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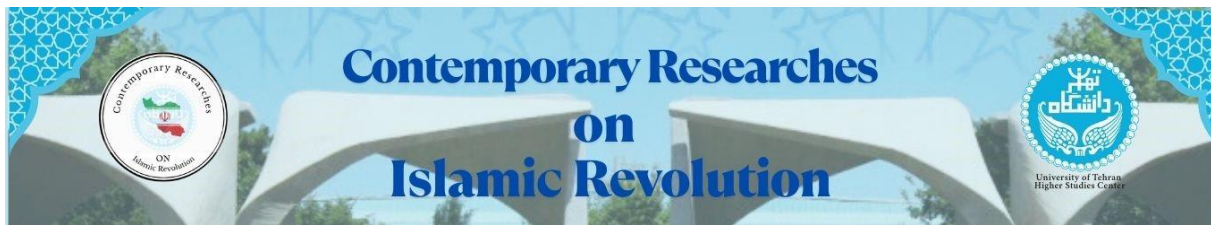


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# Imam Khomeini's Dynamic Interpretation of the Holy Quran and the Islamic Revolution of Iran

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** Islam, with its focus on the sacred text and divine revelation of the Holy Quran, continues to expand as a leading school of thought in the world today. The source of the transformation in Quranic studies in the contemporary world was the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which was initiated by Imam Khomeini in the 1970s and drastically altered the course of Quranic studies worldwide in an unprecedented manner. The present study aims to answer the question of how the position of the Quran is analyzed within the Islamic Republic of Iran's system and what special services the Islamic Republic's institutions provide for the sanctity of the Holy Quran.

**Method:** This was developed based on descriptive-analytical research methods and library documentation.

**Results:** The Holy Quran serves as the foundation for the thoughts and perspectives of Imam Khomeini, and his dynamic interpretation and revolutionary view of the Holy Quran are clearly manifested in numerous levels and sectors of the structures of the Islamic Revolution system of Iran.

**Conclusions:** A comparative look at Islamic republics around the world shows that the Islamic Republic of Iran, in formulating its constitution, made the most use of the Holy Quran and the narrations of the Ahl al-Bayt in various social, political, and familial aspects, establishing public, promotional, and specialized institutions at the highest levels of government to expound and implement Quranic teachings.

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## **Introduction**

The Holy Quran, revealed over 23 years, presented a set of moral, social, and political teachings to ensure human prosperity in this world and the hereafter, but from the very beginning, it faced resistance from the opponents of truth and deceit. The rational and logical explanation of Islamic programs by the impeccable Imams clashed with obstructions and opposition to enlightenments and arguments of divine teachings, gradually creating two major currents within Islamic governance: The pure and dynamic Islamic movement, which is centered on monotheism, rationality, opposition to oppression, truth-seeking, and justice, brought about the Alawi Islam. Secondly, the populist movement, which supports individual and family interests and exploits the masses through the preservation of individual and partisan interests and the development and spread of hypocrisy and ignorance, organized the Umayyad Islam. Insults, slander, defamation, and the creation of factions among the ignorant and the degradation of scholars, especially the creation of false employment for the masses, such as the diversion of thoughts from Quranic teachings to peripheral sciences of the Holy Quran, literature, and poetry, were only part of the Umayyad government's actions against the verses of the Holy Quran and the claimants of knowledge, reason, fairness, and the rights of the deprived in society, and the natural result was the preservation of the interests of capitalists, the powerful, and their lackeys in society and the elimination of the ideals of equality, equity, and the rule of the righteous in society. The reform movement initiated by Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asadābādī two centuries ago aimed to return to Quranic teachings and apply lofty Quranic teachings to create a Quranic value-based governance in the world, and the tireless efforts of Rashīd Riḍā, Muḥammad ‘Abduh, and Sayyid Quṭb undoubtedly created a leap in the socialization and promotion of the Quran, and in the final decades of the past century, the religious and Quranic-centered uprising in Iran, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, established Quranic governance in the political structure of the republic, which has continued to progress and thrive in the Islamic world ever since. The aim of this research is to explain and introduce the position of the verses and narratives in the constitution as the most fundamental layers in the formation of the Islamic system.

## **1. Method**

This was developed based on descriptive-analytical research methods and library documentation.

## **2. Islam as the Foremost of Religions**

The Holy Quran, as the foremost of heavenly books (al-Mā'idah: 48) and the final version of revelation (al-An'ām: 115), has played the most significant role in the recent century in the global discourse among religions. According to the latest research from the Pew Research Center<sup>1</sup>, out of the approximately 7.5 billion people in the world today, about 84% are religious, with Christians, at around 2.3 billion (equivalent to 31.2%), comprising the largest religious group. Islam follows with 1.8 billion (24.1%) in second place, and Hinduism with 1.1 billion and Buddhism with 500 million people are in the subsequent ranks.

However, regarding the global developments and statistics, the presence of Islam and the Holy Quran has shown significant and increasing quantitative and qualitative growth compared to other religions. On one hand, the relative growth of the Muslim population in recent decades is more than double the average population growth rate of the world, and between 2015 and 2060, it is estimated that about 32% will be added to the world's population, while the world's Muslim population will experience a 70% growth during this same period (26% more than Christianity).

This research shows that, firstly, followers of Islam are on average seven years younger than followers of other major religions, thus a larger population of Muslims will be in the reproductive age. Secondly, Muslims have more children than other religious minorities, with the average Muslim woman having 3.1 children, while women of other religions have 2.3 children under the best circumstances. Thirdly, statistics indicate that over time, followers of Christianity will either gravitate towards other religions or become non-religious. Fourthly, although in the coming years, 40 million people will lean towards Christianity, it is predicted that 106 million people will leave this religion. Consequently, from a quantitative perspective,

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<sup>1</sup>. Pew Research Center: an American think tank based in Washington, D.C. It provides information about issues, attitudes and trends shaping the United States and the world. Cf. [PewResearch.org](http://PewResearch.org) and <http://pewresearch.org/docs/?DocID=148>



Islam is projected to become the dominant religion of the world in about fifty years, taking the lead from Christianity in the table of religious adherents.

### 3. Iran's Islamic Revolution as the Turning Point of Transformation in Quranic Studies

From a qualitative perspective, the Holy Quran, which was revitalized by the great reformer of the Islamic world, *Sayyid Jamāl ad-Dīn Asadābādī* (<http://ensani.ir/fa/article/70259>) (1838-1896), with the aim of dispelling the dust of oppression and historical superstitions from the face of the Quran and presenting a modern and social interpretation of the Quran, has taken stronger and more solid steps day by day in recent centuries by its followers' intellectual school. This progress has been made from the enlightenment of *Ḥasan al-Bannā* (1906-1949), *Muḥammad ‘Abduh* (1847-1905), *Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā* (1865-1935), *Sayyid Quṭb* (1906-1966), *‘Allāma Faḍlullāh* (1935-2010), Martyr *Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Ṣadr* (1313-1359), and *Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥakīm* (1939-2003) to the founder of the Quranic system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-1989), who distinguished and transformed the last quarter of the twentieth century with the pure teachings of the Quran and presented a new wave of Islam to the Islamic world with a fresh interpretation of the Holy Quran, doubling the growth of global Islam.

