

# Policy Analysis of the Development of Iran's Cinema Industry: A Thematic Analysis Approach

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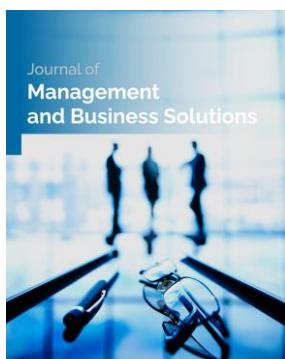
## ABSTRACT

One of the distinctive domains within cultural industries and the cultural economy is cinema, which holds substantial importance from cultural, social, and economic perspectives. On the one hand, the cinema industry is among the principal instruments of culture-building in society. By creating specific conditions for audiences and instilling particular ideas, the cinematic space plays a fundamental role in shaping and transforming societal attitudes. One of the primary pathways to achieving development is the adoption and implementation of appropriate and timely policymaking. Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to analyze the policymaking processes related to the development of Iran's cinema industry. In terms of purpose, the study is applied; in terms of data, it is qualitative; and in terms of analytical method, it employs thematic analysis. The statistical sample consisted of 10 experts from the cinema industry. The sampling method was non-random purposive sampling. Based on the analysis of documented policies—including approvals, bylaws, and regulations—as well as the programs of Ministers of Culture and Islamic Guidance across different periods, in addition to interview analyses, 20 categories for the development of Iran's cinema industry were identified. The findings indicate that the policies and strategies governing Iran's cinema economy have been influenced by the political discourses of each period and government. Even with changes in individuals and relevant officials within a single government, shifts can be observed in policies and strategies and, consequently, in actions and outcomes.

**Keywords:** policy, development, industry, cinema

## Introduction

Cinema occupies a distinctive position within the broader landscape of cultural industries, functioning simultaneously as an artistic medium, an economic sector, and a policy-sensitive domain shaped by ideological, institutional, and structural forces. In contemporary societies, cinema is not merely a form of entertainment but a strategic cultural resource through which identities are constructed, values are communicated, and social meanings are negotiated. As a result, governments increasingly regard the cinema industry as a policy-relevant field requiring targeted interventions, regulatory frameworks, and long-term developmental strategies. The intersection of cultural production and public policy has therefore become a central concern in cultural economics and policy studies,



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particularly in contexts where cinema is closely tied to national identity, cultural sovereignty, and socio-political narratives (1, 2).

From an economic perspective, cinema represents a complex value chain encompassing production, distribution, exhibition, labor markets, technological infrastructure, and international trade. The sustainability of this value chain depends heavily on policy instruments such as subsidies, tax incentives, intellectual property protection, market regulation, and institutional governance. Studies in the economics of motion pictures emphasize that film industries are characterized by high uncertainty, significant sunk costs, and asymmetric information, which justify various forms of public intervention (3, 4). Consequently, cinema policy is often framed as a corrective mechanism designed to address market failures while simultaneously advancing cultural objectives such as diversity, accessibility, and artistic innovation (5, 6).

The globalization of cultural markets has further complicated cinema policymaking. On the one hand, global distribution platforms, transnational co-productions, and digital technologies have expanded market access and audience reach. On the other hand, they have intensified competition and exposed domestic film industries to external pressures that may undermine local production capacities. Comparative studies of film policy in different national contexts illustrate how governments respond to these challenges through protectionist measures, selective liberalization, or hybrid policy models that balance cultural protection with economic competitiveness (7-9). These dynamics underscore the importance of context-sensitive policymaking that accounts for both global trends and domestic structural conditions.

Policy process theories provide valuable analytical tools for understanding how cinema policies are formulated, implemented, and transformed over time. Frameworks such as the advocacy coalition framework and policy subsystem analysis highlight the role of actors, belief systems, institutional arrangements, and feedback mechanisms in shaping policy outcomes (10, 11). Within this perspective, cinema policy is not a static set of regulations but a dynamic arena in which government agencies, industry stakeholders, professional guilds, artists, and audiences interact. Policy feedback effects further suggest that existing policies can reshape political alignments, stakeholder expectations, and future reform trajectories (12). This theoretical lens is particularly relevant for analyzing long-term policy evolution in sectors such as cinema, where incremental adjustments and ideological shifts often coexist.

