



Designing a Policy Laboratory for the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency

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Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to design a policy laboratory and customize it for the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency. The research method is qualitative in nature and exploratory in purpose. Accordingly, thematic analysis was employed to develop the theoretical framework. In the qualitative phase of the study, two tools were used for data collection: note cards and semi-structured interviews. Through a review of the theoretical foundations and previous studies, initial note-taking was conducted, and by conducting purposive and snowball sampling interviews with experts, the dimensions, components, and final indicators for the policy laboratory design model were identified and determined. The findings of the study are categorized into four main themes: (1) antecedents of policy laboratory design, (2) stages of policy laboratory design, (3) the design of the policy laboratory itself, and (4) post-design outcomes of the policy laboratory. If policymakers and scholars utilize this model and establish a policy laboratory with an appropriate physical and environmental space, along with the recruitment of competent staff and engagement of stakeholders, it will be possible to design and formulate key solutions to address social problems. In general, the policy laboratory can become a venue for dialogue and interaction among experts who possess knowledge of various dimensions of major societal challenges.

Keywords: Public problem, public issue, policy-making, policy laboratory, policy design, policy implementation, Center for Strategic Studies

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1. Introduction

The contemporary evolution of public governance systems has highlighted the growing complexity of policy environments, which are increasingly influenced by dynamic socio-political, technological, and economic forces. Policymaking today demands innovative and systemic mechanisms that move beyond traditional bureaucratic paradigms and trial-and-error approaches in decision-making [1]. As governments face multidimensional challenges—ranging from social inequality to technological disruption—the need for institutional mechanisms capable of integrating evidence, stakeholder collaboration, and adaptive learning has become paramount. One such mechanism is the policy laboratory, a modern governance

innovation designed to create an interactive, evidence-based, and experimental platform for developing and testing public policies before their full-scale implementation [2].

In the Iranian context, where policymaking processes often suffer from fragmentation, weak coordination among governmental agencies, and inadequate feedback systems, the establishment of policy laboratories offers a transformative opportunity to bridge research and policy practice [3]. The conceptualization of such laboratories draws upon a wide body of international and domestic research that recognizes the transition from traditional, hierarchical models of governance toward networked and participatory systems [4]. As governments increasingly adopt open, data-driven, and collaborative models, the



concept of a policy lab emerges as a structured environment in which policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders can collectively simulate, analyze, and refine solutions to complex societal problems [5].

In the last decade, the role of policy experimentation in governance has expanded substantially, reflecting a shift toward evidence-informed and adaptive policymaking. The global literature identifies the significance of experimental governance as a response to uncertainty and complexity inherent in modern policy challenges [6]. Digital transformation and the rise of artificial intelligence have further enhanced the capacity of governments to gather, analyze, and apply data to policy decisions, thereby enabling a more flexible and data-centric public sector [7]. The digitalization of public administration facilitates rapid learning loops, enhances transparency, and promotes citizen participation—all of which are central to the ethos of policy laboratories [6].

The theoretical foundations of policy laboratories in Iran are rooted in the framework of “rational decision scene arrangement,” a concept that aims to mitigate the inefficiencies of trial-and-error policy processes through systematic experimentation and stakeholder inclusion [1]. According to Pour Ezzat and Hashemi Kasvaei, the starting point of policy innovation must lie in the recognition of the public problem, which serves as the first analytical unit of policymaking [8]. This recognition enables the transformation of individual or institutional issues into public challenges warranting governmental response. By adopting a systemic approach to policy problem definition, laboratories can serve as controlled spaces for analyzing causal relationships, stakeholder dynamics, and potential unintended consequences [9].

