

Is There an Iranian Perspective on International Relations?

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Abstract

There are two views of social science: the majority one is that it is possible to have a “value-free” social science concerned with capturing the realities of the world around us; and the minority view which says that any effort to produce a body of knowledge is informed by normative and political interests. The former view i.e., the positivist one, has informed much of scholarship in International Relations (IR). The latter is admittedly well-recognized now among many non-American scholars of IR, especially in Canada and Europe. Accordingly, as Robert Cox says, “Theory is always for someone and for some purpose”¹. It is this second view that forms the starting point for this survey regarding the question if we can speak about an “Iranian perspective” on international relations. This paper is divided into two sections. First we try to shed some light on the status of teaching Political Science and International Relations in Iran. Then in the second section of the paper, we survey Iranian IR scholars` views on teaching, research, the discipline, and contemporary debates regarding Iranian perspective on international relations.

Introduction

This survey seeks to examine whether we can talk about an Iranian perspective on international relations. To this end, we will

¹ Robert Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory”, in **Approaches to World Order** edited by R. Cox and T. Sinclair (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 87.

examine the impact of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 on teaching international relations as well as the scope of domesticating/Iranianizing International Relations Theory (IRT). After the revolution, one of the main goals of the Islamic Republic was to transform the nature of teaching and research in humanities and social sciences and it appears that the main goal of the Cultural Revolution in Iran during 1980-81 was to establish an Islamic/Iranian social sciences. Have the Iranian International Relations (IR) scholars tried to achieve this goal by making their teaching and research domesticated/Iranianized? This survey investigates Iranian IR scholars' views on teaching, research, the discipline, and contemporary debates regarding Iranian perspective on international relations. This faculty survey is one part of a larger project designed to study the relationships among teaching, research, and theorizing international relations in Iran. On the other, this paper is directed more toward provocation than proof. What is intended is but a preliminary analysis about how Iranian scholars teach and research IRT as well as their view on domesticating/Iranianizing it.

Teaching Political Science and IR in Iran

The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the close of the universities following it (all the universities were closed according to the declaration of the Revolution Council dated June, 5, 1980) within the framework of the Cultural Revolution, gave rise to numerous changes in the method and content of teaching and research in humanities and social sciences including Political Science and International Relations². On the whole, it can be said that teaching Political Science and IR before the Islamic Revolution had two particular qualities of “descriptive” and

² Nasrin Mosaffa, *Seyri dar tahavvolate Aamoozeshi va Pajooheshi Oloome Syasi va Ravabete Beynalmelal* (A Review of Developments in Teaching and Research in Political Science and IR) (Tehran: CSCS, 2007), pp. 167-169. For more information about Cultural Revolution in Iran see, for example, N. Roshannehad, *Enghelabe Farhangi dar Jomhoorie Eslamie Iran* (The Cultural Revolution in the Islamic Republic of Iran) (Tehran: Markaze Asnade Enghelabe Eslami, 2004).

“distributive”³. By “descriptive” we mean that political issues and phenomena were mostly described and thus critical thinking and reading of them was rare. Consequently, there was little room for theorizing and problem-solving. On the one hand, this situation emanated from the fact that the contents of Political Science and IR in Iran were borrowed from the translated foreign sources (mainly American and European) and the dominant view was that these sciences should be acquired like other modern branches of science, and translated per se without any addition or omission.

On the other hand, another reason for the descriptive character of teaching Political Science and IR in Iran was the dominance of legal approach. From the very beginning of its establishment in Iran in 1899 when the first school of Political Science was founded, this course of study was Political Law rather than Political Science, the object of which being training experts familiar with international rules and laws for civil service in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs⁴. This school was founded in circumstances under which “Iranian diplomats abroad, though being aware of the Iranian court formal procedures, were not familiar with procedures` formalities and protocol prevalent in European countries”⁵.

Foroughi, the then Prime Minister of Iran, says in this regard, “By law we mean the laws of our country, and the discipline of law is one which is dealing with these laws and the school of law is a school in which laws are taught. The aim of founding the School of Political Science was also training officials for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs being aware of laws to the extent possible in order to protect the legal rights of the country better in the face of

³ Hakem Ghasemi, *Tasire Enghelabe Eslami Bar Aamoozesh va Pajooheshe Oloome Siyasi* (The Impact of the Islamic Revolution on Teaching and Research in Political Science) presented at the 1st annual conference of the Iranian Political Science Association, May 2007, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran.

⁴ Alireza Azghandi, *Elme Siyasat dar Iran* (Political Science in Iran) (Tehran: Markaze Bazshenasie Eslam va Iran, 1999), p. 15.

⁵ H. Mahboobi Ardakani, *Tarikhe Moassesate Jadid dar Iran* (The History of Modern Institutions in Iran) (Tehran: University of Tehran, 1975), p. 299.

foreigners”⁶. In view of this aim, the curricula taught at the School were devoted to legal issues. Thus “Political Science was confined to jurisprudence and international law”⁷.

This situation continued from 1927 onward when the School of Political Science and the School of Law were merged as the School of Law and Political Science. Later, with the foundation of University of Tehran in 1934, it continued as a faculty under the name of the Faculty of Law and Political Science. In this period, Political Science was known as political law and a large part of its curricula was legal material. The graduates of this course could even practice as notaries and attorneys. However, these practices are today limited to the graduates of law⁸.

In addition, teaching and research in Political Science and IR in Iran had a distributive nature. It means that teachers and researchers in this field considered their principal duty recounting and transmitting the materials and theories already existing (mainly in Western countries). Like businessmen, they used to import Political Science and IR material (concepts and theories) into the country and distribute it among students.

Therefore teaching and research in the field of Political Science and IR in Iran did not aim at creation and production of political knowledge, knowledge of international relations, or theorizing in these fields. Rather, it tended to distribute the knowledge and theories made abroad and spread theories produced by others, hence not having the approach of making internal or domestic theories.

Political Science and IR, due to their imported nature and not being domestic, could not adapt themselves sufficiently to the atmosphere and circumstances of the Iranian society. Rather, they

⁶ The lecture delivered by Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Iran's Prime Minister in the beginning of the 20th century in the Faculty of Law and Political Science at University of Tehran, quoted from Changiz Pahlavan, *Rishahaye Tajaddod dar Iran* (The Roots of Modernism in Iran) (Tehran: Nashre Qatre, 2003), p. 322.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 399.

⁸ See, for instance, Abbas Mobarakian, *Chehraha dar Tarikhchaye Nezame Aamoozeshe Aali Hoghoogh va Adliyahe Novin* (Who is Who in the History of Higher Education of Law and Modern Justice Administration) (Tehran: Peydayesh, 1998).

dealt with issues which were not Iranian concerns. Thus the Islamic Revolution sought to make changes in this method substituting it with that of the creation of knowledge based on Iranian and Islamic values⁹.

The Islamic Republic approach was not simulating the West, as one scholar argues, but presenting a paradigm based on Iranian and Islamic values. Thus it was supposed that there should be a return to Iranian and Islamic values presenting a new model relying on them. A model that was to differ from the current paradigms (Western and Eastern ones) resting on criteria and principles derived from Islamic as well as domestic doctrines and values¹⁰.

This attitude resulted in the substitution of following Western models with criticizing and in some cases denying them and rejecting the values promoted by them. In other words, from then on, whatever came from or presented by the West was not considered of value or validity. Thus the descriptive and distributive approach of teaching Political Science and IR was replaced by a critical and theory-building one.

Although the present article does not deal with this new approach in detail, it would refer to two principal developments made in Iranian teaching of Political Science and IR after the revolution¹¹. Firstly, there were changes in the contents of course materials, particularly adding new courses to Political Science and IR having Iranian and Islamic nature.

The first regulation of the Cultural Revolution Council concerning Political Science suggested that the curricula of this course for B.A. program must involve up-to 170 course-credits about one third of which (over 50 course-credits) bearing Islamic contents. Two years after the reopening of universities, there came

⁹ Nasrin Mosaffa, *Op Cit.*, p. 168.