In many developing and semi-peripheral economies, cinema policy is closely intertwined with broader debates on cultural economy development. Cultural industries are increasingly recognized as contributors to economic growth, employment generation, urban development, and soft power. Research on cultural capital emphasizes that investment in cultural production enhances not only economic outputs but also symbolic value and social cohesion (13, 14). Accordingly, cinema policy is often embedded within national development plans and cultural economy strategies, reflecting an integrated view of culture as both an economic asset and a public good (1, 2).

The Iranian cinema industry offers a particularly compelling case for policy analysis due to its unique historical, political, and cultural trajectory. Since the Islamic Revolution, cinema in Iran has operated under a distinctive policy regime characterized by strong state involvement, ideological oversight, and evolving mechanisms of support and control. Despite structural constraints, Iranian cinema has achieved notable international recognition, participating in global festivals and contributing to the country's cultural diplomacy (15, 16). This duality—domestic regulation alongside international visibility—raises important questions about the effectiveness, coherence, and developmental orientation of cinema policies in Iran.

Empirical studies on Iran's cinema economy highlight the multifaceted nature of policy influence on production patterns, genre selection, market structure, and labor conditions. Econometric and systems-based analyses suggest that state policies significantly shape investment flows, production incentives, and risk distribution within the industry (17, 18). At the same time, policy-induced stratification has become more pronounced in the digital age, as access to resources, platforms, and audiences is unevenly distributed among industry actors (19). These findings indicate that cinema policy not only enables development but also redistributes power and opportunity within the cultural field.

Another critical dimension of cinema policy concerns social representation and inclusion. Films function as sites where social movements, gender relations, and minority identities are articulated and contested. Policy frameworks that regulate content, funding priorities, and distribution channels indirectly influence whose stories are told and how they are received. Research on gender representation and social movements in cinema demonstrates that policy environments shape the visibility and framing of marginalized voices (20, 21). In this sense, cinema policy intersects with broader issues of social justice, cultural rights, and public discourse.

The evaluation of cinema policies requires methodological approaches capable of capturing complexity, context, and meaning. Traditional quantitative indicators, while useful for measuring outputs such as box office revenues or production volumes, may fail to account for symbolic, cultural, and institutional dimensions of policy impact. Scholars have therefore critiqued narrow economic evaluations and called for interpretive and qualitative approaches that examine policy narratives, discourses, and underlying assumptions (6, 22). Thematic analysis, in particular, offers a systematic yet flexible method for identifying patterns across policy documents, stakeholder perspectives, and institutional practices, making it well suited for cultural policy research.

In the field of policy studies, the use of qualitative methods has been justified as a means of uncovering how policy problems are constructed and how solutions are legitimized. Conceptual mapping and thematic coding enable researchers to trace linkages between policy goals, instruments, and outcomes, thereby revealing implicit priorities and tensions within policy frameworks (23, 24). When applied to cinema policy, such methods can illuminate how economic, cultural, and political rationales are integrated—or fragmented—across different policy periods.

Recent international scholarship further underscores the need to reassess cinema policies in light of technological transformation. Digital platforms, streaming services, and emerging technologies such as virtual production and metaverse-based education are reshaping cinematic production and consumption. These developments pose new regulatory challenges and require adaptive policy responses that address skills development, intellectual property, and global competition (7, 25). For countries like Iran, where policy frameworks have historically emphasized regulation and protection, technological change intensifies the urgency of strategic policy reorientation.

Despite a growing body of literature on cultural policy and cinema economics, comprehensive analyses that systematically examine the underlying categories and indicators of cinema industry development within a national policy context remain limited. Existing studies often focus on specific aspects such as international awards, economic performance, or content regulation, without integrating these dimensions into a coherent analytical framework (15, 17). Moreover, the role of policy feedback, institutional learning, and stakeholder interaction in shaping long-term development trajectories has received insufficient attention in the Iranian context.

