individuals who engage in it jeopardize their own *âberu*. However, Qalibaf extends this accusation beyond Jahangiri, implicating the incumbent president, Rouhani, as well. In essence, he portrays the current administration as corrupt, accusing it of turning a blind eye to financial misconduct within its ranks while deceiving *mardom*. He argues that rather than fighting corruption, the government has embraced nepotism, allowing dishonesty and financial misconduct to flourish-an approach fundamentally at odds with the ideological principles of the Islamic Revolution.

From a linguistic perspective, *âberu*-threatening strategies in [88] are deeply interconnected. For example, a disclosure strategy is embedded within an unpalatable rhetorical question, which intensifies *âberu*-threatening act directed at Jahangiri and Rouhani.

During the 2017 presidential election, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf launched a scathing attack on President Hassan Rouhani, Vice President Eshaq Jahangiri, and their family members, leveling serious allegations of widespread corruption. His accusations extended beyond the two prominent politicians to include their relatives, implicating them in financial misconduct. As demonstrated in example [89], Qalibaf accuses Rouhani of endorsing corruption due to his familial connections.

[89]

6-2017- QLBF, Debate No.3

آقای روحانی! باید اولین برخورد را خودتان انجام دهید بستگان شما در کنارشان چه می‌کنند؟ چرا برخورد نمی‌کنید؟ چون خود شما هم از این رانت استفاده می‌کنید... من اسناد ملک‌ها را آورده‌ام که به نام این دو شخص بزرگوار است.

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Rouhani! should first action yourself take. Relatives your beside you what doing? Why not action you not take? Because you too from this privilege benefiting... I documents property brought have that to name of these two honorable person is.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Rouhani! You should be the first to take action. What are your relatives doing by your side? Why don't you take action? Because you yourself are also benefiting from this privilege... I have brought the property documents, which are registered in the names of these two honorable individuals.

As seen in [89], Qalibaf directly addresses Rouhani-“Mr. Rouhani!”-which immediately establishes a confrontational tone. He then commands Rouhani, “You should be the first to take action,” implying an expectation or demand for accountability. Following this, Qalibaf poses unpalatable rhetorical questions that do not seek genuine answers but rather emphasize his accusations. He directly challenges the incumbent president and the actions of his relatives under Rouhani’s protection with his first question: “What are your relatives doing by your side?” At first glance, this question appears to request an explanation, but it effectively communicates an accusation of nepotism.

Qalibaf immediately follows with a second question: “Why don’t you take action?” [89]. The juxtaposition of these two questions implies that Rouhani’s relatives are engaged in corruption and that Rouhani himself may be complicit by failing to act or by deliberately

ignoring wrongdoing within his inner circle. By structuring his argument in this way, Qalibaf suggests to *mardom* that Rouhani not only tolerates corruption but actively enables it.

Qalibaf's interest is not in Rouhani's response but in his own assertion that Rouhani and his family members are corrupt: "Because you yourself are also benefiting from this privilege...." The inclusion of the adverb 'also' in this statement strengthens the accusation, subtly linking it back to the first question: "What are your relatives doing by your side?" This linguistic structure implies that Rouhani's relatives are indeed benefiting from special privileges, and the president does not intervene because he, too, is personally gaining from them. In this way, Qalibaf extends the accusation beyond Rouhani's relatives, directly threatening the IC of their *âberu* by implicating them in collective wrongdoing.

Throughout the extract, Qalibaf positions himself as an authority figure, addressing Rouhani directly and scrutinizing his actions. He escalates his accusations in [89] when he declares: "I have brought the property documents, which are registered in the names of these two honorable individuals." By explicitly referring to 'documents,' Qalibaf implies that he possesses concrete evidence, thereby shaping public perception and reinforcing his narrative. Whether he is genuinely revealing incriminating information or merely making public accusations, his statement threatens the IC of Rouhani and Jahangiri's collectivist *âberu*. In essence, Qalibaf fosters suspicion and casts doubt on the integrity of these political figures.

In response to Qalibaf's accusations, Jahangiri strategically avoids directly calling him a liar. Instead, he challenges the accuracy of Qalibaf's claims by questioning his source of information: "Mr. Qalibaf, I never said that you are lying; rather, I said that you are presenting a misleading report." [90]. As outlined in chapter four, both lying and publicly accusing someone of lying are culturally condemned and considered sins in Islamic values. Moreover, publicly leveling accusations is a severe *âberu*-threatening act, as it can damage the reputation of the accused. To mitigate this risk, Jahangiri refrains from explicitly branding Qalibaf a liar, as doing so could jeopardize his own *âberu* by portraying him as inconsiderate or as an *âberu-bar* (someone who damages others' *âberu*), which could alienate *mardom*.

In his response, Jahangiri not only refutes Qalibaf's allegations but also defends himself against charges of cronyism and nepotism. His strategy in [90] serves to exonerate him while avoiding direct confrontation that could backfire and threaten his own standing.

[90]

6-2017-JHNGR, Debate No.3

آقای قالیباف من یکجا نگفتم که شما دروغ می‌گویید بلکه به شما گفتم که خلاف گزارش می‌دهید. من هیچ‌گاه از رانت و از روابط استفاده نکردم و اگر خانه‌ای گرفتم به قیمت روز بوده است. هر چیز جز خانه‌ای که دارم، اگر هر اراضی یا املاک دیگری در تهران دارم مال آقای قالیباف. زندگی من سفیدتر از این کاغذ است. در زندگی من یا فرزندانم لکه‌ای نیست.

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Qalibaf, I not anywhere said that you lie, but to you said that misleading report give you. I never from privilege and from connections not used, and if a house acquired I at price of market was. Anything except house that have I, if any lands or properties other in Tehran have, for Mr. Qalibaf. Life my whiter than this paper is. In life my or children my a stain not is.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Qalibaf, I have never said that you are lying; rather, I told you that you are presenting a misleading report. I have never used special privileges and personal connections, and if I have acquired a house, it has been at the market price. Everything I own, except my house-if I have any other land or property in Tehran-belongs to Mr. Qalibaf. My life is whiter than this paper. There is not a single stain on my life or that of my children.

