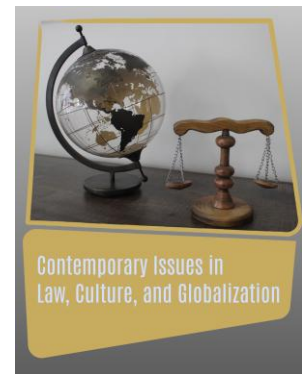




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## Legal Mobilization Among Minority Cultural Groups: Rights Claims and Institutional Response

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how members of minority cultural groups in Tehran interpret rights violations, transform everyday grievances into legal claims, and experience institutional responses when seeking recognition, protection, or redress. This qualitative study was conducted using semi-structured interviews with 24 participants from minority cultural groups residing in Tehran. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to ensure diversity in gender, age, educational background, cultural affiliation, and prior experience with rights-related claims. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, with saturation reached after the twenty-first interview and confirmed through three additional interviews. Interviews focused on participants' experiences of legal awareness, rights-claiming, institutional access, documentation practices, administrative encounters, and perceived barriers to legal recognition. All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. NVivo software was used to organize transcripts, support coding, compare emerging categories, and develop thematic patterns. Trustworthiness was enhanced through member checking, peer review of codes, reflexive memo-writing, and an audit trail. Four main categories emerged from the analysis: transforming cultural grievances into rights claims, reliance on informal and formal support structures, institutional filtering of minority claims, and partial recognition with limited substantive change. Participants described rights-claiming as a gradual process shaped by legal consciousness, collective memory, social networks, and perceived institutional risk. Although legal language helped participants make their claims more legitimate, institutional responses were often procedural, delayed, or symbolic. Participants reported that successful mobilization depended less on individual knowledge alone and more on access to mediators, lawyers, community leaders, civil associations, and sympathetic officials. Legal mobilization among minority cultural groups is a culturally embedded and institutionally mediated process. While rights discourse can empower marginalized communities to articulate claims, institutional responsiveness remains uneven when recognition is not accompanied by procedural accessibility, material resources, and culturally competent administrative practice.

**Keywords:** Legal mobilization; minority cultural groups; rights claims; institutional response; legal consciousness; cultural recognition; qualitative research; Tehran.

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## Introduction

Legal mobilization has become a central concept in socio-legal scholarship because it explains how individuals and groups use legal norms, rights language, institutional procedures, and symbolic claims to pursue social change. Rather than treating law as a neutral set of formal rules, legal mobilization theory examines how law is activated by social actors, how rights become meaningful in everyday life, and how institutions respond when marginalized communities transform grievances into claims. In this sense, law is not merely imposed from above; it is interpreted, negotiated, contested, and mobilized from below. For minority cultural groups, this process is especially significant because their claims often concern not only individual injury but also recognition, identity, cultural belonging, language, representation, religious practice, and equal access to public institutions.

Early socio-legal scholarship challenged the assumption that legal change occurs only through courts, legislatures, or official institutions. Zemans (1983) argued that legal mobilization should be understood as a form of political participation through which citizens activate legal norms and institutional channels. Scheingold (1974) similarly emphasized the “politics of rights,” showing that rights discourse can inspire collective action but may also create unrealistic expectations if formal rights are not supported by political power and institutional capacity. McCann (1994) further demonstrated that law can influence social movements not only through direct litigation outcomes but also through consciousness-raising, strategic framing, organizational development, and the legitimation of collective claims. These perspectives are important for studying minority cultural groups because such groups often mobilize law in multiple ways: by filing complaints, seeking administrative recognition, invoking constitutional or human rights principles, engaging community mediators, using public narratives, and negotiating with local authorities.

Legal mobilization among minority groups is inseparable from legal consciousness. Ewick and Silbey (1998) conceptualized legal consciousness as the ways ordinary people understand, experience, and use law in daily life. Their work shows that people may stand “before the law,” seeing it as distant and authoritative; act “with the law,” using legal tools strategically; or stand “against the law,” resisting legal arrangements perceived as unjust. Minority cultural groups may move between these orientations depending on their experiences of inclusion, exclusion, trust, fear, and institutional responsiveness. A person may believe in legal equality in principle while avoiding formal complaint mechanisms because of fear of exposure, reputational harm, bureaucratic retaliation, or the belief that institutions will not take minority claims seriously. Therefore, the study of legal mobilization must attend not only to formal rights but also to the subjective and cultural conditions under which people perceive an injury as legally actionable.