Moreover, modern governance theories emphasize the necessity of networked interactions among actors across governmental, civil, and private sectors in the policy process [10]. Such interactions facilitate knowledge sharing, collective reasoning, and co-production of policy solutions. This network-based perspective aligns with the idea of open government, which emphasizes transparency, participation, and collaboration as essential principles for effective policymaking [5]. In this context, the policy laboratory serves not only as a research mechanism but also as a democratic arena where policy ideas are tested, refined, and legitimized through deliberative engagement with diverse stakeholders.

The Iranian administrative system, however, faces significant barriers to implementing such collaborative

frameworks. Issues such as bureaucratic inertia, overlapping institutional mandates, and insufficient coordination have long been identified as impediments to the successful execution of public policies [11]. The presence of these challenges underscores the urgent need for innovative policy infrastructures that can enhance agility, accountability, and coordination among decision-makers. In response to these challenges, scholars such as Amiri et al. have emphasized the importance of understanding the essence of public policies as manifestations of national decision-making responsibility, calling for a shift toward scientifically informed and ethically grounded governance structures [12].

The dynamic interplay between socio-political and technological changes necessitates a redefinition of the policymaker’s role as an adaptive learner and systems thinker rather than a mere regulator [13]. The imperial presidential systems and their centralization of authority, as Park notes, often hinder the emergence of participatory and distributed governance structures. Therefore, designing a policy laboratory for Iran’s strategic policy centers, such as the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency, represents a critical step toward institutionalizing a culture of experimentation and participatory analysis in national governance. By doing so, policymakers can balance central control with decentralized innovation, ensuring both legitimacy and efficiency in public decision-making.

In the broader global context, policy laboratories have proven effective in areas such as health, education, and environmental management by applying design thinking, simulation modeling, and collaborative foresight to real-world governance issues [14, 15]. For instance, Sukarno’s study on regional development planning in Indonesia demonstrates how local policy labs can improve planning quality by integrating community feedback and aligning programs with regional priorities. Similarly, Saraan’s investigation into the Medan City government’s health policy showcases how participatory experimentation in health services can enhance transparency and service quality through collaborative policymaking. These international experiences illustrate that policy laboratories can act as innovation incubators, fostering adaptive governance and resilience in complex socio-political systems.

Within Iran, the establishment of such laboratories is expected to address critical governance deficits by integrating policy research, experimentation, and feedback mechanisms into the executive decision-making process [1]. The emphasis on ethical policymaking further highlights the need to ensure that policy experiments respect societal

values, cultural norms, and the moral dimensions of governance [16]. Ethical awareness not only legitimizes public policy but also safeguards it against instrumentalism and technocratic excess.

From an organizational perspective, creativity and innovation are indispensable components of successful policy laboratories. As Ranjbarian argues, creativity serves as a foundation for institutional adaptation and sustainability within dynamic environments [17]. Likewise, Pour Ezzat and Rahmani emphasize the importance of policy packages—integrated sets of coordinated measures that collectively address the complexities of public issues [18]. The policy laboratory, therefore, provides a structured mechanism for developing and testing such packages under controlled yet realistic conditions before they are scaled up to the national level.

In practical terms, the design of a policy laboratory involves multiple interdependent dimensions, including organizational structure, data infrastructure, human capital, and technological readiness. The effective integration of digital platforms is particularly crucial for creating virtual collaboration spaces that enable real-time analysis and stakeholder engagement [6]. The use of data analytics, simulation tools, and machine learning within these laboratories allows for the anticipation of policy outcomes, the evaluation of alternatives, and the identification of systemic interdependencies [7]. Such digital integration transforms the policy laboratory into a smart governance ecosystem, capable of continuous learning and adaptation in response to evolving social and economic conditions.

Furthermore, the contextual realities of Iranian governance demand that these laboratories function within the political, legal, and cultural frameworks of the country [19]. As noted by Hāfez al-Kutub, social costs and bargaining dynamics often shape institutional behavior, underscoring the importance of modeling complex interactions among state actors, private entities, and citizens in the policy process. Incorporating these realities into the laboratory's operational framework ensures that the experimentation process remains grounded in contextual relevance while maintaining scientific rigor.