### 4. Waves of Imam's Renewal interpretation from the Holy Quran

The Renewal interpretation of the Imam Khomeini (2014 AD/1384 SH) from the Holy Quran, which was based on a comprehensive understanding and deep knowledge of the Quranic teachings, was presented so powerfully, logically, and rationally that it led to the creation of several significant waves in the contemporary world (Encyclopedia of Imam Khomeini, Vol. 1, pp. 311-85). The political and social characteristics of the Imam's perspective include: the centrality of Muslim unity (*Āli ‘Imrān*: 103), *Nafyi Sabīl* (*al-Nisā’*: 141), Fight Against Arrogance (*al-Ḥajj*: 39-40, *al-Nisā’*: 75, *al-A‘rāf*: 103, 129, 137, *Ṭāhā*: 111, *Hūd*: 18), Fight Against Arrogance (*al-Baqarah*: 247, *al-Fath*: 29, *al-Tawbah*: 12, *al-Ṣāffāt*: 25), independence-seeking (*Hūd*: 113, *Nemooneh*: 2, 595 and 9, 260 and *Majma‘ al-Bayān*: 9, 213), justice-centered (*al-Naḥl*: 90, *al-Mā‘idah*: 8, *al-Ḥadīd*: 25), benevolence and pursuit of

peace (al-Anfāl: 61, al-Baqarah: 205 and 208, al-Hujūrāt: 9), culture of resistance and Jihad<sup>2</sup>, and so on. Although each of these characteristics requires detailed and independent research and is beyond the scope of our subject matter, they can be seen from a comprehensive perspective as representing a general perspective on the intellectual and operational transformations of the Quranic teachings in recent decades:

#### **4.1. First wave**

Going beyond traditional and literal views of the Quranic verses (Imam Khomeini, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 194) and promoting a dynamic, new, joyful, creative, and purposeful rational, mystical, and social thinking, invigorating, creative and purposeful (Erfan, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 162) not only at the level of Iran and the region, but also to the distant horizons of the Islamic world.<sup>3</sup>

This intellectual revolution of Imam Khomeini, which was the result of his lifelong struggle, effort, and contemplation in the religious seminaries, led to the following:

Firstly: "The seemingly reformist and purifying efforts of many Muslim intellectuals, who merely focused on the outward and superficial aspects of the Quranic verses within the framework of the Umayyad thought of their time, could lead to an explosion of light and awakening in the perspectives of nations and elites, illuminating the radiant stars of hope and the fervor of revolutionary spirit in the hearts of the oppressed in the Islamic world. In this regard, a wide variety of diverse theories emerged worldwide, the extent and depth of which are not easily measurable and analyzable by researchers. The examination of the phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution and the criticisms of theorists such as Michel Foucault (1977 AD/1357 SH: 42), John Foran (<http://ensani.ir/fa/article/229853>), Huntington (<https://maghalejoo.com/doc/3741>), John L. Esposito (2003 AD/1382 SH: 325, and Francis Fukuyama (<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/others-note?id=40865>) (to whom Imam Khomeini referred in his message on the occasion of the seizure of the American spy den, and whose book A

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<sup>2</sup>. There are at least seventeen suras of the Holy Quran, including Baqarah, Āli 'Imrān, Nisā', Mā'idah, Anfāl, Tawbah, Nahl, Hajj, Naml, Ahzāb, Shurā, Muḥammad, Fath, Ḥadīd, Ḥashr, Mumtaḥanah and Saff, and there are nearly 400 verses in relationship with Jihad has been revealed.

Cf. <https://www.sid.ir/fa/journal/ViewPaper.aspx?id=155989>

<sup>3</sup>. In the most remote 3000 islands of Indonesia and in many countries of the African continent, they named their children Ruhollah. Also, martyre Motahari Foundation was established in Bandung, Indonesia, with thousands of students and educational staff, by Dr. Jalaluddin Rahmat, a figure interested in the Imam-centered Qur'an school in the sixties, who pioneered the teaching of reciting the Holy Prophet at the national level and regional.

beginning on an ending is also worth reading in this regard) is very noteworthy in this arena, which is the center of discourse on the Holy Quran in the Islamic school."

Secondly, Imam's intellectual revolution expanded the scientific research space for his disciples and great researchers, enabling them to deepen their research and explore the means of realizing political and revolutionary Islam. This expansion was carried out by intellectuals and thinkers at the national and international levels<sup>4</sup>, and a substantial volume of fundamental research in this area was presented to the world.

Establishment of hundreds of colleges and departments, and the annual enrollment of thousands of students in the fields of Quranic sciences, exegesis, and interpretation at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels, the compilation of about 40 interpretations after the Islamic Revolution with a social, political, and cultural approach, and the launch of hundreds of research-promotion journals in the field of the Holy Quran in multiple languages, as well as more than five thousand research-promotion institutions (Abu Lehya, 2020: 302), are considered the fruits of this wave of Imam's intellectual revolution.

Thirdly, the revolutionary and incendiary thinking and interpretation of Imam Khomeini led to the redirection of many Orientalist currents and thoughts that had allocated their research focus to historical and scientific matters, with the expansion of activities and quantitative proliferation, towards confronting anti-arrogance and anti-imperialist ideologies and organizing themselves accordingly. This included the establishment of Islamic studies departments and groups, Shia studies chairs, and Quranic studies in Tel Aviv<sup>5</sup>, Germany, England, and elsewhere, as well as the activation of strategic institutions such as RAND

(<https://www.rand.org>; <http://nahad.ir/index.jsp?fkeyid=&siteid=51&pageid=3129&newsview=15437>) and its counterparts in Islamic countries, especially in the Persian Gulf

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<sup>4</sup>. Cf. The book of Quran and Hadith study and research centers in Iran and the world by the author, Dar al-Hadith Publications, 2019/1399.

<sup>5</sup>. Tel Aviv University has a department of Islamic studies, Shia studies and educational courses and operates at undergraduate, masters and doctoral levels. The research vice-chancellor of this university is also active in holding conferences, seminars and research workshops, and prominent professors such as: Robin Avery, Mir Litvak, David Manashri, Uzi Rabi, Miri Shafer, Lee Kinberg, Israel Gershoni, Leon Shelf and... are active in it. <https://hawzah.net/fa/Magazine/View/4473/4486/34779/Studies-of-Islam-and-Shi'ism-in-Tel-Aviv-University>.

region (<https://www.quora.com/How-do-peaceful-Muslims-support-their-peaceful-view-of-Islam-from-the-passages-in-the-Quran>).

## 4.2. The second wave

Imam's renewal interpretation of the Holy Quran resulted in the awakening of nations and the confrontation with the ruling system, disrupting the tranquility of colonial powers in the region and the world.

Breaking the power and dominance of America in the eyes of the deprived and oppressed, removing its interests from Iran, and shaking its interests in other countries, focusing on the Zionist enemy and unwavering support for the oppressed people of Palestine, undermining dependent governments, and most importantly, operationalizing the culture of Quranic resistance and steadfastness (<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=1140>) among Muslim people, were all results of the Quran-centered approach of the Imam (Cf. [www.imam-khomeini.ir/fa/n14653](http://www.imam-khomeini.ir/fa/n14653); Mirqaderi and Kiyani, n.d.: 1, 69). In a glance, the anti-Quranic efforts of the ruling system in this regard included: boycotting and distorting news and information that introduced the principles and foundations of the pure and revolutionary Islamic Quran from the Imam and the esteemed leader and cultural and scientific institutions in the country to the Islamic world. In this field, the Quranic positions and perspectives of the Islamic Republic of Iran are under attack from two sides:

1. from the front of arrogance and the ruling system,
2. from the side of the ruling and closed-minded authorities and Salafists.

The ruling system, to prevent the spread of the revolutionary interpretation of the Holy Quran and the interpretations of the Imam and the leader, used all military, political, economic, and cultural capacities and continues to impose oppressive sanctions and distortions from various dimensions, from the beginning of the revolution until today, using global and international tools. Prominent examples include the preparation of repeated UN resolutions<sup>6</sup> against Iran, allocating official budgets for overthrowing and supporting internal and external groups and institutions to confront and eliminate the revolutionary Islamic interpretation. launching

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<sup>6</sup>. Resolutions: 12170, 12205, 12211, 12613, 12957, 12959, 13059, 13224, 13382, 13553, 13572, 13509, 13599, 13606, 13608, 13622, 13628 1737, 1747, 1803, 1835, 1929, From 1357 until now.



satellite networks<sup>7</sup> using opposition and native and regional allies, and supporting the publication of books and magazines in different countries.

