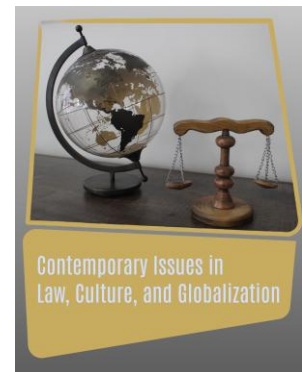




The Role of Law in Managing Cultural Diversity: A Qualitative Study of Multicultural Governance

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore how law contributes to the management of cultural diversity and multicultural governance through the lived experiences and professional interpretations of legal, policy, and civil society actors in Tehran. This qualitative study was conducted using a conventional thematic analysis approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 24 participants in Tehran, including legal scholars, lawyers, public administration experts, civil society representatives, and individuals engaged with cultural and minority-related issues. Participants were selected purposively according to their professional experience with law, governance, cultural rights, minority recognition, or public policy. Interviews continued until theoretical saturation was reached at the twenty-first interview, followed by three additional interviews to confirm the stability of emerging categories. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using NVivo software. Data analysis followed a systematic coding process involving open coding, categorization, theme development, constant comparison, and researcher reflexivity. Four main categories emerged from the data: law as a framework for recognition and equality, law as a mediator between universal rights and cultural particularity, participatory governance and institutional dialogue, and the implementation gap between legal norms and administrative practice. Participants emphasized that law can protect cultural diversity when it is clear, inclusive, rights-based, and procedurally accessible. However, they also reported that legal ambiguity, bureaucratic discretion, weak participation of cultural communities, and limited public legal literacy may reduce the practical capacity of law to manage cultural diversity fairly. The findings suggest that multicultural governance requires more than formal legal recognition. Law becomes effective in managing cultural diversity when legal norms are combined with participatory decision-making, anti-discrimination safeguards, institutional accountability, and culturally responsive implementation mechanisms. The study contributes to qualitative legal scholarship by showing how multicultural governance is experienced not only as a matter of legal doctrine but also as a practical process of recognition, negotiation, trust, and institutional responsiveness.

Keywords: cultural diversity; multicultural governance; minority rights; legal recognition; qualitative research; Tehran; legal pluralism; participatory governance.

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Introduction

Cultural diversity has become one of the defining governance challenges of contemporary societies. Global migration, urbanization, transnational communication, religious plurality, linguistic diversity, and changing forms of collective identity have transformed the social contexts in which legal systems operate. Law is no longer concerned only with regulating relations among formally equal citizens within a culturally homogeneous public sphere. Instead, modern legal systems increasingly face demands to recognize different cultural practices, protect minority identities, prevent discrimination, and maintain social cohesion without suppressing legitimate pluralism. In this context, multicultural governance refers to the institutional, legal, and policy arrangements through which states and public authorities manage cultural difference while seeking to preserve equality, citizenship, public order, and shared political membership.

The role of law in managing cultural diversity is complex because law performs several functions simultaneously. It defines rights, sets limits on state power, regulates public institutions, distributes recognition, creates procedures for participation, and establishes remedies when rights are violated. In multicultural societies, law may either support inclusion or reproduce exclusion. It may protect minorities from assimilationist pressure, but it may also become a tool through which dominant cultural norms are presented as neutral and universal. For this reason, the legal management of cultural diversity cannot be reduced to the question of whether diversity is legally acknowledged. It also requires analysis of how law is interpreted, implemented, accessed, and experienced by different groups.

The theoretical literature on multiculturalism has long emphasized the importance of recognition. Taylor (1994) argued that recognition is a vital human need because identity is shaped through social and institutional relations. When cultural identities are misrecognized or ignored, individuals and groups may experience exclusion not only as a social disadvantage but also as a denial of equal dignity. Kymlicka (1995) similarly challenged the idea that liberal equality requires uniform treatment in all circumstances. He argued that minority rights can be compatible with liberal democratic principles when they protect individuals' capacity to live within meaningful cultural contexts. These arguments shifted the debate from formal equality toward differentiated citizenship, group-sensitive rights, and institutional recognition.