Equally, the institutionalization of policy laboratories requires trained professionals who are capable of navigating the interface between theory and practice. This aligns with Pour Ezzat's earlier emphasis on prioritizing long-term research initiatives in management and governance as a basis for informed decision-making [3]. Developing human capital with multidisciplinary expertise in data science,

policy design, behavioral economics, and systems analysis is essential for sustaining the functionality of such laboratories [20]. Moreover, as Nademi and Shirzadi highlight, social mobility and inclusivity play crucial roles in shaping developmental policies, suggesting that participatory engagement across social strata enhances both the legitimacy and effectiveness of public policy.

Ultimately, the establishment of a policy laboratory for the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency represents a critical step toward creating a rational, transparent, and learning-oriented governance framework in Iran. Drawing on both domestic theoretical advances and international experiences, this initiative aims to institutionalize experimentation, bridge research and policy, and ensure that decision-making is informed by empirical evidence and ethical consideration. The combination of strategic foresight, stakeholder engagement, and digital innovation enables policy laboratories to function as dynamic spaces for dialogue, analysis, and reformulation of national strategies [2, 9].

In conclusion, the integration of policy laboratories within the Iranian governance architecture holds the potential to redefine public policy practice by fostering systematic learning, enhancing inter-agency collaboration, and preventing costly trial-and-error policymaking. Such laboratories will serve as institutional embodiments of experimental governance, where policymakers and researchers jointly explore pathways for sustainable, ethical, and evidence-based development. Grounded in both theoretical insight and empirical innovation, this study seeks to design a policy laboratory model suited to the Iranian context

2. Methodology

The present study adopted a qualitative and exploratory research design aimed at conceptualizing and developing a model for designing a policy laboratory tailored to the needs of the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency. This design was selected due to the novelty of the subject and the absence of comprehensive models in the existing literature. The qualitative phase provided the opportunity to explore experts' perspectives and uncover latent conceptual relationships necessary for designing a contextualized model. The study population included experts and specialists in the fields of public policy, governance, strategic management, and innovation systems who possessed direct or indirect experience in policy design and implementation.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling with a snowball approach to ensure theoretical diversity and depth of understanding. The sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning that no new themes or categories emerged from the interviews. Participants represented a range of institutional backgrounds, including academic scholars, senior policy analysts, and practitioners from governmental and semi-governmental organizations, ensuring that the data reflected multiple perspectives on the design and operationalization of policy laboratories within the Iranian governance context.

Data collection relied primarily on two qualitative tools: note-taking (fiches) and semi-structured interviews. The initial phase involved an extensive review of theoretical foundations, prior studies, and international experiences related to policy laboratories, innovation in governance, and policy experimentation. Through this literature review, preliminary notes were prepared to inform the conceptual boundaries of the study and guide the development of the interview framework. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to capture rich, detailed insights from key informants. The interview guide included open-ended questions focusing on conceptual definitions, design stages, operational principles, and institutional prerequisites for policy laboratories. The flexibility of the semi-structured format allowed the researcher to probe further into emerging ideas and clarify ambiguities during the interview process. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 90 minutes and was recorded with participants' consent to ensure the accuracy of the data. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, informed consent, and voluntary participation were observed throughout the process. In total, the data gathered from both documentary sources and interviews formed the empirical foundation for the study's analytical framework and model development.