¹⁰ Bahram Navazeni, "*Tabyini bar Na Sharghi, Na gharbi: Barrasie Shoarhaye Asliye Matrah Shodah dar Enghelabe Eslam*" (An Explanation of Neither East, Nor West: A Survey of Mottos in Islamic Revolution), *Zamaneh*, No. 42, 2006.

¹¹ See, for example, Mansoor Mirahmadi, Critical Dialogue on Islamic Studies and Political Science in Modern Iran, a paper will be presented in the Canadian Political Science Association Conference, May 2009, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada.

a second regulation of the Cultural Revolution Council which reduced the B.A. course-credits to 144 out of which 28 course-credits dealt with Islamic material and 10 with Revolution concerns. Four of optional course-credits were among the Islamic ones. According to the last amendment of Cultural Revolution Council, the B.A. course-credits of Political Science reduced to 136 out of which over 30 course-credits concerned Islamic and Islamic Revolution ones.

Thus the curricula system was changed due to the introduction of Islamic course-credits. On the other hand, the syllabi of the courses were defined in such a way that the views derived from Islamic sources were raised and discussed in various courses.

Secondly, founding new institutions and universities, authorities of theological seminaries and muslim scholars sought to combine Political Science and IR with Iranian and Islamic teachings. The foundation of such universities as Imam Sadegh University in 1982, Baqir al-ulum University in 1992 and Mufid University in 1994- the last two were located in Qum- was to achieve the above goal. The principal aim of these new academic centers was training researchers and graduates who were not only familiar with Western Political Science and IR, but with Islamic teachings which allowed them to participate in creating Political Science and IR within Islamic and Iranian bearing.

A study of the conditions of teaching and research in Political Science and IR in Iran thirty years after the Islamic Revolution can indicate in rough whether and to what extent customizing this field has materialized in Iran. Is it possible to speak about Political Science and IR from an Iranian perspective? The next section, concentrating on teaching and research in the subfield of IR in Iran, deals with the views of Iranian IR faculty members in this regard.

Survey of International Relations Faculty in Iran

In this section, we describe the results of our survey of Iranian IR faculty. It contains descriptive statistics for some of the questions we asked them during 2008-2009.

1) Methodology

We attempted to identify and survey all faculty members in universities in Iran (public and private) who do research in the sub-field of international relations or who teach courses on international relations. This meant that we excluded those researchers who are not faculty members in various Iranian universities.

We used the list compiled by the Iranian Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in 2006-2007 to identify all IR faculty members in Iranian public universities¹². We also used the websites of the Iranian Political Science Association and the Iranian International Studies Association. Since IR is mainly taught as a sub-field within departments of Political Science in various Iranian universities, we tried to find the IR faculty members teaching at these universities through a series of web searches, email contacts, and phone calls to department chairs, secretaries, and individual scholars.

According to the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, there are 328 Political Science and IR faculty members in Iranian public universities among which 58 are identified as teaching IR courses. The Iranian Political Science association has around 200 members among which 69 are faculty members. The Iranian International Studies Association too has around 200 members among which 40 are faculty members. Accordingly, we identified around 50 faculty members in Iranian Universities (public and private) who teach IRT courses as well as courses related to international relations.

On February 24, 2009 we began sending emails to each of these individuals, asking them to fill out an on-line survey which

¹² (Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education, **Faculty Members in Iranian Universities and Institutes** (February 2008))

had three sections: Individual Information (questions 1-9), Teaching, Research and Theorizing (questions 10-38), and Personal Views (questions 39- 58). We promised confidentiality to all respondents. In all, by end of April 2009, 25 scholars responded to our survey.

We also conducted an interview with 10 Iranian IR faculty members. These interviews were conducted during February-March 2009 with IR faculty members in universities located in Tehran (2 scholars from University of Tehran, 4 scholars from Beheshti University, 2 scholars from Imam Sadegh University, 1 scholar from each of Tarbiat Modarres and Allamah Tabatabaee universities). These interviews were intended to get an in-dept sense of our main question in this paper (whether we have an Iranian perspective on international relations) as well as to find the main obstacles to having Iranian international relations perspective/theorizing. These interviews also helped us in designing our survey questionnaire.

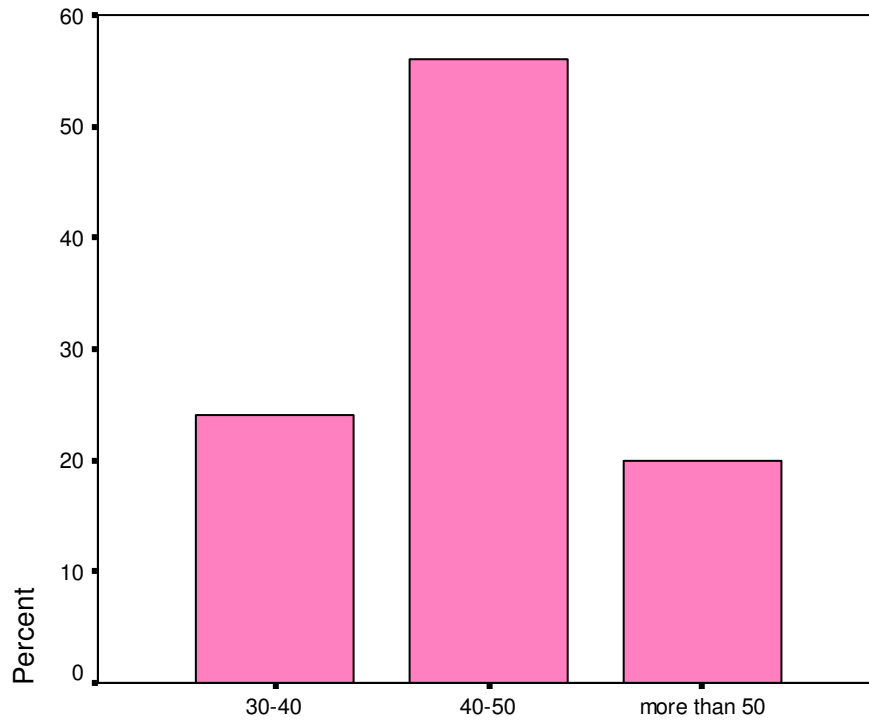
2) Findings

Due to the fact that our research is still in process and we hope to get more information from the IR faculty members who have not responded our survey yet, we refrain from in-depth analysis in this paper, allowing readers to view the summary findings and draw their own conclusions. In our forthcoming book, we analyze these data at greater length. That is said, some broad themes and a few noteworthy, if preliminary findings are highlighted here.

Section I: Individual Information

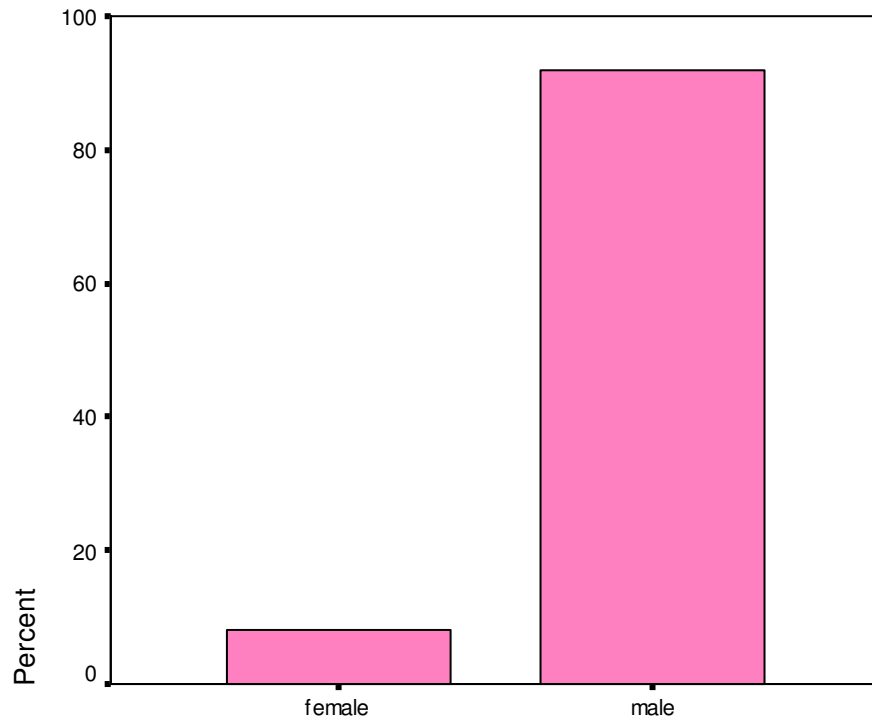
1) What is your age?