The transformation of social injury into a legal claim is not automatic. Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat (1980–1981) famously described the movement from “naming” to “blaming” to “claiming.” First, individuals must recognize an experience as injurious; second, they must attribute responsibility to another actor or institution; and third, they must formulate a claim for remedy. This framework is particularly relevant in minority cultural contexts because exclusion may be normalized, individualized, or interpreted as an unavoidable cost of social difference. Participants may initially describe discriminatory treatment as misunderstanding, administrative inconvenience, or social prejudice rather than as a rights violation. Only through discussion with family members, community networks, lawyers, civil society actors, or peers may the experience be reframed as a claim requiring institutional response. Legal mobilization therefore depends on interpretive resources as much as on legal rules.

Minority cultural claims also raise broader theoretical questions about recognition and redistribution. Kymlicka (1995) argued that minority rights are often necessary to ensure genuine equality in multicultural societies because formally identical

treatment may not address unequal cultural conditions. Taylor (1994) emphasized that recognition is a vital human need because misrecognition can constitute a form of oppression. Fraser (1995), however, warned that recognition must not be separated from redistribution, since cultural status injuries often intersect with economic disadvantage, institutional exclusion, and unequal access to resources. These debates suggest that minority legal mobilization is rarely limited to symbolic respect. Claims about language, cultural expression, religious accommodation, or community representation may also involve access to employment, education, public services, legal documentation, and institutional participation.

Institutional response is a decisive dimension of legal mobilization. Rights claims do not enter a neutral administrative environment; they pass through institutional filters, gatekeeping procedures, evidentiary demands, bureaucratic discretion, and professional interpretations. Galanter's (1974) distinction between "repeat players" and "one-shotters" remains useful here. Institutions and experienced actors often possess procedural knowledge, resources, and strategic advantages, while ordinary claimants may lack information, time, financial means, and confidence. Minority claimants may face additional barriers when their cultural practices, language, names, documents, community norms, or collective histories are unfamiliar to institutional actors. As a result, institutional response may formally acknowledge equality while informally discouraging claims through delay, complexity, narrow interpretation, or demands for documentation that minority claimants struggle to provide.

Epp's (1998) theory of the "support structure for legal mobilization" is especially relevant to this problem. Epp argued that sustained rights revolutions depend not only on constitutional texts or judicial willingness but also on rights-advocacy organizations, lawyers, funding, and organized claim-making capacity. For minority cultural groups, support structures may include formal legal aid, community associations, trusted translators, religious or cultural leaders, academics, journalists, non-governmental organizations, and sympathetic officials. These actors help translate grievances into legally recognizable forms. They also reduce the individual burden of mobilization by sharing knowledge, preparing documents, offering emotional support, and helping claimants anticipate institutional resistance. Without such support structures, rights may remain formally available but practically inaccessible.

Legal opportunity structure theory further explains why some claims are pursued while others are abandoned. Hilson (2002) argued that social movements are shaped by the openness or closure of legal venues, standing rules, costs, remedies, and judicial receptivity. Vanhala (2012) showed that legal opportunity structures may produce paradoxical effects: even when legal avenues exist, organizations may avoid litigation because of cost, risk, organizational culture, or uncertainty. This insight is important in minority contexts because legal mobilization may not always appear as courtroom litigation. Communities may choose administrative petitions, negotiated accommodation, informal mediation, public awareness, or quiet advocacy when they perceive formal litigation as too risky or ineffective. Therefore, a narrow focus on lawsuits would underestimate the actual forms of legal mobilization used by minority cultural groups.