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, which is particularly suited for identifying, interpreting, and structuring patterns of meaning within qualitative datasets. The analysis followed a systematic and iterative process that began with the transcription and repeated reading of interview data to gain familiarity with the content. The initial coding phase involved identifying key concepts and ideas related to the establishment and design of policy laboratories. These codes were then refined and grouped into broader categories representing higher-order themes. Axial coding was used to establish relationships among these themes, linking them to theoretical constructs identified in the literature review. The final stage, selective coding, led to the synthesis of an integrated framework describing the antecedents, stages, structural design, and outcomes of a policy laboratory suited to the Center for Strategic Studies. To ensure credibility and reliability, techniques such as member checking, expert validation, and triangulation between literature-derived and interview-derived data were applied. The analysis yielded four major thematic clusters: antecedents of policy laboratory design, design stages, the core structure of the policy laboratory, and the post-design outputs. This thematic synthesis provided the foundation for proposing a coherent and context-sensitive model that can facilitate evidence-informed policymaking and strategic innovation in governmental settings.

3. Findings and Results

The purpose of categorization is to establish relationships among the basic themes generated during the initial phase of theme extraction. This process is typically conducted in accordance with the main objective of the research. The organizing and basic themes derived from ten conducted interviews are presented below.

Table 1. Organizing and Basic Themes Extracted from the Interviews

Organizing Theme	Basic Themes
Necessity of Hearing the Voice of Society	Citizens' ability to exert pressure; level of social capital; public mobilization for solving national problems; considering the young and educated population in designing the policy laboratory; accounting for family dynamics; ensuring participation of all social groups; listening to underrepresented voices; considering diverse opinions and stakeholders; identifying root causes of national issues; creating understanding of public problems; establishing a virtual platform for citizens' expression.
Problem Identification and Recognition of Priority, Urgency, and Severity	Identifying roots of social unrest; recognizing challenges hindering progress; addressing past dysfunctions; determining urgency of problems; resolving national issues before crises; ensuring transparency in policy design.
Creating a Platform for Dialogue Among Parties and Guilds	Promoting inter-party dialogue; engaging guild representatives; respecting ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity among participants.