Age	Valid percent
Less than 30	-
30-40	%24
40-50	%56
More than 50	%20



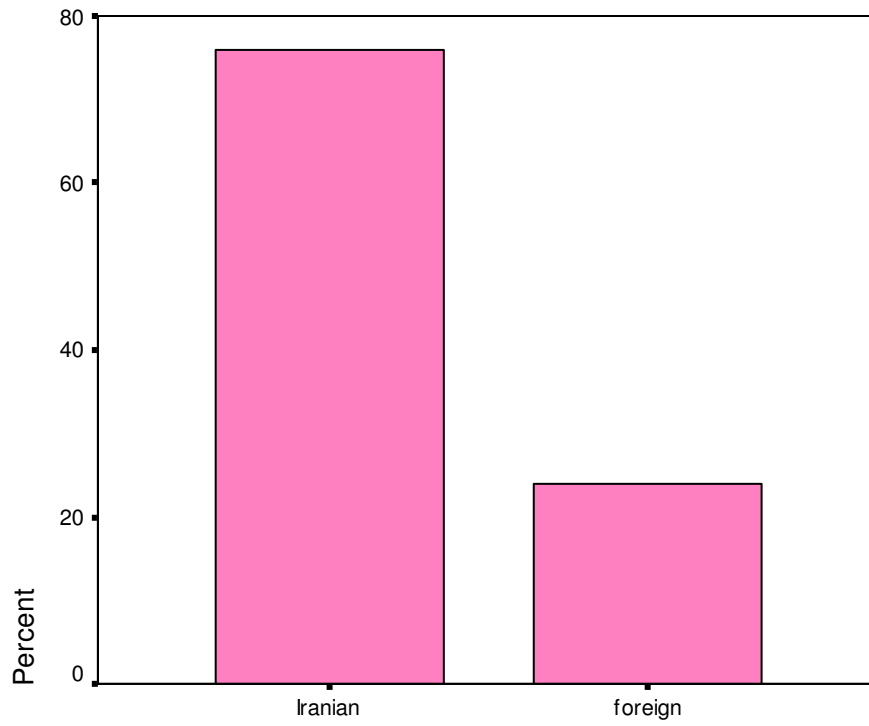
2) Sex

sex	Valid percent
Female	%8
Male	%92



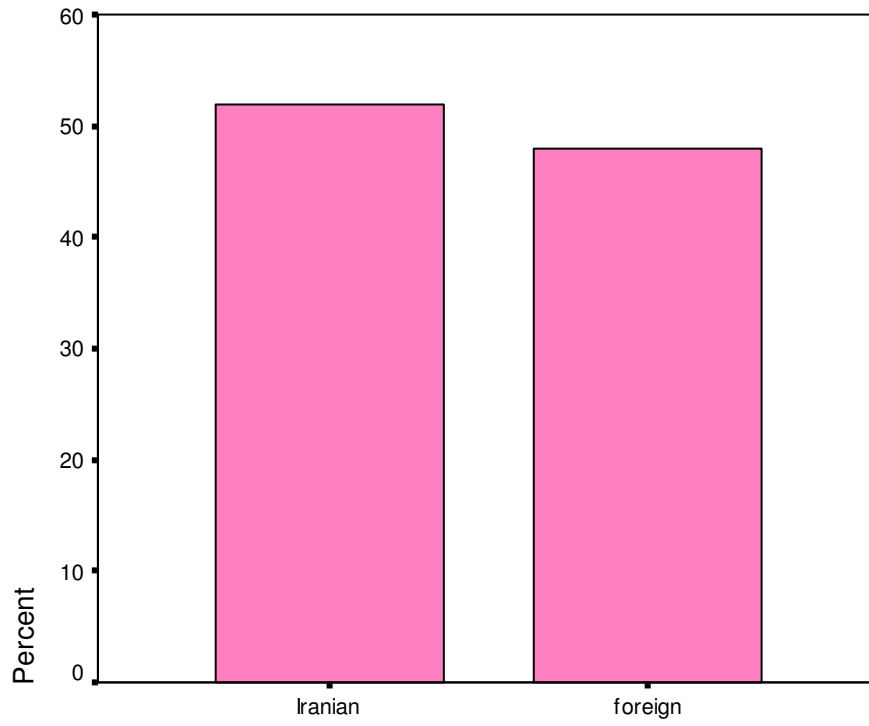
3) Where did you receive your MA.?

university	Valid percent
Iranian	%76
Foreign	%24



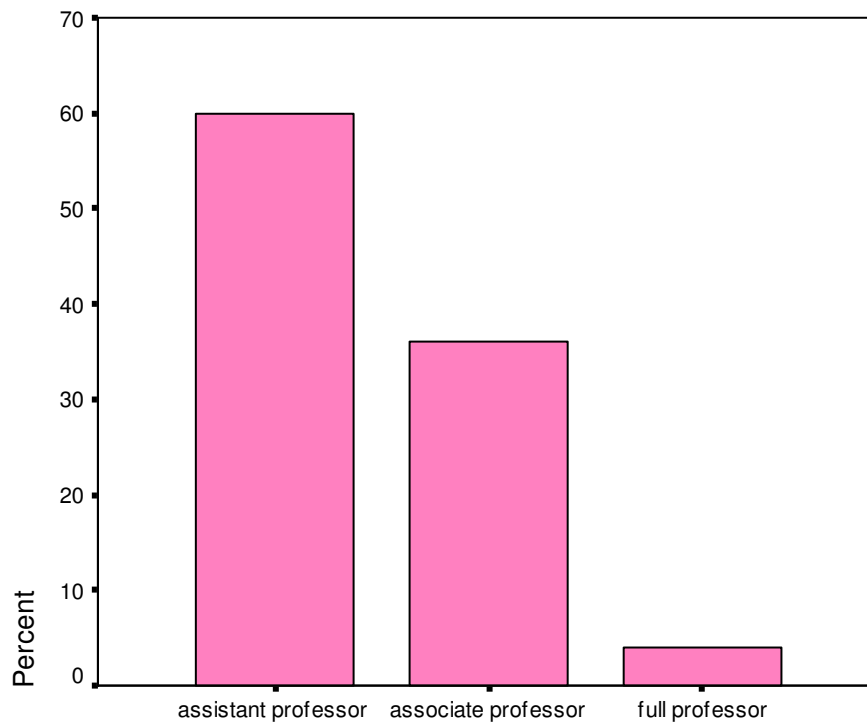
4) Where did you receive your PhD?

university	Valid percent
Iranian	%52
Foreign	%48



8) What is your current status within your department?

	Valid percent
instructor	-
assistant professor	%60
associate professor	%36
full professor	%4



Section II: Teaching, Research and Theorizing IR

10: In the past ten years, have you taught undergraduate courses in any of the following?

Course	Valid percent
Introduction to IR 1 & 2	%40
International Organizations	%48
The Politics & Economics of Third World Development	%28
Theories of Imperialism	%12
Islam and International Relations	%16
Globalization	%4
Diplomacy	%4
International Public Law	%16
Methodology 1 & 2	%4
History of International Relations	%24
Using Computer in Political Science	%4
Current Islamic Movements	%4
Theories of IR	%8
Regional Organizations	%4
Foreign Policy of Great Powers	%12
Foreign Policy of the I.R. of Iran	%12
Government and Politics in the Middle East	%12
Political and Economic Issues of Oil	%8
Government and Politics in the Persian Gulf	%16
Developments in International Relations	%4
Strategic and Military Issues	%8
Introduction to Political Science	%4
Comparative Politics	%4
Political Modernization and Change	%4
History of Iran's Foreign Policy	%4
The Middle East and World Politics	%8

11: In the past ten years, have you taught graduate (MA) courses in any of the following?