Jahangiri directly addresses Mr. Qalibaf, signaling an ongoing debate while maintaining an assertive and focused tone. He clarifies that he is not accusing Mr. Qalibaf of lying but rather questioning the accuracy of the information he has received: “Mr. Qalibaf, I have never said that you are lying; rather, I told you that you are presenting a misleading report.” He then makes a striking statement, declaring that if he owns any additional lands or properties in Tehran—excluding his current house—Mr. Qalibaf is free to claim them: “Everything I own, except my house-if I have any other land or property in Tehran-belongs to Mr. Qalibaf” [90]. This assertion may serve as either a direct challenge to Mr. Qalibaf’s authority or an attempt to emphasize transparency.

As elaborated in Chapter Four, Iranian politicians must distance themselves from aristocratic privilege and a luxurious lifestyle, values that Ayatollah Khomeini firmly rejected in his vision of an Islamic government. Consequently, being accused of acquiring extensive properties while in power severely threatens the IC of their *âberu*. In this exchange, Qalibaf implicitly accuses Jahangiri of straying from the principles of the Leader of the Revolution and of using his political influence to expand his wealth. In response, Jahangiri attempts to defend

his reputation by inviting Qalibaf to seize any excess properties he allegedly owns, except for his primary family residence, as proof of his financial integrity.

To reinforce his claim of a transparent and modest financial life, *Jahangiri* employs a metaphor, likening his integrity to a white paper—a symbol of purity, innocence, and the absence of wrongdoing. He extends this assertion beyond himself, including his children, thereby strengthening his collectivist *âberu* while simultaneously restoring any damage to his individual *âberu*: “My life is whiter than this paper. There is not a single stain on my life or that of my children.” This declaration underscores Jahangiri’s insistence on personal and familial integrity.

Example [90] illustrates that politicians often bolster their collectivist *âberu* by asserting their family members’ financial propriety, particularly when they are in positions of political power. In doing so, they not only protect their own *âberu* but also criticize nepotism to reinforce the IC of their individual and collective reputations.

The offensive and defensive reactions from Rouhani further demonstrate that Qalibaf successfully managed to threaten the IC of his *âberu*, as seen in Example [91].

[91]

05-2017-RHN, Debate No.3

شما ریاکاری می‌کنید اگر من تخلف کردم بهتر است شکایت کنید, اگر بحث زمین است اگر من اضافه داشتم تماماً متعلق به شما باشد و اگر تخلف کردم شکایت کنید و ناراحتید بهتر است به املاک طرّقه نیز که در دست اقوام شما است رسیدگی شود.

(Lit. Trans.) You hypocrisy do if I violation did better is complaint do, if discussion land is, if I excess had entirely belong to you be and if violation did complain and if upset you, better is to properties Torqaba also that in hand of relatives your is investigated be.

(Com. Trans.) You are being hypocritical. If I have violated the rules, it is better to file a complaint. If it’s about the land, if I have extra, it all belongs to you. And if I have violated the rules, file a complaint. If you are upset, it is better to investigate the properties in Torqabeh, which are in the hands of your relatives.

In [91], Rouhani’s word choice—such as ‘hypocritical,’ ‘violated the rules,’ ‘extra lands,’ and ‘investigate’—suggests a legal or political context. He begins with an accusation speech act: “You are being hypocritical.” This opening immediately establishes a confrontational tone. He

then adopts an *âberu*-defensive reaction to restore the IC of his *âberu*, a strategy previously analyzed in Example [61]. Following this, *Rouhani* shifts to an *âberu*-offensive stance by targeting his opponent's relatives, calling for an investigation: "If you are upset, it is better to investigate the properties in Torqabeh, which are in the hands of your relatives." The phrase "If you are upset" carries a sarcastic undertone, juxtaposed with the illocutionary act of requesting an investigation.

Example [91] highlights underlying power dynamics in which *Rouhani* appears to assert authority or control. Additionally, he employs indirect language to subtly convey accusations and requests. By publicly accusing *Qalibaf* of nepotism and implicating his relatives in embezzlement, *Rouhani* launches a collectivist *âberu*-threatening strategy, mirroring *Qalibaf*'s own tactics. *Rouhani* challenges the IC of *Qalibaf*'s *âberu* by suggesting that his concerns about corruption are disingenuous, given that his own relatives allegedly amass wealth through illicit means under his protection or due to kinship ties. *Rouhani*'s response confirms that *Qalibaf* successfully managed to threaten his *âberu*, prompting a counterattack.

Iranian politicians frequently employ a calculated strategy to expose corruption within their opponents by scrutinizing their family connections. This tactic aims to reveal the extent of political malfeasance, suggesting that corruption is not confined to individuals but extends through familial networks. Examining a broader research of political discourse, I extract several instances where family ties are weaponized for scrutiny and analysis. These examples, found in [92-94], serve as compelling evidence of how corruption infiltrates not only governance but also personal relationships.

The 2017 presidential election was a heated contest between three main candidates: *Qalibaf*, *Jahangiri*, and *Rouhani*. Throughout the campaign, *Qalibaf*, then Mayor of Tehran, repeatedly accused the incumbent president *Rouhani*'s administration of smuggling. In response, *Rouhani* and his Vice President, *Jahangiri*, accused *Qalibaf* of spreading misinformation in an effort to damage their administration's reputation. To counteract these allegations and restore their damaged collectivist *âberu*, they engaged in *âberu*-offensive and defensive rhetoric. The following interactions illustrate the strategic deployment of these *âberu*-related tactics throughout the 2017 election.

[92]

6-2017- QLBF, Debate No. 3

جناب آقای جهانگیری ما اگر بحث ۴ درصدی ها را می‌گوییم به همین دلیل است، هیچ مبارزه‌ای علیه قاچاق وجود ندارد. شرط اول مبارزه پیشگیری است

شما دیدید در هفته گذشته دیدید که فرزند وزیر فرهنگ قاچاق کالا کرد. چگونه انتظار دارید این وزرا مانع قاچاق شوند؟ آیا فکر می‌کنید که می‌توانید از قاچاق جلوگیری کنید؟ در حالیکه پیشگیری از قاچاق وظیفه شما است.

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Jahangiri, if we about the 4% speak, for same reason is, no fight against smuggling exists. The condition first of the combatting prevention is. You saw in week last an offspring of minister that affair of culture has, himself hand in this practice has. How you expect these ministers from smuggling prevent? Do you think if you can from smuggling prevent? When preventing from smuggling is responsibility your.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Jahangiri, when we speak about the “4 percenters,” it is for this reason: there is no fight against smuggling. The first condition for combatting it is prevention. Last week, you saw an offspring of the minister in charge of cultural affairs who himself engages in this practice. How do you expect these ministers to prevent smuggling? Do you think you can prevent smuggling, when preventing smuggling is your responsibility?