From the ruling authorities and closed-minded Salafi institutions within the Islamic school, there have been numerous designs, efforts, and actions against the enlightening and revolutionary interpretation of the Holy Quran, which are quite detailed and extensive. In the year 83, the Qatari newspaper "al-Rayah," which at that time hosted the sole political representation of the Zionist regime in Doha, practically unveiled the Zionist plans with the collaboration of regional mercenary writers and the support and guidance of the ruling system by writing an editorial titled "The Legitimacy of Tempering Islam with Islam." The launch of multiple satellites between the years 2001 and 2010<sup>8</sup> against Iran and Shiism, and the commissioning of the authoring of thousands of volumes of books against Iran and the Shia school to some extent exceeds the volume of anti-Shia books published from the emergence of the Shia school until before the Islamic Revolution in Iran (*al- 'Imrān, Ali ibn Muḥammad Mu'jam al-Muṣannaḑāt wal-Rudūd 'alā al-Shī'a al-Ithnā 'Asharīyyah*) and to some extent can be considered as the launch of Shia phobia (Hemmati, The Efforts of Shia Studies, [urd.ac.ir://http](http://urd.ac.ir/) dated 21/4/95). In the Islamic world (Salehi Najafabadi, n.d.: 185) and the distribution of millions of anti-awakening thought books and revolutionary interpretations, as well as support for the establishment of anti-Shia chairs in the academic centers of Islamic countries<sup>9</sup>, only a corner of their full-scale invasion is considered.

From another perspective, the effects of the waves of renewal interpretation of the Imam from the Holy Quran and the tradition of the Ahl al-Bayt are still progressing and expanding in the Islamic world and the West.

Islamic awakening in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and other regions has doubled the demands of institutions and countries from the ruling system. A serious transformation and reconsideration of Ash'ari and traditional thought has taken place in global Quranic and Islamic institutions and organizations.

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<sup>7</sup>. Between 2001 and 2010, several satellite networks have been launched with the support of the reactionary countries of the region: such as Kalameh, Noor, Al-Hawar, Zamzam, Iran International, Alwahabiyah.com.

<sup>8</sup>. Such as: MBC, Al-Arabiya, Wesal, Kalameh, Noor, Al-Ahvaz, Al-Meshkat, Al-Borhan, Dalil Haqiq al-Rafidiya and... For more information, refer to: Alwahabiyah.com

<sup>9</sup>. Since the 1970s, the book of Dr. Nasser al-Qaffari entitled: The Principles of the Shia al-Imamiyyah al-Athna Ashariyyah Religion has been officially taught in universities under the aristocracy of Saudi universities, especially in Malaysia.

### 5. Quranic and Hadith Universities at a Global Level

According to statistics provided by the Federation of the Universities of the Islamic World (FUIW), which is affiliated with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), the total number of Islamic universities is 322 universities in 32 countries. Research and education on the Quran and Hadith are offered in various ways at universities and academic centers worldwide. At a glance, these institutions can be classified into several levels:

- Countries that have established universities for the study of the Holy Quran, such as the University of the Quran and Islamic Sciences in Sudan (1990);
- Countries that have defined specific Quranic studies faculties, such as the Faculty of Quranic Sciences in Medina, the Quranic Faculty of the Academy of London, and others;
- Countries that have defined Quranic studies in the departments or specific groups of Islamic universities or academic centers in the field of humanities, such as the Department of Quranic Studies in Nigeria, Quranic Studies at the University of London (SOAS), Quranic Studies at the University of Oxford, the Department of Quranic Studies at the University of Goethe Frankfurt, Germany, and others;
- Countries that have defined Quranic studies under the faculties of humanities, literature, and religious studies at the level of individual courses or research projects. Among the recent major projects in the Western world is the Corpus Coranicum project at the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences.

It is worth mentioning that nowadays, Quranic and Hadith studies in academic centers worldwide generally focus on Ash'ari theology, peripheral and tangential aspects, rather than on the spiritual and epistemological aspects. In other words, most Islamic studies centers focus their educational and research efforts on topics such as the seven or ten readings, memorization, and on a broad level, on the acquisition of Quranic sciences such as Meccan and Medinan verses, Muḥkam and Mutashābih, Nāsikh and Mansūkh, and similar topics, without doubt, stopping on this path without epistemological and social studies is desired by colonial countries and the ruling system.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> . You can see examples of these studies and examples in countries like Sudan, Egypt and even Tunisia and other Arab countries. Because the great country of Sudan has many schools for memorizing the Qur'an in

## **6. The Quran and the Islamic Republic of Iran**

The Islamic Republic of Iran benefits from the advantages of the fourfold method of Quranic studies in the world. Firstly, it is the only country that has dedicated two important universities, the University of Quran and Hadith, and the University of Quranic Sciences and Knowledge, to the Holy Quran. Secondly, various faculties and groups in Iran specialize in Quranic sciences. Thirdly, Quranic studies are offered at all levels from elementary school to university as specific courses throughout the week. And fourthly, hundreds of major projects have been defined and dedicated to Quranic research and investigation.

Accordingly, it should be said that undoubtedly the Islamic Republic of Iran is considered the standard-bearer of pure Islam in the contemporary world. A cursory look at nearly half a century of the Islamic Revolution in Iran clearly attests to this claim. A look at the constitutional foundations and the Quranic performance of the system over the past years provides clear evidence of this matter. First, we will examine the Quranic nature of the Iranian system, and then we will delve into some of the legal provisions derived from the Holy Quran and the traditions of the impeccable Imams to further substantiate this claim.

### **6.1. The Quranic Nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran**

In the contemporary world, out of more than 50 Islamic countries, only four countries have a government system officially registered as an "Islamic Republic": Pakistan was the first country to change its name to the Islamic Republic in 1956 AD/1336 SH. Then Iran, with the victory of the Muslim people of Iran in the 1977 AD/1357 SH Revolution and a decisive 98% vote, rejected the dictatorial monarchy system of 2,500 years and positively voted the country into an "Islamic Republic," forming the second Islamic Republic system. About 30 years later, with the efforts and jihad of the Muslim people of Afghanistan, the third Islamic Republic country was officially registered in world history. All three countries are in Asia and are neighbors. The fourth Islamic Republic system in the northwest of the African continent belongs to the small country of Mauritania.

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different readings and most of the people of this land are memorizers of the Holy Qur'an and in this country, next to two rivers with abundant water, Azraq and Abyaḍ, in the city of Khartoum, and the good conditions of agriculture, but according to global statistics, they still need to reach out to the countries of the domination system to receive their daily consumption needs!

While it is true that all four countries bear the name "Islamic Republic" and their form of government is a republic with Islamic content and support for religious laws, if we pay attention to their constitution and the nature of their governance, we will see clear differences in both form and content. The recognition of the nature of a movement and a government system also takes place through various means:

"Through the individuals and groups who have carried the burden of the movement, achieved victory, and established the Islamic Republic, through the causes and roots that have provided the groundwork for the movement, through the goals pursued by that movement, through the slogans that have empowered and given life and movement to that movement, and from the perspective of the leader of the movement and the founder of a system of government.<sup>1</sup> Imam Khomeini, the great founder of the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the spiritual leader of the century, believes, "Our republic is a sign of Islam... The thoughts of the corrupt are raw sedition." (Khomeini, n.d.: 195)

The Islamic Revolution of Iran, as its name implies, is a revolution with an Islamic nature, founded, guided, and led based on Islamic principles and standards. If we look closely at the atmosphere of the people and the desires and slogans of the early years of the revolution, we will see that they were all based on the Quran and Islamic teachings. Throughout the country, from the center to the farthest border areas, religion and faith were central concerns, and no one dictated this to the people or chose slogans for them. Rather, the people themselves expressed it with their hearts and souls, based on their belief and faith in Islam, the Quran, and their leader.

