

Examining the Demographic Structure of the Coastal Provinces of the Persian Gulf with a National Security Approach of Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

Background and Theoretical Basis: Coastal areas around the world have great potential and have major capabilities from a defense, political, economic, cultural and natural perspective that have always attracted people. More precisely, the unique characteristics of the coasts have caused them to attract a large population. Population has a direct relationship with security, especially national security. Therefore, the quality of the population, and especially its structure, including gender, age, literacy, and community structure, can be very influential on security as well as development at different geographical scales.

Methodology: The present study, with a descriptive-analytical approach and relying on library and statistical resources, as well as using the trend research method, aims to examine the population structure in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf from the perspective of the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran and answer the question of how the population structure of the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf can affect the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

Findings: According to the research findings, four components of gender, age, literacy, and social structure were examined with a national security approach on the Persian Gulf coast. The gender variable, which mostly consists of men and males, is

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of great importance in terms of national security. In the coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf, the sex ratio is higher than the national average; the national sex ratio is 103, but in the aforementioned provinces, the sex ratio is 105, which indicates a relatively favorable state of the sex composition in these areas. In terms of age composition, it should also be kept in mind that the increase in the young and elderly population will only increase the burden of dependency and dependency rates in the country. Another variable that shapes population structure is literacy. In Khuzestan Province, more than 86 percent, in Bushehr Province, 89 percent, and in Hormozgan Province, more than 87 percent were literate. According to social structure as the fourth indicator, the population can be divided into three groups: urban, rural, and non-resident. In the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf, it shows that the urban population caught up with the rural population a little earlier. From this period onwards, the urban population surpassed the rural and non-resident population, and as the urban population rose, rural population began to decline.

Conclusion: The results of this study indicate that population structure can affect national security. Thus, the gender composition of the population has a direct relationship with the military forces that provide security, the age and age pyramid of the residents with the type of activities and population balance, the level of literacy and skilled human group with the geopolitics and geo-economics of the region, as well as the achievement of development and, ultimately, the structure of communities with the population coverage and the elimination of security gaps in the border areas of the Persian Gulf coast.

Keywords: Population, National Security, Coastal Regions, Persian Gulf, Islamic Republic of Iran.

1. Introduction

Coastal areas around the world possess numerous potentials and have major defensive, political, economic, cultural, and natural capabilities that have always attracted population. However, it is observed in Iran that coastal areas have a very low population, and a kind of imbalance is evident in these



geographical areas. The coastal regions of the Persian Gulf, encompassing the three important provinces of Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan, are of great geopolitical and national security significance. It must be stated that the population residing in these areas can play an undeniable role in ensuring the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Persian Gulf is located between 23 to 30 degrees of north latitude and 48 to 56 degrees of east longitude. The width of the Persian Gulf varies between 185 to 333 kilometers, and the length of its coastline from the mouth of the Faw to Bandar Abbas is 1375 kilometers. Its depth rarely exceeds 2.73 to 5.91 meters, and its average depth ranges between 25 to 35 meters, reaching more than 100 meters at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz. The Persian Gulf covers an area of 226,000 square kilometers, accounting for 0.62% of the Earth's surface waters. (Hafeznia and Rabiei, 2013: 46-47).

It is important to note that the term "population" does not merely refer to the quantity and number of residents; in the present era, the quality of the population and its constituent structure, such as gender, age, literacy, and community structure, are of far greater importance. One could argue that the primary necessity and significance of this research are related to the geopolitical and strategic position of the Persian Gulf. We know that the population, through providing skilled human resources (whether from an economic or military perspective), is essential and crucial for the development and security of a country, hence conducting research in this area is of utmost importance. This is especially true when migration increases in a geographical area, disrupting population balance and leading to noticeable consequences such as smuggling, reduced social security, centralization, etc.

How does the demographic structure of the coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf impact the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran?

It appears that the demographic structure of the coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf has a direct impact on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Accordingly, the gender ratio of the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf

compared to the [entirety of] country, the age structure and age groups, literacy status, and community structure in all three provinces (coastal regions) compared to the [entirety of] country, highlight this important issue.

2. Theoretical Framework

Population has an undeniable role in determining power and security. In evaluating the power of countries, it is assumed that, all else being equal, a country with a larger population is more powerful than a country with a smaller population. Since it is rare to find two countries equal in all other factors, so assessing population as a definitive factor of power is not entirely appropriate. Population size is more important from a military and political perspective; but economically, especially when considering population distribution across the land and demographic trends, the situation would be different. In this case, the qualitative characteristics of the population, its structure, literacy levels, growth rates, and the age/gender ratio are more important than sheer number of people. For instance, the age/gender ratio impacts potential military reserves and the share of producers and consumers in society. Moreover, factors such as emigration/immigration rates, education levels, health factors, income distribution, and poverty levels should also be considered. Cultural and racial homogeneity or heterogeneity can either strengthen or weaken a society (Mirheydar *et al.*, 2015: 166).

Before delving into the discussion, it is necessary to provide definitions of population and security and their interrelationship. Most definitions of population encompass the concept of a group of individuals of the same species living in a specific place (Berryman, 2002: 440). The component of '*population*' is considered an important factor in models measuring the national power of countries. The term '*population*' refers to all individuals who constantly live in a geographical unit (i.e., country, province, county, city, or village) as households or families (Kazemipour, 2009: 3).

The population is recognized as a backbone of national power from several perspectives:



1. Source of military and defense force,
2. Source of labor, production, and wealth,
3. Reservoir of war power during national mobilization,
4. Source of national spirit, as a large population brings self-confidence internally and fear and respect externally (Roshandel, 1995: 71).

Security is also defined as freedom from doubt, riddance from anxiety and fear, and having some justified and documented confidence. Security, whether at individual, national, or international scale, is among the issues that human beings face (MirArab, 2000: 133). The literal definition of security includes protection against danger (objective security), a sense of safety (subjective security), and freedom from doubt (confidence in personal perceptions). According to Arnold Wolfers, “security, in its objective sense, means the absence of threats to acquired values, and in its subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked.” The concept of “security” is a normative concept that is synonymous with development and social welfare and is considered an appropriate criterion in social guidance (Günter Brauch & Bogardi, 2005: 7-8). This concept, on one hand, is connected with crime, and on the other hand, with the concept of delinquency and fear of being delinquent. It is also necessary to distinguish between fear and danger, or feeling secure and being secure (Carmona, 2003: 119-120).

From among the various types of security, national security must be considered separately. (Tahami, 2009: 27). In general, “national security” refers to conditions in which the national interests and internal values of a nation are kept safe from internal and external threats. In other words, the ability of a society to maintain and pursue national interests and utilize internal culture and values free from internal and external threats is called “national security.” Each nation has its own unique interpretation of this security (Mojtahedzadeh, 2018: 113-114).

National security may not be defined as a goal but rather as a result. This means that we cannot recognize what security is or how important it is until we are threatened and lose our security (Ullman, 1981: 129). In general, national

security is that part of government policy aimed at creating suitable national and international political conditions for protecting or expanding fundamental and essential national values against potential conflicts (Trager & Simonie, 1973: 36).

It is evident that population and its dynamics have a significant impact on national security, especially if the population is considered a source of national power, meaning it affects the level of national power both in terms of quantity and quality. It is also important to note the class structure of society. In some societies, moving from one class to another is easily possible, while in others it is difficult and even impossible. The land ownership system and the distribution of fertile agricultural land and the position and role of elites in society should also be considered. Religious and cultural values are intangible factors that can play a significant role in mobilizing society and guiding it towards certain political goals (Glassner and De Blij, 1989: 129).

Today, the strength and security of any country depend on its stable population, particularly on its knowledgeable and effective human resources, which, with proper management of the environment and population, achieve correct and extensive utilization and productivity.

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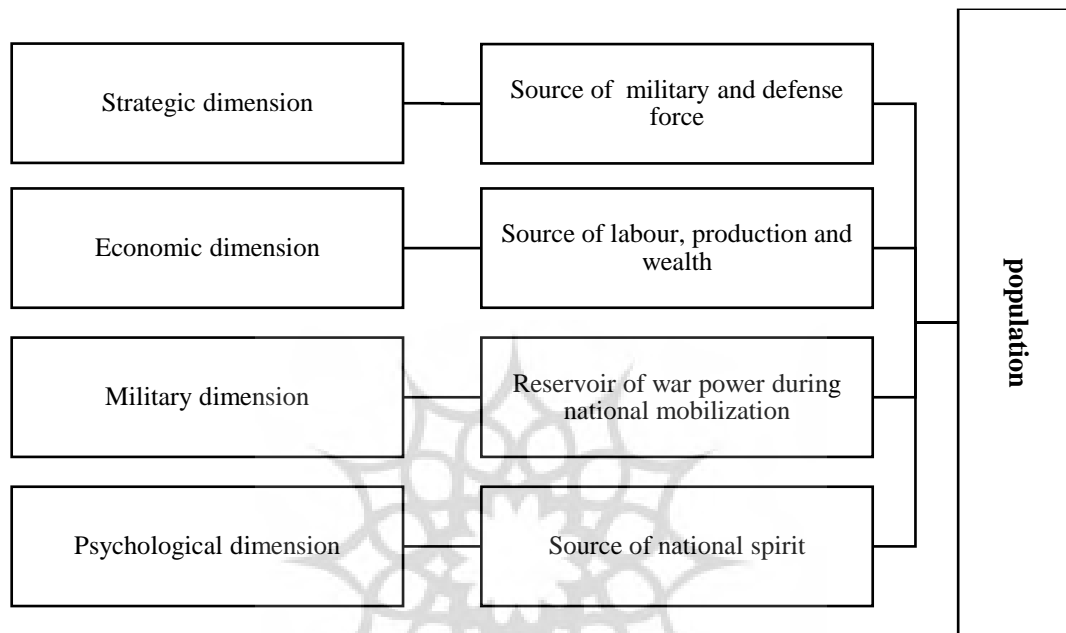


Figure 1: Importance of Population for the Country

The demographic variables affecting national security, which will be examined in this study considering the scope of the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf, include:

Gender Composition: The gender ratio reflects the number of women per 100 men, which varies between 90 to 110 in different countries (Mehryar, 2014: 31).

Age Composition: The population of each country or geographical area is divided and classified based on five-year age groups. In some cases, general classifications such as 0-14 year-old, 15-64 year-old, and 65-plus year-old age groups are used. Based on this, the age groups between 15 to 30 years reflect the number and capacity of the country's youth. In other words, the active population of the country, which participates in the development, construction, and defense aspects, falls within the 15-30-year-old age group. This age range reflects the potential for producing the country's defense force in official,

reserve, and paramilitary capacities, among others. It also indicates the capacity to enter the workforce and economic production; thus, it has different impacts on national power (Khoramshad et al., 2019: 19).