Against this backdrop, a thematic analysis of cinema development policies offers an opportunity to synthesize dispersed policy elements and identify core developmental categories that have guided governmental action over

time. By examining official documents, strategic plans, and policy discourses, it becomes possible to map the dominant themes that structure state intervention in the cinema industry, such as government supervision, private sector participation, cultural consumption, international engagement, and social capital formation (11, 12). Such an approach aligns with contemporary interpretive policy analysis, which emphasizes meaning-making processes and contextual embeddedness in policy research (3, 5).

Understanding these thematic structures is not only of academic interest but also of practical relevance for policymakers, industry practitioners, and cultural planners. Clear identification of policy categories can inform more coherent policy design, reduce fragmentation, and enhance alignment between cultural objectives and economic instruments. Furthermore, it can support evidence-based reforms aimed at strengthening the resilience and competitiveness of the cinema industry while preserving its cultural integrity (2, 13).

Therefore, the present study aims to analyze and categorize the development policies of Iran's cinema industry through a thematic analysis of post–Islamic Revolution governmental policy documents and strategies, in order to identify the core policy categories that function as indicators of cinema industry development.

## Methods and Materials

In terms of purpose, the present study is an applied research, and in terms of methodological approach, it adopts a qualitative research design. The analytical method employed in the qualitative phase was thematic analysis.

The data collection methods included interviews and document analysis. Accordingly, considering the subject and objectives of the study, semi-structured interviews and the analysis of written policies—namely documents, approvals, regulations, and bylaws—were used. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, with note-taking, and some were audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewees. Following the interviews with experts and specialists, the interviews were transcribed, and the collected data were subsequently analyzed and synthesized.

The participants consisted of academic experts and specialists in the field of cinema industry policymaking. The statistical sample of the present study included 10 experts from the cinema industry. A non-random purposive sampling method, one of the purposive sampling techniques, was employed.

To determine qualitative content validity, the researcher asked 10 experts and specialists to review the interviews qualitatively based on criteria such as grammatical accuracy, appropriate word usage, necessity, importance, proper placement of expressions, and to provide their suggestions and feedback. Accordingly, revisions were made to each expression based on the experts' comments. To establish the credibility (confirmability) of the findings, three techniques were used: data collection from multiple sources, negative case analysis, and methodological flexibility. The data sources were diverse, and triangulation was applied. In analyzing negative cases in the interviews, contradictory interpretations identified in the data were resolved. In addition, the interview protocol was repeatedly re-evaluated, and its content and procedures were reviewed, ensuring full flexibility in interpretations, suggestions, and findings.

## Findings and Results

In the present study, data were first extracted from the statements of the interviewees (10 experts from the cinema industry and academic specialists) and from the analysis of written policies—namely documents, approvals, regulations, and bylaws. The outcome of these interviews was a set of initial themes which, through the coding process, were organized and from which basic themes were extracted.