At the same time, multicultural governance raises important tensions. Parekh (2006) argued that culturally diverse societies need a dialogical model of political community in which no single cultural tradition monopolizes public reason. For Parekh, multicultural governance requires mutual accommodation, intercultural dialogue, and a willingness to reinterpret national identity in inclusive terms. Modood (2007) similarly conceptualized multiculturalism as a civic idea rather than a separatist project. From this perspective, multiculturalism is not the abandonment of shared citizenship but an attempt to make citizenship more inclusive by recognizing that citizens may enter the public sphere with different cultural, religious, and historical identities. These approaches suggest that law should not merely tolerate difference privately but should structure fair conditions for public belonging.

However, critics and feminist theorists have warned that cultural recognition may sometimes reinforce internal inequalities within groups. Shachar (2001) showed that when states delegate authority to cultural or religious communities without adequate safeguards, vulnerable members—especially women and children—may be exposed to intra-group domination. Her model of “joint governance” is important because it proposes that neither the state nor the cultural group should possess exclusive authority over contested matters. Instead, legal arrangements should create overlapping jurisdictional responsibilities that protect both cultural membership and individual rights. Phillips (2007) similarly criticized essentialist understandings of culture, arguing that individuals should not be treated as passive representatives of fixed cultural traditions. These critiques are

central to legal debates because they show that multicultural governance must balance recognition with autonomy, equality, and protection against domination.

International human rights instruments also provide an important normative framework for the legal management of cultural diversity. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes, in Article 27, that persons belonging to ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities should not be denied the right to enjoy their culture, profess and practice their religion, or use their language in community with others (United Nations, 1966). The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities further emphasizes minority participation, identity protection, and conditions for cultural development (United Nations General Assembly, 1992). UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity frames cultural diversity as a source of exchange, innovation, and creativity and links it to human rights and dialogue (UNESCO, 2001). These instruments do not eliminate national legal variation, but they establish a rights-based vocabulary through which diversity can be understood as a matter of dignity, participation, and equal citizenship.

In sociological terms, contemporary diversity is increasingly described as “super-diversity,” a concept introduced by Vertovec (2007) to capture the intensified complexity of migration-related diversity. Super-diversity refers not only to the presence of multiple ethnic or national groups but also to the interaction of language, religion, legal status, class, gender, locality, migration history, and transnational ties. This concept is especially relevant for legal governance because law often operates through fixed categories, while lived diversity is fluid, overlapping, and context-dependent. Legal systems may recognize religion but ignore language, protect formal citizenship but overlook migrants' administrative vulnerability, or prohibit discrimination while leaving everyday bureaucratic exclusion unaddressed. Thus, the effectiveness of law depends on its capacity to respond to complex social realities without reducing cultural identity to rigid categories.

Citizenship scholarship also shows that legal membership is not simply a formal status. Bloemraad, Korteweg, and Yurdakul (2008) emphasized that citizenship involves legal status, rights, participation, and belonging. This broader understanding is useful for multicultural governance because cultural diversity is managed not only through constitutional rights or statutory provisions but also through institutional practices that affect whether people feel recognized as members of the political community. Legal inclusion may remain incomplete when minority groups possess formal rights but lack meaningful participation in policy formation, access to legal remedies, or trust in public institutions. Therefore, qualitative research is particularly valuable because it can reveal how legal norms are interpreted and experienced by those involved in governance processes.

Another important debate concerns the relationship between recognition and redistribution. Fraser (2000) argued that justice requires attention to both cultural recognition and socioeconomic redistribution. In multicultural contexts, cultural marginalization often intersects with economic disadvantage, spatial inequality, educational exclusion, and limited access to public services. Banting and Kymlicka (2006) examined the relationship between multicultural policies and welfare-state solidarity, showing that recognition and redistribution should not be treated as mutually exclusive. This is important for legal governance because cultural diversity cannot be effectively managed if recognition remains symbolic while material inequalities persist. Laws that protect cultural identity must therefore be connected to anti-discrimination enforcement, equal access to services, and fair public resource allocation.