The concept of vernacularization also helps explain how universal rights language becomes meaningful in local cultural settings. Merry (2006) argued that human rights norms must often be translated into local moral vocabularies to become persuasive and actionable. Minority groups may not describe their claims only in technical legal terms; they may speak of dignity, respect, ancestral memory, religious obligation, family honor, cultural continuity, or equal citizenship. These vocabularies do not weaken legal claims. Instead, they show how rights discourse becomes embedded in lived experience. At the same time, vernacularization can produce tension when institutions accept only standardized legal language and disregard culturally grounded meanings of harm.

Despite the richness of legal mobilization scholarship, minority cultural groups remain underexamined in many urban contexts where diversity is socially present but institutionally under-recognized. Tehran provides a significant setting for examining these dynamics because it is a large metropolitan environment in which people from different ethnic, linguistic,

religious, migrant, and cultural backgrounds encounter state institutions, municipal services, educational organizations, workplaces, and legal-administrative systems. In such settings, minority claims may not always appear as dramatic constitutional disputes. They may arise through everyday encounters: difficulty registering a cultural association, lack of accommodation for religious or linguistic practices, discriminatory treatment in employment or education, unequal access to documentation, or dismissal of cultural identity in administrative procedures.

The present study therefore seeks to explore legal mobilization as a lived, relational, and institutionally mediated process. It focuses on how members of minority cultural groups in Tehran identify rights-related grievances, decide whether to make claims, use legal or quasi-legal channels, and interpret institutional responses. The study contributes to socio-legal research by connecting legal mobilization theory with cultural recognition, legal consciousness, and qualitative accounts of institutional interaction. It also provides practical insights into why formal legal equality may not produce substantive access to justice unless institutions develop culturally competent and procedurally accessible mechanisms for hearing minority claims. The guiding research question was: How do members of minority cultural groups in Tehran experience legal mobilization, and how do institutional responses shape the trajectory of their rights claims?

## **Methods and Materials**

### **1. Study Design and Participants**

This study used a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of minority cultural group members regarding legal mobilization, rights claims, and institutional response. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand meaning-making, legal consciousness, institutional encounters, and culturally embedded interpretations rather than measure predetermined variables. The study was conducted in Tehran, Iran, among participants who self-identified as belonging to minority cultural groups and had direct or indirect experience with rights-related claims in administrative, legal, educational, occupational, municipal, or civil society contexts.

The participants included 24 individuals selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Inclusion criteria were: being at least 18 years old, residing in Tehran for at least one year, self-identifying as a member of a minority cultural group, and having experience with or close observation of rights-related claim-making. Participants were not required to have filed a formal lawsuit, because the study conceptualized legal mobilization broadly to include administrative complaints, petitions, requests for recognition, negotiations with public institutions, and community-based advocacy. Exclusion criteria included unwillingness to participate in an audio-recorded interview or inability to provide informed consent. Recruitment continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. Saturation was reached after 21 interviews, when no substantially new codes or categories emerged; three additional interviews were conducted to confirm the stability of the thematic structure.

### **2. Data Collection**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was selected because it allowed participants to describe their experiences in their own words while enabling the researcher to explore comparable topics across interviews. The interview guide included questions about participants' understanding of rights, experiences of cultural misrecognition or unequal treatment, pathways used to express claims, sources of legal or community support, perceptions of institutions, barriers encountered, and outcomes of mobilization. Sample interview questions included: "Can you describe a situation in which you or your community felt the need to make a rights-related claim?" "How did you decide whether to pursue the issue formally or informally?" "Who helped you understand the legal or administrative process?" and "How did the institution respond to your claim?"

Interviews lasted between 45 and 75 minutes and were conducted in a private and convenient location selected by the participants or through a secure online platform when preferred. All interviews were conducted in Persian. With participants'

permission, interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Field notes were written after each interview to document contextual impressions, non-verbal cues, analytic reflections, and emerging patterns. Participants were assured that their identities, cultural affiliations, and institutional references would be anonymized. Pseudonyms and participant codes were used in all transcripts and reports. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews.