Course	Valid percent
Theories of International Relations	%56
Government and Politics in the Middle East	%12
Methodology	%12
European History	%4
History of the Middle East	%4
International Organizations	%12
IT and Politics	%4
IT and International Relations	%4
Seminar on Third World Development	%16
International Politics	%12
Regional International Organizations	%4
Europe and the International System	%4
Diplomatic and Consular Law	%4
Regional Studies	%4
Political Economy of the Middle East	%4
Comparative Study of International Systems	%4
New Theories of Political Science	%4
The Islamic Revolution in Iran and Its Consequences	%4
Military Strategy of Great Powers	%8
International Security	%4
New Trends in International Law	%4
Management of International Crisis	%4
Ideology and International Politics	%4
Regional Organizations and Treaties	4%

12: In the past ten years, have you taught graduate (PhD) courses in any of the following?

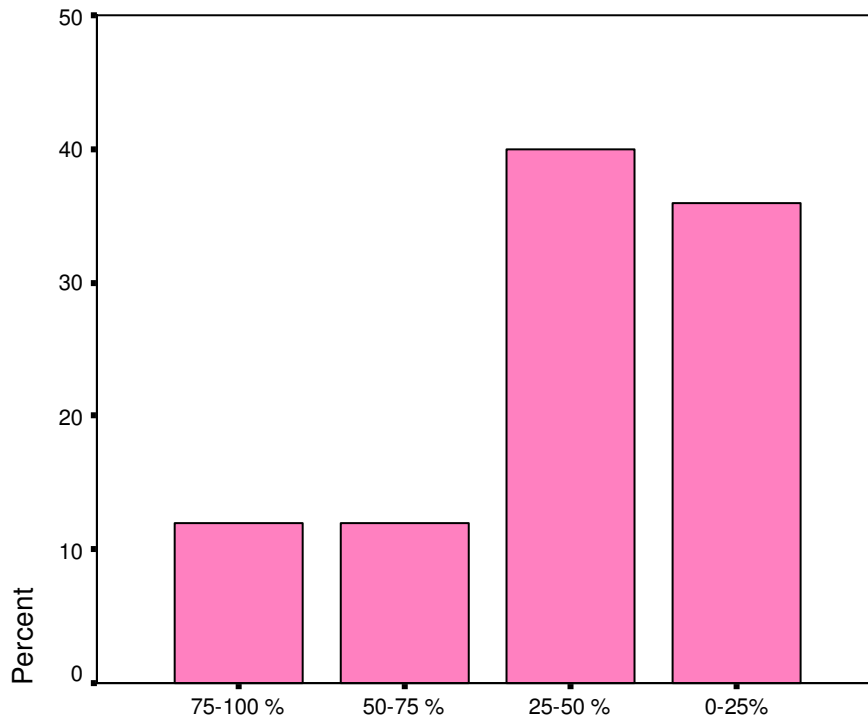
Course	Valid percent
UN and Global Security	%4
Assessment of IR Theories	%8
Foreign Policy of Islamic Republic of Iran	%4
Changing Concepts in IR	%4
Cultural International Relations	%4
Integration and Disintegration	%4
North- South Relations	%4
Methodology	%12
IT and Politics	%4
IT and International Relations	%4
Legal Principles of International Relations	%4
International Political Economy	%4

13: In the past five years, have you taught courses in any of the following?

	Valid percent
Introduction to IR (BA)	%44
Theories of IR (MA)	%44
Assessment and Critical Reading of IR Theories (PhD)	%4
Changing Concepts in International Relations (PhD)	%4
Methodology (PhD)	%20
IT and Politics (PhD)	%4
IT and International Relations (PhD)	%4
Foreign Policy of Islamic Republic of Iran in Theory and Practice (PhD)	%4
Comparative Study of International Systems (PhD)	%4
International Politics (MA)	%4
Sociology of Knowledge (PhD)	%4
International Organizations (MA)	%4

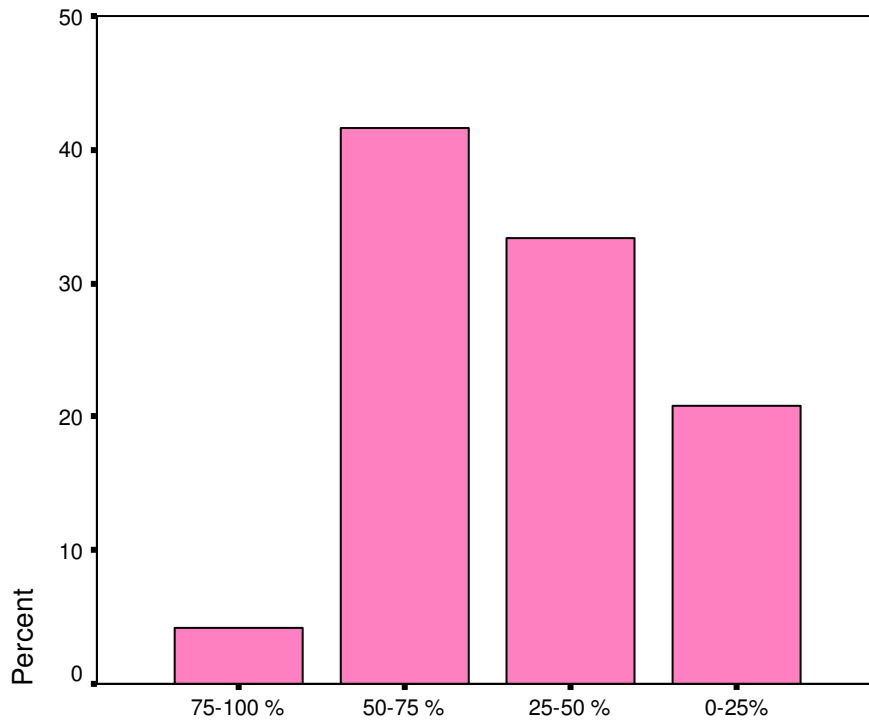
14) Approximately what percentage of your publications have you devoted to theoretical issues in international relations?

	Valid percent
75-100%	12%
50-75%	12%
25-50%	40%
0-25%	36%



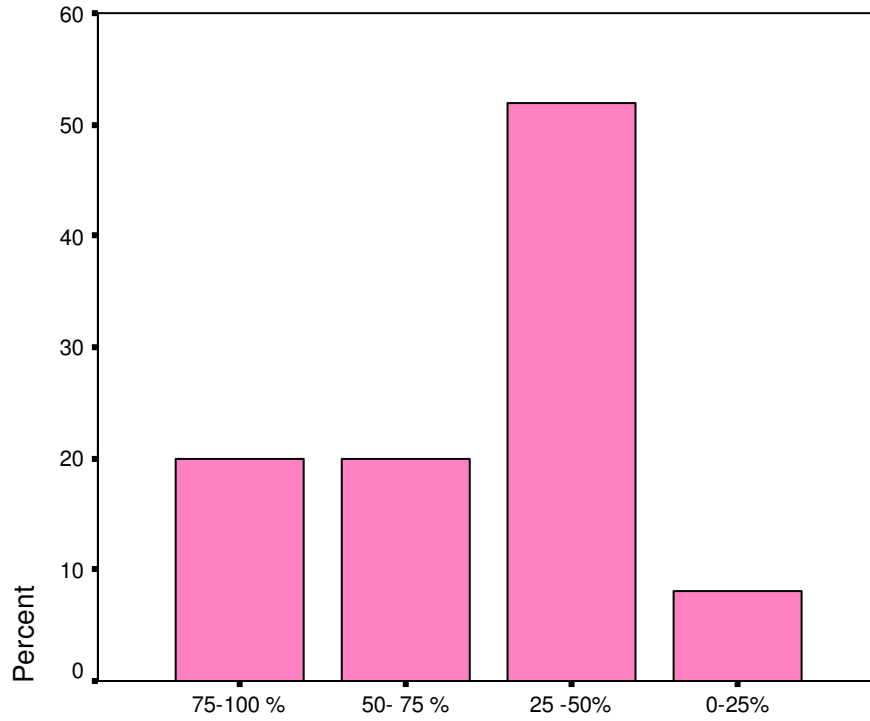
15) Approximately what percentage of your publications have you devoted to policy-related issues in international relations?