In [92], Qalibaf reiterates his categorization, where the wealthy represent the 4%, and the poor the 96%. Through this distinction and statistics, he aims to emphasize the gap between these two social classes. He places the government in the 4% and insists that they should be held accountable for smuggling, one of the key issues discussed in the third debate of the 2017 election. In fact, Qalibaf associates corruption with Jahangiri, Rouhani, and their cabinet, accusing them of failing in smuggling prevention: “...there is no fight against smuggling. The first condition for combatting it is prevention.” [92]. He accuses Rouhani and his party of accumulating wealth by abusing their power and supporting their relatives in smuggling, rather than taking action to fight it. In this way, Qalibaf challenges the integrity of the current government’s collectivist *âberu*.

According to Qalibaf’s claims, a corrupt administration cannot effectively control smuggling. He cites the case of the current government’s cultural minister, whose daughter was involved in illegally importing products from Turkey: “Last week, you saw an offspring of the

minister in charge of cultural affairs who himself engages in this practice.” [92]. Candidates extend their *âberu*-threatening acts to the family members of their opponents’ party members. For instance, Qalibaf attacks *âberu* of the daughter of the culture minister in Rouhani’s government. By revealing this scandal, he tarnishes the minister’s collectivist *âberu*, thereby threatening the integrity of the incumbent’s *âberu*. Qalibaf challenges the government’s *âberu*, suggesting that it is tainted by corruption, as he claims. In other words, he reveals that not only are Rouhani’s party members corrupt, but even their immediate networks are complicit in venality. Iranians’ collectivist *âberu* is closely intertwined with the performance of their immediate and extended networks. Qalibaf takes advantage of Iranian collectivist culture and argues that Jahangiri is incapable of preventing smuggling because he is surrounded by family members involved in it, as evidenced by his question: “Do you think you can prevent smuggling?” [92].

In the 2009 election, incumbent president Ahmadinejad similarly targeted politicians and their family members, accusing them of legal violations. For instance, in example [93], Ahmadinejad highlights the Statavil case to exploit the scandals surrounding the family connections of Mousavi’s supporters.

It may be useful to provide some background on the Statavil case. The Statavil bribery scandal was a political corruption incident that took place between Iran and a Norwegian oil company in 2002 and 2003. In this case, a bribe was paid to an Iranian consulting firm linked to Mehdi Hashemi, the son of the Iranian president at the time, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Although Mehdi Hashemi had no direct power over the allocation of oil and gas contracts to foreign companies, the bribe scandal implicated him nonetheless. The Statavil case was considered a violation of economic ethics in Norway, leading to legal consequences for those involved in Norway. However, no legal actions were taken against the recipients of the bribe in Iran, and the case was eventually suspended. Ahmadinejad, therefore, used this scandal to question the integrity of Hashemi’s family, specifically targeting the legitimacy of their actions and the credibility of their *âberu*. By publicly accusing Hashemi’s family members of lawbreaking, Ahmadinejad sought to undermine the collectivist *âberu* of Mousavi’s supporters and, in turn, damage Mousavi’s political reputation.

[93]

6-2009-AHMDNJD, Debate No.6

بی قانونی اینهاست جناب آقای موسوی. استات اوایل بی قانونی است که طرف می‌آید اینجا محاکمه میشود. محکوم میشود از زندان فراری داده میشود. استات اوایل بی قانونی است که طرف می‌آید

اینجا محاکمه میشود و می‌رود خارج و تهش پسر آقای هاشمی است، بی قانونی در پسران بعضی از همین آقایانی است که امروز از شما حمایت میکنند. پسر آقای ناطق چه طوری میلیاردر شد؟ خود، آقای ناطق چه طوری دارد زندگی میکند؟ اینها حامیان شما هستند. بی قانونی اینهاست.

(Lit. Trans.) This is lawlessness, Mr. Mousavi! Statavil is lawlessness, where someone comes here, is trialed, is convicted, and escaped from prison. Statavil is lawlessness, where someone here comes, triald is, and then goes abroad. And in the end, it's the son of Mr. Hashemi. Lawlessness in the sons of some of these same gentlemen is who today from you support. How son of Mr. Nategh a billionaire become? How Mr. Nategh live? Thes supporters your are. Lawlessness this is.

(Com. Trans.) This is lawlessness, Mr. Mousavi! The Statavil (case) is a lawlessness, where someone comes to trial, gets convicted, and then gets escaped from prison. Statavil represents lawlessness where someone is trialed, leaves the country, and in the end, it's the son of Mr. Hashemi (involved). The lawlessness is (in the actions) of the sons of some of these gentlemen who are supporting you today. How did Mr. Nategh's son become a billionaire? How does Mr. Nategh live? These are your supporters. This is lawlessness.

In example [93], in response to Mousavi's allegations that Ahmadinejad does not respect the law, Ahmadinejad threatens Mousavi's collectivist *âberu*: "Mr. Mousavi! The Statavil case is lawlessness, where someone comes to trial, is convicted, and then escapes from prison. Statavil represents lawlessness, where someone is tried, leaves the country, and in the end, it's the son of Mr. Hashemi involved." [93]. Ahmadinejad attacks *âberu* of Hashemi's sons to damage Hashemi's *âberu*, and consequently, Mousavi's *âberu*, since Hashemi is a key supporter of Mousavi in the 2009 election. Therefore, when *âberu* of the family members within one's network is threatened, the individual's own *âberu* is also at risk.

In this example [93], Ahmadinejad persistently shifts the accusation towards the sons of Mousavi's supporters, anonymously accusing them of lawlessness: "The lawlessness is (in the actions) of the sons of some of these gentlemen who are supporting you today." However, he quickly follows up with specific names: "How did Mr. Nategh's son become a billionaire? How does Mr. Nategh live?" Ahmadinejad questions the substantial wealth of the children of Mousavi's allies. By doing so, he challenges the IC of these individuals and their family members' *âberu*. Ahmadinejad raises uncomfortable questions, revealing unpleasant

information that criminalizes Mousavi's supporters and their immediate networks. This strategy is intended to associate these supporters with Mousavi, thereby tarnishing his collectivist *âberu*. Ahmadinejad effectively demonstrates how corruption has pervaded Mousavi's supporters and questions the integrity of their *âberu*.