Imam considers the nature of the Islamic Republic to be based on the rules and principles of Islam and Quranic teachings, with the republic as its form and structure, and Islam as its spirit and content. But it is a pure Islam, not a closed and regressive Islam! It is a comprehensive Islam, not one-dimensional! It is an Islam that values the people and their opinions, not an Islam that interprets politics as meaningless (lies, hypocrisy, self-centeredness, dictatorship, etc.)! It is an Islam that advocates justice and fairness, freedom and independence, and religious democracy. He says:

"We, who speak of an Islamic government, want a government that is both desired by the people and a government to which God Almighty says at times, "They have indeed sworn

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<sup>1</sup> . Cf. Jamaran information and news base.

allegiance to Allah" (*Innamā Yubāyi'ūnallāh*), a ruler to whom allegiance is allegiance to God. We want a divine government. We want a government that is like no other. Our wish is for a government that does not violate divine law... We want a government that is based on the law that follows the law, not a government that follows Satan." (Khomeini, n.d.: 4, 460-461)

The Islamic Revolution of Iran, under the leadership of Imam Khomeini and based on the foundations and values of the Quran and Islam, took shape. Its characteristics, such as anti-oppression, struggle against tyranny, social corruption and deviations, revival of the Islam religion and divine commandments in the country, commanding good and forbidding evil, promoting the culture of jihad and martyrdom, are among the fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which Imam Khomeini has repeatedly emphasized in his speeches, messages, and letters, all derived from the foundations of the clear religion of Islam and the Quran (Fuad, 2016 AD/1396 SH).

By referring to Imam's Sahifah and examining the goals and foundations of the Islamic Revolution expressed by him, it can be concluded that his most important goal of the revolution was the revival of the religion of Islam and the implementation of divine commandments. The Pahlavi regime sought to weaken and eradicate the foundation of Islam from the country, and the fight against this view is one of the Imam Khomeini's fundamental principles, which has a completely Quranic basis. He said in Homafaran (Army Air Force) gathering on Bahman 5th, 1357:

"Greetings to you who have recognized the value of God's blessings and have attached yourselves to the "Quran", the "Noble Quran" that guarantees the happiness of all mankind. The "Noble Quran" in the shadow of which anyone who falls, is successful in this world and the hereafter. The "Noble Quran" which recommends freedom and independence. We are all followers of the "Noble Quran" and followers of the principles and rules of Islam."

Imam Khomeini, as a Usuli jurist, considered the Quran as the most important and fundamental source of Islamic knowledge, alongside attention to reason, tradition, and consensus as sources of religious knowledge production. The Quran has not only been a source of individual and religious life but has also been of concern to Imam Khomeini in political and social matters. Imam Khomeini's political and religious movement can be considered a return to the Quran; a movement that was nourished by the Quran and sought to act on the teachings of the Quran in the political and social arena. Imam Khomeini considered



the Quran to be the source of all human knowledge and recommended that Islamic scholars also see and present the Quran in this way: "So that it becomes clear that this book (Quran) is the source of everything; from mysticism and philosophy to literature and politics. So that the uninformed do not say that mysticism and philosophy are nothing more than fabrications and fantasies, and the ascetic practices and spiritual exercises are just the work of wandering dervishes, or what does Islam have to do with politics, governance, and the administration of the country, which are the affairs of sultans, presidents, and the people of the world. Or that Islam is a religion of peace and reconciliation and is even against war and conflict with oppressors, and they use this to criticize the church of ignorance and the politicians who have brought disgrace upon the great religion of Christ." (Sahifah Noor: 20, 93)

Imam Khomeini considers the cause of the decline and backwardness of Islamic societies, and ultimately their colonization, to be the failure to act according to the values of the Quran. He believes that in addition to internal factors, colonizers have also played a role in separating the Quran from the social and political lives of Muslims. In fact, the theory of the separation of the Quran and religion from politics has been continuously raised by the preachers of Christianity and the Zionists (ibid: 95).

Imam Khomeini has emphasized many times that the Holy Quran addresses the needs of not only Muslims but all humans in political and social matters. He said, "The Quran is everything. It reforms humanity; it is a book of humanization. The Quran has everything; it has politics, jurisprudence, and philosophy. Humanity is everything, and the Quran must fulfill all its needs." (ibid: 95)

Imam Khomeini's directive to interpreters and scholars is to pay attention to the purposes of the Quran. They should derive these purposes from the Quran itself and consider them in the interpretation of every verse of this holy book. In his view, the purpose of the Quran is guidance. In their testament, Imam Khomeini declared their pride in striving to realize the purposes of the Quran and the Sunnah.

## **6.2. The Quranic-Hadith Foundations of the Iran Constitution**

Looking at the principles and articles of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is evident that the foundations of the constitution are based on the Quran and the traditions of the impeccable Imams. The constitution contains the most Quranic and traditional content. In

other words, the divine sources of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran are the Quran and the traditions of the impeccable Imams.

### **6.2.1. Quran**

The Holy Quran is the heavenly, divine, and sacred book of Muslims that has been respected and revered among Muslims since the time of the Prophet and has always been the primary source of reference for all Muslims and all existing sects for the discovery and inference of religious commandments.

### **6.2.2. Quran in the Constitution**

The Quran is considered the most important source for the drafting of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, with its theoretical foundations directly and explicitly embedded in it. The Quran is the manifestation of true Islam and the source of the dynamic and everlasting text of the happiness of humanity, presenting the principles and foundations of the strategies for a dignified life for Muslims, as well as providing a program for life and a perspective on the human approach to the world. The Quran is a source of truth and a clear spring that unites the Islamic nation as a single entity across the world, and all sects and denominations agree on this unity.

The preamble of the Constitution begins with the verse: "We have already sent Our messengers with clear evidences and sent down with them the Scripture and the balance that the people may maintain [their affairs] in justice" (al-Ḥadīd: 25) which expresses the purpose and direction of the constitutional school. Referring to the verse: "Indeed this, your religion, is one religion,<sup>[903]</sup> and I am your Lord, so worship Me," (al-Anbīyā': 92) the legislator in the preamble of the Constitution outlines the movement of the Islamic government towards the formation of a unified global community based on the Quran. In line with the consolidation of anti-oppression and people-oriented governance, the Constitution refers to the verse: "And relieves them of their burden<sup>[410]</sup> and the shackles which were upon them," (al-A'rāf:157) and for the purpose of explaining the management of institutions and the administration of the system by worthy and righteous leaders, it refers to the verse: "The land [of Paradise] is inherited by My righteous servants." (al-Anbīyā':105)

In the preamble of the Constitution in the section on the form of government in Islam, the verse: "And to Allāh belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and to Allāh is the destination" (al-Nūr: 42) is used to express submission to spirituality and movement towards divine proximity. To articulate the realization of the government of the oppressed, the Constitution refers to the verse: "And We wanted to confer favor upon those who were oppressed in the land and make them leaders and make them inheritors." (al-Qaṣaṣ: 5) The emphasis on the need for the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitutional system to have well-equipped military forces with a religious mission, namely jihad in the path of God and the struggle for the expansion of the rule of God's law in the world, is acknowledged through the verse: "And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war<sup>[456]</sup> by which you may terrify the enemy of Allāh and your enemy and others besides them." (al-Anfāl: 60)

In the section on "Judiciary" in the Constitution and the necessity of justice and fairness in arbitration, the Constitution refers to the verse: "And when you judge between people to judge with justice." (al-Nisā': 58) To illustrate the exemplary nature and superiority of the Islamic system, inspiration is drawn from the verse: "And thus We have made you a median [i.e., just] community that you will be witnesses over the people." (al-Baqarah: 143)