The law also operates as a mechanism of translation between global norms and local contexts. Merry (2006) argued that human rights norms become effective when they are translated into local meanings, institutional practices, and accessible forms of justice. This insight is highly relevant to multicultural governance because legal frameworks may fail when they are written in abstract rights language but are not understood, trusted, or used by communities. The challenge is not only to adopt inclusive legal standards but also to make those standards meaningful in local administrative, judicial, and civic settings. Legal pluralism,

local mediation, public consultation, and culturally responsive legal education may all contribute to this translation process, provided that they remain consistent with fundamental rights.

Despite extensive theoretical literature, there remains a need for empirical qualitative studies that examine how legal actors, policy professionals, and community representatives understand the role of law in managing cultural diversity. Much of the existing literature is normative, comparative, or doctrinal. Less attention has been given to the interpretive experiences of those who work within legal and governance systems in specific urban contexts. Tehran provides a meaningful context for such inquiry because it is a large metropolitan space in which different ethnic, linguistic, religious, regional, and social identities interact within public institutions, legal processes, educational systems, and civic life. Studying Tehran does not imply that cultural diversity is unique to this city; rather, it allows the research to explore how multicultural governance is understood in a concrete institutional environment.

Therefore, this study investigates the role of law in managing cultural diversity through a qualitative exploration of multicultural governance in Tehran. It asks how participants interpret the capacity of law to recognize cultural difference, mediate conflicts between universal rights and cultural claims, support participatory governance, and address implementation gaps. By focusing on semi-structured interviews, the study seeks to move beyond abstract legal theory and examine the lived and professional meanings attached to law as a tool of cultural governance. The study contributes to multicultural legal scholarship by showing that law is most effective when it functions not only as a system of rules but also as a framework for recognition, negotiation, accountability, and institutional trust.

Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative research design using conventional thematic analysis. A qualitative approach was selected because the aim was to explore participants' interpretations, experiences, and professional understandings of how law contributes to managing cultural diversity and multicultural governance. The study was exploratory and interpretive in orientation, focusing on the meanings participants attributed to legal recognition, rights protection, cultural accommodation, institutional participation, and implementation challenges. Thematic analysis was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to identify, analyze, and report patterns of meaning within qualitative data while remaining flexible across theoretical frameworks (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The participants consisted of 24 individuals from Tehran who had direct or indirect experience with legal, administrative, civic, or cultural aspects of diversity governance. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants who could provide rich and relevant information. The inclusion criteria were: residence or professional activity in Tehran, at least three years of experience in law, governance, public administration, academia, civil society, or cultural affairs, and willingness to participate in an interview. The sample included six university scholars in law, sociology, public policy, or cultural studies; six lawyers, legal consultants, or judicial professionals; five public administration or municipal policy actors; four civil society activists; and three representatives or advocates connected with cultural, linguistic, or minority-related issues. The final sample size was determined by theoretical saturation. Saturation was reached after 21 interviews, when no substantially new categories emerged. Three additional interviews were conducted to confirm and refine the final categories.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. An interview guide was developed based on the study objective and the literature on multiculturalism, legal recognition, minority rights, and governance. The guide included open-ended questions such as: "How do you understand the role of law in managing cultural diversity?", "What legal mechanisms are most important for protecting cultural differences?", "How should law balance cultural recognition with equality and individual rights?", "What are the main challenges in implementing diversity-related legal norms?", and "How can public institutions improve trust and participation among culturally diverse groups?" Follow-up questions were used to elicit examples, clarify

meanings, and deepen participants' reflections. Interviews lasted between 45 and 85 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Persian, audio-recorded with informed consent, and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were written after each interview to document contextual impressions, emerging ideas, and reflexive observations.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis with support from NVivo software. The analysis began with repeated reading of transcripts to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial codes were generated inductively and assigned to meaningful units of text. Codes with conceptual similarity were then grouped into preliminary subcategories. Through constant comparison across interviews, these subcategories were refined into broader main categories. NVivo was used to organize transcripts, manage codes, compare coded segments, and retrieve quotations related to emerging themes. The research team reviewed codes and categories several times to ensure conceptual coherence and reduce interpretive bias. The final thematic structure included four main categories: law as a framework for recognition and equality, law as a mediator between universal rights and cultural particularity, participatory governance and institutional dialogue, and the implementation gap between legal norms and administrative practice.