As a result, Ahmadinejad intensifies his *âberu*-threatening act by publicly linking the corruption of Mousavi's supporters with Mousavi himself: "These are your supporters." Ahmadinejad's approach of publicly disclosing such damning information about Mousavi's supporters and their family members is a deliberate attempt to undermine Mousavi's *âberu*. By revealing the perceived corruption of Mousavi's allies, Ahmadinejad aims to tarnish Mousavi's image.

Furthermore, Ahmadinejad's strategy involves publicizing the names of individuals, such as Hashemi, Nategh, and their sons, accusing them of lawlessness in an attempt to defend himself against earlier accusations of legal violations. In essence, he seeks to exonerate himself from the earlier allegations: "This is lawlessness" [93]. Ahmadinejad's attack on the family members of Mousavi's supporters serves as a disclosure tactic, aimed at dismissing the accusations against him while simultaneously accusing others of breaking the law.

As seen in example [93], Ahmadinejad attacks the collectivist *âberu* of his adversaries to restore his own *âberu*. In response, Mousavi implies that he has a clean record; otherwise, Ahmadinejad would have exploited any weaknesses in his background. Consequently, when Ahmadinejad cannot find any dirt on Mousavi, he turns to accusing Mousavi's network of widespread corruption, ascribing it to Mousavi himself, as shown in example [94].

[94]

6-2009-MSV, Debate No.6

آقای احمدی نژاد ! ظاهراً چیزی از بنده نداشتید آمدید وصل کردید من را به دیگران.

(Lit. Trans.) Mr. Ahmadinejad! Apparently something from me you not had.

Came and connected me to others.

(Com. Trans.) Mr. Ahmadinejad! You could not find anything against me and connecting me to the others.

6.5 Conclusion

Every Iranian belongs to a group-whether their family, relatives, colleagues, or political party-that is responsible for protecting and enhancing their collectivist *âberu*. As such, there is

always a third party, often the public (*mardom*), that evaluates an individual's verbal and nonverbal behavior based on societal and cultural values to assess their *âberu*. Iranian individuals are expected to uphold their own *âberu* while adhering to the values of their in-group. Since individuals' *âberu* is interwoven with and built upon *âberu* of their immediate social networks, they are expected to conform to Iranian cultural, societal, and religious norms to safeguard their collectivist *âberu*.

Politicians, in particular, manipulate the collectivist nature of *âberu* to further their own agendas and to undermine their opponents. They employ *âberu*-defensive strategies to restore or bolster the collectivist aspect of their own *âberu*, while adopting *âberu*-offensive strategies to threaten *âberu* of their rivals. Politicians enhance their *âberu* by praising their networks and simultaneously attack their opponents' *âberu* by accusing them of being surrounded by corrupt political and familial networks. Those accused of embezzlement, nepotism, or cronyism are portrayed as violating the principles of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini's worldview, and the expectations of the people (*mardom*). Ultimately, politicians are compelled to defend and restore the collectivist *âberu* of their networks, as doing so also safeguards their individual *âberu*, particularly when they are publicly attacked by adversaries.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the key findings of this research, provides answers to the research questions proposed in the introduction, outlines the contributions, discusses the limitations, and suggests possible directions for future research.

Generally, this thesis aims to analyze and interpret the non-harmonious interactions of Iranian presidential candidates in the 2009, 2013, and 2017 elections, based on the concept of *âberu*, rather than *face*. The corpus and the ethnographic research conducted led to the development of a new framework based on the concept of *âberu*, which aligns most closely with Iranian collectivist culture.

This study demonstrates that the concept of *âberu* is constructed from a blend of social values, norms, and virtues such as dignity, reputation, grandeur, and honor-referred to as the interwoven elements of *âberu*. These elements differ from the aspects of the Western concept of *face*. In Iranian collectivist culture, where individuals are interconnected with a group, *âberu* is not only an individual's most valuable collective possession but also the core of both the individual's and their network's security and well-being. Any individual Iranian can enhance or jeopardize their collectivist *âberu* once their own individual *âberu* has been either protected or damaged. Indeed, *âberu* of the group is embedded in *âberu* of its individuals. In contrast, the concept of *face*, as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987), is closely tied to an individual's personal desires.

In the context of Iranian collectivist culture, *âberu* of politicians is intricately linked to *âberu* of their networks. This motivates Iranian politicians to protect or restore their networks' *âberu* in order to safeguard or enhance their own *âberu* in the pursuit of electoral success. However, this often leads them to threaten *âberu* of their opponents and their networks, as a result of the zero-sum nature of political debates. Consequently, the *face* or *facework* theories of impoliteness fail to explain *âberu*-threatening behavior of Iranian politicians. As a result, an *âberu*-work model is developed to analyze the interactions of Iranian presidential candidates.

The following findings facilitated the design of an *âberu*-work model for analyzing Iranian politicians' behavior. First, the concept of *âberu* and its significance in the daily lives of ordinary Iranians, as well as its importance among presidential candidates within their community of practice, was defined. Second, the individualistic and collectivist aspects of

âberu were recognized, which were primarily considered in the development of *âberu*-work model. Third, the components of *âberu* were identified, including the sociocultural and institutional components (S/IC) of *âberu*. Finally, an *âberu*-threatening act framework was proposed to examine whether the individualistic or collectivist aspect of politicians' *âberu* was threatened when their opponents intentionally employed various sociocultural *âberu*-threatening strategies to challenge the pragmatic components of their *âberu* unreservedly.

7.1 Major findings

The concept of *âberu* in Iranian culture represents a crucial ritualistic and sociocultural value, deeply embedded in both individual and collective identities. As stated in the introduction, the formulation of *âberu*-work model is the most significant finding of this research. However, it was necessary to first define *âberu* and recognize its importance among both the general populace and politicians through ethnographic research and the survey research, respectively.