	Valid percent
75-100%	%4/2
50-75%	%41/7
25-50%	%33/3
0-25%	%20/8



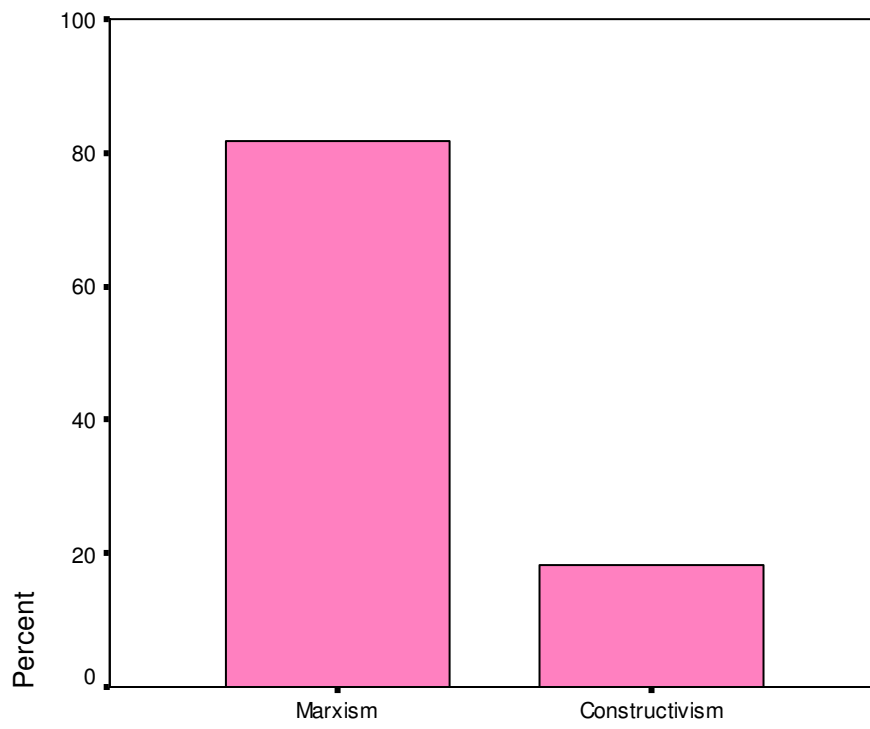
16) Approximately what percentage of your publications have you devoted to issues about Iran?

	Valid percent
75-100%	%20
50-75%	%20
25-50%	%52
0-25%	8%



17: Which of the following IR paradigms you basically do not teach in your courses?

	Valid Percent
Marxism	%81/8
Constructivism	%18/2



24) In your view, which of the following statements should be the main goal of teaching IR?

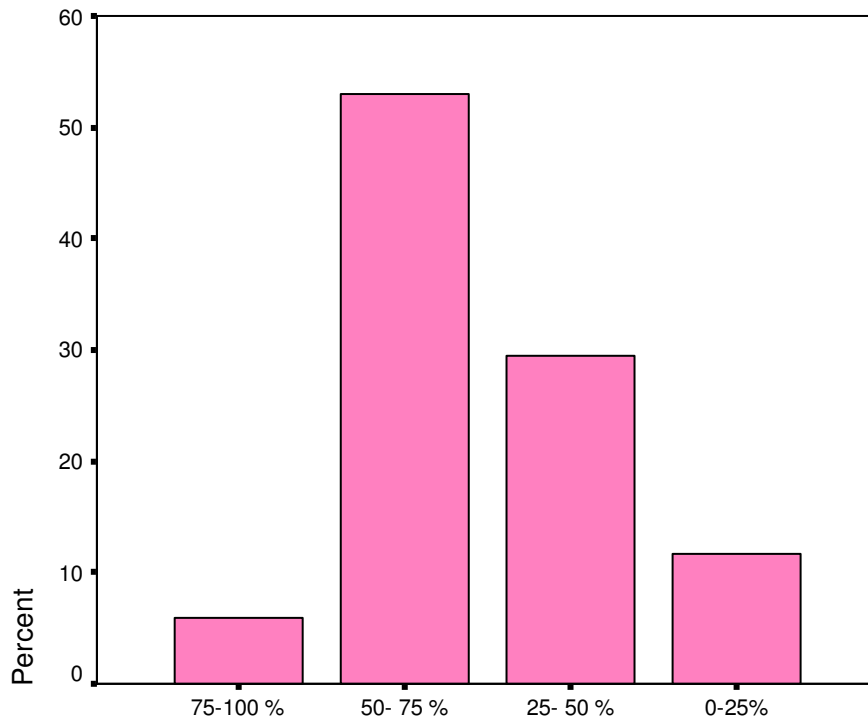
	Valid percent
To prepare students to become civil servants	%40
Growth and expansion of IR as a discipline	%44
To prepare students to acquire skills in order to advise the governments to achieve national interests	%60
To prepare students to analytically understand international relations	%8

25: What is your main goal in teaching Intro IR course?

	Valid percent
Introduce students to the scholarly discipline of IR	0%
To prepare students to be informed participants in policy debates about international politics and foreign policy	15%
Both	75%
Other	10%

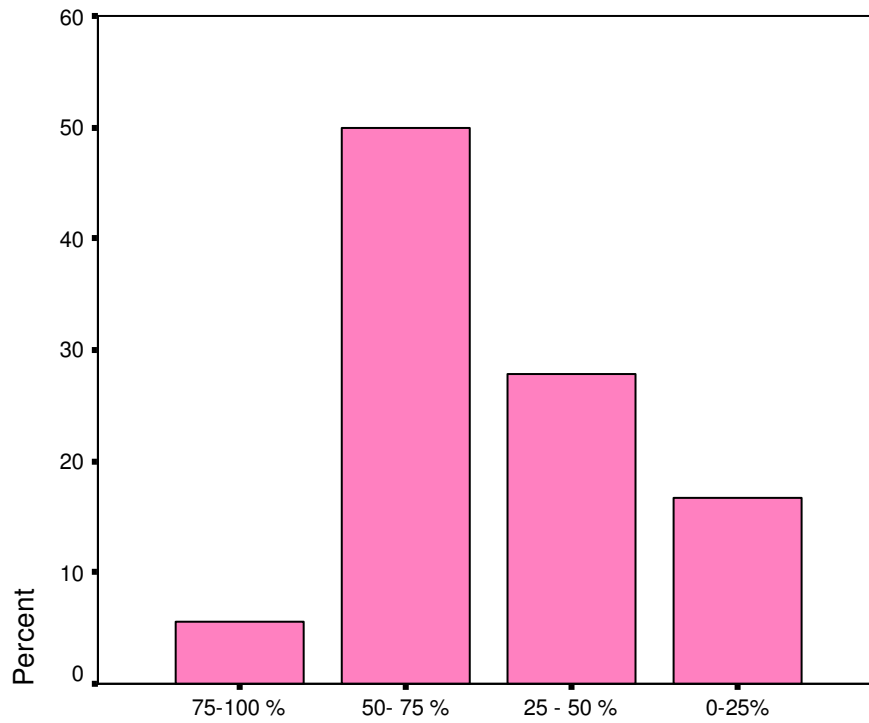
26: What percentage of your Intro IR course do you devote to analyzing current policies and events? A policy/event is considered “current” if it has occurred within the last five years.