Literacy and Education Level: The level of education includes indicators such as the expansion of public education, the high ratio of university graduates to the population, and the high level of technical knowledge of the population, among others. It leads to the expansion of thinking, creativity, skill, and sensitivity to national affairs. From a geopolitical perspective, only skilled human beings with goals and qualitative suitability are considered important. If the residents of a country do not have good analytical power, they cannot understand the existing situation, resulting in the impossibility of sustainable and comprehensive development and security for that society. Therefore, such countries always struggle with instability (Ezzati, 2015: 95).

Community Structure: This refers to the distribution of the population in urban centers and human settlements, mainly taking the forms of urbanism, ruralism, and nomadism.

3. Research Literature

By studying the research background, it can be understood that no independent research has been written on this topic so far. However, some of the most important works in the field of population and national security are:

- The Relationship between Population and Security (Sarami, 2001).
- Geopolitical Analysis and National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Ayorloo, 2010).
- Changes in Population Policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Their Security Implications (Gholizadeh, 2010).
- Population, War, and Power: Global and Iranian Experiences (Forootan, 2011).
- Reflections on Population Control Policy; Its Effects and Consequences (Fouladi, 2011).



- Defensive-Security Considerations in the Spatial Planning of Eastern Hormozgan Province; The Northern Shores of the Strait of Hormuz (Saidi and Tork Leshkenari, 2013).
- The Necessity of Spatial Planning Attention in the Persian Gulf Region (DoostMohammadi and DoostMohammadi, 2014).
- Changes in Demographic Patterns and Their Impact on the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Asadi, 2015).
- Defensive-Security Analysis of Spatial Planning in Border Regions with a Passive Defense Approach; A Case Study: Bandar Deylam - South of Nayband Gulf (Arjmand and colleagues, 2016).
- Examining the Impact of Population Decline in Iran on National Security from a Political Geography Perspective (Mojtahedi, 2017).
- Demographic Variables Affecting the National Security of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Khoramshad and colleagues, 2019).

With a little reflection on this matter, it can be understood that neither did these works comprehensively and independently examined the population structure with a national security approach, nor did any of them study the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf and its coastal provinces (Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan). Therefore, the present essay aims to examine the demographic structure of the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf with a national security approach, considering the necessity and importance of this issue.

4. Research Methodology

Given the nature and subject of the present research, it falls under applied research, which aims to examine the demographic structure of the coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf with a national security approach of the Islamic Republic of Iran. To this end, the present study seeks to answer the question: How can the population structure of the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf affect the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran? To find the answer to this question, a trend research method with a descriptive-analytical approach has been used. It is evident that library sources and statistical annuals constitute

a major part of the data and information for this article. It is clear that demographic issues are not limited to the mere number of people living in a geographical area; each population has its own characteristics such as gender, age, literacy, culture, type of settlement, and many other attributes. In Iran, the responsibility for collecting and presenting such statistics lies with the “Statistics Center of Iran.” Therefore, it is evident that the statistical information for this research is mostly sourced from the data provided by this center.

5. Research Findings

1.5. Demographic Structure of the Coastal Regions of the Persian Gulf

1.1.5 Gender

The gender ratio is one of the most fundamental demographic characteristics that simultaneously reflects social and cultural dynamics on one hand and serves as a tool and indicator in analyzing population transitions in different societies on the other hand. The main components of population changes, i.e., fertility, mortality, and migration, also affect gender ratios. The gender ratio at birth in any given population is a result of a combination of biological laws and social and cultural conditions (Doroudi Ahi, 2007: 126). Six factors influence the gender ratio of different age groups, which are:

- i. Genetic-biological factors
- ii. Environmental effects
- iii. Migration
- iv. Importance of male offspring in certain geographical areas
- v. Geographical latitude
- vi. Differences in mortality rates between the two genders (Bardi Anamoradnejad, 2018: 99)

Among the factors mentioned above, considering the scope of the study and the current research topic, migration is of great significance. In many migrations, men often leave their homeland to find better livelihoods and suitable employment opportunities in prominent economic, commercial, and industrial cities. As a result, the gender ratio decreases in the native area and increases in



the destination city; for instance, the gender ratio in Asaluyeh, in Bushehr province, is about 200.

Gender is considered a very important indicator in a country's national security because the majority of the country's military forces are composed of men. Therefore, a high male population significantly impacts the level of national security. In other words, the more men there are in a political unit, the higher the military security, and vice versa, the fewer men and combat-ready individuals there are, the lower the military and national security. This becomes more evident in a country where military service is compulsory, and male young adults must introduce themselves to the relevant centers after reaching the legal age of 18 and serve in the country's military forces for two years. Additionally, in wartime, males must serve the country to defend its territorial integrity. Thus, the presence of men is a prerequisite for improving the country's military and combat capabilities. Moreover, many economic activities, especially in the industrial sector, require men, and most people working in this sector or other economic sectors are men. Therefore, having more men can help boost the area's economy and prevent migration waves to other regions.

It is evident that the importance of the above matters varies from one region to another; the gender ratio is far more significant in borderline areas compared to central regions of the country. Although this statement does not imply that the gender ratio in central regions has low military importance, as in unified systems, forces can be deployed from the center and other areas to different regions. However, border areas and the presence of local forces to defend borders have always been valuable under any circumstances (whether in peacetime or wartime).

According to the statistics from 2016, the total population of Khuzestan province was 4,710,509, of which 2,388,674 were men and 2,321,835 were women. This means that the gender ratio in the province for the year in question was approximately 103; that is, there were 103 men for every 100 women. In Bushehr province, in the same year, the total population, regardless of age group

and residence status, was reported to be 1,163,400, with 620,722 men and 542,678 women, resulting in a gender ratio of 114, which is a significant figure. Finally, Hormozgan province, with a total population of 1,776,415, had 906,814 men and 869,601 women, giving it a gender ratio of 104, placing it second among the three provinces.

Therefore, Bushehr province, with the highest gender ratio of 114, not only ranks at the top among the provinces in the Persian Gulf region but also nationwide. This can be attributed to the expansion of job opportunities related to the oil and gas industries, especially in Asaluyeh. This massive industry has attracted thousands of people from various parts of the country. Due to the harsh living conditions there, such as high temperatures and issues like low-quality fresh water, most of the migration is male-dominated, and men often refrain from bringing their families to work centers in this province. In recent years, Bushehr province has become one of the provinces attracting migrants. According to 2016 statistics, Asaluyeh county had 51,642 men compared to 22,316 women, resulting in a gender ratio of 231 (Rahimi Anamoradnejad, 2018: 101).

In 1986, the male population was 2,073,548 and the female population was 1,982,819. In 1996, the male population in the southern coastal areas of the country was 2,835,521 and the female population was 2,697,081. In 2006, the male population was 3,378,189 and the female population was 3,186,831. In the 2011 census, the male population was estimated at 3,649,922 and the female population at 3,492,930. The population of men and women in the 2016 census was mentioned earlier by province, but the total male population in the coastal areas that year was 3,916,210 and the total female population was 3,734,114. Overall, the trend of the male and female population from 1986 to 2016 can be observed in a bar chart in Figure 2. In this chart, it can be seen that the male population has always increased more than the female population, along with the growth of the population.

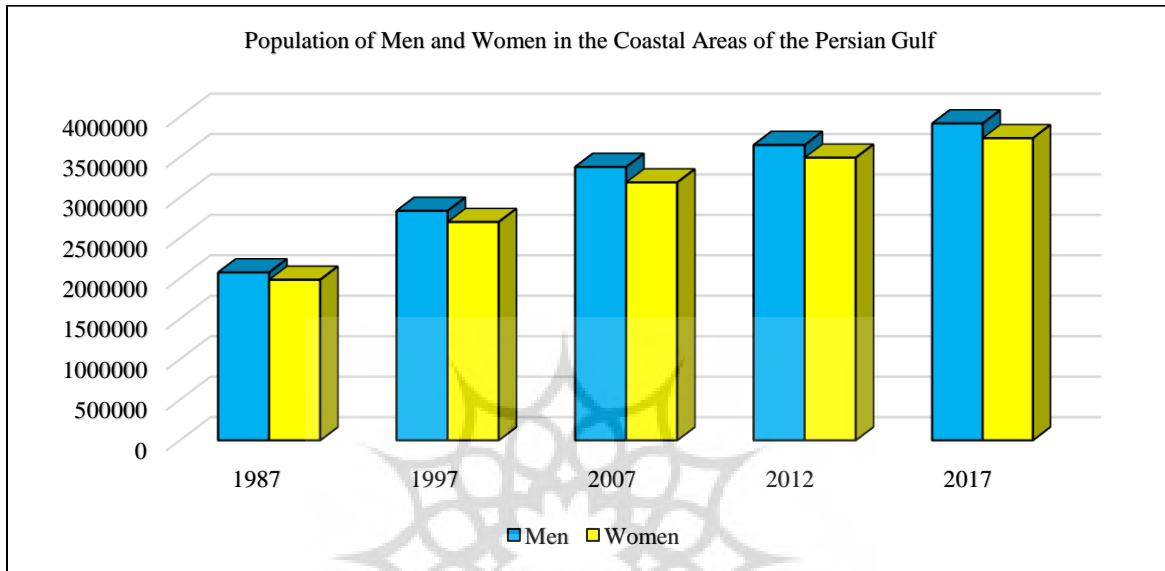


Figure 2: Population of Men and Women in the Coastal Areas of the Persian Gulf from 1986 to 2016
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

The gender ratio in the southern coastal regions of the country in the Persian Gulf area from 1986 to 2016 was 105, 105, 106, 104, and 105, respectively. The gender ratio for the entire country in the years 1986, 1996, 2006, 2011, and 2016 was 105, 103, 104, 102, and 103, respectively (Table 1).

Table 1: Gender ratio in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf and the entire country

No	Year of Census	"Gender ratio in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf"	Gender ratio nationwide
۱	۱۹۸۷	۱.۰۵	۱.۰۵
۲	۱۹۹۷	۱.۰۶	۱.۰۳
۳	۲۰۰۷	۱.۰۶	۱.۰۴
۴	۲۰۱۲	۱.۰۴	۱.۰۲
۵	۲۰۱۷	۱.۰۵	۱.۰۳

(Source: Authors, 2024)

Therefore, the gender ratio in the Persian Gulf regions, on average, is higher than the national average. This means that the male population compared to the female population in the coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf has been

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significantly higher compared to the entire country. This trend can be observed over the years 1986 to 2016 in Figure 3.