### **3. Data Analysis**

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on the procedures proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved repeated reading of transcripts, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. NVivo software was used to organize the data, store transcripts, manage codes, retrieve coded segments, compare cases, and support the development of thematic categories. The analysis combined inductive and theoretically informed coding. Initial codes were developed from participants' narratives, while later interpretation was informed by concepts such as legal consciousness, support structures, naming–blaming–claiming, recognition, and institutional filtering.

To enhance trustworthiness, several strategies were used. Credibility was strengthened through member checking with selected participants, peer discussion of codes, and the use of direct quotations. Dependability was supported through documentation of the coding process, analytic memos, and an audit trail. Confirmability was addressed through reflexive memo-writing to identify the researcher's assumptions and reduce premature interpretation. Transferability was supported by providing detailed descriptions of the study context, participant characteristics, and analytic categories. The reporting of the study was informed by the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ), particularly in relation to research team reflexivity, study design, data collection, and analytic transparency.

### **Findings**

#### **4. Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

A total of 24 participants took part in the study. Of these, 13 participants were women and 11 were men. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 58 years. Five participants were between 18 and 25 years old, nine were between 26 and 35 years old, six were between 36 and 45 years old, and four were older than 45 years. Regarding educational level, three participants had completed high school or diploma-level education, eleven held bachelor's degrees, eight held master's degrees, and two held doctoral degrees. In terms of self-described minority background, ten participants identified with ethnolinguistic minority communities, six with religious minority communities, five with migrant or diasporic cultural backgrounds, and three with intersectional or mixed minority identities. Participants' rights-related experiences included educational claims ( $n = 7$ ), employment-related claims ( $n = 5$ ), municipal or public service claims ( $n = 5$ ), cultural association or community recognition claims ( $n = 4$ ), and documentation or administrative identity claims ( $n = 3$ ).

#### **5. Main Category 1: Transforming Everyday Grievances into Rights Claims**

The first main category concerned the gradual transformation of ordinary grievances into explicit rights claims. Participants often described early experiences of exclusion as "normal," "expected," or "part of being different." However, through repeated encounters with unequal treatment, discussions with peers, and exposure to legal or civic language, these experiences were gradually reinterpreted as violations of dignity, equality, or cultural recognition. For many participants, legal mobilization began not with formal complaint but with a shift in interpretation. One participant stated, "At first, I thought it was only a personal problem. Later, when I heard the same story from others in our community, I understood that it was not only about me; it was about how they see us" (P7, female, 31). Another participant explained, "When you do not know the language of rights, you only feel hurt. When someone explains that this is discrimination, then the feeling becomes a claim" (P12, male, 39). Participants emphasized that rights language gave legitimacy to experiences that had previously been dismissed as

sensitivity, misunderstanding, or cultural difference. Yet this transformation was emotionally difficult because naming an experience as a rights violation also created fear of confrontation, exposure, and possible institutional retaliation.

## **6. Main Category 2: Reliance on Informal and Formal Support Structures**

The second main category reflected the importance of support structures in enabling legal mobilization. Participants rarely acted alone. They relied on family members, educated peers, lawyers, community elders, cultural associations, religious leaders, university instructors, journalists, and sympathetic administrative staff. These actors helped participants interpret procedures, prepare documents, write petitions, contact institutions, and decide whether to pursue a formal or informal strategy. One participant noted, “Without the lawyer, we would not even know which office was responsible. The problem was not only the law; the problem was finding the door to enter” (P3, male, 44). Another participant said, “Our community association did not solve everything, but it gave us courage. When you go alone, they can ignore you. When you go with a letter and signatures, they listen differently” (P16, female, 28). Participants also described informal mediators as crucial because they could translate cultural concerns into language institutions recognized. However, access to such support was unequal. Participants with higher education, professional networks, or financial resources were better able to mobilize effectively, while socially isolated participants often abandoned their claims early.