Several strategies were used to enhance trustworthiness. Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the data, peer review of codes, and member checking with a subset of participants. Transferability was strengthened by providing detailed descriptions of participants, context, and analytic procedures. Dependability was enhanced through maintaining an audit trail that documented interview procedures, coding decisions, category development, and analytic memos. Confirmability was supported through reflexive note-taking and comparison of interpretations among the researchers. These strategies were informed by established qualitative trustworthiness criteria (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participation was voluntary, and all participants received information about the study purpose, interview process, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Written informed consent was obtained before each interview. Participants' names and identifying details were removed from transcripts and replaced with codes such as P1, P2, and P3. Audio files and transcripts were stored securely and were accessible only to the research team. In reporting the findings, quotations were anonymized to protect participants' privacy and professional identity.

Findings

The study included 24 participants from Tehran. Of these, 13 participants were men and 11 were women. In terms of age, five participants were between 28 and 35 years old, nine were between 36 and 45 years old, six were between 46 and 55 years old, and four were older than 55 years. Regarding educational level, three participants held a bachelor's degree, nine held a master's degree, and twelve held a doctoral or equivalent professional degree. With respect to professional background, six participants were university scholars, six were lawyers or legal professionals, five were public administration or municipal governance actors, four were civil society activists, and three were cultural or minority-related community representatives. Participants' professional experience ranged from 4 to 31 years, with the majority having more than 10 years of experience in law, policy, governance, or civic work related to cultural diversity.

The first category reflected participants' belief that law provides the formal foundation for recognizing cultural diversity and preventing exclusion. Participants described law as the "first language of public recognition" because it determines whether cultural groups are treated as legitimate members of society or merely tolerated as private communities. This category included three subthemes: formal recognition of cultural identity, equality before public institutions, and anti-discrimination guarantees. Participants emphasized that cultural diversity becomes governable when individuals and groups know that their language, customs, religious practices, and cultural affiliations are not treated as threats to citizenship. One participant stated, "When the law names people as equal citizens, it gives them a place in society; without that, diversity remains invisible" (P7). Another participant explained, "Recognition is not only emotional; it must be legal. If a group is respected socially but ignored legally,

its security is always temporary” (P12). Participants also noted that legal equality should not be limited to abstract constitutional language but should be reflected in administrative procedures, access to public services, employment, education, and legal remedies. From their perspective, law can reduce cultural marginalization when it explicitly prohibits discrimination and provides clear procedures for complaint, review, and remedy.

The second category concerned the mediating role of law in balancing respect for cultural practices with universal principles of equality, dignity, and individual rights. Participants did not view cultural diversity as an unlimited claim that should override all other legal norms. Instead, they described law as a boundary-setting mechanism that must protect both cultural membership and individual autonomy. This category included the subthemes of rights-based accommodation, limits of cultural claims, and protection of vulnerable members within groups. Several participants argued that cultural accommodation is legitimate when it expands dignity and participation but becomes problematic when it justifies coercion, gender inequality, exclusion, or harm. One legal scholar noted, “The question is not whether culture should be respected; the question is who speaks for culture and whether all members of that culture are free inside it” (P3). Another participant stated, “A fair legal system should not force people to choose between their culture and their rights” (P18). Participants therefore supported a model in which law recognizes cultural difference while retaining fundamental safeguards. They emphasized that courts, policymakers, and public institutions should avoid both assimilationist rigidity and uncritical cultural relativism. The role of law, in this sense, is to create principled negotiation between shared civic norms and legitimate cultural particularities.