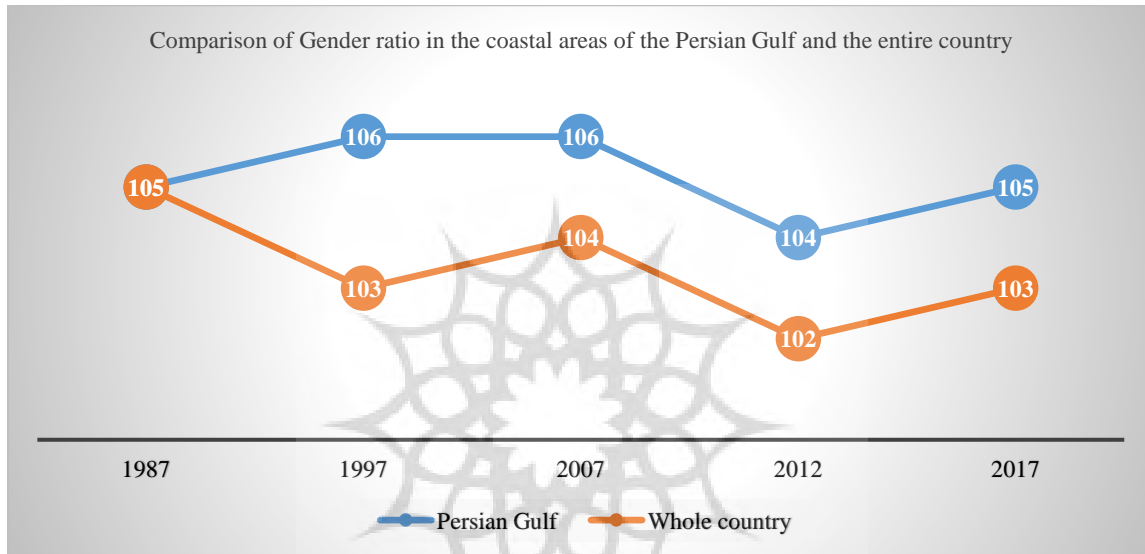


Figure 3: Comparison of Gender ratio in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf and the entire country
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

2.1.5 Age

The age structure index has always impacted national security. When individuals aged 20 to 65 make up more than 35% of a country's total population, the country will benefit from the most favorable geopolitical factors for maintaining security, political stability, and economic development. Therefore, considering this importance, it is mentioned in this section.

One of the important issues that influence the increase in national power and is always considered by demographers is the age structure and composition of the population just because each age group plays a specific role and position in the development and progress of countries. For example, the percentage of the population in the productive age group, which usually includes those aged 15-60, is highly significant for national power. A higher proportion of the



population within this age range ensures military, scientific, agricultural, industrial, and other forces, as well as the production of a new generation. On the other hand, an increase in the elderly population also brings its own problems. Part of the population loses its productive role, and significant costs are imposed on the government and families, which increases the dependency ratio and the social support burden. The population of the three provinces adjacent to the Persian Gulf (Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan) was 7,650,341, and out of this number, the population aged 20 to 65, considered economically and security-wise active and useful, was 4,451,988. This means that 58.27% of the population falls within this age group, which can be very significant for the development and security of these regions.

The age pyramid of the people in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf shows that the base of the pyramid, which includes individuals aged 0-4 and 5-9 years, as well as 25-29 and 30-34 years, has a wider span. This should be viewed as an opportunity, especially in the economic field. The average age in 2016 in the provinces of Khuzestan, Bushehr, and Hormozgan was 28.7, 28.8, and 27.1 years, respectively, which indicates a relatively young population that can be fruitful in economic development and as a valuable security force.

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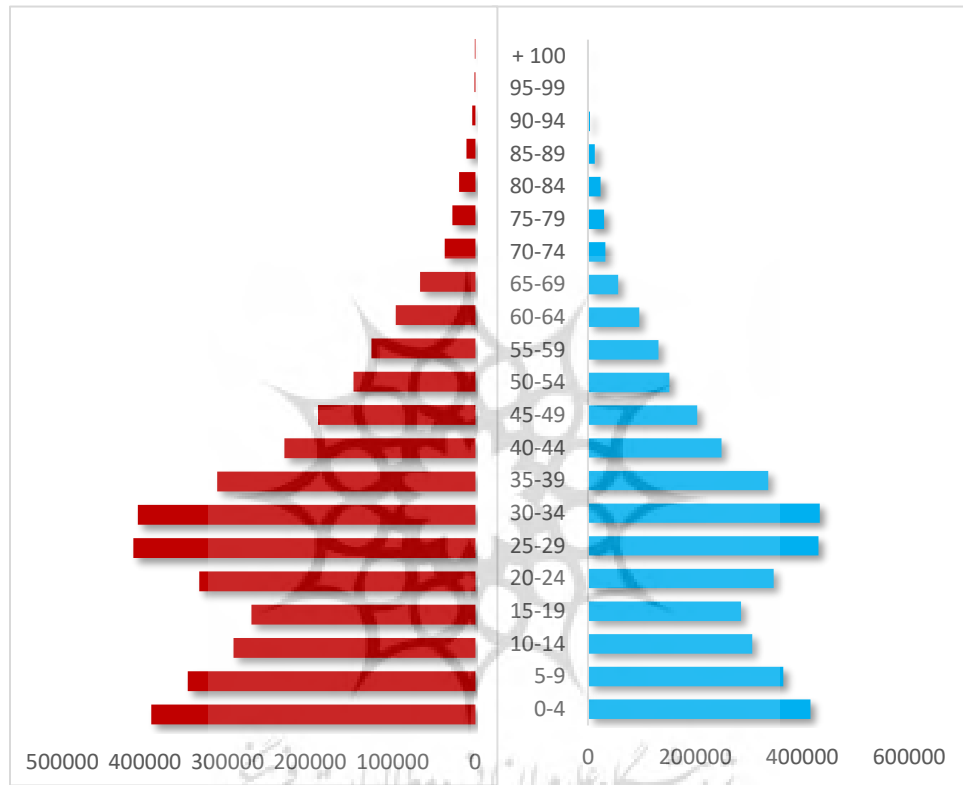


Figure 4: Age pyramid of the population in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

The age groups 0-14 years and 65 years and above impose significant costs on the country and other age groups. Among the provinces in the Persian Gulf regions, Khuzestan has experienced an upward trend in the population aged 65 and above. From 1986 to 2016, the percentage of this age group relative to the total population was 2.64%, 3.32%, 3.78%, 4.10%, and 4.42%, respectively. Bushehr province has had some fluctuations but generally has shown an upward trend; during the statistical period in question, the percentage of the elderly age group was 2.59%, 3.74%, 4.05%, 3.89%, and 4.21%, respectively. Finally,



Hormozgan province, unlike the other two provinces, has undergone noticeable changes, with a relatively significant decrease between 2006 and 2011, but it has increased again. It appears that in the next statistical period, we will witness an increase in the population of this age group as well. From 1986 to 2016, the percentage of the elderly population in this province was 3.20%, 4.03%, 4.06%, 3.85%, and 3.91%, respectively.

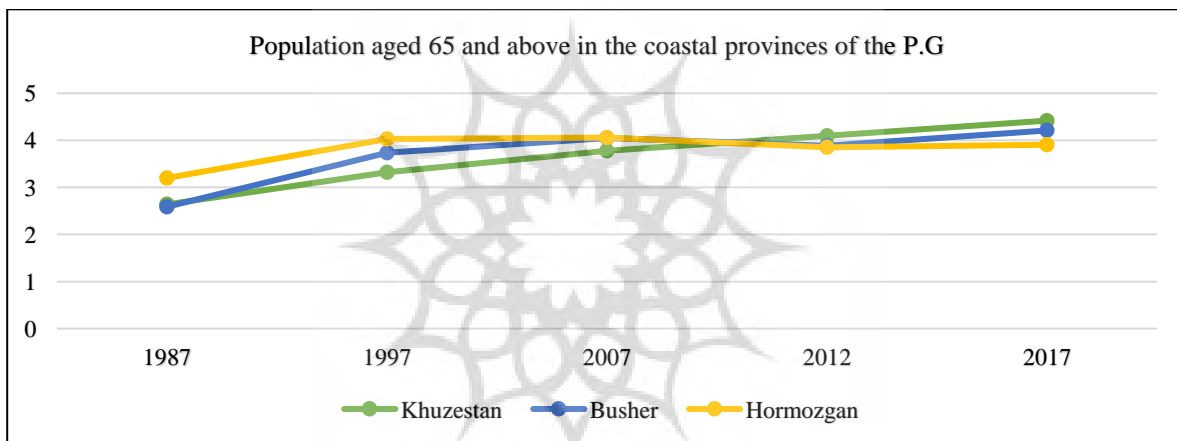


Figure 5: Population aged 65 and above in the coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

In addition to its number, the population's structure and quality should also be considered. Age is one of the most important and fundamental factors affecting population structure. Unlike some characteristics like gender, it can be more easily organized and controlled by planners and population experts. The presence of a young age structure, which constitutes the active population of the country, ensures economic prosperity and a workforce for the country. It also prepares the military force in crisis and wartime situations. Of course, attention should not only be paid to the number of young people, but also to the skill level of the people in a region. However, the presence of an active young population is an opportunity to ensure the national security of the country. On the other hand, if a country has a larger population of young children (e.g., in the first

decade of their life) and elderly (over 65 years), or has significant statistics in proportion to the total population, the dependency ratio increases. This situation exerts pressure on the active force, as many of the country's resources and energy must be spent on these age groups, which do not significantly contribute to production and security, but rather become a burden on society. Therefore, planners and high-ranking managers should make every effort to advance the age structure of the population to establish a balance among age groups, ensuring that the active young population has a larger and more significant share compared to other age groups.

3.1.5. Literacy

The presence of skilled and educated human resources is considered essential for the development and progress of a country. In other words, regarding the importance of population, the quality, i.e., skilled and educated individuals, is more significant than the quantity. Both internally and externally, the presence of literate and educated people not only strengthens the country's defense force but also leads to greater economic development.

The most stable countries are those where the percentage of skilled individuals is higher than that of other countries. The increase in skilled individuals in a country is directly related to the higher average lifespan of its population. One criterion that can be mentioned as an example is the age criterion; when individuals aged 20 to 65 constitute more than 35% of a country's total population, the country enjoys the best and most favorable geopolitical factors for maintaining security, political stability, and economic development. Such a factor serves as a strategic advantage (Ezzati, 2018: 93-94).