In Article Seven of the Constitution, to emphasize the necessity of public participation in decision-making and the establishment of a consultative system, assistance is sought from the verses: "And whose affair is [determined by] consultation among themselves," (al-Shurā:38) "And consult them in the matter." (Āli 'Imrān:159). In Article Eight, to express the obligation and necessity of commanding good and forbidding evil as a universal duty in society, the verse: "The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong" (al-Tawbah: 71) is cited. In Article Fourteen of the Constitution, the necessity of behaving kindly and justly towards non-Muslims is expressed through the verse: "Allāh does not forbid you from those who do not fight you because of religion and do not expel you from your homes - from being righteous toward them and acting justly toward them. Indeed, Allāh loves those who act justly." (al-Mumtaḥanah: 8)

The principles related to family and women are derived from verses 21 of Surah al-Rūm, 97 of Surah al-Naḥl, and 228 of Surah al-Baqarah. The verses 59 of Surah al-Nisā', 44 and 46 of Surah al-Mā'idah, 57 of Surah al-An'ām, and 229 of Surah al-Baqarah are the fundamental source and essence of the Constitution, and principles 4, 72, 91, 105, and 107 of the

Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran are based on these verses. In the economic principles, the constitutional law is derived from verses 5 and 29 of Surah al-Nisā', verses 29 and 168 of Surah al-Baqarah, verse 1 of Surah al-Anfāl, and verse 128 of Surah al-A'rāf, and for the negation of wealth concentration, reference is made to verses 6 and 7 of Surah al-'Alaq, verse 7 of Surah al-Hashr, and verse 34 of Surah al-Tawbah.

In the prohibition of usury (Article 43 of the Constitution), help is sought from verses 275, 278, and 279 of Surah al-Baqarah. In relation to the prohibition of extravagance and wastefulness in the Constitution, reference is made to verse 31 of Surah al-A'rāf and verses 26 and 27 of Surah al-Isrā'. The characteristics of leadership are addressed based on verse 35 of Surah Yūnus and verse 246 of Surah Al-Baqarah, and in terms of preventing foreign domination and influence on the country, verse 141 of Surah al-Nisā' has been used by the legislator (Madani, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 25 and 26).

Accordingly, it can be said that the Quran is the most fundamental source of the Constitution, which has been incorporated into the process and construction of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and other divine sources of the Constitution (Sunnah and Hadith, consensus and reason) also derive their credibility and validity from the Quran. Therefore, because they have derived their legitimacy from the Quran, they fall under the category of divine sources.

### 6.2.3. Sunnah<sup>1</sup>

2

Sunnah according to the school of Ahl al-Bayt<sup>1</sup> is defined as the sayings, actions, and statements of the impeccable Imams, which reports the tradition of these sayings, actions, and statements in the form of speech. Therefore, Sunnah is the actual practice that was performed by the impeccable Imams during their time, and thus, Sunnah does not have categories of authentic and weak, and all Sunnahs are considered authentic.

In this way, Sunnah and not just Hadith are one of the sources of deducing religious rulings. However, this reality (Sunnah) was an absolute proof during the presence of the impeccable

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<sup>1</sup> . Sunnah in the word means way and method and "Sunan" is its plural form. Also, other meanings such as "continuity" and "favorable way" are also mentioned in the meaning of Sunnah.

<sup>1</sup> . Hadith researchers of the first centuries believe that the Sunnah, it was the concept of the works of the Prophet, the Companions and the successors, who were called Companions of the Works, and from the time of Shafi'i until now, it refers to the sayings, deeds, and narrations of the Prophet. Cf. Talkhīs Miqbās al-Hidāyah, p. 12, and the Great Encyclopedia of Islam, entry of Companions of Ahl al-Hadith.

Imams, and now that we are distant from them, it is natural that we should rely on the report of Sunnah, which is the same as Hadith. So, some have used Sunnah and Hadith interchangeably.<sup>1</sup>

4

#### **6.2.3.1. Sunnah in the Constitution**

Sunnah is the second source for the formulation of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Islamic jurisprudence sources, including the Quran, Sunnah, consensus, and reason, are considered fundamental sources, all of which refer back to the Quran. The Holy Prophet, with divine knowledge, expressed Islam for the people and was careful not to speak except by the command of God.

On the other hand, based on divine command, it is obligatory to follow their orders. The successors of the Prophet also had the authority to interpret the commandments and laws of Islam, and their words have authenticity and validity for discovering the command of God. Therefore, the sum of the words and actions of the Prophet and the Imams, called Sunnah and Sirah, are sources of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, and many of the principles of the Constitution are directly based on Sunnah.

The narrations and sayings of the Holy Prophet and the Imams, especially Nahj al-Balagha, hold a special place in the Constitution. The Holy Prophet said: "O! People! know that your Lord is one and your father is one. There is no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab or for a non-Arab over an Arab and neither for white over black or for black over white, except by piety." (Qurtubi, 1985 AD/1364 AH: 16, 342) This statement is explicitly conveyed in the nineteenth and twentieth principles of the Constitution. Furthermore, the equality of citizens' rights in benefiting from the resources of the Muslim society is always emphasized in Nahj al-Balagha (Goli, n.d.: 4, 15), and its lofty contents have been incorporated into various social, political, cultural, and military arenas and the principles of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Cf. Nahj al-Balaghah, sermons: 37, 205, 34 and 216 and letters: 5, 53 and 45).

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<sup>1</sup> . In addition, Sunnah in different fields; for example: Jurisprudence (in the sense of what is recommended against the duty) and kalam (the Sunnah against heresy) are also used (Usul Muzaffar, vol. 2, p. 63).



### **6.3. The Status of Quranic and Hadith Institutions after the Revolution**

The performance of the Islamic Republic of Iran's system in the past decades and the establishment of various Quranic and Hadith institutions with a social-political approach, and bringing forth the lofty contents of the Quran and Sunnah from various perspectives, is noteworthy and worthy of contemplation.

The formulation of the Charter for the Development of Quranic Culture and the establishment of the Council for the Development of Quranic Culture with the presence of the Ministries of Education, Culture and Islamic Guidance, and Science and Technology at public, promotional, and higher levels, the compilation of more than forty interpretations of the Quran after the Islamic Revolution, the establishment of a series of Quranic promotional centers and institutions in the system until 1395, according to the official statistics of the Ministry of Guidance, more than two thousand were registered, and in 1398, around eight thousand institutions were registered. Additionally, the organization of more than thirty international Quran competitions and 28 international Quran exhibitions with the presence of personalities and international Quranic and Hadith institutions highlights the special capacities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the field of Quranic services, which is admirable and unparalleled on a global scale.

The establishment of Quran and Hadith sciences, and interpretation fields at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels, and the enrollment of 26,000 master's and doctoral students in these fields in 1395, the official registration of 22 scientific research journals in the Ministry of Science, the publication of 402 articles in 1396, and the defense of 25,000 doctoral and master's theses in the universities of the Islamic Republic of Iran until 1395 are services that have been carried out in recent decades in the service of the Quran (ibid.).

The number of active educational units for the Quran and Hadith sciences reached a maximum of 5,700 in 1395-1396, while for theology, humanities, and arts, 59,000 educational units were offered. Among the approximately 400 fields in the universities and higher education centers of the country in the fields of humanities, about 80 of these fields are in the field of humanities, while up to fourteen general units of study are mandatory for all university fields at the bachelor's level. This also indicates the unparalleled or unique status of

the Quran and Hadith in the social and cultural structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the world.<sup>1</sup>

5

Theology, Humanities and Art (1394)	Quranic Sciences and Hadith (1395)	Major	
1100	60	The number of active curricula	
59000	5700	The number of active study units	
17400	360	The number of active sites	
92000	550	Number of faculty members	
2345000	26000	Total	Number of students studying
44000	1700	P.H.D	
454000	7700	M.A	
1400000	16000	B.A	
450000	600	an associate	
650000	6500	Number of enrolled students	
360000	4000	The number of graduates	
155000	1140	Total	The number of theses
144000	40	P.H.D	
11000	1100	M.A	
615	22	Number of research journals (1396)	
12000 <sup>1</sup>	402	Number of research articles (1396)	
3100+700=3800	53	The number of active scientific associations	
440		The number of Quran and Ahl al-Bayt centers	

## Conclusion

Research and interpretation of the Holy Quran has faced numerous ups and downs throughout history. In recent centuries, Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī and his students introduced a new transformation in the position and return to the Holy Quran at the level of the Islamic world. The Islamic Revolution of Iran, under the leadership of Imam Khomeini, presented a unique

<sup>1</sup> . Official statistics of the Center for Coordination and Development of Higher Quranic Research and Education in the country.