**Table 1. Themes and Open and Axial Coding**

Initial Theme	Organizing Theme	Basic Theme
Charging fees for reviewing feature films	Government supervision	Government participation and supervision
Fee discounts for domestic production	Encouragement and support of production	Production of cinematic works
Exchange and cooperation in cultural activities	Exchange and cooperation with other countries	Cultural diplomacy
Holding festivals and inviting artists	Introducing the art and artists of other countries	Cultural diplomacy
Determining cinema ticket prices	Supervision of supply	Government participation and supervision
Exemption of domestic film production from municipal duties	Support for production	Production of cinematic works
Requirement of screening permits	Supervision of supply	Government participation and supervision
Exemption of filmmaking equipment imports from commercial profit duties	Facilitation of equipment imports	Production of cinematic works
Insurance, welfare of filmmakers, and compensation for damages	Livelihood of producers and artists	Employment and livelihood
Financing cinema hall construction for children and adolescents	Development of screening halls	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Holding festivals	Exchange of artistic and cinematic works	Film festivals
Participation in international festivals	Distribution and presentation of works abroad	Cultural diplomacy
Supervision of production and screening	Supervision	Government participation and supervision
Intervention in production	Government supervision and intervention	Government participation and supervision
Attention to domestic production	Support for production	Production of cinematic works
Attention to children's cinema	Support for production	Production of cinematic works
Organization of guilds and associations	Support for the private sector	Support for guilds and non-governmental institutions
Establishment of cinemas in underprivileged areas	Development of screening halls	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Allocation of licenses to the private sector	Encouraging private sector participation	Private sector participation
Exchange of cinematic and cultural works	Familiarity with the counterpart's culture and history	Cultural diplomacy
Exchange of artists	Introducing art and artists to other countries	Cultural diplomacy
Facilities for artists' visits to cultural centers	Familiarity of artists with other cultures	Cultural diplomacy
Holding exhibitions	Familiarity with art and artists of other countries	Cultural diplomacy
Holding art and tourism weeks	Support for tourism	Tourism
Establishment of cultural and cinematic centers (cinemas)	Development of cultural capacity	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Construction and equipping of cinemas	Development and upgrading of cultural capacity	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Establishment and strengthening of cinema centers and equipment	Development of cinematic production	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Public art education	Development of education	Education
Increasing and popularizing cinematic production	Popularization of culture	Cultural consumption
Establishment of artistic hubs for artists	Support for hubs and associations	Support for guilds and private institutions
Legislation supporting works and productions	Support for cultural works	Intellectual property
Development of relations between domestic and foreign artists	Intercultural dialogue	Cultural diplomacy
Establishment of centers for preserving artistic works	Protection of cultural capital	Cultural capital
Establishment of cultural and cinematic complexes (halls)	Development of exhibition capacity	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Supervision of sales and rental of films and audiovisual works	Supervision of supply	Government participation and supervision

Supervision of home distribution of films	Supervision of supply	Government participation and supervision
Supervision of film screenings in provinces	Supervision of screening	Government participation and supervision
Supervision of distribution and screening of films	Supervision of supply and screening	Government participation and supervision
Supervision of film production	Supervision of production	Government participation and supervision
Establishment of educational centers	Development of artistic education	Education
Support for artistic activities of the non-governmental sector	Facilities for privatization	Private sector participation
Tax incentives for developing cinematic and artistic centers	Development of cultural and educational capacity	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Regulating foreign works to avoid harm to domestic production	Protection of domestic production	Increase in cinematic production
Exchange of works and experts in cultural and artistic fields	Familiarity with other cultures and arts	Cultural diplomacy
Holding cultural and film weeks	Introducing art and artists abroad	Cultural diplomacy
Exchange of students and professors in cinema	Knowledge exchange and development	Education
Commercial distribution facilities for films	Exchange of cinematic works	Exports
Exchange of cooperation and technical achievements	Exchange of technical information	Education
Facilitation of festivals and film weeks	Familiarity with art and artists of other countries	Cultural diplomacy
Expansion of exchanges and support for non-governmental sectors in product distribution	Cultural exchange and cooperation	Cultural diplomacy
Development of public and private educational centers	Cultural and cinematic education	Education
Tax exemptions and banking facilities for developing cultural and cinematic centers	Development of cultural and cinematic centers	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Development of cinemas by the private sector	Support for non-governmental participation	Private sector participation
Increase in cinema screens	Development of cinema	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Training specialized workforce	Nurturing a new generation of filmmakers	Education
Facilitating women's entry into cinema	Greater participation of women in cinema	Gender equity
Production facilities	Support for filmmakers	Increase in cinematic production
Strict censorship	Intervention and supervision of screening	Government participation and supervision
Support for production in specific genres	Intervention in production	Government participation and supervision
Art education and supervision	Supervision of education	Education
Supervision of public and private financial contributions to domestic film production	Supervision of public support	Government participation and supervision
Registration of domestic films	Protection of producers' rights	Intellectual property
Renovation of cinemas and screening halls	Development of exhibition capacity	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Establishment of screening halls and cultural complexes for women	Development of cultural capacity	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Ensuring home screening rights	Support for producers	Intellectual property
Creation of sales and distribution markets	Support for product distribution	Employment
Reform of guild regulations	Support for guild organizations	Support for guilds
Encouraging use of cultural products	Development of cultural consumption	Cultural consumption
Linking art and industry	Support for art distribution	Employment
Artistic workshops	Support for artistic education	Education
Employment of graduates	Utilization of specialized capacity	Employment
Professionalization of jobs	Use of expertise in occupations	Employment
Allocation of cultural vouchers	Encouraging cultural consumption	Cultural consumption
Expansion of audience support	Consumer and audience rights	Cultural consumption
Scientification of the art field	Use of science and technology in art	Education
Revitalization of auxiliary jobs	Support for auxiliary job creation	Employment