The literacy status is considered for the population aged 6 years and above. Therefore, in this section, the literacy status of the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf will be examined, broken down by province and then overall and comprehensively. The population aged 6 years and above in Khuzestan province totals 4,136,255 people, of which 2,092,675 are men and 2,043,580



are women. Of the total population aged 6 years and above, 3,569,475 are literate, 564,733 are illiterate, and 2,047 were not specified.

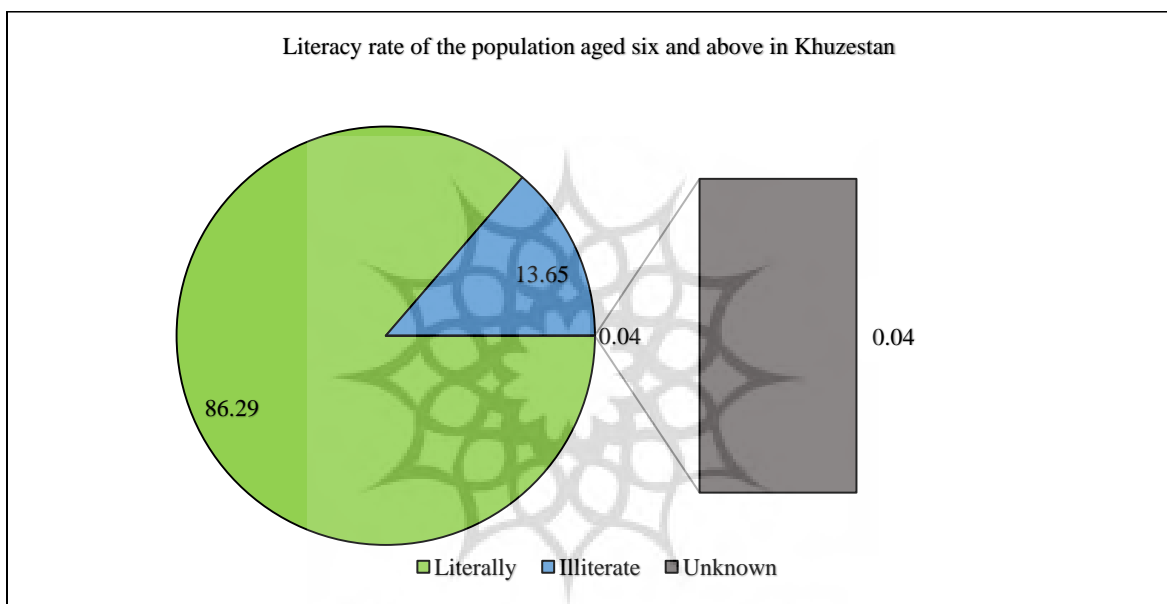


Figure 6: Literacy status of the population aged six and above in Khuzestan province
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

From among this number, 1,884,145 men are literate, 207,158 men are illiterate, and 1,372 are not specified. On the other hand, 1,685,330 women are literate, 357,575 are illiterate, and 657 are not specified. Therefore, the number of illiterate women in Khuzestan province is higher than that of men, but this number is very negligible compared to the literate population.

In addition to dividing the population into literate and illiterate, literacy can also be examined by educational level in a broader classification. In Khuzestan, 25% have higher education, and 21% have a high school diploma or pre-university education. 24% have primary education, which is a significant portion of the population. Secondary and middle school education account for 23% and 24% of the literate population, respectively.

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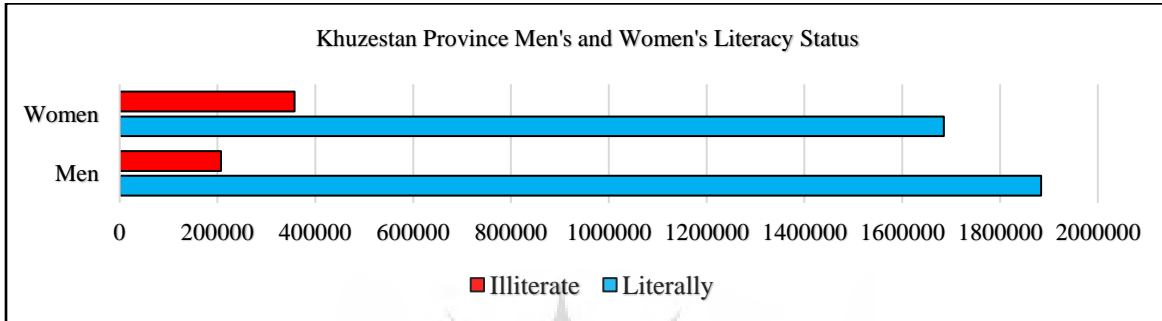


Figure 7: Literacy status of Khuzestan province by gender
 (Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

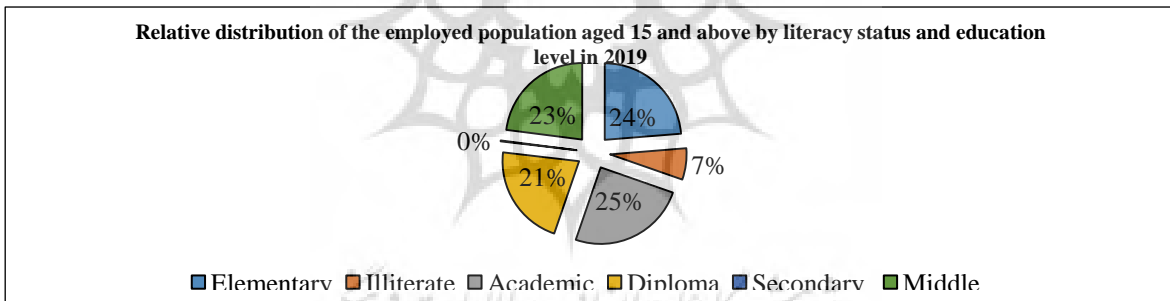


Figure 8: Relative distribution of the employed population aged 15 and above in Khuzestan province
 (Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

From the perspective of social structure, the population can be divided into three groups: urban, rural, and nomadic. In 2016, the total urban population was 3,142,244, of which 2,819,745 were literate, 320,707 were illiterate, and 1,792 were not specified. The rural population was 989,942, of which 747,448 were literate, 242,245 were illiterate, and 249 were not specified. The non-resident population was 4,069, of which 2,282 were literate, 1,781 were illiterate, and 6 were not specified (Figure 9). From the 1960s and the beginning of land reforms in villages and the execution of the so-called White Revolution by the Pahlavi



government, the "Literacy Corps" was established with the aim of educating villagers in remote areas. After the Islamic Revolution, the Literacy Movement played a major role in educating villagers, and gradually more schools and elementary schools were built in villages to reduce the educational inequality between rural and urban areas. Nevertheless, although the literacy rate in Khuzestan's villages is higher than the illiteracy rate, it still seems somewhat high compared to the cities. Therefore, literacy and education should be more emphasized in developmental and planning programs.

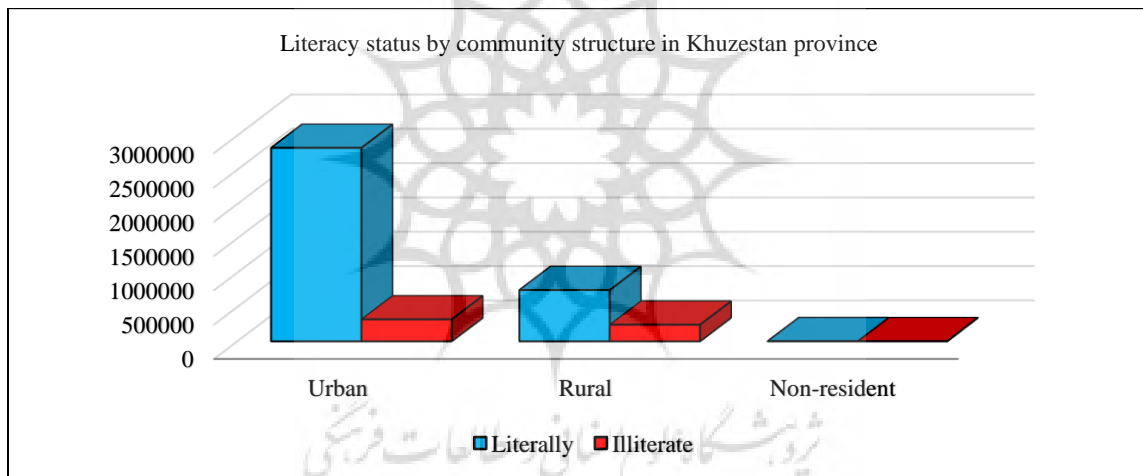


Figure 9: Literacy status by community structure in Khuzestan province
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

The population aged 6 years and above in Bushehr province was 1,024,604, of which 914,041 were literate, 109,902 were illiterate, and 661 were not specified. Out of this total, 549,752 were men and 474,852 were women. The presence of schools, high schools, institutes, higher education centers, and universities in Bushehr province, especially the Persian Gulf University, has played a major role in spreading knowledge and science and in the growth of the literacy movement in this province. The existence of only 10.72% illiteracy in Bushehr

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is very promising. If there is any imbalance in the demographic discussions of Bushehr province, it will definitely not be from the literacy aspect because this province has managed to include most of its population under the literate category, which can be a significant point in the demographic discussions of the province.

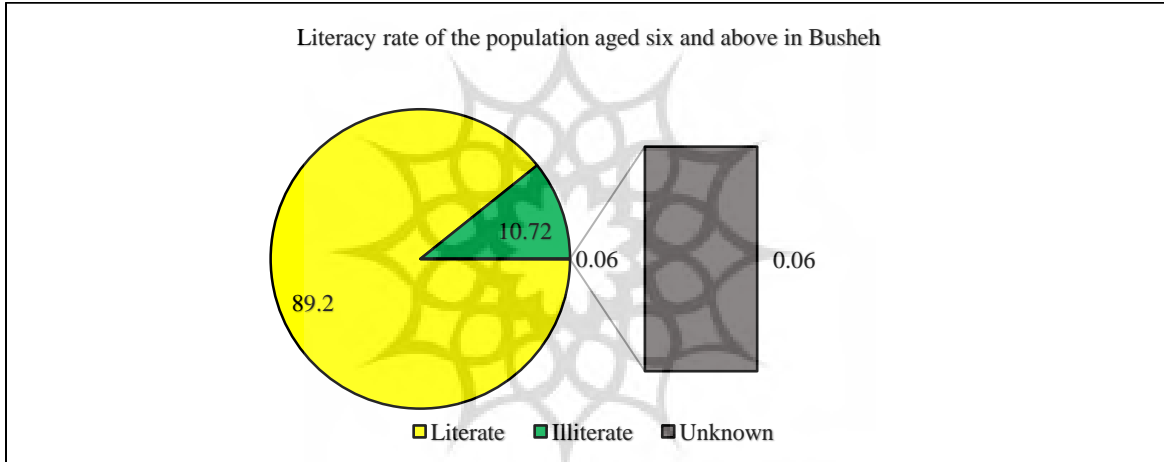


Figure 10: Literacy rate of the population aged six and above in Bushehr province
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

Out of the total population aged 6 years and above, 505,356 men are literate and 43,931 men are illiterate. The literate women amount to 408,685, while the population of women aged 6 years and above who are illiterate is reported to be 65,971. Similar to Khuzestan, in Bushehr, the number of literate men is higher than that of women, and conversely, the number of illiterate women is higher than that of illiterate men.