## **7. Main Category 3: Institutional Filtering and Procedural Containment**

The third main category referred to the ways institutions filtered, narrowed, delayed, or procedurally contained minority claims. Participants did not always describe institutional response as openly hostile; rather, they frequently described it as bureaucratic, technical, ambiguous, and exhausting. Claims were redirected from one office to another, reframed as individual misunderstandings, or reduced to documentation problems. One participant explained, “They never said we do not have the right. They only said, ‘Bring another document,’ ‘Come next week,’ ‘This is not our department.’ After some time, you become tired and the claim dies by itself” (P9, female, 36). Another participant stated, “The answer was polite, but nothing changed. They accepted the letter, stamped it, and after that there was silence” (P21, male, 47). Participants interpreted these responses as a form of institutional avoidance. Formal acknowledgment did not necessarily lead to substantive remedy. Some participants also felt that institutions were more comfortable addressing individual cases than recognizing collective or cultural dimensions of the claim. As a result, minority claims were often depoliticized and treated as isolated administrative problems.

## **8. Main Category 4: Partial Recognition and Limited Substantive Change**

The fourth main category concerned the gap between recognition and meaningful change. Participants reported that legal mobilization sometimes produced symbolic gains, such as written acknowledgment, respectful meetings, temporary accommodation, or verbal promises. However, these gains did not always produce durable institutional reform. Participants valued recognition because it reduced feelings of invisibility, but they also expressed frustration when recognition was not accompanied by enforceable procedures, resource allocation, or accountability. One participant stated, “They told us, ‘Your culture is respected,’ but respect must be seen in decisions, not only in words” (P5, female, 42). Another participant explained, “After months of following up, they agreed with our request in principle, but the next year we had to start from zero again” (P18, male, 34). Participants therefore described legal mobilization as both empowering and exhausting. It created a sense of agency and collective voice, but repeated procedural barriers produced fatigue, distrust, and selective withdrawal from formal institutions. The findings suggest that minority legal mobilization is most effective when recognition is institutionalized through clear procedures, accessible complaint mechanisms, and culturally competent implementation.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to explore how members of minority cultural groups in Tehran experience legal mobilization, formulate rights claims, and interpret institutional responses. The findings showed that legal mobilization was not a single legal



act but a gradual and relational process. Participants first had to reinterpret everyday grievances as rights-related harms; then they had to find language, support, and institutional pathways through which those harms could be expressed as legitimate claims. This finding aligns with Felstiner, Abel, and Sarat's (1980–1981) naming–blaming–claiming framework, which emphasizes that disputes are socially constructed through interpretive stages rather than automatically produced by injury. The participants' narratives showed that minority claim-making often begins before formal institutions become involved. It begins when repeated experiences of disrespect, exclusion, or cultural invisibility are collectively named as unjust. This also supports Ewick and Silbey's (1998) argument that legal consciousness is embedded in everyday life. Participants did not relate to law only as a formal system; they encountered it as a cultural symbol, a possible strategy, a source of fear, and a language for dignity. In this respect, legal consciousness shaped whether participants remained silent, sought informal mediation, or pursued formal complaint.

The first main finding, transforming everyday grievances into rights claims, is consistent with socio-legal research showing that legal mobilization depends on interpretive capacity and rights consciousness. McCann (1994) argued that legal mobilization can raise consciousness and provide symbolic resources for collective action even when litigation itself does not produce immediate structural victory. In the present study, participants described legal language as a mechanism that converted private hurt into public claim. This is also consistent with Scheingold's (1974) argument that rights discourse can be politically powerful because it provides moral legitimacy and a framework for action. However, the findings also confirm Scheingold's warning that rights discourse may produce frustration when institutional realities do not match the promise of rights. Participants experienced rights language as empowering, but they also recognized that naming a violation could expose them to risk, disappointment, or bureaucratic exhaustion. Therefore, the politics of rights was both enabling and constraining. For minority cultural groups, rights consciousness did not simply increase formal claims; it also intensified awareness of institutional inequality.