Export of artistic works	Support for exporting artistic products	Exports
Creating competitive environments for quality production and distribution	Support and supervision of production and distribution	Government participation and supervision
Export awards	Support for exports	Exports
Export awards for the private sector	Support for the private sector	Private sector participation
Prevention of piracy	Support for producers	Intellectual property
Prevention of illegal reproduction and distribution	Supervision of distribution and reproduction	Government participation and supervision
Promotion of public culture to support domestic production	Supervision and support of lawful consumption	Government participation and supervision
Legal reform to promote competition and support the private sector	Public cultural participation	Private sector participation
Establishment of a non-governmental guarantee fund for production, distribution, and export	Support for production by the private sector	Private sector participation
Legal reform to develop the cultural economy	Support for cultural economic growth	Economic development
Approval of standards for utilization of cultural spaces	Development of cultural capacity	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Development of structures for private-sector production and distribution	Support for domestic production with public participation	Private sector participation
Facilities for importing required equipment	Improving domestic production quality for export	Exports
Organization of subsidies to develop cultural consumption	Development of cultural consumption	Cultural consumption
Registration of cultural and cinematic works	Protection of producers' rights	Intellectual property
Renovation and construction of cultural complexes and cinemas	Expansion of cultural and cinematic spaces	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Equal access to cultural, educational, and artistic facilities nationwide	Development of cultural and artistic facilities across the country	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Cultural and artistic development prioritizing public needs	Development of responsive cultural resources	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Removal of subsidies for cultural products and public access to products	Increase in household cultural consumption	Cultural consumption
Enforcement of laws instead of discretionary supervision	Rule-based supervision of cultural activities	Government participation and supervision
Legal protection of authors' and artists' rights	Supervision of artists' rights	Intellectual property
Expansion of coverage of cultural and artistic programs nationwide	Distribution of cultural product supply facilities	Cultural development
Organization of supply and demand markets and export development	Distribution of cultural products in domestic and export markets	Production of cinematic works
Reduction of government dominance and increased private sector share	Increased non-governmental participation	Private sector participation
Increase in culture's share of GDP	Financing cultural affairs and development	Economic development
Support for professional and guild associations	Support for cultural guild associations	Private sector participation
Financial and legal support for cultural centers	Strengthening cultural production	Production of cinematic works
Allocation of resources to popularize cinema	Increase in cultural consumption	Cultural consumption
Diversification of cultural affairs and public oversight	Strengthening public participation	Private sector participation
Organization of cultural subsidies to enhance consumption	Encouraging cultural consumption	Cultural consumption
Establishment of cultural centers in all cities	Development and expansion of cultural and cinematic centers	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Facilities for completing unfinished cultural buildings	Development and completion of cultural and cinematic centers	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Inter-agency cooperation to provide cultural spaces	Development of cultural and cinematic centers	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Reduction of supervision	Facilitation of production and screening	Production of cinematic works
Delegation of affairs to guild institutions	Reduction of government dominance	Private sector participation
Reduction of government intervention in genre selection	Facilitation of production and screening	Increase in cinematic production
Attention to the international dimension of festivals	Exchange of cinematic works	Cultural diplomacy
Downsizing of government institutions	Reduction of government dominance	Private sector participation
Penalization of illegal activities in production and distribution	Supervision of artistic activities	Government participation and supervision
Facilitation of technical service business development	Growth of cinematic technical services	Business development