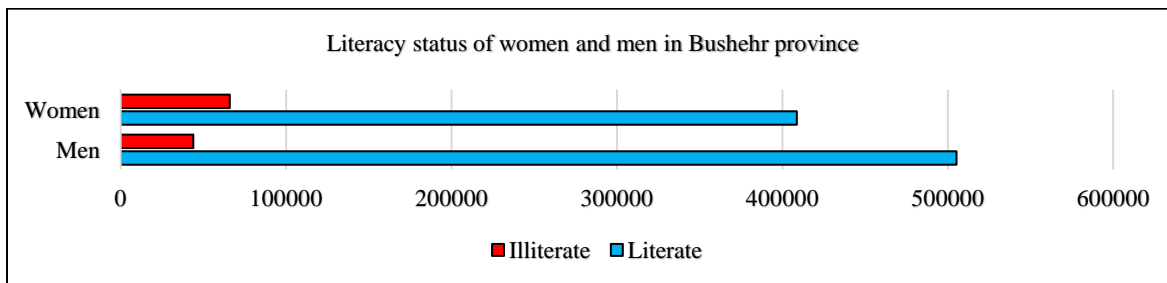


Figure 11: Literacy status of women and men in Bushehr province
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

The population aged 6 years and above in Bushehr province, including urban, rural, and non-residents, are 735, 518, 287, 367, and 1,719, respectively. The literate urban population is 667,599 and the illiterate urban population is 67,439; the literate rural population is 245,239, and the illiterate rural population is 41,953; finally, the literate non-resident population is 1,203, and the illiterate non-resident population is 510. Unlike Khuzestan, it seems that the number of literate people in rural areas of Bushehr is higher, and the literate urban population is also at the top proportionally. Undoubtedly, the presence of literate people in Bushehr has an undeniable impact on national security because the skilled, educated, and specialized workforce of Bushehr province, with its abundant energy and unique geographical location, works in many of the province's important refineries and power plants or engages in other economic sectors. This not only prevents the migration of locals and the depopulation of rural and urban areas, but also attracts the migrant population and further aids the province's development.

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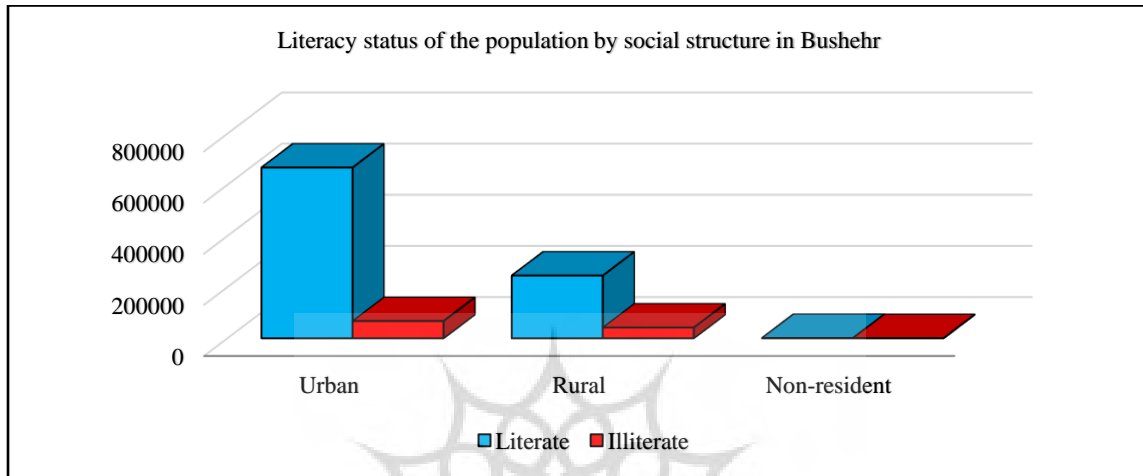


Figure 12: Literacy by social structure in Bushehr
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

Out of the total population aged 6 years and above in Hormozgan province, which amounts to 1,532,278 people, 781,812 are men and 750,466 are women. Of the main number mentioned, the majority, 1,345,952, are literate, 185,786 are illiterate, and 540 were not specified.

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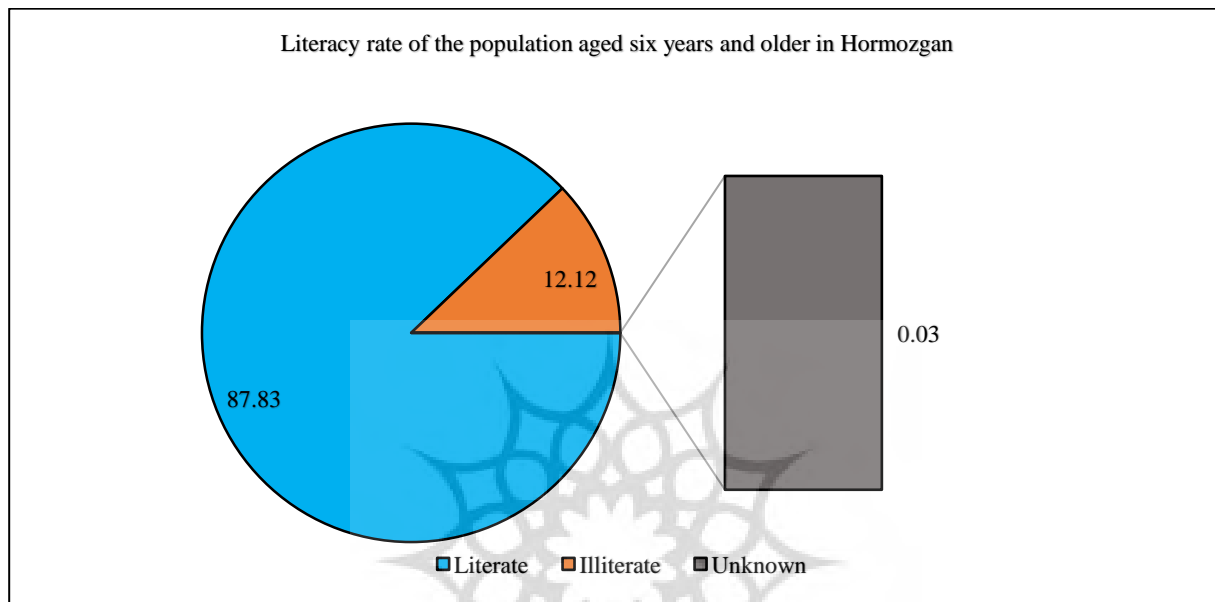


Figure 13: The literacy rate of the population aged six years and older in Hormozgan
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

Out of the aforementioned population, literate and illiterate men number 708,939 and 72,416, respectively, while literate and illiterate women number 637,013 and 113,370, respectively. Given the status of the previously examined provinces, it can be concluded that the number of illiterate individuals among women in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf is higher than among men. This is attributed to social issues and the social and cultural status of women in these regions, as well as the higher gender ratio of men compared to women. As previously mentioned, in Bushehr province, the gender ratio in 2016 was 114, meaning that for every 100 women in Bushehr, there were 114 men reported.

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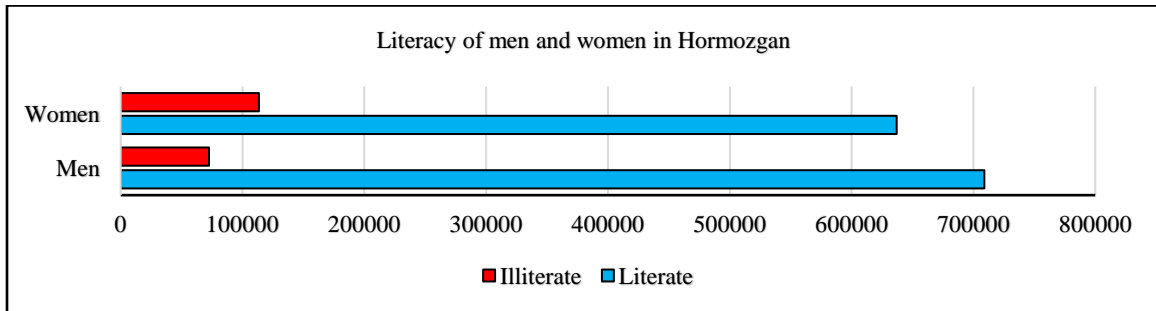


Figure 14: Literacy of men and women in Hormozgan
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

The literacy status in the overall urban, rural, and non-resident communities is 842,929, 687,453, and 1,896, respectively. The literate population in the cities of this province is 778,745 and the illiterate population is 63,823. Similarly, in the villages, the literate population is 566,011 and the illiterate population is 121,264. Finally, the literate and illiterate non-resident and nomadic populations are 1,196 and 699, respectively.

Therefore, considering the literacy status in the three separate provinces, if we want to evaluate the overall literacy status in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf, we need to calculate the total population aged 6 years and above, as well as the literate and illiterate populations. In 2016, the total population aged 6 years and above in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf was estimated to be 6,693,137, of which 5,829,468 were literate, 859,721 were illiterate, and 3,248 were not specified. Meanwhile, the total population aged 6 years and above in the entire country in the same year was 71,506,392, of which 62,666,760 were literate, 8,795,553 were illiterate, and 44,079 were not specified. This means that the average literacy rate in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf is almost equal to that of the entire country, indicating that the literacy status in this area aligns with the national average. Therefore, in terms of literacy, which is one of the main components of demographic structure, there is not only no imbalance,



but also it shows a significant percentage. However, it should be noted that although the literacy rate alone cannot be considered a significant component in the imbalance of a geographical area, since the demographic structure, in general, determines the quantity and quality of the population in that region and has important impacts on other factors, it was inevitable to study and examine the literacy status of the Persian Gulf regions. This importance becomes more apparent when considering that literacy has an undeniable role in other indicators such as employment, economic status, marriage, migration, and so on.