<sup>1</sup> . . For the number of 615 journals in humanities and arts, an average of 20 articles per year per journal.

model of Quran-centered Islamic governance to the global community, as a continuation of dynamic movement, anti-colonialism, and anti-hegemonic system.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has established significant structures at the highest levels of government and legislation in the fields of general education, specialized and scientific education, and promotional activities, with the participation of five ministries. Additionally, it has achieved unparalleled expansion in social and cultural levels for the development of Quranic culture, establishing thousands of scientific, research, promotional, and artistic institutions in the form of grassroots organizations, leading to in-depth Quranic research and production. This structure is unparalleled or unique among Islamic countries.

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## A Review of the Policy of Islamicization of Universities in Iran: Theoretical and Practical Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** After nearly three decades since the formation of the Council for the Islamicization of Universities, it is necessary to examine the policy of Islamicization of universities from various angles and dimensions. In this regard, the research question is: what theoretical and practical challenges does the policy of Islamicization of universities face in Iran?

**Method:** To answer this question, qualitative analysis and content analysis of available sources, especially the views of policymakers and experts in this field, have been used, and the necessary investigation has been conducted by analyzing the themes of these views.

**Results:** After nearly three decades since the formation of the Council for the Islamicization of Universities, it is necessary to examine the policy of Islamicization of universities from various angles and dimensions. The research hypothesis is that "the lack of a common understanding of the necessity and possibility of religious science and the Islamic university and its negative policy consequences, the accumulation of policies and the multiplicity and overlap of the duties of decision-making institutions in the matter of Islamicization of universities, the abstract nature of executive assignments, the weak communication between policymakers and stakeholders and actors at the operational level, and the lack of an efficient mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the policy of Islamicization" are among the most important theoretical and practical challenges of the policy of Islamicization of universities.

**Conclusions:** The results indicate that stakeholders do not have adequate participation in decision-making related to this policy. Furthermore, five different institutions are responsible for guiding and overseeing the implementation of the policies, which this institutional multiplicity and policy density creates problems. It is also unclear exactly what guidance and oversight each of these institutions should provide. In reality, there is no clear distinction between the different natures of oversight, for example, macro oversight, executive oversight, etc. At the level of monitoring and evaluation, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, the Council for the Islamization of Universities, and the Steering Committee for the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country have not yet published any monitoring reports or evaluations of the policies for the Islamization of universities. This approach prevents the strengths and weaknesses from being revealed and hinders the possibility of benefiting from the corrective suggestions of researchers and scholars.

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## **Introduction**

The Islamization of universities in the Islamic Republic of Iran, before becoming a formal policy with a specific institution responsible for guiding and overseeing its implementation, was emphasized in the words of Imam Khomeini and the Leader of the Revolution. Imam Khomeini, addressing students who were members of the Islamic Association of Universities, stated: "I must give you a reminder to know what we mean by reforming universities. Some have assumed that those who want to reform universities and want universities to be Islamic believe that - these people imagine that - sciences are of two kinds: "Every science is of two kinds." Geometry is one Islamic and one non-Islamic. Physics is one Islamic and one non-Islamic. For this reason, they objected that science is not Islamic and non-Islamic. And some imagine that those who say that universities should be Islamic mean that only the science of jurisprudence, interpretation, and principles should be taught there. That is, the same role that old schools have should be taught in universities as well. These are mistakes that some people make, or mislead themselves. What we want to say is that our universities are dependent universities. Our universities are colonial universities. Our universities train and educate people who are Westernized."

Many teachers are Westernized and raise our youth to be Westernized. We say that our universities are not universities that are beneficial to our nation. We have had universities for over fifty years, with huge, back-breaking budgets that come from the hard work of this very nation, and in these fifty years, we have not been able to be self-sufficient in the sciences that are acquired in the universities (Imam Khomeini, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 248-252). In Imam Khomeini's view, universities have two main tasks: one is to educate and reform people, and the other is to train scientists and specialists, and both of these tasks must be done together. Just as a university can be considered a suitable ground and opportunity for the progress and advancement of the country, if it does not have the desired conditions, it is a serious threat to the dignity, independence, and health of the society's culture (Mousavi, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 5-11). The Leader of the Revolution also sees the meaning of the Islamization of universities in specific approaches: "The meaning of Islamizing universities is that religion should be the dominant aspect of universities... Being Islamic means a university that can generate science within itself... Islam gives science genuine honor and dignity, not instrumental honor, and considers science as light... Being Islamic means standing on the firm principles and foundations that exist under the feet of human thought and intellect (Ayatollah Khamenei,

1998 AD/1377 SH). The policies of Islamizing universities have been approved in the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in two time periods. The first time was the "Document of Islamic University" in 1377. Subsequently, in 1391, the Secretariat of the Council for the Islamization of Universities was assigned the task of revising and updating the document under the macro strategy of "Institutionalizing the Islamic Perspective on Science and Accelerating the Processes of Islamizing Educational and Research Institutions" and the related macro strategies "10, 8, 6, 2" of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country, and the revised document of the Islamic University was approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution in 1392.

In 1376, in the 402nd session of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, the formation of the "Council for the Islamization of Educational Centers for the Purpose of Developing the Necessary Policies for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers" was formally approved. The most important tasks of this council in this field are:

- 1) Formulation and suggestion of policies related to the Islamization of universities and educational centers to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution;
- 2) Formulation of appropriate strategies for the Islamization of universities and educational centers based on existing findings and novel research;
- 3) Presentation of fundamental plans and proposals effective in the Islamization of universities and educational and research centers to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution;
- 4) Monitoring the correct implementation of approvals related to the Islamization of universities and educational centers;
- 5) Providing progress reports on the trend of Islamization of universities and educational centers to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution.

In fact, the Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers states its mission as follows: "The Council for the Islamization of Universities is an intellectual body that, with a correct and comprehensive understanding of the dimensions of the concept of Islamization of universities and educational centers and an accurate knowledge of the current situation in this field, formulates appropriate policies, strategies, and programs, and by monitoring the quality and quantity of the proper implementation of programs, guides institutions and elites through this process." (Council for the Islamization of Universities,

2018 AD/1398 SH) After nearly three decades since the formation of this council, it is necessary to examine the policy of Islamization of universities from various angles and dimensions. In this regard, the question of the present research is: what theoretical and practical challenges do the policy of Islamization of universities in Iran face? The research hypothesis is that "the lack of achieving a common understanding of the necessity and possibility of religious science and the Islamic university and its negative policy consequences, the accumulation of policies and the multiplicity and overlap of the duties of decision-making institutions in the matter of Islamization of universities, the abstractness of executive tasks, the weak connection of policymakers with stakeholders and actors at the operational level, and the lack of an efficient mechanism for monitoring and evaluating the policy of Islamization" are among the most important theoretical and practical challenges of the policy of Islamization of universities. In the following, by mentioning the theoretical foundations of the research and the research method, the relevant findings are stated, and a conclusion is presented at the end.

### **1. Research Background**

Khanmohammadi (2006 AD/1385 SH) in examining the process of Islamizing universities in Iran has shown that policymakers and students do not have a positive assessment of this policy and its results. Hashemzahi and Mira (2012 AD/1392 SH) in evaluating the measures of Islamization of universities in Iran from the perspective of academics, have assessed it as unsuccessful.