Establishing a Multidimensional Perspective Toward National Problems	Selecting representatives from diverse social and cultural backgrounds; creating national dialogue spaces; training policy specialists in various domains; appointing knowledgeable and governance-aware policy actors.
Ethical Considerations in Policy Formulation	Commitment to ethical responsibility; ensuring moral dimensions in policy design; evaluating ethical consequences; maintaining scientific and political independence; preventing political manipulation of research outcomes.
Complexity and Uncertainty in Social Domains	Interconnection of economic and social issues; loss of internal decision-making autonomy due to external pressures; acknowledging uncertainty and complexity; addressing ideological and discursive challenges in governance; considering global influences; promoting contextual awareness at national and international levels.
Physical Space of the Policy Laboratory	Designing inclusive and creative physical spaces; ensuring hardware and software resources; providing comfort and flexibility; creating environments conducive to creativity and collaboration.
Location of the Policy Laboratory	Maintaining a calm and green environment; providing relaxation and recreational areas; ensuring safety, autonomy, and comfort; enabling both formal and informal communication spaces; situating laboratories in universities and science parks.
Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure	Establishing a data center of interdisciplinary thinkers; employing AI, learning, and automated systems; integrating problem-solving and self-correcting technologies; using simulation systems and high-performance computing resources.
National Culture and Political System	Aligning implementation with Iran's political economy and legal system; recognizing the influence of cultural and political context on policy identification, analysis, and response.
Policy Laboratory Actors	Inclusion of hybrid personalities with political and scientific literacy; strong communication skills; expertise and experience; avoiding bias and ideological rigidity; fostering scientific understanding; identifying and selecting elite actors; promoting strategic thinking and foresight; ensuring flexibility; enhancing collaboration among internal and external actors.
Policy Laboratory Stakeholders	Identifying and categorizing all stakeholder groups involved in policymaking and implementation.
Interaction Between Policy Experts and Specialists in Other Fields	Avoiding self-interest and partisanship; facilitating access to experts across domains; embracing multiple viewpoints; encouraging multidisciplinary collaboration; involving citizens, IT, and statistical experts.
Knowledge Acquisition	Connecting with international researchers; accessing global research databases; adopting advanced policy models and successful international experiences.
Access to Required and Existing Data	Establishing a national data repository; promoting data sharing and transparency; utilizing diverse data sources; leveraging new technologies like data science and behavioral studies; converting qualitative data to measurable formats; using innovative data collection methods.
Policy Laboratory Programs	Ensuring transparency; comparing policy outcomes; organizing frequent policy sessions; engaging universities and think tanks; preventing brain drain; promoting participatory policymaking; maintaining confidentiality; ensuring resource adequacy; prioritizing public interests; applying evidence-based and Islamic principles.
Problem-Solving Strategies for National Issues	Developing flat and transparent policy structures; defining clear procedures and accountability systems; establishing reward and punishment mechanisms.
Policy Implementation Feasibility	Evaluating accuracy, practicality, and success requirements; conducting cost-benefit analyses; identifying implementation barriers; proposing corrective solutions; performing institutional mapping and pilot testing.
Policy Impact Analysis	Forecasting short-, medium-, and long-term effects; evaluating stakeholder benefits and losses; analyzing policies through rational and constraint-based models; identifying achievements and failures; adopting multidimensional, long-term, and foresight-based approaches; applying cost-benefit and multi-perspective analysis.
Providing Interdisciplinary Solutions	Integrating scientific and expert opinions from multiple fields; designing interdisciplinary laboratory environments; employing cross-disciplinary technologies for national problem-solving.
Policy Review and Redesign	Identifying necessary modifications; analyzing policy details; redesigning ineffective policies; incorporating stakeholder perspectives during re-evaluation.
Policy Laboratory Performance Evaluation	Conducting knowledge-based assessments; defining measurable indicators; using international evaluation models; identifying strengths and weaknesses; performing pre-, during-, and post-implementation evaluations; maintaining independence and justice-oriented approaches.
Focus on Teamwork	Applying scientific methodologies; encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration; promoting dialogue among experts; fostering diverse and inclusive teams.
Utilizing Digital Foundations and Virtual Communication with Society	Using digital platforms to connect with all social groups; engaging the diaspora; incorporating virtual components; developing digital tools for experimental policy modeling.
Supporting Governmental Governance	Implementing laboratory-approved policies; familiarizing actors with governance models; involving experts from key governance areas; strengthening institutional relationships with government bodies.
Enhancing Policy Design	Producing comprehensive reports; presenting stakeholder viewpoints; identifying control factors; generating policy proposals, dashboards, and evaluation programs; validating and quantifying outputs; offering analytical and systemic results.
Accelerating Governance Processes	Promoting agility and responsiveness among policy actors during policy formulation.
Preventing Waste of Time and Resources	Estimating long-term and multidimensional costs; developing alternative low-cost policies; ensuring efficient, synergistic policy processes; minimizing financial and social expenses; maximizing overall benefits and resource efficiency.

The stage of selecting global themes consists of the process of identifying, categorizing, and systematically

linking major categories with other related classifications, validating these relationships, and refining or expanding

categories that require further development. The selection of global themes was based on the results obtained from extracting the basic and organizing themes and represents the main phase of theory construction.

This model comprises four main dimensions: antecedents of policy laboratory design, stages of policy laboratory design, the design of the policy laboratory itself, and post-design outcomes of the policy laboratory. In the dimension of antecedents of policy laboratory design, four components were identified, including causal conditions, contextual factors, intervening factors, and laboratory functions.

The causal conditions component includes indicators such as the necessity of hearing the voice of society, creating a foundation for dialogue between political parties and professional associations, providing a multidimensional perspective, emphasizing ethical considerations, and addressing complexity and uncertainty in social domains.

The contextual factors component includes indicators such as information and communication technology infrastructure, culture and political system, knowledge acquisition, and access to required or existing data.

The intervening factors component includes indicators such as the actors of the policy laboratory, the stakeholders of the laboratory, and the interaction between policy experts and specialists in other fields.