The third category showed that participants considered participation essential for effective multicultural governance. They argued that legal rules are more legitimate and effective when culturally diverse communities are involved in policy formation, implementation, and evaluation. This category included the subthemes of consultation, representation, intercultural dialogue, and trust-building. Participants criticized top-down legal and administrative approaches that design policies for cultural communities without including them in decision-making. One civil society participant stated, “Many problems begin when institutions speak about communities but not with communities” (P14). Another participant explained, “Participation changes the meaning of law. People obey a rule more willingly when they feel they had a voice in shaping it” (P21). Participants also emphasized the importance of institutional dialogue between legal authorities, local administrations, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and community representatives. They believed that such dialogue can prevent cultural misunderstandings, reduce conflict, and help public institutions identify practical barriers before they become legal disputes. According to participants, multicultural governance requires not only legal texts but also ongoing communicative processes through which cultural concerns can be heard, interpreted, and translated into fair policy.

The fourth category referred to the gap between formal legal commitments and everyday institutional practice. Participants repeatedly stated that cultural diversity is often addressed in general legal language, but difficulties arise when laws are implemented by administrative bodies, local officials, schools, courts, or service providers. This category included the subthemes of legal ambiguity, bureaucratic discretion, weak remedies, limited legal literacy, and inconsistent institutional practice. One participant observed, “The law may be acceptable on paper, but the citizen meets the clerk, the office, the form, and the unwritten habit” (P5). Another participant stated, “For minority groups, the real question is not only what the law says, but whether anyone will enforce it when discrimination happens” (P16). Participants described bureaucratic discretion as a major challenge because officials may interpret diversity-related issues differently depending on their personal attitudes, institutional culture, or lack of training. They also noted that many citizens are unaware of their rights or do not trust complaint mechanisms. As a result, legal protection may remain underused. Participants suggested that effective implementation requires clear guidelines, public legal education, staff training, monitoring systems, and accessible complaint procedures.

Discussion

This study explored the role of law in managing cultural diversity and multicultural governance through semi-structured interviews with 24 participants in Tehran. The findings showed that participants understood law not merely as a formal set of rules but as an institutional mechanism of recognition, mediation, participation, and implementation. Four main categories were identified: law as a framework for recognition and equality, law as a mediator between universal rights and cultural particularity, participatory governance and institutional dialogue, and the implementation gap between legal norms and administrative practice. Overall, the results suggest that multicultural governance depends on the capacity of law to combine normative clarity with practical responsiveness. Law can support cultural diversity when it protects equal citizenship, recognizes legitimate cultural difference, prevents discrimination, creates participatory procedures, and offers effective remedies. However, the findings also show that formal legal recognition is insufficient when implementation is inconsistent or when affected communities are excluded from decision-making.

The first finding emphasized the role of law as a framework for recognition and equality. Participants believed that cultural diversity becomes socially and politically manageable when law provides formal recognition and protects individuals and groups against exclusion. This finding is consistent with Taylor's (1994) theory of recognition, which argues that misrecognition can be a form of harm because identity is shaped through social and institutional acknowledgment. In the present study, participants similarly described legal recognition as a condition of dignity and public belonging. The finding also aligns with Kymlicka's (1995) argument that minority rights can be compatible with liberal equality when they protect individuals' access to meaningful cultural contexts. Participants did not interpret recognition as a privilege for specific groups; rather, they viewed it as a mechanism for ensuring that formal citizenship becomes substantively inclusive. This supports Modood's (2007) claim that multiculturalism should be understood as a civic project aimed at expanding the meaning of equal citizenship. In this sense, the study shows that law contributes to multicultural governance by transforming diversity from a private social fact into a public matter of justice, rights, and institutional responsibility.

The second finding concerned the mediating role of law between universal rights and cultural particularity. Participants supported cultural accommodation, but they also emphasized that cultural claims must be evaluated in relation to dignity, equality, and individual freedom. This finding is strongly aligned with Shachar's (2001) critique of exclusive cultural jurisdiction. Shachar argues that legal systems should avoid both state monopoly and group monopoly over identity-related disputes because either model can produce injustice. The participants' emphasis on protecting vulnerable members within cultural groups reflects this concern. Similarly, Phillips (2007) warns against treating cultures as fixed and internally homogeneous. The present findings confirm this critique by showing that participants were aware of the danger of allowing selected elites or dominant voices within a community to define "culture" for all members. The study therefore supports a rights-based model of multicultural governance in which law does not simply preserve cultural traditions but evaluates how those traditions affect the agency, equality, and security of individuals. This result also resonates with Benhabib's (2002) argument that cultures are contested, internally plural, and continuously reinterpreted. Law, therefore, should not freeze culture into rigid categories but should create conditions for democratic negotiation within and between cultural communities.