	Valid percent
75-100%	%5/6
50-75%	%52/9
25-50%	%29/4
0-25%	%11/8



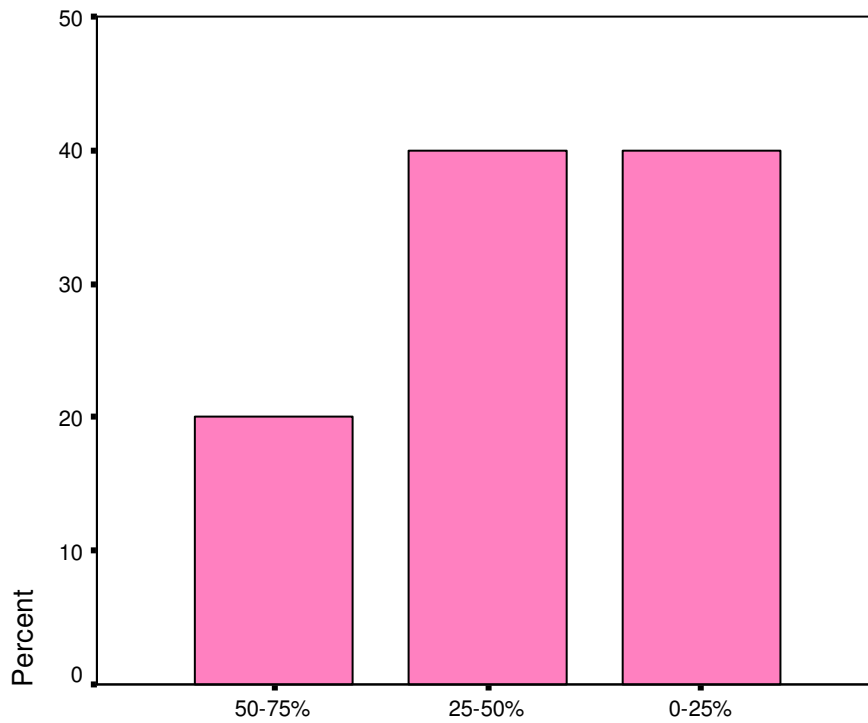
27: What percentage of your Intro IR class is devoted to policy analysis and policy-relevant research?

	Valid percent
75-100%	%5/6
50-75%	%50
25-50%	%27/8
0-25%	%16/7



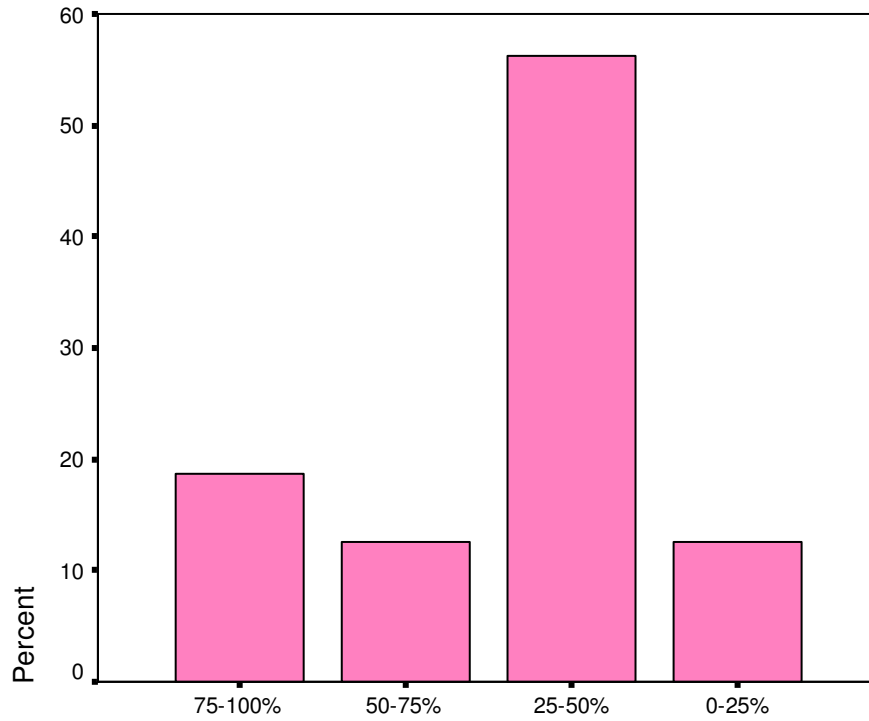
29: Approximately what percentage of your Intro IR class do you devote to studying the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

	Valid percent
75-100%	-
50-75%	%20
25-50%	%40
0-25%	%40



30: Approximately what percentage of your Intro IR class do you devote to Iran?

	Valid percent
75-100%	%18/8
50-75%	%12/5
25-50%	%56/3
0-25%	%12/5



31: Which of the following statements best describes the extent to which events in the real world influence the way you teach courses in international relations, including but not limited to Intro IR?

	Valid percent
I adjust the content of my course from day to day depending on events in the world	%22/5
I adjust my course a few times per term when policy changes or events warrant	%22/5
I only make adjustments within the term in rare circumstances and only in response to major events like 9/11 or the Berlin Wall coming down	%22/5
I only make adjustments from one term to the next because of events in the world	%12/5
I don't change my course based on events in the world because the core concepts of IR should be applicable no matter what	%20

33) What is the main focus of your research?

	Valid percent
Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy and Relations	%48
Comparative Foreign Policy	%24
International Organizations	%32
Human Right and International Law	%20
International Political Economy	%16
International Security	%56
History of International Relations Discipline	%32
IR Theories	%60
Methodology	%40
Cultural Issues and Development	%4
IT and IR	%4
Persian Gulf	%4
Islamic Studies and IR	%4

Section III: Personal Views

40) List up to four scholars who have had the greatest impact on the field of international relations over the past 20 years.

Scholar	Valid percent
James Rosenau	%4
Karl Deutsch	%4
Samuel Huntington	%24
J. Habermas	%8
Joseph Nye	%16
Robert Keohane	%28
John Mearsheimer	%8
Kenneth Waltz	%44
Alexander Wendt	%40
Hans Morgenthau	%12
Barry Buzan	%8
Immanuel Wallerstein	%16
Robert Jervis	%8
Stephen Walt	%4
R. Aron	%4
F. Fukuyama	%4
David Campbell	%4
M. Kaplan	%4
M. Sariolghalam	%4

41) List up to four scholars (Non-Iranian) who have had the most profound impact on your own research and the way you teach international relations.

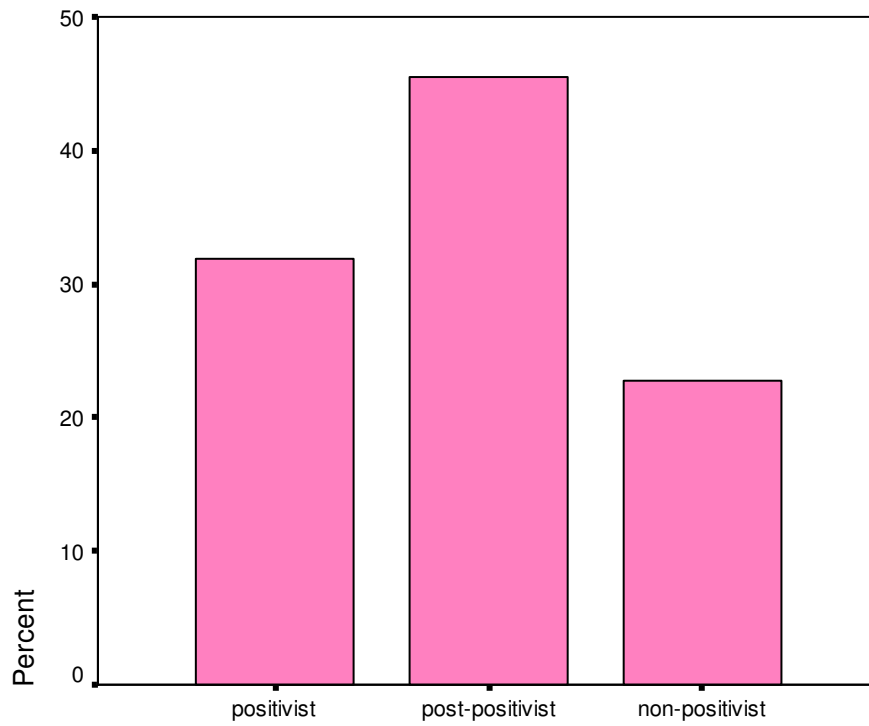
Scholar	Valid percent
James Rosenau	%28
J. Haynes	%4
Samuel Huntington	%16
J. Habermas	%8
Alexander Wendt	%24
Robert Keohane	%16
F. Fukuyama	%8
David Campbell	%4
Kenneth Waltz	%20
F. Haliday	%4
Nicholas Onuf	%8
M. Kaplan	%4
R. Maclelland	%4
J. Snyder	%4
T. Shelling	%4
G. Modelski	%4
Joseph Nye	%20
Robert Cox	%4
Hedly Bull	%4
Robert Jevrvis	%8
R. Rosecrance	%4
Richard Little	%4
Richard Ashley	%4

42) List up to four scholars (Iranian) who have had the most profound impact on your own research and the way you teach international relations.