Legalized support for technical service centers	Support for technical and support centers	Government participation and supervision
Supervision of technical and support services	Supervision of technical service centers	Government participation and supervision
Support for domestic production of cinematic equipment	Facilities for indigenous equipment production	Production of cinematic works
Allocation of budgets to support and expand national cinema	Investment	Government participation and supervision
Provision of capital to establish a culture and art insurance fund	Insurance for artists	Employment
Allocation of budgets for cinema complexes in Tehran	Development of screening halls	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Budget allocation to cover filmmakers' outstanding debts	Financial support for cinema owners and filmmakers	Employment
Refund of value-added tax to licensed filmmakers	Financial support for licensed artists	Employment
Support for legal import of cinematic equipment	Facilities for importing technical and equipment services	Government participation and supervision
Renovation of cinemas using modern technologies	Upgrading and renovation of cinemas	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Strengthening technical knowledge and integrating it into education	Updating the education system	Education
Support for filmmakers in selected themes	Guidance and supervision of production	Government participation and supervision
Increase in cinema attendance	Increase in cultural consumption	Cultural consumption
Fair distribution of subsidies and facilities for filmmakers	Filmmaking facilities	Production of cinematic works
Supervision of cultural consumption and popularization of cinema	Supervision of cultural consumption and production	Government participation and supervision
Distribution of cinematic products abroad	Export of cultural products	Exports
Increase in meaningful cinematic productions and Iran's global share	Support for meaningful productions for global presence	Exports
Development of technical infrastructure and cinema	Technical development of cinema	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Expansion of cinematic activities nationwide	Development of cinema across the country	Cultural development
Increase in home network cinematic production	Support for home screening	Production of cinematic works
Increased production in Sacred Defense and high-value genres	Support for Sacred Defense cinema	Government participation and supervision
Development and renovation of cultural and cinema complexes nationwide	Increase in cinema hall per capita	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Utilization of talents in cinema	Employment of human resources	Employment
Allocation of large government budgets	Neglect of the private sector	Government participation and supervision
Confiscation of produced films	Intervention in screening and production	Government participation and supervision
Neglect of guilds and associations	Lack of support for the private sector	Government participation and supervision
Intervention and participation in production	Neglect of the private sector	Government participation and supervision
Exchange of cinematic works	International presence	Cultural diplomacy
Use of cinema to enhance quality of civic life	Creation of social vitality	Social capital
Expansion of access to cinema	Development of cultural consumption	Cultural consumption
Facilitation of licensing for production and distribution	Facilitation of licensing	Production of cinematic works
Ensuring security for production, publication, and screening	Security of production and distribution	Government participation and supervision
Delegation of licensing to the private sector	Support for privatization	Private sector participation
Support for cultural guilds	Strengthening cultural guilds	Support for guilds
Attention to welfare, insurance, and livelihood of cultural workers	Livelihood and welfare of artists	Employment
Implementation of copyright law	Supervision of artists' rights	Intellectual and moral property
Support for private-sector internet services for cultural information	Cultural service technology and equipment	Production of cinematic works
Support for non-governmental investment in technology transfer	Delegation to the non-governmental sector	Private sector participation

Expansion of cultural education in the non-governmental sector	Cultural education	Education
Expansion of formal artistic and cultural education	Cultural education	Education
Development of cultural spaces	Increase in per capita cultural spaces	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Attention to cultural industry infrastructure in cinema	Strengthening cinematic infrastructure	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Investment in production development and cultural equipment	Technology and equipment	Production of cinematic works
Increased production and support for cultural festivals	Cultural production and festivals	Film festivals
Support for popular institutions and associations	Strengthening non-governmental institutions	Support for guilds
Increase in cultural and artistic spaces	Increase in per capita cultural spaces	Expansion of cinema hall per capita
Delegation of affairs to the private sector	Strengthening non-governmental institutions	Private sector participation

Based on the categorization conducted of governmental policies and strategies during the post-Islamic Revolution periods, the categories—which themselves are considered indicators of the development of Iran's cinema industry—are presented in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Main Categories of Iran's Cinema Industry Development**