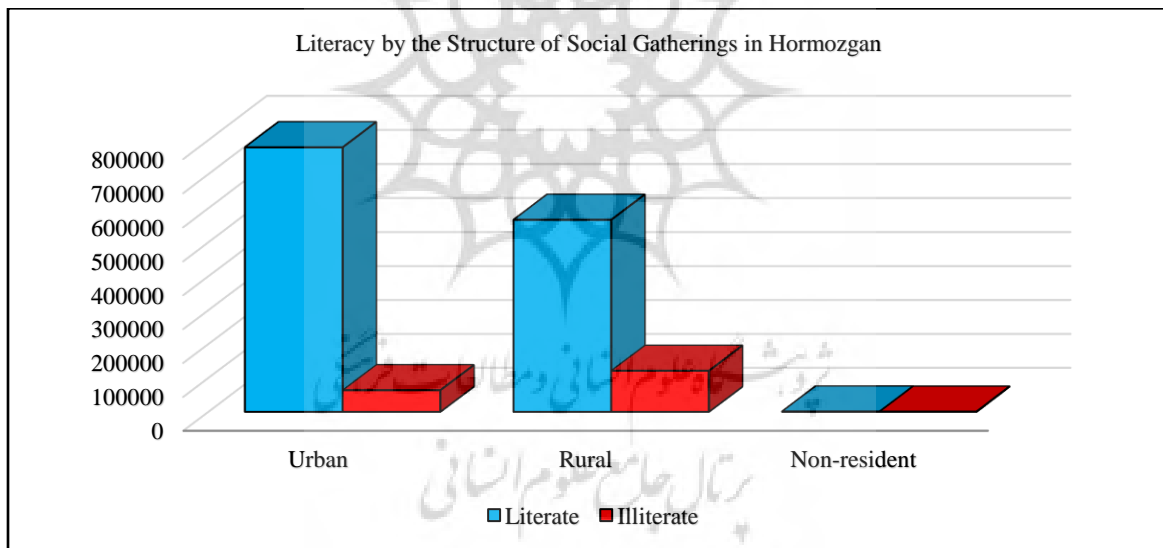


Figure 15: Literacy by the Structure of Social Gatherings in Hormozgan
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

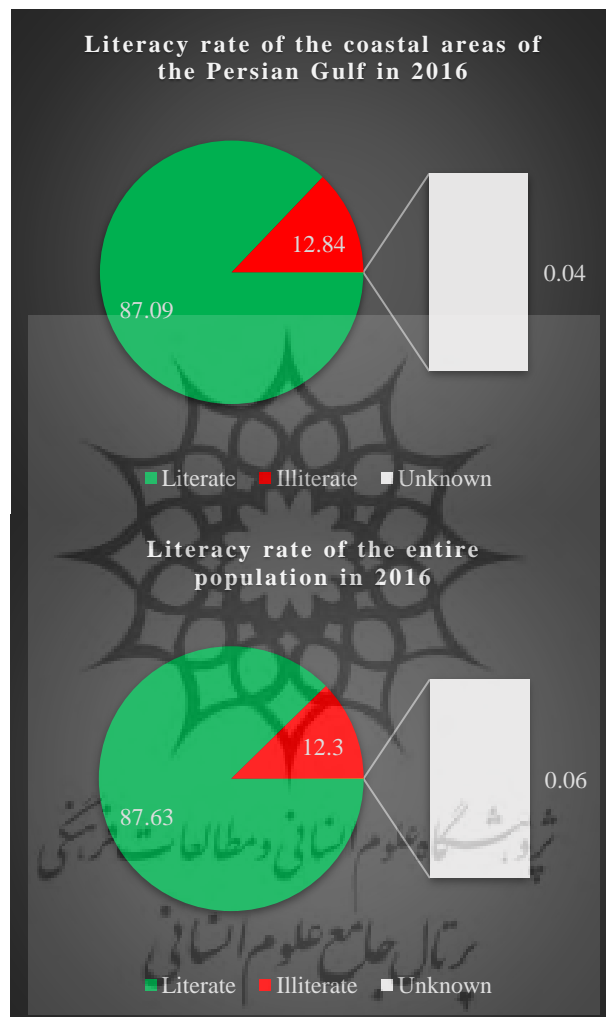


Figure 16: Comparison of Literacy Status in the Coastal Areas of the Persian Gulf with the National Average (drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

4.1.5. Social Structure

The country's population can be divided into three main groups based on the type of residence and geographical location: urban, rural, and non-resident or



nomadic. By examining population statistics from 1956 to the present, it can be observed that initially, the majority of the population resided in rural areas, and cities were in the minority in terms of numbers. However, over time, with the expansion of modernity and its manifestations on one hand, and neglecting villages and the hard life of villagers on the other hand, cities and urban areas became the focal points. Villagers, for various reasons, primarily economic ones such as obtaining jobs and suitable housing, flocked to cities. From this time, rural-to-urban migration increased, and each year, more people moved away from rural areas, adding to the urban population. In 1980, the populations of cities and villages were equal, but after that year, the urban population surpassed the rural population, leading to the isolation of villages.

The population, based on its social structure and type of residence, is divided into the three previously mentioned categories (urban, rural, and non-resident/nomadic). This classification can be significant for security studies, especially when we focus on the border regions of the Persian Gulf coasts, which have considerable national security value. Settlements are the bedrock of community formation, and therefore, these areas and regions are formed to accommodate populations where social and economic activities occur. To enhance national security levels and degree, the population must be discussed based on the locations where they reside.

In 1966, the total urban population of the coastal regions was 990,680, and the rural population was 1,185,730. In 1976, the urban population was 1,517,715 and the rural population was 1,479,706. In 1986, the urban population was 2,099,630 and the rural population was 1,914,034. In 1996, the urban population was 3,180,973 and the rural population was 2,314,155. In 2006, the urban population was 4,112,354 and the rural population was 2,429,704. In 2011, the urban population was 4,711,315 and the rural population was 2,413,640. Finally, in the 2016 census, the urban population was estimated to be 5,361,982 and the rural population 2,279,603. The population statistics of the coastal regions are detailed by the three provinces in Table 2.

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Table 2: Structure of communities in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf by border provinces

Rural Population	Urban Population	Year of Census	Province
٦٩٥.٢٢	٨٨٣.٥٧	١٣٤٥	Khuzestan
٩١٢.٠٩	١٢٧٥١.٩	١٣٥٥	
١١٦١٦.٢	١٤٨٥٣٥٦	١٣٦٥	
١٣٦٧٩٤٥	٢٣٤٢٥١٤	١٣٧٥	
١٣٨٣٩٤٦	٢٨٧٣٥٦٤	١٣٨٥	
١٣.١٢٦٨	٣٢١٨٤٥١	١٣٩٠	
١١٥١٥٩٦	٣٥٥٤٢.٥	١٣٩٥	
١٩٧٢٩٨	٥٤٦٢٣	١٣٤٥	Bushehr
٢٢٨٧١٩	١١٩١٤٤	١٣٥٥	
٣٠.٤١٣	٣.٦.٧٥	١٣٦٥	
٣٣٢٨٨٤	٣٩٤٤٨٩	١٣٧٥	
٣.٣٤.٩	٥٧٧٤٦٥	١٣٨٥	
٣٢٥٩٩٣	٧.٤٣٩٣	١٣٩٠	
٣٢٥٤٩٥	٨٣٥٩٥٥	١٣٩٥	
٢٩٣٤١٠	٥٣.٠٠	١٣٤٥	Hormozgan
٣٣٨٩٧٨	١٢٣٤٦٢	١٣٥٥	
٤٥٢.١٩	٣.٨١٩٩	١٣٦٥	
٦١٣٣٢٦	٤٤٣٩٧.٠	١٣٧٥	
٧٤٢٣٤٩	٦٦١٣٢٥	١٣٨٥	
٧٨٦٣٧٩	٧٨٨٤٧١	١٣٩٠	
٨.٢٥١٢	٩٧١٨٢٢	١٣٩٥	

Source: (Authors, 2024)

The trend of population changes in social structures indicates that rural-to-urban migrations are increasing yearly. This becomes more evident when many rural areas are located on the country's periphery and border regions. In centralized systems, the further you move from the center, the less attention is paid to the periphery. Consequently, rural settlements on the borders gradually lose their population, leading to depopulation and creating security gaps in border areas. However, if migration decreases and managers and officials pay sufficient attention to these settlements in their planning, we will not only avoid seeing



villages become abandoned, but also prevent the emergence of security gaps. Instead, these areas can become strong points at the borders.

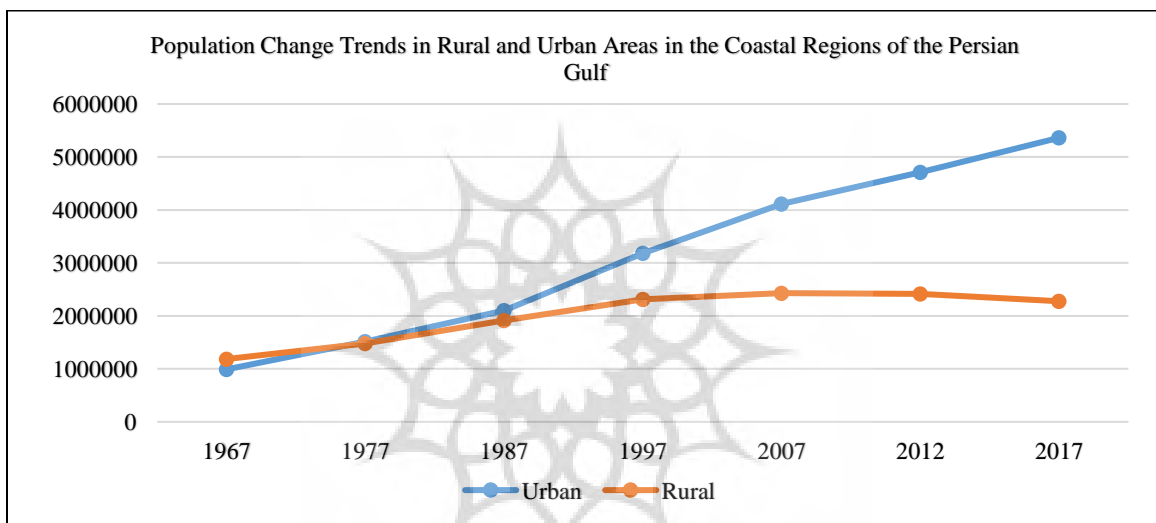


Figure 17: Population Change Trends in Rural and Urban Areas in the Coastal Regions of the Persian Gulf

(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

In addition to the people residing in urban and rural areas, there is another population group, although its number is variable: the non-resident population. Due to their non-permanent residence, the statistics related to this group are usually not accurately provided. In 2006, the non-resident population in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf was about 24,606; in 2011, it was about 17,897; and in 2016, it was about 8,739. Although the statistics for the non-resident population cannot be as precise as those for urban and rural populations due to their nomadic lifestyle and lack of permanent residence, overall, it indicates that the number of this group is gradually decreasing while the urban and rural populations are increasing. Throughout history, the nomadic population has always been one of the most important forces and vital resources

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for strengthening the country's military capabilities. This was due to their warrior spirit and bravery, coming to the country's aid in critical historical periods. However, after modernity in Iran and the formation of the modern army, as well as the repressive policies of Reza Pahlavi, the military and even economic significance of this population group has steadily declined, leading to a significant decrease in their numbers, a trend that continues to this day.