Scholar	Valid percent
G. Eftekhari	%4
H. Ahmadi	%4
H. Semati	%8
N. Hadian	%4
H. Moghtader	%4
A. Ghavam	%12
H. Seifzadeh	%24
H. Moshirzadeh	%20
A. Haji-Yousefi	%16
M. Sariolghalam	%24
H. Salimi	%4
G. Chegini	%4
R. Ramazani	%4

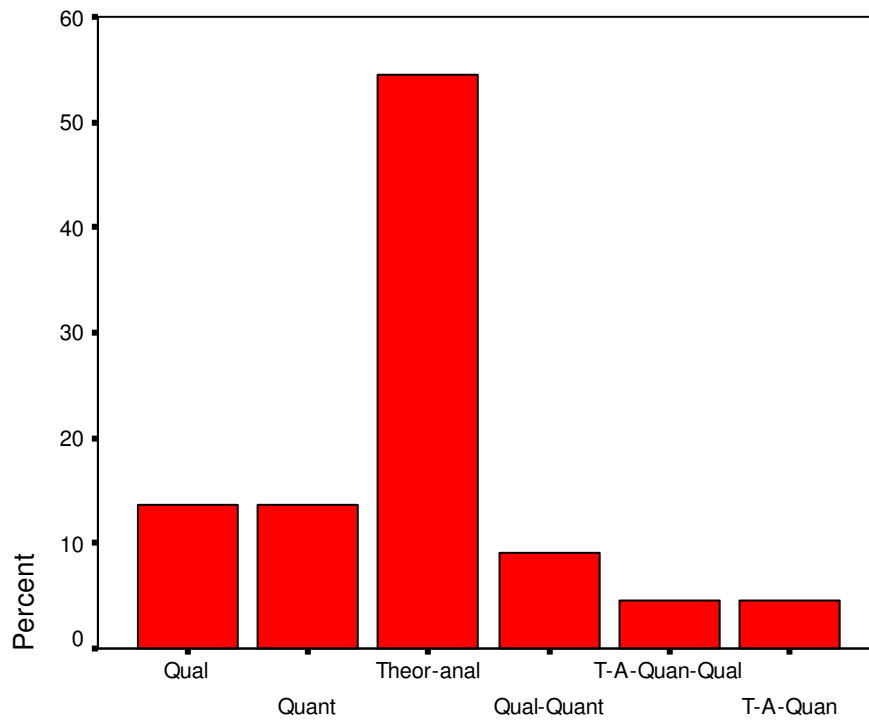
45) In general, how would you characterize your work in epistemological terms?

	Valid percent
Positivist	<i>%31/8</i>
Post-positivist	<i>%45/5</i>
Non-positivist	<i>%22/7</i>



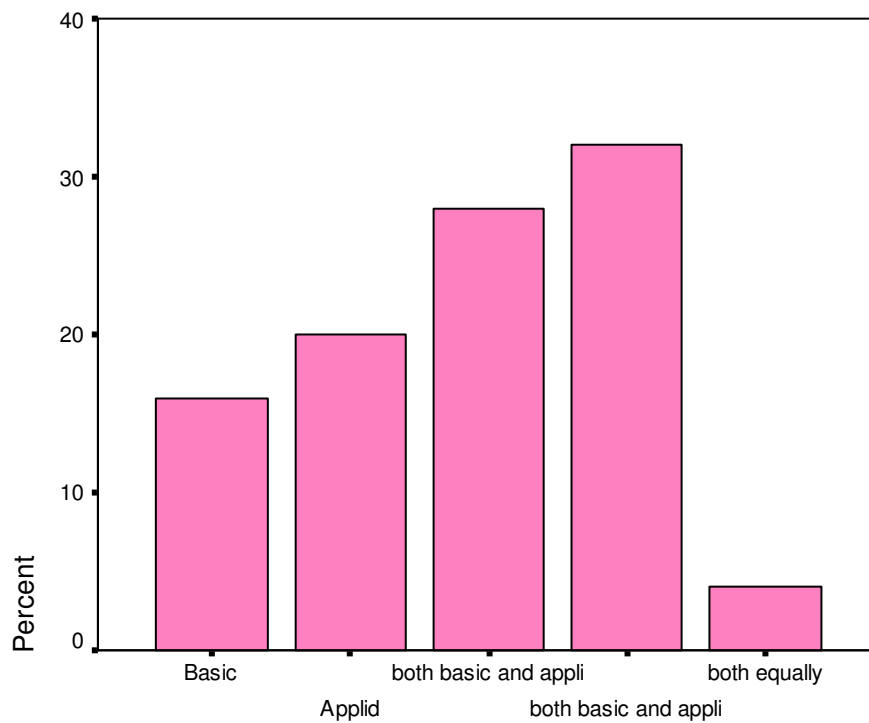
46) In your research, what methodology do you primarily employ?

	Valid percent
Qualitative	%13/6
Quantitative	%13/6
Theoretical-Analytical	%54/5
Qualitative& Quantitative	%9/1
Theoretical-Analytical& Qualitative& Quantitative	%4/5
Theoretical-Analytical& Quantitative	%4/5



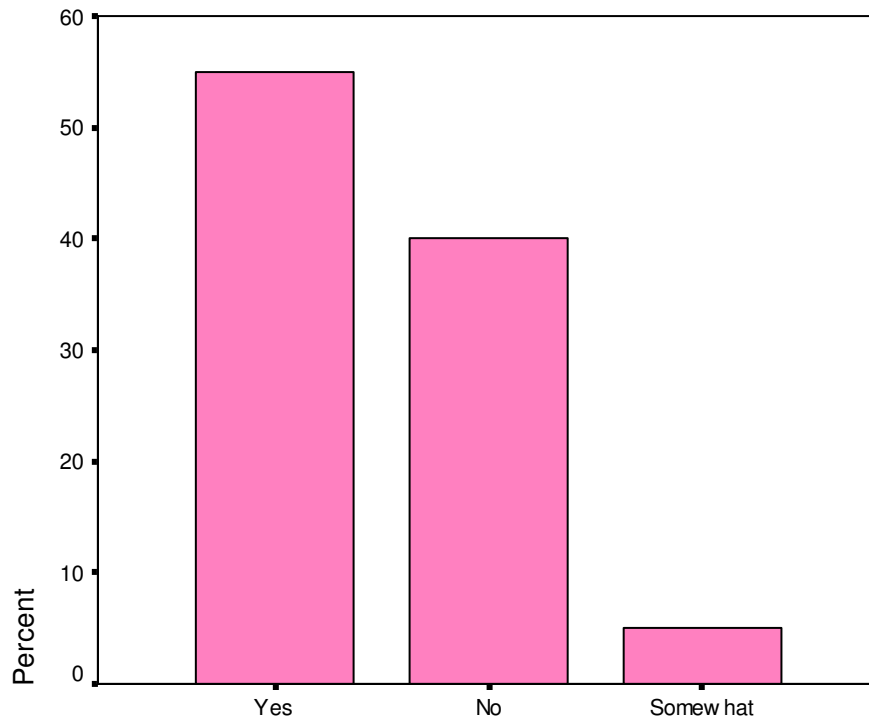
47) How do you characterize your research?