The laboratory functions component includes indicators such as policy impact analysis, providing interdisciplinary solutions, revising and redesigning existing policies, diagnosing problems through the policy laboratory, and identifying the urgency and intensity of problems.

In the dimension of stages of policy laboratory design, the components related to identifying the need for a laboratory are addressed through the following questions:

1. Is a policy laboratory necessary?
2. What type of policy laboratory is required?

In this context, factors such as identifying challenges that hinder laboratory design, assessing existing capacities for establishing a laboratory, securing resources, planning and budgeting for the establishment, selecting the founding organization or institution, designing the physical space, obtaining legal permissions in accordance with national administrative structures, forming a specialized team and employing necessary human resources, utilizing digital infrastructures and virtual environments, conducting feasibility studies for policy implementation, and continuously evaluating the laboratory's performance were all taken into account.

In the dimension of policy laboratory design, special attention was given to customizing different types of policy laboratories, including:

1. Laboratory for prioritizing public issues;
2. Laboratory for public sector innovation and creativity;
3. Laboratory for policy dissemination and learning;
4. Laboratory for data-driven and evidence-based policymaking;
5. Laboratory for testing various capacities and experimental domains.

This dimension also encompassed the determination of operational steps and necessary tools, structuring the laboratory's programs and vision, and developing practical strategies for addressing national problems.

In the dimension of post-design outcomes of the policy laboratory, two main components—specialized and general—were identified.

The specialized component includes indicators such as a dashboard for prioritizing issues, emphasis on innovative policymaking, comparative studies and policy learning, evidence-based and data-driven policy development, and enhancement of government capacity.

The general component includes indicators such as supporting governmental governance, improving policy design, enhancing agility in governance processes, preventing waste of time and resources, and educating and training specialists and policymakers in this field.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this qualitative and exploratory study, which aimed to design a policy laboratory model for the Center for Strategic Studies of the Presidency, revealed a four-dimensional framework comprising antecedents, design stages, structural components, and post-design outcomes of the policy laboratory. Each dimension represents a key pillar of a systemic approach to evidence-based and participatory policymaking, consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of policy system design and adaptive governance. The first dimension—antecedents of policy laboratory design—highlighted causal, contextual, and intervening factors, as well as the essential functions of the laboratory. This dimension confirms that policy laboratories emerge not merely from administrative need but from broader social, ethical, and technological imperatives that demand new modes of rational decision-making and civic inclusion [1].

The findings underscore that one of the most significant causal factors driving the establishment of a policy laboratory is the necessity of hearing the voice of society. This aligns with Pour Ezzat and Hashemi Kasvaei's conceptualization of the "public problem" as the foundational challenge of governance, where the legitimacy of policy formulation depends on the accurate recognition and interpretation of citizens' needs and collective concerns [8]. The study found that public participation, stakeholder diversity, and ethical sensitivity form the moral infrastructure upon which policy experimentation must rest. This is consistent with Amiri et al.'s argument that public policymaking in Iran must be understood as an ethical and accountable process grounded in the imputability of policymakers and the collective responsibility of the state [12]. Similarly, Hosseini Motlagh et al. emphasized that the infusion of ethical norms into organizational innovation processes enhances trust and legitimacy—both indispensable for the operation of a policy laboratory [16].

The study's results also demonstrated that complexity and uncertainty in social systems are critical motivators for adopting policy laboratories. These laboratories act as "safe spaces" for trialing policy prototypes and anticipating unintended outcomes before full implementation. This finding is strongly aligned with international studies emphasizing adaptive governance and experimental policymaking as responses to the unpredictability of socio-political environments [2, 6]. For instance, Valle-Cruz's analysis of the transformation of the policy cycle into an innovation-driven process highlights the necessity of continuous feedback loops, agile adaptation, and systemic learning within policy institutions—principles also observed in the current study.