No.	Main Category	Code
1	Government participation and supervision in production, distribution, and content	C1
2	Production of cinematic works	C2
3	Participation in festivals	C3
4	Employment and livelihood of artists and cinema professionals	C4
5	Increasing the per capita number of screening halls	C5
6	Private sector participation	C6
7	Tourism	C7
8	Education	C8
9	Increasing societal cultural consumption	C9
10	Attention to guilds and non-governmental associations	C10
11	Intellectual property of works	C11
12	Preservation and maintenance of cinematic works	C12
13	Development of cinematic activities	C13
14	Development of the cultural economy	C14
15	Export of cinematic works	C15
16	Deployment of specialized human resources	C16
17	Cinematic equipment	C17
18	Attention to social capital	C18
19	Cultural diplomacy	C19
20	Holding festivals and exchanges with other countries	C20

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the present study reveal that the development of Iran's cinema industry has been structured around a coherent yet internally tensioned set of policy categories, with government participation and supervision emerging as the dominant and overarching axis shaping production, distribution, content, and institutional governance. The thematic analysis demonstrated that state intervention has not been limited to regulatory oversight but has extended deeply into economic support mechanisms, content control, market organization, and international representation. This result aligns with cultural policy literature emphasizing that cinema industries in ideologically sensitive or strategically important cultural contexts tend to evolve under strong governmental steering rather than purely market-driven dynamics (1, 2). In the Iranian case, the prominence of government supervision confirms that

cinema has been treated as a hybrid cultural–political domain, where economic rationales are consistently mediated by symbolic, ideological, and social considerations, a pattern also observed in other national cinemas with strong state traditions such as France and Korea (4, 8).

At the same time, the identification of “production of cinematic works” as a core category indicates that policy attention has persistently focused on sustaining production capacity, mitigating financial risk, and ensuring continuity of output. This emphasis is consistent with the economic characteristics of film industries, which are marked by uncertainty, high sunk costs, and volatile demand, thereby justifying public intervention to stabilize production cycles (3, 6). Prior empirical studies on the Iranian cinema economy similarly show that production incentives, subsidies, and selective support schemes have played a decisive role in shaping the volume and orientation of film output (17, 18). The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that production support is not an isolated policy tool but is embedded within a broader constellation of categories that include supervision, labor protection, infrastructure development, and cultural diplomacy.

The emergence of employment and livelihood of artists and cinema professionals as a distinct policy category underscores the social dimension of cinema policymaking in Iran. This finding reflects a recognition of cinema as a labor-intensive cultural industry in which human capital constitutes the primary productive asset. Consistent with cultural economy theories, policies addressing welfare, insurance, and job security are essential for sustaining creative labor markets and preventing talent attrition (13, 14). Previous research has shown that policy-induced stratification within the film industry can exacerbate inequalities among filmmakers, particularly under conditions of digital transformation and platformization (19). The results of this study suggest that Iranian cinema policies have attempted—albeit unevenly—to respond to such risks through livelihood-oriented measures, even as broader structural imbalances persist.

Another significant result concerns the expansion of screening infrastructure and the increase in per capita cinema halls as a central development indicator. This category reflects a supply-side understanding of cultural consumption, whereby access to physical and technological infrastructure is treated as a prerequisite for audience development. Comparative policy research confirms that investment in exhibition infrastructure is a critical determinant of cinema attendance and market sustainability, particularly outside major metropolitan centers (7, 26). In Iran, this infrastructural emphasis also carries an equity dimension, as policies have sought to reduce regional disparities in cultural access. The findings therefore support arguments in the cultural policy literature that spatial distribution of cultural facilities is integral to both cultural justice and market expansion (5, 22).

The identification of private sector participation as a major category highlights an important, and at times contradictory, trajectory in Iran’s cinema policymaking. While the state remains the dominant actor, policies increasingly reference privatization, delegation, and encouragement of non-governmental investment. This duality mirrors broader debates in policy studies regarding the balance between state steering and market mechanisms within policy subsystems (10, 11). International experiences suggest that hybrid governance models—combining public oversight with private initiative—are more resilient in the face of globalization and technological change (7, 9). However, the findings indicate that in Iran, private sector participation has often been constrained by persistent state intervention, a pattern that may limit the full realization of entrepreneurial and innovative potential within the cinema industry.