Mousavi (2016 AD/1395 SH), in examining the policymaking for the realization of the Islamic University with reflection on the views of Imam Khomeini, has expressed its epistemological viewpoints. Asadbegi (2016 AD/1395 SH), in examining the policy of Islamization/becoming Islamic of universities in Iran, has critiqued the Islamic University Document. The research results show that the Islamic University Document lacks the necessary characteristics for a policy document. Lack of realism, lack of coherence and connection, and lack of comprehensiveness and validity are among the shortcomings of the Islamic University Document, which have been formed due to non-compliance with the document development regulations. He states that the existence of these deficiencies reduces the validity and acceptability of the document among university agents and reduces the

expected results and effects of the document's development. Homayoun et al., (2015 AD/1394 SH) have also addressed the genealogy of obstacles to the Islamization of universities in their research. The results show that the discourse of the Islamic university, in terms of political and content aspects, fluctuates in a continuum from "Islamizing" to "Becoming Islamic" with subheadings of representationalism and formalism, selectivity and discipline-centricity, program-centricity and control to libertarianism, release, etc. In terms of scientific change and transformation, various discussions are also ongoing in a continuum from the constancy of science in all ontologies to nativism and then to reductionist partial replacement and beyond that, holistic replacement. The distinguishing feature of the present research is the emphasis on examining the continuum of compilation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation for examining the policies of Islamization of universities, which has not been addressed so far.

## **2. Conceptual Framework**

To answer the question of how a university can become Islamic, we need a more fundamental examination of the concept of Islamization. This question has been addressed by many Islamic scholars in the past two decades, especially in the Western tradition of Islamic studies, and they have tried to find a comprehensive and worthy answer for it. For example, Reinhart (2020) in the book "Lived Islam: "Everyday Religion in a Cosmopolitan Tradition" has tried to provide a view focused on the idea of lived Islam. In his view, on one side of the spectrum are essentialists who believe that Islam has constant and immutable characteristics that are the same in all times and places. Reinhart sees a clear manifestation of essentialism in works published under the title "Islam and..."

For example, a work titled "Islam and Modernity" seems to assume a single "Islam" that does not change with time and place, and makes it the subject of its study. One example of efforts to avoid this blatant essentialism is the approach of studying regional manifestations of Islam; what can be seen in works titled "Islam in..." For example, a work that studies "Islam in Indonesia" attempts to address the local characteristics of Islam in that land, and not the universal, unchanging characteristics of Islam. At the same time, works with this approach also seem to assume a fixed end that Muslims are moving towards, and in studying these local characteristics, it is shown how Islam in a land is moving towards realizing that "Original/True" form of Islam more and more. Reinhart calls a step further than this approach

the "Islams Approach;" an approach that embodies the idea that we have as many Islams as there are places where Muslims are present (Fayzbakhsh, 2023 AD/1402 SH). From another perspective, "In the face of indigenization of science, there is stateless science; when science has no homeland, indigenization means ruining science and using something that is completely meaningless. If the intention is Islamization, even that is not a human being that you want to convert to Islam. They said the application of a science is Islamic and non-Islamic, but the science itself is not Islamic and non-Islamic. There is no Islamic or non-Islamic bicycle-making knowledge, but there is Islamic and non-Islamic bicycle riding. It is a matter of taking a position on meaning and concept. Regarding "Necessity," some say it is not only necessary, but it is necessary not to propose it. From another dimension, when you talk about Islamic, the Buddhist talks about Buddhist, the Jew talks about Jewish, and the Zoroastrian talks about Zoroastrian. Therefore, the issue is much more than denying the necessity; rather, some believe in the necessity of not proposing it. Another issue is "Importance." Some say that even if it is necessary, there is no benefit in proposing it and no harm in not proposing it. Based on our understanding of Islamic intellectual foundations, we can, regardless of history, conceive and depict a pattern for religious knowledge in its very essence."

How this adoption can be localized, what its solutions are, and what capacities exist for localization is another matter. The cultural background of the general public and our historical context are significant capacities, as are the civilizational rise of the Islamic world and its sense of identity. These highlight the issue of localization. The collapse of positivism and the rigid view of the universality of Western science are also substantial capacities. Unless the Islamic world undertakes this, the very rise of Islamic awakening will be sterile and lead nowhere." (Cultural-Social Cognition, 2009 AD/1388 SH)

From another perspective, the approaches within this concept are important: "If we want to distinguish between "Islamization" and "Islamification," the former refers to the Islamization of knowledge, and the latter to the Islamization of society. The minimum assumptions of localization are twofold: "That knowledge abstracted and detached from specific social and cultural conditions is neither possible nor beneficial, and that it is possible to adapt knowledge to specific conditions." Despite the differences in defining Islamization, it can be said that Islamization is the discovery, compilation, communication, and dissemination of knowledge from the perspective of the Islamic worldview about the world, life, and humanity. It seems



that the two concepts of localization and Islamization overlap, and there is, in a sense, a partial overlap between them. Apparently, localization implies that knowledge has been produced in another world, the developed world, and must be localized when it migrates to us. Therefore, the term "Localization" is unlikely to have wide application in developed countries. The idea of Islamization can converge with localization in one place. In Islamic Iran, Islamization is considered a specific form of localization, just as the concept of Islamization may be raised in developed countries without the need for localization. Localization is not necessarily accompanied by Islamization, because the purpose of localization is to adapt knowledge to specific temporal and spatial conditions. Therefore, one may believe in the necessity of adapting knowledge, including the humanities, to the specific conditions of their country, but not necessarily consider Islamization reasonable. Fundamentally, the localization of sciences is not exclusive to Muslims. Regarding Islamization, it is necessary to distinguish between the presuppositions, method, and goals of the sciences."

For instance, in politics, assumptions such as anthropological presuppositions are taken for granted. Just as Hobbes considers human nature to be evil and Locke considers human nature to be benevolent, one can adopt an intermediate view (a combination of good and evil) from the Quran and base a political philosophy on reason, free from revelation. Also, undoubtedly, Islamic politics is teleological and, in this respect, stands in contrast to secular, utilitarian, and pragmatic politics." (Haghighat, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 3-12)

### **3. Research Method**

In this qualitative research, we collect and analyze the necessary data by reviewing the literature and analyzing the content of existing sources. Articles, books, documents, and interviews with policymakers, planners, and prominent researchers constitute the most important sources for data collection and analysis in the research. For data analysis, the thematic analysis method is used by examining the extracted propositions.

## **4. Research Findings**

### **4.1. Theoretical and Practical Challenges of Islamicizing Universities in Iran**

- 1) Failure to Achieve a Common Understanding of the Necessity and Possibility of Religious Science and the Islamic University, and its Negative Policy Consequences One of the most important principles of effective policymaking is the policymakers' accurate and comprehensive understanding of the issue. This understanding, as an agreed-upon authority, should govern all policies to prevent theoretical confusion among policymakers (Vahid, 2005 AD/1384 SH). One of the most important issues in this area, which is the root cause of various problems in the field of policymaking, planning, and implementation of Islamicizing policies in universities, is: "Failure to achieve a common understanding of the concept of the Islamic university – and religious science as its focal point – and the lack of consensus regarding the necessity and possibility of realizing religious science." One of the most important challenges in this area is the "Epistemological Perspective" of the policymakers of this document on the category of "Religious Science." In the academic community of the country, there are two approaches, for and against, regarding religious science. Supporters emphasize the necessity and possibility of realizing religious science, while opponents reject this necessity and possibility. For example, Davari Ardakani states: "When political matters are mixed with scientific issues, no matter how hard they try, they will not reach a conclusion. Science has a different nature from religion, and therefore cannot be described with a religious attribute; in other words, a religious description cannot be an inherent attribute of science. [...] No science can be judged by criteria external to it. If we have a different order in mind than the order of modernity, and we think about how to establish it and how to realize it, and we strive to achieve it, we may be on a scientific path appropriate to the new order. In this case, we should also pay attention to the fact that science and society are established together. Our current society is an underdeveloped society. This society has all the needs of a modern society, without possessing its capabilities. If we could free ourselves from this dependence and find a way to reach a society in which the religious spirit, that is, belief in monotheism and the unseen world and the afterlife, prevails, and its people are free from the desire to consume the latest technologies made in the developed world, and strive for a livelihood with morality through empathy and harmony, perhaps a horizon would open up before