The third finding highlighted participatory governance and institutional dialogue. Participants argued that legal norms are more legitimate and effective when culturally diverse communities participate in policy formation and implementation. This finding is consistent with Parekh's (2006) dialogical approach to multiculturalism, which emphasizes intercultural exchange and mutual accommodation. It also corresponds with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which emphasizes the importance of minority participation in decisions that affect them (United Nations General Assembly, 1992). In the present study, participants described participation not only as a democratic ideal but also as a practical strategy for preventing conflict and improving policy effectiveness. This supports

the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities' Ljubljana Guidelines, which frame integration as a shared process requiring inclusive institutions, participation, and social cohesion (OSCE HCNM, 2012). The findings show that multicultural governance cannot be achieved through legal command alone. It requires institutional dialogue, consultation, and trust-building mechanisms that allow public authorities to understand the lived realities of culturally diverse groups. Participation transforms law from a distant regulatory system into a communicative structure through which citizens can negotiate belonging.

The fourth finding identified an implementation gap between legal norms and administrative practice. Participants repeatedly emphasized that the practical effectiveness of law depends on how legal standards are applied by public officials, courts, schools, service providers, and local institutions. This finding is consistent with Merry's (2006) argument that legal and human rights norms must be translated into local contexts to become meaningful and effective. In the present study, participants suggested that rights may remain abstract when citizens do not understand them, when officials are not trained to apply them, or when complaint mechanisms are inaccessible. This also relates to Bloemraad et al.'s (2008) broader understanding of citizenship as involving not only legal status but also rights, participation, and belonging. A person may formally possess rights but still experience exclusion if institutional practices prevent those rights from being realized. The implementation gap identified in this study is also relevant to Vertovec's (2007) concept of super-diversity. As cultural identities become more complex and intersectional, administrative systems based on rigid categories may fail to respond to actual needs. Therefore, the study suggests that multicultural governance requires administrative capacity, discretion control, monitoring, legal literacy, and culturally responsive institutional training.

The findings also contribute to debates about recognition and redistribution. Participants focused on legal recognition, but their comments about access to services, complaint mechanisms, and bureaucratic treatment show that recognition cannot be separated from material and institutional equality. This supports Fraser's (2000) argument that justice requires attention to both recognition and redistribution. If cultural diversity is acknowledged symbolically but minority citizens face barriers in education, employment, housing, public services, or legal remedies, multicultural governance remains incomplete. Banting and Kymlicka (2006) similarly argue that recognition and redistribution should not be understood as opposing principles. In the context of this study, participants implicitly supported an integrated approach: law should recognize cultural identities while also ensuring equal access to institutional resources and remedies. This integrated view is important because multicultural legal policy may fail when it focuses only on symbolic inclusion without addressing structural disadvantage.

Another important implication of the findings is that law must manage diversity without producing cultural essentialism. Participants repeatedly warned that cultural communities are internally diverse and that no single spokesperson can fully represent all members. This concern is consistent with Benhabib (2002) and Phillips (2007), both of whom criticize static understandings of culture. Legal systems often require categories in order to regulate rights and responsibilities, but these categories may oversimplify lived identities. The findings suggest that multicultural governance should therefore use legal categories carefully, flexibly, and procedurally. Rather than assuming fixed cultural identities, law should create participatory procedures through which individuals and groups can articulate their concerns in context. This is particularly important in urban settings such as Tehran, where cultural diversity may be shaped by ethnicity, language, religion, region, class, education, and migration history. A flexible legal approach can help prevent both assimilation and stereotyping.