As frequently elaborated, Kádár (2017) emphasizes the importance of rituals in maintaining moral order within interpersonal interactions, which is directly related to the Iranian concept of *âberu*. He argues that rituals function to uphold the moral and social norms within a community, a function that can be extended to the concept of *âberu*. In Iranian culture, *âberu* is not merely about personal honor; it is deeply interwoven with social expectations and collective morality. As the research highlights, understanding *âberu* requires an exploration of its intertwined elements, which include individual honor, social reputation, collective honor, grandeur, and more. This complexity is what makes *âberu* a powerful and pervasive concept in Iranian life, influencing behavior across various social and institutional contexts.

Therefore, the following sections, 7.1.1, 7.1.2, and 7.1.3, shed light on the major findings of this research: the illumination of *âberu*'s interwoven elements, the individualistic or collectivist aspect of *âberu*, and its sociocultural or institutional components.

7.1.1 *Âberu* and the components

This study demonstrates that the concept of *âberu* is significant not only among the Iranian populace but also among Iranian politicians.

The ethnographically collected data in this research reveal that the concept of *âberu* is indispensable to Iranians' everyday lives, with individuals beginning to accumulate it at an

early age within their families. In Iranian families, older members instruct younger ones to build credibility, honor, grandeur, and reputation throughout their lives in order to safeguard their own *âberu* as well as their families' *âberu* in the public eye or before significant *mardom* (people). They learn to conform to social, moral, cultural, and religious norms in order to be positively evaluated as an *âberu-mand* person (a person with *âberu*) by significant others or *mardom* (people). They also come to understand that they must positively acknowledge others' *âberu* in order to protect or enhance their own *âberu* and, by extension, their families' *âberu*, due to the cyclic nature of *âberu*.

It can be argued that the cyclic nature of *âberu* reflects ritualistic interactions. This cyclic nature reinforces social cohesion and the moral fabric of the community, making *âberu* an indispensable element of Iranian social life. For instance, one can enhance their own and their families' *âberu* by positively acknowledging others' or their interlocutors' *âberu*. In their very first social communities, Iranians recognize the cyclic nature of *âberu* and its impact on their own *âberu*. Therefore, alongside the concept of *âberu* and its importance, its cyclic nature is emphasized within each family.

Participants in the ethnographic research, representing ordinary Iranians, identified several factors influencing each individual's *âberu*. These influential factors exist within every Iranian's cognition and culture, referred to as the sociocultural components (SC) of *âberu*. Section 7.1.3.1 briefly outlines the sociocultural components (SC) of *âberu*.

7.1.2 Multifunctionality of references to *âberu* in Iranian televised presidential debates

In Iranian presidential debates, the concept of *âberu*, which signifies honor, dignity, and prestige, is used by politicians as a versatile rhetorical tool. Politicians strategically invoke *âberu* to emphasize Iran's national identity and revolutionary pride. By referring to Iran's historical and cultural significance, they highlight the importance of safeguarding the nation's *âberu* on the global stage. They connect *âberu* with the principles and accomplishments of the Islamic Revolution, fostering a sense of collective unity and national pride among Iranians. This approach not only strengthens national cohesion but also casts politicians as the true protectors of Iran's revolutionary ideals and honor.

Additionally, *âberu* is employed to critique and question the competence of political opponents. Politicians use references to *âberu* to challenge their rivals by questioning their ability to maintain Iran's dignity and reputation. By framing *âberu* as a crucial issue, they aim

to undermine their opponents' credibility and portray them as inadequate leaders. Conversely, politicians use *âberu* to showcase their own leadership qualities, aligning themselves with values such as *efteqâr* (respect and esteem) and *hormat* (dignity), which appeal to the electorate. This method is designed to persuade voters of their competence and suitability for leadership, positioning them as effective representatives of Iran's interests on the international stage.

Moreover, references to *âberu* are utilized to rally public support for specific political agendas. Politicians appeal to the public's sense of national pride and collective identity to garner backing for their policies. They often evoke past instances where Iran's *âberu* was threatened or compromised to elicit emotional responses from the public and support measures that aim to protect the nation's honor. By linking specific issues to the broader concept of *âberu*, they reinforce their commitment to upholding Iran's dignity (*heysiyat*) and honor (*ez^oat*), thereby positioning themselves as defenders of Iranian values and rights. This strategic use of *âberu* reflects the intricate relationship between cultural values and political communication within the context of Iranian electoral politics.

The findings of this section align closely with the theoretical perspectives of Fetzer (2013) on the strategic use of political discourse. Fetzer's analysis of political communication underscores how leaders employ rhetoric to construct and defend narratives that bolster their authority and influence. Therefore, the strategic use of *âberu* by Iranian politicians, as demonstrated, reflects Fetzer's findings by showing how references to honor, dignity, and national pride are leveraged to assert legitimacy, challenge opponents, and mobilize support. By framing *âberu* in relation to revolutionary ideals and national identity and by referring to other concepts such as dignity (*heysiyat*) and honor (*ez^oat*), politicians effectively utilize rhetorical strategies to reinforce their positions and shape public opinion, thus confirming Fetzer's insights into the intersection of language, power, and cultural values in political discourse.

7.1.3 The components of *âberu*

The concept of *âberu* is deeply embedded in Iranian culture, guiding both individual and collective behaviors. This study explores the sociocultural and institutional components

that influence *âberu*, revealing how Iranians strive to earn or maintain their *âberu* by adhering to established norms and values. Key factors such as age, appearance, gender, social status, possessions, and education play significant roles in shaping one's *âberu*.

Iranians aim to be perceived as *âberu-mand* (honorable individuals) by their community, carefully avoiding actions that could harm others' *âberu*. This mutual respect helps individuals maintain their reputation and avoid negative judgments from *mardom*. For politicians, additional institutional components, such as adherence to Islamic values and revolutionary principles, as well as endorsements from authoritative figures, significantly impact their *âberu*. Iranian politicians can enhance their *âberu* by aligning with these values or undermine their rivals by questioning their adherence to them.

Overall, understanding the components of *âberu* is crucial for grasping the dynamics of social and political interactions in Iran. Sections 7.1.3.1 and 7.1.3.2 highlight the importance of maintaining *âberu* through cultural and institutional adherence, demonstrating how it affects both personal and public spheres.