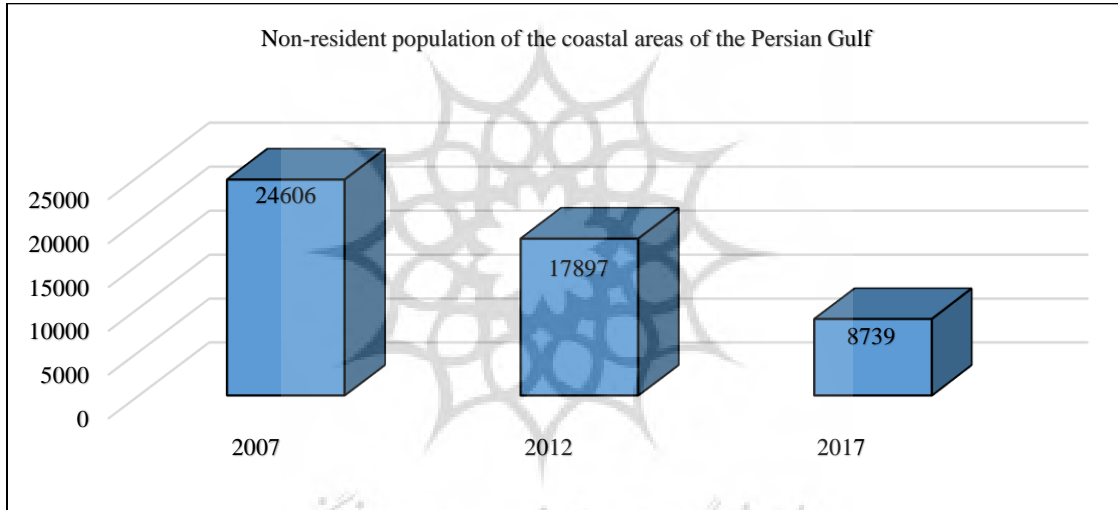


Figure 18: Non-resident population of the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

According to the data from 2016, the urbanization rate in Khuzestan province was 75.45%, in Bushehr province was 71.85%, and in Hormozgan province was 54.70%. This indicates that Hormozgan has the lowest urbanization rate, while Khuzestan has the highest urbanization rate along the Persian Gulf, followed closely by Bushehr. Overall, 70.08% of the population in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf lives in urban areas, 29.79% in rural areas, and finally, 0.11% are non-resident.

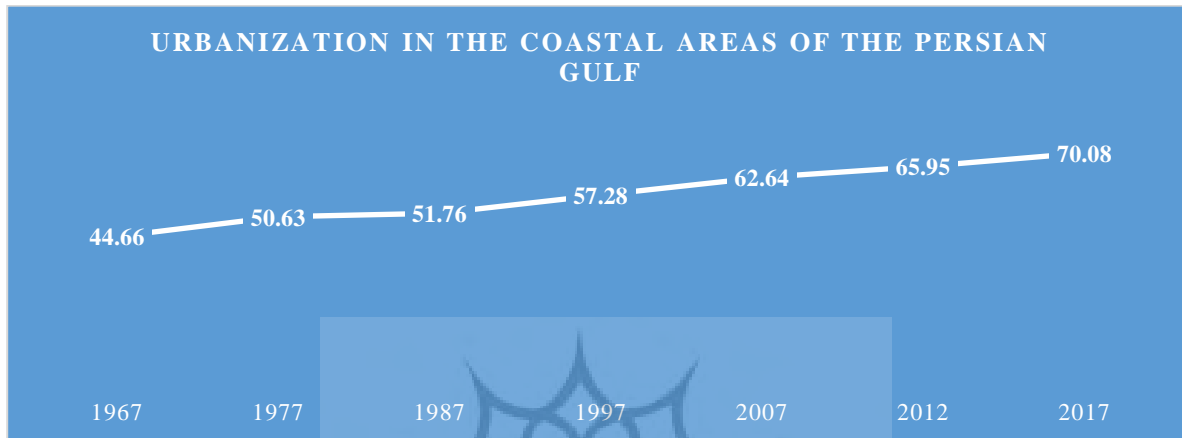


Figure 19: Urbanization rate in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf from 1966 to 2016
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

The presence of suitable facilities and services, job opportunities, an increase in housing compared to villages, factories and industries, energy facilities, extensive health and educational centers, etc., has caused the urbanization rate in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf to increase from 44.66% in 1966 to 70.08%. Although reverse migration cannot be expected under the current conditions, rural industries and job opportunities should be increased, and educational, health, and other services should be expanded in villages to prevent the growth of urbanization from causing an imbalance in settlements in these areas. It cannot be said that urbanization should not occur or is detrimental to the country; in fact, it has positive effects and consequences. However, this should not disrupt the balance between settlements and increase spatial inequality.

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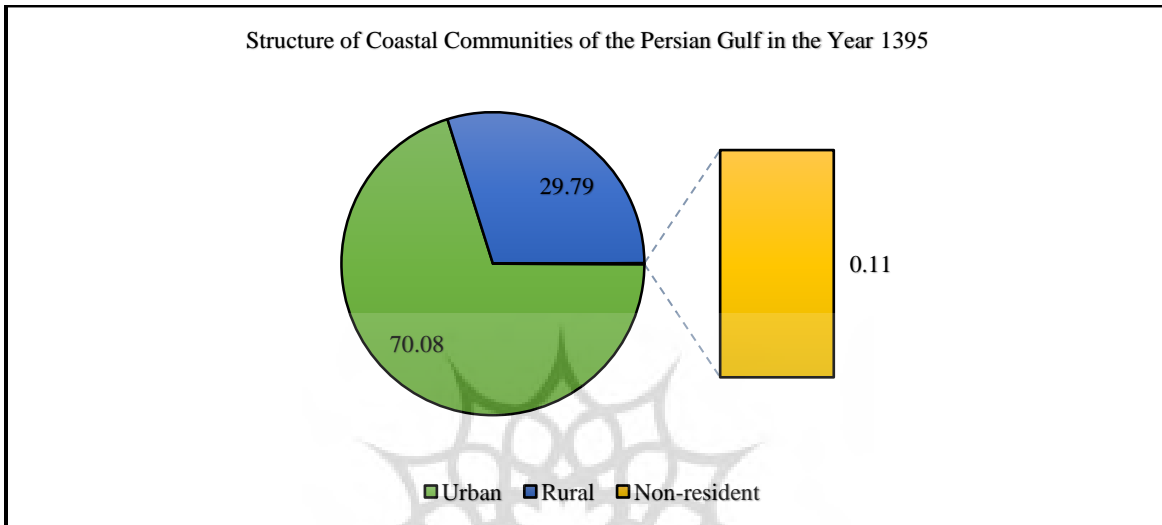


Figure 20: Structure of Coastal Communities of the Persian Gulf in the Year 1395
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

Another topic that falls under the structure of communities is the number of settlements in border areas. Obviously, the more settlements (urban and rural) in border areas, the fewer security gaps there will be. In other words, the more settlements in border areas, the less security void there will be, so there is an inverse relationship between these two variables. According to the map in Figure 21, one can see the geographical distribution of settlements and major urban and rural centers. It appears that Khuzestan has a higher density and number of centers compared to the other two provinces, while Hormozgan ranks lower in terms of settlement density. To further refine this analysis, it is necessary to examine the number of urban and rural settlements in these three provinces and, in general, in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf, to see if the number of these settlements has increased or even decreased over the past years.

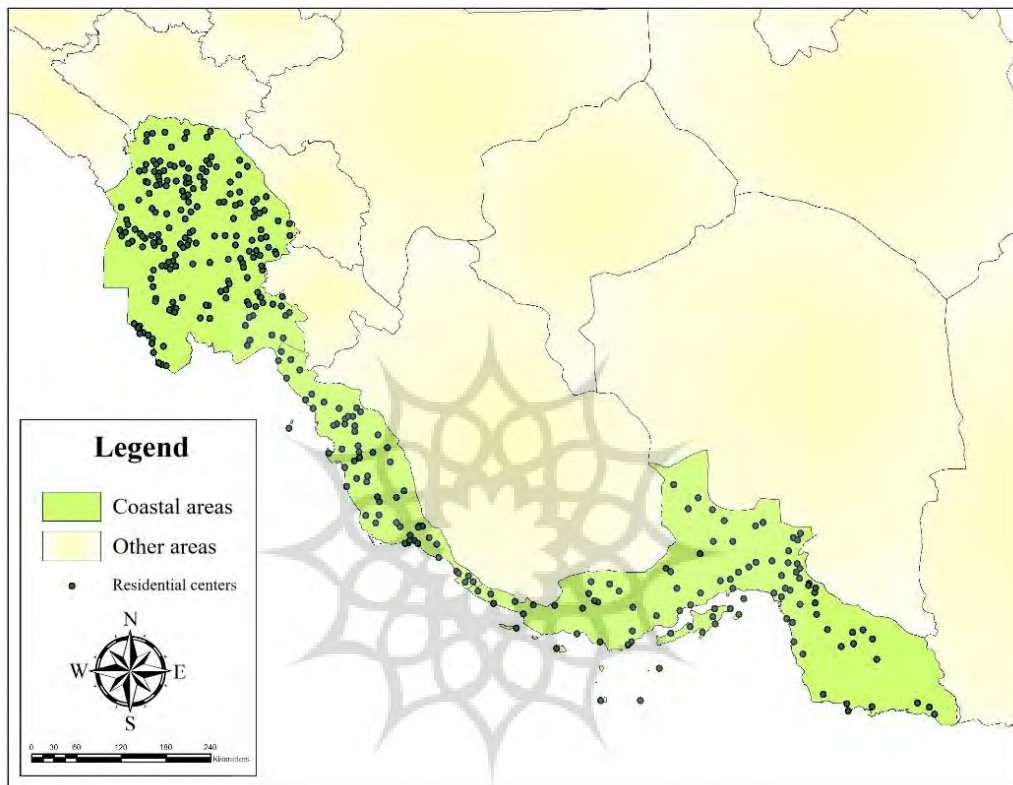


Figure 21: Importance of Population for the Country
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

The number of urban localities increases every year, while the number of rural areas either decreases or the number of uninhabited settlements increases. In 2001, there were 41 urban points in Khuzestan province, which increased to 82 by 2018, meaning that in seventeen years, the number of urban points in the province doubled. In Hormozgan province, the same trend is observed: in 2001, there were 18 points, and by 2018, the number of urban points had reached 44, showing a similar doubling trend. In Bushehr province, there were 22 cities in 2001, and by 2018, there were 38 urban points, although the growth in this area is less compared to the other two provinces.