The second finding, reliance on informal and formal support structures, strongly supports Epp's (1998) theory that rights mobilization depends on organized support structures, including lawyers, advocacy organizations, funding, and civic networks. Participants with access to lawyers, cultural associations, educated peers, or institutional insiders were more able to prepare documents, identify competent offices, and sustain their claims. Those without such support were more likely to abandon claims. This finding also corresponds with Galanter's (1974) analysis of unequal legal capacity. Minority claimants often functioned as "one-shotters" facing complex bureaucracies and repeat institutional actors. Their disadvantage was not only legal but informational, emotional, and procedural. Support structures helped reduce this asymmetry by translating claims into institutionally recognizable forms. The study extends Epp's theory by showing that in minority cultural contexts, support structures are not limited to formal rights organizations. Community elders, cultural mediators, religious leaders, and informal advisors may also act as rights translators. These actors help connect cultural meanings of harm with legal-administrative categories.

The third finding, institutional filtering and procedural containment, aligns with legal opportunity structure theory. Hilson (2002) argued that legal mobilization depends on the openness of legal venues, procedural rules, costs, and institutional receptivity. Vanhala (2012) similarly showed that legal opportunities may not automatically produce mobilization because organizations and claimants evaluate cost, risk, identity, and expected effectiveness. Participants in this study often encountered institutions that appeared formally open but practically difficult to access. Their claims were not always rejected directly; instead, they were delayed, redirected, individualized, or reframed as technical matters. This finding is important because it shows that institutional non-responsiveness may operate through procedural neutrality. A bureaucracy can claim to treat everyone equally while still failing to recognize the specific cultural, linguistic, or collective dimensions of minority claims.

Such responses narrow the scope of mobilization by converting structural grievances into isolated administrative files. In this way, institutions may contain minority claims without explicitly denying minority rights.

The fourth finding, partial recognition and limited substantive change, contributes to debates on recognition and redistribution. Taylor (1994) emphasized that recognition is essential to identity and dignity, and participants in this study clearly valued being heard, named, and respected by institutions. However, Fraser (1995) argued that recognition must be connected to redistribution and institutional restructuring if justice is to move beyond symbolic inclusion. The findings strongly support Fraser's position. Participants appreciated respectful language and symbolic acknowledgment, but they became frustrated when recognition did not produce procedural reform, enforceable commitments, or practical accommodation. Kymlicka's (1995) theory of minority rights is also relevant here because it highlights the inadequacy of purely formal equality in culturally diverse societies. Treating all claimants identically may reproduce inequality when minority groups face distinct barriers to recognition, documentation, language use, or cultural participation. The participants' experiences suggest that minority rights require institutional design, not only tolerant discourse. Recognition must be embedded in administrative routines, complaint procedures, training, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms.

Another important implication of the findings concerns the translation of rights into local cultural vocabularies. Merry (2006) argued that human rights norms become effective when they are vernacularized, meaning translated into locally meaningful moral and cultural frameworks. Participants in this study did not always speak in technical legal terms. They often used concepts such as dignity, respect, community memory, cultural survival, and belonging. These expressions were not separate from rights; they were the local language through which rights became meaningful. However, institutional actors often responded more readily to standardized legal documents than to culturally grounded narratives. This produced a translation gap: communities needed to express their claims in ways that preserved cultural meaning while satisfying institutional expectations. Support structures were crucial in bridging this gap. The finding suggests that minority legal mobilization should be understood as a process of double translation: cultural harms must be translated into legal categories, and legal rights must be translated back into culturally meaningful remedies.

The findings also show that legal mobilization can produce mixed emotional consequences. Participants described empowerment, solidarity, and increased awareness, but also fatigue, distrust, and withdrawal. This ambivalence reflects the broader socio-legal debate about whether courts and legal institutions can generate social change. Rosenberg (2008) cautioned that courts alone are often limited in producing social reform without political support and implementation capacity. Although this study did not focus only on courts, the same logic applies to administrative institutions. A favorable meeting, stamped letter, or verbal promise may not produce durable change unless institutions have mechanisms for implementation. At the same time, the findings support McCann's (1994) more expansive view that legal mobilization matters even when immediate outcomes are limited, because it can reshape consciousness, collective identity, and future strategies. Participants who did not achieve full remedies still learned how institutions operate, developed networks, and sometimes became informal advisors for others in their communities. Therefore, legal mobilization should be evaluated not only by immediate institutional outcomes but also by its effects on collective capacity.