The study also indicates that trust is a central element of multicultural governance. Participants did not define legal effectiveness only in terms of formal validity. They linked effectiveness to whether people believe institutions will listen, respond fairly, and enforce rights consistently. This finding is significant because multicultural governance often fails not because laws are entirely absent, but because communities lack confidence in the institutions responsible for implementing them. Trust requires transparency, accountability, representation, and remedy. Where legal procedures are unclear or complaint

mechanisms are weak, cultural minorities may avoid institutions and rely on informal strategies. While informal community mechanisms may sometimes solve problems, they can also reproduce power inequalities and leave vulnerable individuals unprotected. Therefore, law must be accessible and credible if it is to serve as a common framework for diverse citizens.

Finally, this study shows that the role of law in multicultural governance is multidimensional. Law recognizes identities, protects equality, sets limits, structures participation, translates rights into local practice, and provides remedies. However, law cannot manage cultural diversity effectively if it is isolated from governance capacity, civic education, institutional accountability, and social dialogue. The findings suggest that multicultural governance should be understood as a dynamic process rather than a fixed legal model. It requires continuous adjustment between general principles and specific contexts. The most effective legal approach is neither assimilationist uniformity nor unrestricted cultural relativism. Rather, it is a rights-based, participatory, and institutionally responsive model that protects cultural diversity while maintaining equal citizenship and individual dignity.

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted only in Tehran, and the findings may not fully represent experiences in smaller cities, rural areas, border provinces, or regions with different cultural compositions. Second, the study relied on semi-structured interviews, which means that the findings reflect participants' perceptions and interpretations rather than direct observation of legal institutions or administrative procedures. Third, although the sample included participants from several professional and civic backgrounds, some groups may have been underrepresented, especially individuals with limited institutional access or lower legal literacy. Fourth, because cultural diversity is a sensitive topic, some participants may have expressed cautious or socially desirable views during interviews. These limitations suggest that the findings should be interpreted as an in-depth qualitative account rather than a generalizable measurement of multicultural governance.

Future research should examine multicultural governance in different Iranian cities and compare how legal recognition, participation, and implementation vary across local contexts. Comparative studies between metropolitan and non-metropolitan settings could show how institutional capacity affects the legal management of diversity. Future studies may also focus specifically on the experiences of minority citizens, women within cultural communities, migrants, young people, or public officials responsible for implementing diversity-related policies. Mixed-methods research could combine qualitative interviews with survey data to examine broader patterns of trust, rights awareness, and access to remedies. Longitudinal research would also be valuable for understanding how legal reforms, administrative training, or participatory mechanisms affect multicultural governance over time.

Public institutions should strengthen the practical implementation of legal protections related to cultural diversity by developing clear administrative guidelines, accessible complaint mechanisms, and regular staff training on equality, non-discrimination, and cultural responsiveness. Policymakers should create structured consultation channels that allow culturally diverse communities to participate in decisions affecting them. Legal education programs should be expanded to improve public awareness of rights and remedies. Institutions should also monitor the implementation of diversity-related rules to reduce arbitrary discretion and inconsistent treatment. Finally, multicultural governance should be approached as a shared civic process in which law protects both cultural belonging and individual dignity.

Conclusion

This qualitative study explored the role of law in managing cultural diversity and multicultural governance in Tehran. The findings revealed that law plays a central but conditional role in diversity governance. Participants viewed law as a framework for recognition and equality, a mediator between universal rights and cultural particularity, a basis for participatory governance, and a mechanism whose effectiveness depends on implementation. The study showed that legal recognition is necessary but insufficient. For law to manage cultural diversity effectively, it must be supported by institutional dialogue, accessible remedies,

anti-discrimination enforcement, legal literacy, and administrative accountability. The findings suggest that multicultural governance should not be reduced to symbolic recognition or abstract rights language. Rather, it should be understood as a practical and participatory process through which culturally diverse citizens are recognized, protected, heard, and included. Law is most effective when it creates a shared civic framework that respects cultural difference while safeguarding equality, dignity, and individual rights.

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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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