Cultural consumption and audience development also emerged as a key policy category, reflecting an explicit concern with demand-side dynamics. Policies aimed at increasing cinema attendance, promoting cultural vouchers,

and popularizing film consumption resonate with cultural economics research emphasizing that sustainable cultural industries require active audience cultivation rather than reliance on supply expansion alone (1, 2). This result is consistent with studies showing that policy-driven incentives can significantly influence cultural participation patterns, particularly in societies where economic barriers and competing media platforms shape consumption choices (3, 4). In the Iranian context, such policies also intersect with broader social objectives, including public morale, social cohesion, and quality of life.

The strong presence of cultural diplomacy and international engagement among the identified categories highlights the outward-facing dimension of Iran's cinema policies. Participation in festivals, export of cinematic works, and cross-border exchanges have been instrumental in positioning Iranian cinema within global cultural circuits. Prior research demonstrates that international recognition can function as a compensatory mechanism for domestic market constraints, enhancing symbolic capital and soft power (15, 16). The present findings corroborate this perspective, showing that cultural diplomacy has been institutionalized as a policy objective rather than a byproduct of artistic success. This aligns with comparative analyses of national cinema policies that frame international festivals as strategic platforms for cultural representation and policy legitimization (4, 8).

Education and human capital development constitute another critical pillar identified in the analysis. Policies related to training, academic exchange, and skill development reflect an understanding of cinema as a knowledge-intensive industry requiring continuous adaptation to technological and aesthetic change. This finding is particularly salient in light of recent scholarship emphasizing the transformative impact of digital technologies and immersive environments on cinematic education and production practices (25). By foregrounding education as a development category, the results support arguments that long-term competitiveness in cultural industries depends on systematic investment in learning infrastructures rather than short-term production subsidies (5, 24).

Finally, the inclusion of social capital and cultural economy development as distinct categories indicates that cinema policy in Iran has been conceptualized not merely as sectoral management but as part of a broader socio-economic strategy. Cultural policy theorists argue that cultural industries contribute to trust-building, collective identity, and social integration, thereby generating indirect economic and political benefits (12, 13). The findings suggest that Iranian policymakers have, at least discursively, acknowledged these broader functions, even if practical implementation has been uneven. This reinforces the value of thematic policy analysis in uncovering latent policy rationales that may not be fully articulated in formal economic indicators (6, 23).

Despite its contributions, the present study is subject to several limitations. First, the analysis relied primarily on policy documents and expert interviews, which may reflect official narratives and elite perspectives more strongly than grassroots or audience-level experiences. Second, the qualitative and interpretive nature of thematic analysis, while suitable for capturing complexity, limits the ability to make causal claims about policy effectiveness or to quantify the relative impact of different policy categories. Third, the study focused on national-level policies and did not systematically examine regional or local variations in policy implementation, which may lead to differentiated outcomes across the country.

Future research could build on these findings in several directions. Comparative studies examining Iran's cinema policy categories alongside those of other national cinemas would provide deeper insight into the specificity and generalizability of the identified themes. Longitudinal research linking policy categories to measurable industry outcomes—such as production diversity, employment stability, or international market penetration—would also help bridge the gap between interpretive analysis and policy evaluation. In addition, incorporating audience research

and industry network analysis could enrich understanding of how policies are experienced and negotiated by different stakeholder groups.

From a practical perspective, the results suggest several implications for policymakers and practitioners. Greater coherence between state supervision and private sector participation could enhance policy effectiveness by reducing uncertainty and encouraging innovation. Strengthening coordination between education policies and industry needs may improve workforce readiness in the face of technological change. Finally, adopting more transparent and participatory policy processes could help align cinema development strategies with the evolving expectations of artists, investors, and audiences, thereby supporting a more sustainable and inclusive cinema industry.

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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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