7.1.3.1 The sociocultural components of *âberu*

According to this study, Iranians attempt to earn *âberu* (*âberu kasb kardan*) or maintain it (*hefze âberu kardan*). They, therefore, strictly adhere to sociocultural norms and values when considering the SC of *âberu* and enhancing them. In this way, they may be regarded as *âberu-mand* (a person with *âberu*) by their significant *mardom* (people). They simultaneously inhibit themselves from threatening others' *âberu* by avoiding questioning the SC of their *âberu*. Indeed, it is the cyclic nature of *âberu* that hampers them from threatening others' *âberu*. In this manner, they can distance themselves from *mardom*'s negative interpretation. Factors such as age, appearance and clothing, gender, sexual relationships and gender-based practices, social status, possession, education, and approved verbal and non-verbal behavior can adversely or favorably influence one's *âberu* if they are challenged or supported.

The above-mentioned components can be strongly interwoven with one another. For instance, in terms of gender and gender-based practices, Iranian men are responsible for earning decent lives, which should be achieved through *pul-e halâl* (pure money). This decent life also involves affording shelter (protection), which is associated with their possession, tackling the social status component. Iranians' possession and the source of their income should be untouchable and generated through *pul-e halâl* (pure money), as expected by Iranian Islamic

culture. Otherwise, they could not maintain their families' *zâher* (appearance), resulting in an *âberu*-loss phenomenon. It is worth mentioning that one's *zâher* (appearance) can surpass physical appearance and clothing, engaging their competence; if they are competent enough to stand in society as an *âberu-mand* person. In this case, one's *zâher* (appearance) can be challenged based on whether they wear appropriate clothing that aligns with their age, gender, and the immediate society's norms and values, as well as whether they can afford a decent life to be interpreted as a competent person by significant *mardom*.

In a normative society where the concept of *âberu* is one of the key cultural schemas, and people are judged accordingly by their significant *mardom*, it is important to understand how they can boost their *âberu* and avoid *âberu*-loss, which extends to their group members. Therefore, identifying the factors influencing one's *âberu* is critical, as one can be accepted as a competent and *âberu-mand* individual in their immediate group when enhancing the pragmatic components of *âberu*. Consequently, they can stand in society as competent delegates. This study sheds light on not only the sociocultural components of *âberu* but also the boundary between *âberu*-boost and *âberu*-loss phenomenon. For instance, education is one of the SC of *âberu*; being a well-educated person may enhance one's *âberu*, but a lack of excellent education does not necessarily threaten one's *âberu*. However, one's *âberu* can be threatened if their credentials are questioned and they are accused of holding fraudulent certificates. Therefore, identifying the SC of *âberu* and the boundary between *âberu*-boost and *âberu*-loss phenomenon are among the major findings of this study.

Kádár and Haugh (2013) further explore the role of politeness in social interactions, which can be related to the concept of *âberu*. Kádár and Haugh emphasize that norms are not just individual concerns but are deeply embedded in the collective consciousness. In the same manner, in the Iranian context, the sociocultural components of *âberu* guide individuals in how they should behave to maintain and enhance their *âberu*, reflecting a collective understanding of honor and reputation.

It should be noted that the SC of *âberu* is prevalent among both the Iranian populace and politicians. Alongside the SC of *âberu*, there are institutional components (IC) of *âberu* that specifically affect Iranian politicians' *âberu*, as demonstrated in 7.2.1.2. In line with Fetzer (2007, 2013), who discusses the multilayered nature of political discourse often mirroring broader cultural values, in Iranian society, not only the sociocultural but also the institutional components of *âberu* are relevant in the political arena, where politicians must navigate *âberu* carefully. Indeed, *âberu* influences not just personal interactions but also the institutional and political spheres, underscoring its significance across different levels of society.

7.1.3.2 The institutional components of *âberu*

Data analysis indicates that there are additional components affecting Iranian politicians' *âberu* that do not influence *âberu* of common Iranians. The following factors were identified as the components of Iranian politicians' *âberu*: adhering to religion and Islamic values, participating in the 1979 *Enqelâb* (Revolution) and possessing a revolutionary (*enqelâbi*) character, being endorsed by an authority (such as endorsement by Ayatollah Khomeini, the Supreme Leader), and being able to satisfy *mardom*'s needs. If politicians can fulfill these components, the so-called institutional components (IC) of *âberu*, they boost their *âberu* within this community of practice. For example, they enhance their *âberu* by aligning themselves and their networks with the *Enqelâb* (Revolution), its leader's principles, and Islamic ideologies or by claiming endorsement from the Supreme Leader and *mardom*. Indeed, gaining the Supreme Leader's and *mardom*'s endorsement is a key *âberu*-boost factor for Iranian politicians.

Due to the zero-sum nature of debates, Iranian politicians challenge the IC of their opponents' *âberu* while simultaneously protecting and enhancing their own. For instance, they question their rivals' policies and accuse them of developing policies that are at odds with Ayatollah Khamenei's worldview. Such accusations can have severe consequences, such as being labeled as possessing a *qeyre-enqelâbi* (non-revolutionary) or even *zede-enqelâbi* (counter-revolutionary) character. They may also explicitly accuse their adversaries and their networks of distancing themselves from the Revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini's ideologies, such as when failing to serve *mardom* and the Supreme Leader. Iranian politicians occasionally challenge various IC of their opponents' *âberu* simultaneously, intensifying *âberu*-loss or damage.

The IC of *âberu* can either be boosted in favor of politicians or used to challenge their adversaries. As seen, these factors can act as both *âberu*-boost and *âberu*-loss elements, depending on how they are utilized. Politicians can maintain or restore their own *âberu* or threaten their opponents' *âberu* by defending the IC of their own *âberu* or attacking those of their rivals.

As another example, Iranian politicians experience *âberu*-loss phenomenon if they are accused of allocating *mardom*'s property, the national budget, or *Beyt al-mal* to their networks and themselves. They lose their *âberu* because creating wealth by misusing *Beyt al-mal* is strictly prohibited by Islamic rules and the leader of the Islamic Revolution. Additionally, they lose *mardom*'s endorsement, which challenges the IC of their *âberu*. As a result, Iranian

politicians consistently claim that they firmly adhere to Islamic rules and the ideology of the Islamic Revolution and its leader. They also assert that satisfying the Supreme Leader's and *mardom*'s needs or expectations is their immediate priority. In this way, they enhance their *âberu* in the eyes of *mardom*.