Furthermore, the study identified information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure as a key contextual enabler. The existence of robust digital infrastructures—such as data centers, artificial intelligence applications, and simulation systems—was found to be essential for the operation of policy laboratories. This mirrors findings by Silva et al., who demonstrated that agile project management in government software development enhances the responsiveness and transparency of public service delivery [7]. In the same vein, Zhou and Feng confirmed that the integration of digitalization and resource management in public systems significantly boosts governmental efficiency, particularly by transforming traditional administrative models into data-driven ecosystems [6].

The second dimension of the study—stages of policy laboratory design—illustrated a structured pathway for institutionalizing a laboratory environment within Iran's governance architecture. This process involves identifying the need for experimentation, securing financial and human resources, designing a physical and digital infrastructure, and establishing performance evaluation mechanisms. These findings are in line with Pour Ezzat's framework for rational decision scene arrangement, which emphasizes the necessity of a systematic, pre-tested approach to policymaking to avoid trial-and-error narratives in governance [1]. By embedding experimental mechanisms into the policy process, policymakers can identify bottlenecks, evaluate competing alternatives, and develop strategic foresight.

Comparative studies further support this result. For example, Sukarno et al. found that the application of structured planning laboratories within regional development agencies in Indonesia improved interdepartmental coordination and enhanced the coherence of policy implementation [15]. Similarly, Saraan et al.'s case study on Medan City's public health services demonstrated that collaborative experimentation between policymakers and citizens significantly improved the quality and adaptability of service policies [14]. Together, these findings reinforce the universality of policy laboratories as mechanisms of adaptive learning that transcend national boundaries and institutional traditions.

The design dimension of the model—focusing on the architecture, types, and operational mechanisms of policy laboratories—further emphasizes specialization as a success factor. The study's proposed typology included innovation laboratories, data and evidence-based laboratories, public issue prioritization laboratories, and cross-sectoral testing environments. This typology corresponds to Howlett and Ramesh's conceptualization of policymaking as a continuous and iterative process of agenda-setting, formulation, implementation, and feedback [4]. The inclusion of specialized labs reflects an understanding that public policies cannot be addressed through monolithic institutions but require diversified and adaptive structures tailored to specific domains of governance.

This finding is also consistent with global shifts toward networked and open government paradigms. As Mohammadi et al. demonstrated in their design of an open government policy model, institutional transparency, data accessibility, and citizen collaboration are crucial for enhancing trust and innovation in public decision-making [5]. The integration of these principles into the Iranian policy

laboratory model reflects a move toward democratizing the policymaking process, thereby transforming governance from a bureaucratic hierarchy into a collaborative ecosystem.

The study's fourth dimension—post-design outcomes—revealed two principal categories: specialized and general outcomes. Specialized outcomes include the creation of policy dashboards, development of innovative policy frameworks, and institutionalization of comparative learning for evidence-based policymaking. General outcomes, on the other hand, encompass improvements in governance agility, reduction of time and cost inefficiencies, and enhancement of policymaker training. These results echo Pour Ezzat and Rahmani's argument that policy formulation must be conceptualized as a package integrating knowledge production, implementation readiness, and performance evaluation [18]. Likewise, Zolfagharzadeh and Karimian's typology of public policy processes reinforces the necessity of integrated models that bridge theory and practice, ensuring that policy instruments are systematically linked to institutional learning mechanisms [9].

The research further demonstrated that ethical, cultural, and political considerations play a decisive role in the success of policy laboratories. The findings revealed that laboratories grounded in ethical responsibility and independence from political manipulation are more likely to achieve long-term credibility and effectiveness. This conclusion aligns with Hāfēz al-Kutub's work on modeling institutional behavior under social cost pressures, which argues that ethical accountability in policy behavior can stabilize stakeholder relations and prevent the distortion of public priorities [19]. Similarly, Abedali's identification of bureaucratic bottlenecks in Iranian public policy implementation underscores the need for transparent and depoliticized mechanisms for experimentation and reform [11].