	Valid percent
Basic	%16
Applied	%20
Both basic and applied but more applied than basic	%28
Both basic and applied but more basic than applied	%32
Both equally	%4



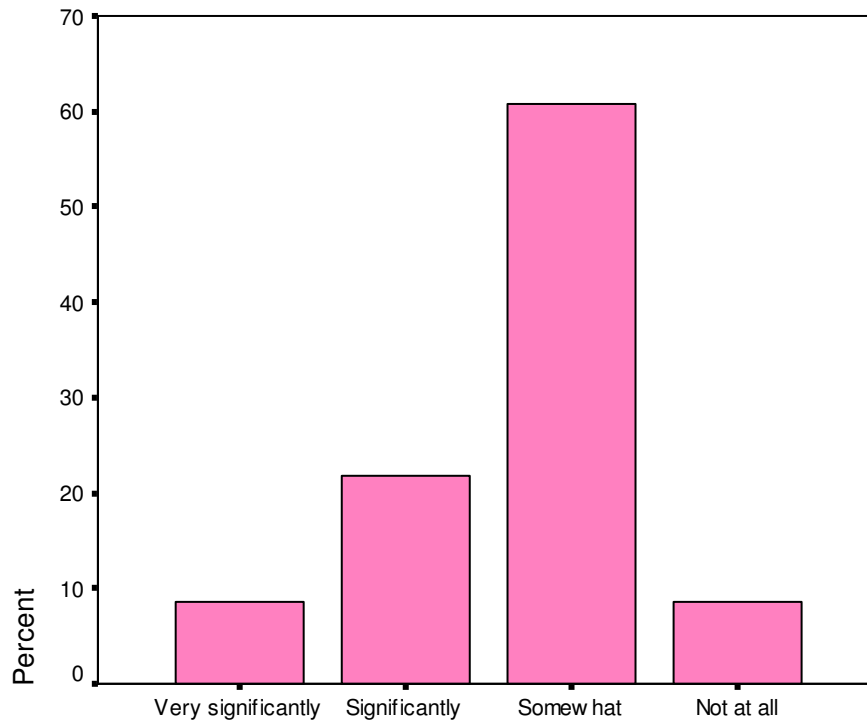
54) In your view, is Iranianizing IRT a desirable goal?

	Valid percent
Yes	%55
No	%40
Somewhat	%5



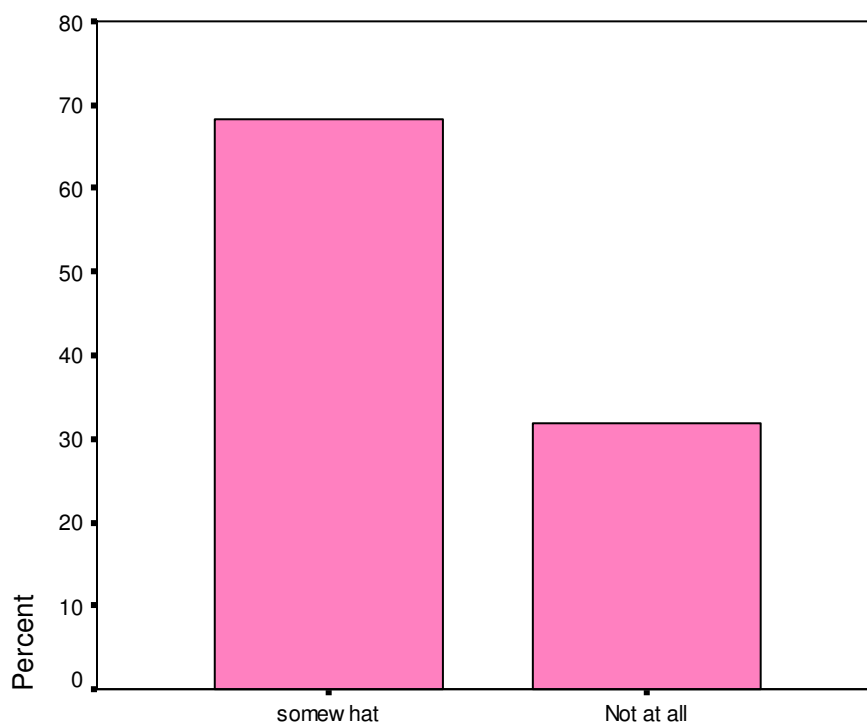
55) In your view, is it possible to Iranianize IRT?

	Valid percent
Very significantly	%8/7
Significantly	%21/7
Somewhat	%60/9
Not at all	%8/7



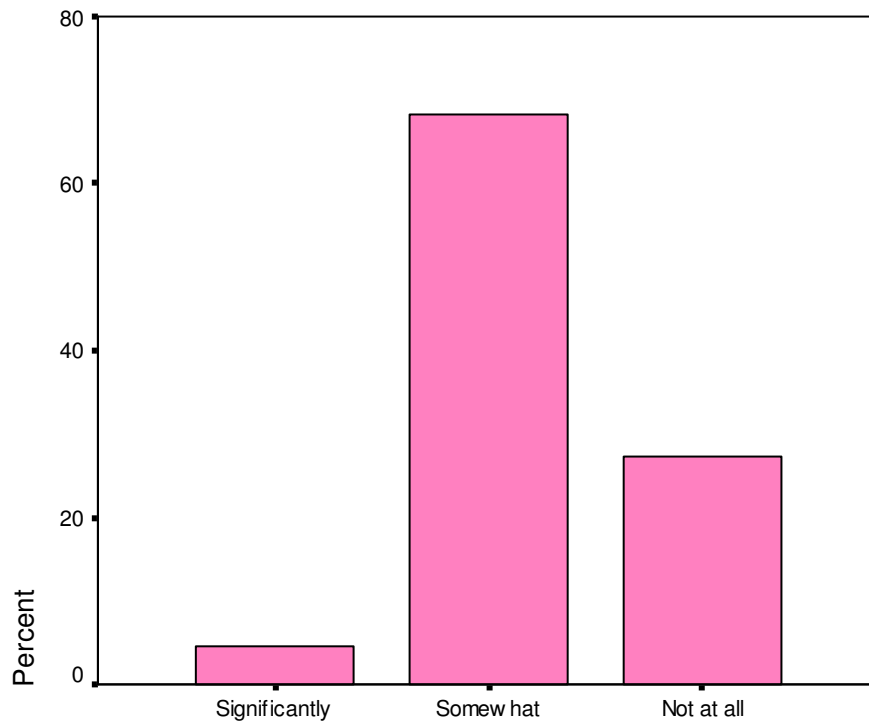
56) To what extent has IRT been Iranianized in teaching and research in Iran?
Iranianizing means here to adjust IRT according to Iranian geographical, cultural, political, economic, etc..... situation.

	Valid percent
Very significantly	-
Significantly	-
Somewhat	%68/2
Not at all	%31/8



57) To what extent, has IRT been domesticated in teaching and research in Iran?
Domesticating here means to use examples from Iran in teaching and research.

	Valid percent
Very significantly	-
Significantly	%4/5
Somewhat	%68/2
Not at all	%27/3



58) In your view, what are the main obstacles to Iranian theorizing in IR?

Obstacles	very significantly	significantly	somewhat	Not at all
Western IRT has discovered the right path to understanding IR and thus there is no need for other perspectives	%36/4	%18/2	%22/7	%22/7
Western IRT has acquired hegemonic status in the Gramscian sense thus others have not sought to theorize	%52/2	%26/1	%8/7	%13
Non-Western, Iranian and Islamic IR theories do exist but are hidden	%4/5	%40/9	%31/8	%22/7
Non-appropriate local conditions have discriminated against the production of Iranian IR theory	%43/5	%34/8	%13	%8/7
Iranian cultural traits have made it difficult to engage in the production of IR theories	%13	%26/1	%26/1	%34/8
Iranian` lack of confidence has made it difficult to engage in the production of IR theories	%8/7	%34/8	%30/4	%26/1
Iranians do not believe that they themselves can solve their own problems so they think engaging in theory production is useless	%13	%13	%30/4	%43/5
The authoritarian nature of most Iranian governments throughout its history has made thinking freely and critically very difficult and thus theorizing very rare	%34/8	%21/7	%17/4	%26/1
Universities in Iran do not sufficiently encourage research in IR	%33/3	%54/2	%8/3	%4/2
Theoretical (basic) research is not encouraged in Iranian universities in IR	%39/1	%47/8	%12	-
Iranian IR faculty members are more engaged in teaching than research	%21/7	%43/5	%26/1	%8/7
The insufficient belief of Iranian leaders and authorities in scientific management of basic issues including international relations	%100	-	-	-
There is no functional linkage between IR research in Iranian universities and policy-makers	%66/7	%33/3	-	-