Overall, the study contributes to socio-legal scholarship by showing that minority cultural legal mobilization is shaped by the interaction of rights consciousness, support structures, institutional filters, and recognition politics. The findings suggest that legal mobilization is not simply a question of whether rights exist. It is a question of whether people can recognize injuries as claimable, whether they have support to act, whether institutions are accessible, and whether recognition produces practical change. In minority contexts, the distance between formal equality and lived equality is often produced through subtle institutional mechanisms rather than explicit denial. Therefore, improving access to justice for minority cultural groups requires



attention to everyday administrative practices, culturally competent procedures, and the social conditions that allow rights to be used.

**Limitations:** This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted only in Tehran; therefore, the findings may not fully represent the experiences of minority cultural groups in smaller cities, rural areas, border regions, or provinces with different institutional and cultural dynamics. Second, the study relied on self-reported interview data, which means that findings reflect participants' perceptions, memories, and interpretations of institutional encounters. Third, the sample included participants with at least some willingness to discuss rights-related experiences, so individuals who were more fearful, isolated, or distrustful of research may have been underrepresented. Fourth, because the study anonymized cultural affiliations to protect participants, it could not provide detailed comparison among specific minority groups. Finally, the study examined legal mobilization broadly and did not focus exclusively on litigation; therefore, future court-based or document-based research may reveal additional dynamics.

**Suggestions for future research:** Future studies should compare legal mobilization among minority cultural groups across different Iranian cities and institutional settings. Comparative research could examine whether claim-making differs in educational institutions, workplaces, municipal offices, courts, cultural associations, and administrative agencies. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable because legal mobilization often unfolds over time, and the long-term effects of partial recognition or institutional delay cannot be captured fully through one-time interviews. Future research could also explore the perspectives of institutional actors, including lawyers, administrative officials, judges, social workers, and civil society mediators, to better understand how institutions interpret minority claims. Finally, mixed-methods research could combine interviews with complaint records, policy analysis, and observation of institutional procedures.

**Suggestions for practice:** Institutions should develop clear, accessible, and culturally sensitive procedures for receiving and responding to minority rights claims. Complaint mechanisms should explain required documents, responsible offices, timelines, appeal options, and available support services in simple language. Public institutions should train staff to recognize cultural dimensions of claims rather than reducing them to individual misunderstandings or technical deficiencies. Legal aid services and community-based advisory centers should be strengthened so that minority claimants are not dependent only on personal networks or private lawyers. Institutions should also create mechanisms for monitoring whether recognition leads to actual implementation. Respectful communication is important, but it is not sufficient. Minority cultural groups need predictable procedures, accountable responses, and practical remedies that make rights meaningful in everyday institutional life.

## Conclusion

This study explored legal mobilization among minority cultural groups in Tehran by examining how participants transformed grievances into rights claims and how institutions responded to those claims. The findings showed that legal mobilization was a gradual process shaped by legal consciousness, community support, procedural accessibility, and institutional recognition. Participants did not simply "use law" as an external instrument; they interpreted law through experiences of dignity, cultural belonging, exclusion, and collective memory. Rights language helped participants legitimize their claims, but the effectiveness of mobilization depended heavily on access to support structures and institutional responsiveness.

The study identified four main categories: transforming everyday grievances into rights claims, reliance on informal and formal support structures, institutional filtering and procedural containment, and partial recognition with limited substantive change. These findings indicate that formal rights are insufficient when institutions lack culturally competent mechanisms for

hearing and resolving minority claims. Legal mobilization can empower minority groups, but it can also produce fatigue when claims are delayed, individualized, or symbolically acknowledged without practical reform.

The study concludes that minority rights require more than legal recognition in abstract terms. They require institutional pathways through which cultural claims can be expressed, understood, documented, and remedied. Strengthening legal aid, community mediation, administrative transparency, and culturally responsive institutional practice can help reduce the gap between formal equality and lived access to justice. Legal mobilization among minority cultural groups should therefore be understood as both a rights-based and relational process: it depends on law, but also on trust, translation, support, and the willingness of institutions to respond substantively to cultural difference.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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