Identifying the institutional components of *âberu* that influence Iranian politicians' *âberu* is another major finding of this study. It was not feasible to analyze Iranian politicians' non-harmonious interactions solely through the sociocultural components of *âberu*. The political context calls for its localized or institutional components of *âberu*, which are valid within this community of practice. Therefore, Iranian politicians restore, protect, or boost their own *âberu* while threatening their adversaries' *âberu* by addressing the IC of their *âberu*.

7.1.3.3 Navigating institutional and sociocultural dynamics of *âberu* in Iranian political discourse

Drawing on Fetzer's (2013) insights on procedural knowledge and discourse practices, Iranian political discourse reflects a shared understanding of culturally situated norms and expectations. Politicians navigate concepts such as *âberu*, which encompasses honor, dignity, and reputation, by leveraging their procedural knowledge of societal norms, religious values, and the ideologies shaped by the Islamic Revolution. This knowledge enables them to fulfill the expectations of *mardom* (people) while strategically enhancing their own *âberu* and challenging that of their rivals. In line with Fetzer's insights, this reflects the interplay between shared cultural knowledge, pragmatic principles, and discourse practices within a speech community.

The concept of *âberu* is multifaceted, influenced by both institutional and sociocultural factors that shape political discourse. Politicians' reputations and credibility are closely tied to their ability to navigate these elements. Institutional factors, such as religious and Islamic values, play a crucial role. The legacy of Ayatollah Khomeini's 1979 *Enqelâb* (Revolution) continues to influence the political landscape, with alignment to its principles enhancing politicians' legitimacy and support. Politicians who are endorsed by key religious figures or who align with revolutionary values are viewed as upholding the Islamic Republic's ideals, thereby strengthening their *âberu*.

In televised debates, Iranian politicians emphasize their alignment with Islamic principles and seek endorsements from religious leaders to enhance their *âberu*. By presenting themselves as committed to the Revolution and Islamic governance, they aim to gain public

and religious support. This strategic presentation is designed to highlight their dedication to religious values and secure the necessary endorsement to maintain their *âberu*. Politicians effectively use televised media to reinforce their positions and convey their adherence to Islamic and revolutionary ideals.

Beyond institutional influences, sociocultural factors are essential in shaping politicians' interactions and perceptions of *âberu*. Iranian political discourse is deeply rooted in cultural expectations related to age, appearance, gender roles, and social status. Politicians must navigate these norms to maintain their credibility and connect with *mardom*. This alignment with societal expectations is crucial for maintaining effective communication and enhancing their *âberu*. By addressing societal concerns and upholding cultural values through their public appearances and debates, politicians aim to reinforce their reputation and secure political legitimacy. Thus, Iranian politicians strategically balance institutional and sociocultural influences to enhance their *âberu*, using various rhetorical strategies to navigate and manipulate public perception effectively.

By focusing on the concept of *âberu* and its role in Iranian political discourse, this research provides a concrete example of how deeply ingrained cultural values shape political communication in a specific context. This contributes to the broader field of discourse analysis by offering a culturally specific example that illustrates the broader theoretical points made by Lauerbach and Fetzer (2007). It shows how the analysis of political discourse must account for both the institutional framework and the cultural context in which it operates.

7.1.4 Individual and collectivist *âberu*

Due to the interdependency that exists among Iranians, they not only maintain their individuality but also find themselves attached to a larger group whose expectations limit their personal interests. They must conform to their group's norms and values to avoid negative evaluations from both their in-group members and society at large. As a result, every individual Iranian maintains and enhances their *âberu* to stand firmly within their immediate groups, ensuring a positive interpretation from *mardom* (people). Indeed, valuable and *âberu-mand* (honorable) members bring more credibility, better social standing, and *âberu* to their groups. Therefore, this study indicates that Iranians' *âberu* is acknowledged at two levels: individual and collectivist.

Individuals can also adversely influence their collectivist *âberu* if they fail to protect their individual *âberu*. In such a case, they threaten their collectivist *âberu*, which may lead to their exclusion by in-group members who aim to safeguard their group's *âberu*.

Iranian politicians' *âberu* is also inherently tied to *âberu* of those closely related to them, such as their families and party members. Thus, politicians and their networks strive to adhere to the values that are meaningful and necessary in this community of practice to be accepted as valuable members and qualified politicians in the eyes of *mardom*. In general, Iranian politicians' *âberu* can be enhanced or threatened in the eyes of their in-group members, depending on whether they are regarded as valuable and *âberu-mand* members. Politicians are also evaluated by their opponents and *mardom* as worthy or unworthy representatives of their networks, which directly impacts their collectivist *âberu*. Since *âberu* of a political party is tied to its members' individual *âberu*, any politician can either enhance or threaten their collectivist *âberu* based on how their own *âberu* is perceived by *mardom*. Consequently, politicians are obligated to protect or restore *âberu* of their networks to maintain their own *âberu*, due to the interconnectedness between them and their networks.

More precisely, Iranian politicians possess two distinct aspects of *âberu*: their individual *âberu* and their collectivist *âberu*, which includes *âberu* of their significant others and their party. Significant others refer to family members and, by extension, family relations. Therefore, in this study, Iranian politicians must protect and enhance both their individual and collectivist *âberu* to succeed in elections, as their performance is not judged independently of their parties, family members, and family relations. Simultaneously, they attack both the individual and collectivist *âberu* of their adversaries to threaten their rivals' *âberu*. They exploit the interconnectedness between rivals and their networks to attack the rival's *âberu* by threatening *âberu* of their networks. In other words, politicians are compelled to enhance the sociocultural/institutional (S/IC) aspects of their own networks' *âberu* alongside their own but challenge those of their rivals and their networks. Therefore, politicians' parties and significant others must protect their *âberu* to avoid damaging the collectivist *âberu* of the intended politician.

Interestingly, while *âberu*-threatening behavior is sanctioned in this political context, politicians still use certain strategies, such as disclaimers, to prevent negative interpretations by *mardom* before they threaten any aspect of their intended rivals' *âberu*. This highlights the cyclic nature of *âberu*, as politicians are also concerned with protecting their own *âberu* before publicly disgracing their adversaries and threatening their *âberu*.

As a further contribution, *âberu* should be acknowledged in its two aspects-individual and collectivist. Without this distinction, analyzing Iranian presidential candidates' *âberu*-threatening behavior would not be feasible.