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Table 3: "Urban areas of the coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf from 2001 to 2018

All Coastal Regions	Hormozgan	Bushehr	Khuzestan	Year
۸۱	۱۸	۲۲	۴۱	۲۰۰۲
۹۸	۲۲	۲۹	۴۷	۲۰۰۷
۱۲۶	۳۲	۳۲	۶۲	۲۰۱۲
۱۵۰	۳۸	۳۶	۷۶	۲۰۱۵
۱۵۱	۳۸	۳۷	۷۶	۲۰۱۶
۱۵۱	۳۸	۳۷	۷۶	۲۰۱۷
۱۵۴	۴۱	۳۷	۷۶	۲۰۱۸
۱۶۴	۴۴	۳۸	۸۲	۲۰۱۹

Source: (National Statistical Yearbook, 2019)

According to Table 3, it is observed that all three provinces have experienced an upward trend in the number of urban points, but Khuzestan has had a higher share than the other provinces. This can be attributed to several factors, including the significant rural areas in this province that have turned into cities, the province's vastness, and its larger population compared to other provinces. However, there has been a notable upward trend for new cities in the Persian Gulf regions. This trend is not limited to these regions but has also increased significantly in other parts of the country. A comprehensive review of all provinces and geographical areas of the country is beyond the scope of this research.

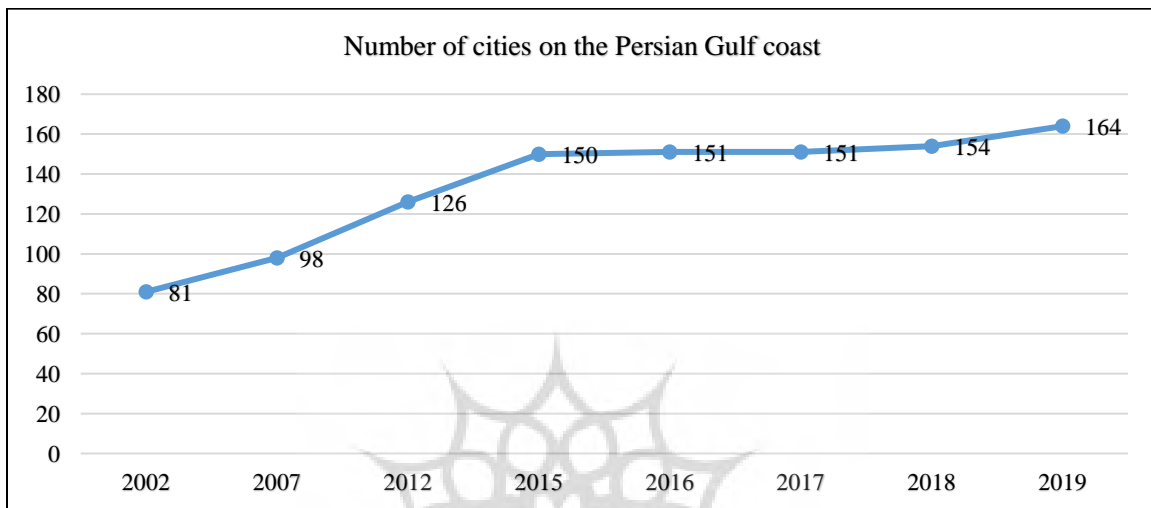


Figure 22: Temporal trend of the number of urban points in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf
(Drawn by: The Authors, 2024)

According to data provided by the Statistics Center of Iran in 2018, the total number of settlements in Khuzestan province is 6,434, of which 4,018 are inhabited and 2,416 are uninhabited. The total number of settlements in Bushehr province is 826, of which 628 are inhabited and 223 are uninhabited. Additionally, 223 of these settlements have fewer than 20 households, 408 settlements have more than 20 households, and 223 settlements have 100 households or more. The total number of settlements in Hormozgan province is 2,268, of which 1,710 are inhabited and 558 are uninhabited, indicating the importance of rural areas and community life in these regions of Hormozgan. Rural-to-urban migrations are one of the most important and fundamental reasons for the number of uninhabited villages. Although some of these villages were abandoned long ago, and others in Khuzestan province became uninhabited due to the imposed war and unbearable conditions near the borders, at least in the past three decades, migration and the lack of facilities in these villages have been the most significant motivators for villagers to migrate.

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Table 4: Number of settlements in the coastal areas of the Persian Gulf in 2018

Uninhabited	Inhabited	Villages	Geographical area
۲۴۱۶	۴۰۱۸	۶۴۳۴	Khuzestan
۲۲۳	۶۲۸	۸۲۶	Bushehr
۵۵۸	۱۷۱۰	۲۲۶۸	Hormozgan
۳۱۹۷	۶۳۵۶	۹۵۲۸	All coastal areas

Source: (National Statistical Yearbook, 2019)

Usually, there is a relationship between the area and the number of settlements. In many cases, regions with larger geographical areas have a correspondingly higher number of settlements. However, this depends on various natural and human conditions. In some provinces, due to geographical barriers such as impassable mountains, deserts, etc., human settlements rarely form in these areas. Therefore, this cannot be considered solely on paper, based on statistics and different figures, and requires geographical research in this field.

Table 5: Area and number of residential centers

Number of settlement centers	Area (square kilometers)	Geographical area
۶۵۱۶	۶۴۰۵۷	Khuzestan
۸۶۴	۲۳۱۹۷/۴۶	Bushehr
۲۳۱۲	۷۰۱۹۸/۷۵	Hormozgan
۹۶۹۲	۱۵۷۴۵۳/۲۱	All coastal areas

Source: (National Statistical Yearbook, 2019)

Conclusion

In the past, the focus was solely on the population's quantity, where a higher number was considered more desirable, regardless of quality. However, it became apparent in modern times that the mere number of the population alone cannot be a source of power. For the population to be fruitful and beneficial for the country's progress and to be a crucial element in achieving development and ensuring security, it must be balanced in terms of gender, predominantly active



in terms of age, skilled in terms of literacy, and desirably distributed in terms of social structure. In this research, four components of gender, age, literacy, and social structure were examined with a national security approach. The gender variable is of high importance in countries where the military force is predominantly composed of men, as national security—especially from a defensive perspective—is ensured by the military. Thus, attention must be paid to the gender composition of the population. In the coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf, the gender ratio is higher than the national average; the country's gender ratio is 103, but in these provinces, it is 105, indicating a relatively favorable gender composition in these areas. Regarding the age composition, it should be noted that an increase in the young and elderly population only increases the dependency burden and dependency rate in the country. In other words, these two groups do not contribute to the country's development and economy, although the young population will eventually join the active class and become the youth. In every statistical period, the population must remain young to implement many of the country's executive plans. Additionally, the existence of the military force requires a young and active population, which is why many sources emphasize that increasing the young population is a source of national power. According to the studies and calculations conducted in this research, over fifty percent of the population in the three coastal provinces of the Persian Gulf falls within the 20-65 age group, indicating that the resident population in these areas is mainly composed of young people, especially those in the working age group. This is a positive indicator for establishing security and comprehensive development in these areas. However, the growing elderly population and those aged 65 and above should not be overlooked.

Another variable that constitutes the demographic structure is literacy. The higher the literacy rate of the population in terms of quantity and quality, the more the economy and development progress on the right and correct path. The presence of educated and skilled individuals can drive the industrial production cycle and lead to national self-sufficiency in the three economic sectors.

Undoubtedly, unskilled labor in agriculture, industry, and services is important, but to achieve economic self-sufficiency and sustainable development, it is necessary to have an optimal number of skilled, specialized, and educated individuals in the country. A high literate population ensures not only economic security for society but also increases the number of literate military personnel in related and necessary sciences to ensure the defensive security of coastal areas and protect the country's borders. Literate individuals in society are considered based on the population aged 6 years and above. In this research, to evaluate and calculate the literate population of the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf, the population aged 6 years and above was examined. In Khuzestan province, over 86%, in Bushehr province, 89%, and in Hormozgan province, over 87% of the population were literate.

Population is categorized based on the type of residence in the social structure classification; according to this structure, the population is divided into three groups: urban, rural, and non-resident. Throughout history, most of Iran's people resided in rural areas or were nomadic, with only a small number living in cities. Gradually, the importance of cities increased, leading to the isolation of villagers, a trend evident in contemporary times, especially in the modern era. The significance of villages in this research lies in the fact that a substantial portion of the rural population and a considerable number of settlements are villages. Therefore, the reduction of the rural population in border areas will result in the depopulation of these regions. This leads to population gaps in the southern coastal regions of the country, which are border areas, and issues such as increased smuggling, decreased social security, lower defense security, and lack of development in coastal regions. The lack of sufficient income opportunities, unfair distribution of facilities, and many other issues have driven villagers to migrate to cities. According to studies, the most prevalent type of migration in Iran is rural-to-urban, with higher rates in border areas. Based on demographic studies conducted from 1966 to 2016, in the first period, the rural population outnumbered city dwellers, and by the next period, in 1976, the



urban and rural populations were equal. This parity occurred for the whole country in 1980, where the populations of these two settlement groups equaled. However, in the coastal regions of the Persian Gulf, the urban population caught up with the rural population slightly earlier. From this period onwards, the urban population surpassed the rural and non-resident populations, and as the urban population grew, rural living declined.

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