A further alignment is observed with Park's analysis of the imperial presidential system, which cautions that overcentralized authority in governance often suppresses institutional learning and innovation [13]. The decentralized, participatory structure proposed in this study's model thus offers a corrective to such tendencies, fostering a balance between strategic control and policy pluralism. Moreover, the study found that cultural and contextual alignment—respecting the national political system, legal traditions, and societal norms—is essential for the effective adaptation of the policy laboratory framework. This resonates with Nademi and Shirzadi's findings that social mobility and

cultural inclusivity are vital drivers of developmental policymaking in Iran [20].

Creativity and innovation, identified as structural enablers in the present study, also parallel Ranjbarian's assertion that innovation is not a mere organizational trait but a strategic necessity for institutional renewal [17]. Policy laboratories, by institutionalizing creativity, transform the traditionally rigid policy process into a dynamic and iterative system of learning. This interpretation is reinforced by Jahandideh et al.'s model of networked policymaking in national tourism, which found that horizontal linkages and collective design practices generate more resilient and adaptive policy systems [10].

The present study, therefore, contributes to the theoretical and practical discourse on governance innovation by integrating both Iranian and international perspectives. It confirms that the establishment of a policy laboratory within the Center for Strategic Studies can bridge the gap between academic research, policymaking practice, and stakeholder engagement. This finding aligns with Pour Ezzat's long-standing emphasis on institutionalizing rational decision-making environments to ensure that national governance evolves beyond reactionary models [3]. By embedding data, deliberation, and design thinking into the policymaking ecosystem, Iran's governance system can transition toward a future-oriented, evidence-based paradigm that is both adaptive and ethically grounded.

Limitations

Despite its theoretical and practical contributions, this study faced several limitations. First, due to its qualitative nature, the findings are context-specific and may not fully generalize to other institutional environments beyond the Center for Strategic Studies. The reliance on expert interviews, while valuable for in-depth understanding, limits the inclusion of broader stakeholder perspectives such as citizens, civil society organizations, and private sector actors. Additionally, the conceptual model, although comprehensive, has not yet been empirically tested through implementation in a real policy environment. The absence of longitudinal data on laboratory performance also restricts the ability to evaluate the long-term sustainability and adaptability of the proposed model. Finally, political and administrative constraints within Iran's public sector may pose challenges to the practical establishment and operation of such laboratories, particularly in securing inter-agency cooperation and policy continuity.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should focus on empirically validating the proposed model through pilot implementation in specific policy domains, such as health, education, or environmental management. Comparative studies between Iranian policy laboratories and international counterparts could provide deeper insights into best practices, institutional barriers, and cultural adaptations. Quantitative approaches—such as network analysis, system dynamics modeling, or experimental policy evaluation—could complement the qualitative findings of this study. Moreover, examining the role of digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and behavioral data analytics in the functioning of policy laboratories would further enhance understanding of their operational efficiency. Researchers are also encouraged to investigate the political economy of policy innovation, exploring how institutional incentives, leadership styles, and public trust affect the sustainability of experimental governance systems.

Suggestions for Practice

From a practical perspective, policymakers should prioritize the institutionalization of policy laboratories within national governance structures by establishing formal mandates, inter-organizational coordination mechanisms, and dedicated funding frameworks. The development of interdisciplinary training programs for policymakers, data scientists, and social researchers is essential to build the human capital required for running such laboratories. Moreover, integrating public participation mechanisms—both physical and digital—can enhance legitimacy and responsiveness in policymaking. The Center for Strategic Studies should position the policy laboratory as a hub for policy innovation, facilitating dialogue among ministries, research institutions, and civil society. Finally, a strong emphasis must be placed on ethical governance, ensuring that experimentation in policy remains transparent, inclusive, and aligned with public values and long-term national interests.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

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Declaration of Interest

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All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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