7.1.5 An *âberu*-work model: individual *âberu* threatening act and collectivist *âberu* threatening act

Much like Terkourafi's (2008) study, where speakers seek face enhancement and collaborate as necessary to constitute their face at the expense of threatening their interlocutors', this study finds that Iranian politicians threaten their opponents' *âberu* to enhance their own. In this way, each presidential candidate intentionally targets their opponent's individual or collectivist *âberu* when challenging the pragmatic components of their *âberu* against sociocultural and religious norms. Politicians apply *âberu*-threatening behavior to antagonize their opponents, aiming to make them lose the election while exalting themselves to win.

This study posits that an *âberu*-work model best fits Iranian collectivist culture, where one's security and pleasure are influenced by, and extended to, their directly related network. Given the competitive nature of presidential debates, Iranian politicians threaten their opponents' *âberu* in two ways: the "Individual *Âberu*-Threatening Act" (ÎÂTA) and the "Collectivist *Âberu*-Threatening Act" (CÂTA).

To clarify, candidates intentionally target the individual aspect of their opponents' *âberu* in an unmitigated manner (ÎÂTA) during presidential debates while making every effort to enhance their own *âberu*. They also utilize their collectivist culture when threatening their opponents' parties and significant others' *âberu* (CÂTA) to undermine the collectivist *âberu* of their rivals. However, they protect their own party's and significant others' *âberu* to enhance their individual *âberu*. In this study, candidates endeavor to enhance the pragmatic components of both their own and their networks' *âberu*, while adopting ÎÂTA or CÂTA to threaten those of their intended rival's *âberu*. The *âberu*-based model makes Iranian politicians' *âberu*-threatening behavior interpretable.

This framework can be applied to collectivist societies; however, there is also the potential to incorporate other cultural schemas depending on their importance in specific contexts or among communities of practice. Despite the diversity of cultural schemas in various collectivist societies (mainly in Eastern cultures), this model addresses both the individual and

collectivist aspects of *âberu* cultural schema. It considers the interconnectedness among group members, where behavior influences both individual and collectivist outcomes for the group, which is a common phenomenon in collectivist societies. Western theories, in contrast, fail to account for this fundamental feature of collectivist culture since they are rooted in individualist frameworks. Therefore, the model developed in this study offers the potential to be extended to other collectivist societies, overcoming the limitations of face-model theories.

It is also important to note that Iranian politicians combine both *IÂTA* and *CÂTA* main strategies and adopt culture-specific linguistic strategies to intensify *âberu*-threatening acts toward their adversaries while initially protecting their own *âberu* due to the cyclic nature of *âberu* (e.g., disclaimers). They use various sociocultural *âberu*-threatening strategies, such as questioning their opponents' policies, knowledge, and skills, making disclosures, and using Speaker Response-Seeking Questions (SRSQ) to challenge the pragmatic components of their rivals' individual or collectivist *âberu*. The SRSQ is a culture-specific strategy employed by Iranian politicians in which they pose awkward questions but expect no response from their interlocutors. Instead, they provide their own unpleasant replies to threaten their opponents' individual or collectivist *âberu*. They may accuse their intended rivals or their networks, or reveal uncomfortable information about them in their responses.

7.2 Limitations of the study

I encountered several limitations during the process of conducting this research. First, the concept of *âberu* was only investigated within the political context of Iranian presidential debates, specifically between 2009 and 2017. Therefore, one must exercise caution when generalizing the findings of this study.

The concept of *âberu* and *âberu*-threatening phenomenon were examined among Iranian presidential candidates. However, it can be argued that other institutional components (IC) of *âberu* could be identified depending on the context and the relationship between the interactants. Since this research is limited to the analysis of Iranian presidential debates, the IC of politicians' *âberu* may differ from those in other social contexts, such as among teachers and students, or doctors and patients. Given this limitation, the IC of *âberu* identified within this community of practice may not be generalizable to other societal groups or communities.

The participants in the ethnographic research were from two metropolitan cities, Tehran and Isfahan. It can be argued that *âberu*, the sociocultural (SC) components of *âberu*, and

collectivist *âberu* may be characterized differently by rural populations, whose collectivist bonds might be stronger or more pronounced.

Additionally, Iran is a large, multiethnic country with diverse linguistic communities. Each ethnic group may have its own specific understanding and interpretation of *âberu* and its pragmatic components, which may differ from those of the Persian participants in this study. In other words, this study focused on *âberu* among a limited number of Persian speakers from two major cities. As a result, the findings may not be applicable to all Iranian ethnic groups.

7.3 Further research

This study introduces the pragmatic components of *âberu* and more carefully examines the boundaries between being typified as an *âberu-mand* (with *âberu*) person or not, in comparison to previous research. It also proposes an *âberu*-work framework, highlighting its significance among both common Iranians and Iranian politicians. Furthermore, the data analysis reveals that Iranian politicians use *âberu*-threatening acts to target their adversaries' individual and/or collective *âberu* in public. As demonstrated in this study, they employ various linguistic strategies to undermine their rivals' *âberu*.

However, given the limitations of this study, further research is needed to explore the concept of *âberu* in different contexts and assess its significance across other communities. One potential avenue for future research is to investigate whether *âberu* can be influenced by additional institutional components, depending on the nature of the context and the relationship between interactants. Alongside the institutional components of *âberu* identified in this study, it is important to note that the sociocultural components (SC) listed here are considered widespread among the Iranian populace. However, there may be room to expand this list through further research conducted among different social actors across various societal classes.

On one hand, Iran is a patriarchal society, which suggests that male and female members may have different perceptions and interpretations of *âberu*, with varying implications for their lives. Therefore, it would be valuable to conduct research investigating how gender affects the interpretation of *âberu*, and whether there are gender-specific pragmatic components associated with it. On the other hand, given that Iran is a multiethnic nation with a diversity of languages, cultural schemas, and ethnic conventions, more research is needed to understand how *âberu* is valued among different ethnic groups. It would be useful to explore whether these groups identify other or additional pragmatic components of *âberu*. For example,

studies could be conducted among Iranian Kurdish, Turkish, Baluch, and other ethnic communities.

Lastly, comparative research could be undertaken in other collectivist cultures and countries to examine what cultural schemas are of similar importance to *âberu* in Iranian culture. It would be interesting to investigate whether such cultural schemas significantly influence people's lives and the lives of their related networks.

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