us." (Davari Ardakani, 2016 AD/1396 SH) In contrast, a member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and a tenured member of the Academy of Sciences, as one of the proponents of religious science, believes: "Religious science is a science that is formed and shaped within the framework of the Islamic worldview; whether that science is in the field of natural sciences or humanities. From an applied perspective, the religiousization of science is also possible, in the sense that if the application of science and its orientations are based on religious teachings, that science will be religious. Secular sciences have not been formed based on the Islamic worldview and have not been used based on it, and therefore have shortcomings; but if these sciences are used with a religious approach, those shortcomings will be eliminated. For example, according to the liberal view, science is used for the sake of maximizing human profit and pleasure, and therefore it does not matter whether others are oppressed and colonized or not, or whether nature is destroyed as a result or not." Since this thought is shaped on the foundation of humanism, what is important in it is human's access to more pleasure and profit; but if science is viewed from the perspective of religion, these consequences automatically disappear, and such a science can be called religious." (Golshani, 2016 AD/1395 SH) These epistemological disputes regarding religious science have persisted for years, and the document on the Islamization of universities belongs to an epistemological approach that believes in the possibility and necessity of realizing religious science. Of course, this difference in perspective is not limited to the scientific community but has also extended to the realm of policymaking in the country. As a result, it can be clearly observed that the "perception" of the country's policymakers regarding the concept of religious science differs from one another and is sometimes contradictory. For example, the then-President said in this regard: "Science is science and is not connected to a type of thinking or ideology. Some in our country spent years trying to create Islamic mathematics, chemistry, and physics; they spent a lot of money, time, and resources, but achieved nothing [...] any attempt to divide science is doomed to failure. Basically, connecting a branch of science to an aspect of religion does not create status or position for that science, and if we do not connect it to religion, nothing will be detracted from its value [...] some of the divisions that have occurred in society after the revolution are not very accurate. Certainly, Islamic and non-Islamic science is similar, and there is no difference between them, but the goals are different. The difference between Islamic and non-

Islamic sciences is only in the goals and results of these sciences, not in the science itself." (Rouhani, 2017 AD/1396 SH) In contrast, the Secretary of the Council for the Islamization of Universities believes: "Our scientific propositions can be different from Western scientific propositions. Our understanding is a function of our environment and audience, like paintings or other works of art, where each person sees and interprets a meaning. While in our Islamic view, we can ascertain the degree of its truth. It is not the case that we reach the same conclusions as Westerners in basic propositions. We are also different in purpose. We can differ from the current conventional forms of science in all aspects (subject, foundations, goals, and even method)." "With a religious approach to Islam, we will arrive at a different definition from what current science has achieved. By establishing a foundation and changing the foundations, certainly our superstructure will also change, and it will lead to different methods and goals." (Shateri, 2017 AD/1396 SH) Therefore, there is an inconsistent, and in some cases contradictory, perception among policymakers and the scientific community of the country regarding the nature of religious science. This creates grounds for theoretical and operational disagreements regarding policy options, program implementation, and so on, challenging the implementation of policies. The purpose of stating the arguments of proponents and opponents of religious science – of which only a glimpse has been provided here – is to emphasize that until a consensus (and before that, providing the grounds for critical dialogue in a non-political atmosphere) is achieved among policymakers and managers of the country regarding the idea or issue of religious science, there is a high probability of disunity in opinions and divergence in actions in practice; that is, the very thing we are currently witnessing in the country. A policymaker at one level has an understanding of religious science that the relevant manager at the operational level does not believe in, and this creates disruption in planning at the middle and micro levels, challenging the implementation of policies. Therefore, the issue of Islamicizing the university requires "Epistemological and managerial restructuring and rethinking" to be able to move forward in achieving its goals by creating a discourse and a "Shared Understanding." A shared understanding in which the viewpoints of all stakeholders and academic actors are taken into account, and concise and unilateral interpretations are avoided, is one of the most important requirements. It should be noted that "Theoretical Resistance" to these policies can also lead to "Practical resistance" and a lack of cooperation from various

actors – especially academics. Epistemological and cognitive differences between policymakers in the matter of realizing religious science have paved the way for operational differences regarding policy options, program implementation, and so on, challenging the implementation of policies. At one level, policymakers possess an understanding of religious science that operational-level managers do not believe in, leading to disruption in mid-level and micro-level planning and challenging policy implementation. Therefore, the Islamicization of universities requires a "Restructuring and Rethinking" of both epistemological and managerial aspects to create a "Discourse" and "Shared understanding" to progress towards achieving its goals.

## **2. The Density of Policies and Multiplicity and Overlap of Responsibilities of Decision-making Bodies in the Matter of Islamicizing Universities**

At the broadest level of policymaking in this area are the general policies of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution. The third clause of the general policies on science and technology, communicated by the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, emphasizes the realization of the Islamic university. These policies emphasize the "Islamic education system," the "Training of professors and students who believe in Islam," and "Maintaining Islamic standards in the use of science and technology." At another level is the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. The "Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution" is the main policymaking institution in the field of Islamicizing universities in the country, which, with the approval of the "Document on Islamic University," has defined the missions, principles and foundations, vision, macro goals, institutional framework, and executive system of the goals and programs of Islamicizing universities. According to this document, policymaking, monitoring, and macro evaluation of the process of Islamicizing universities are the responsibility of this council. The Council for Islamicizing Universities and Educational Centers, which operates under the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, is responsible for cross-sectoral planning of policies for Islamicizing universities and is responsible for reviewing, approving, and communicating executive policies, designing mechanisms for achieving goals, reforming structures and processes, updating and repairing, coordinating and integrating policies and programs, and monitoring the proper implementation of programs. According to the Secretary of the Council for Islamicizing Universities, "Policymaking in this area has been delegated to

the Council for Islamicizing Universities. The resolutions of this council are communicated to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution after two weeks, and if the members of the council have no objections, after two weeks, this same resolution of the Council for Islamicizing Universities is considered a resolution of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and is communicated to the agencies by the President." (Shateri, 2018 AD/1397 SH)

In one of the most important resolutions of this council, the driving actions of the Islamic University Document have been specified, separated into four systems: cultural-educational, instructional, managerial, and research & technology. According to clause "B" of chapter nine of the Islamic University Document, the Council for the Islamization of Universities must submit an annual report on the progress of the document's implementation and the performance of related organizations to the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. The Steering Headquarters for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country is another policy-making body in this area. In the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country document, grand strategy 5, "Institutionalizing the Islamic perspective on science and accelerating the Islamization processes of educational and research institutions" is considered, and under it, 4 national strategies and 13 national actions related to the Islamization of universities are stated. Also, in grand strategy 6 of the same document, "Transformation and modernization of the education system in order to adapt to the principles of Islamic education" is stated, and under it, 10 national strategies and 51 national actions are mentioned. According to the explicit statement in section 2-5 of this document, the Steering Headquarters for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country is responsible for monitoring the achievement of the map's goals and evaluating the progress of work. Based on the Islamic University Document, the "Ministry of Science, Research and Technology," the "Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education," "Islamic Azad University," "Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research," and the "Office of the Supreme Leader's Representative in Universities" are responsible for institutionalizing and implementing the document, as well as designing and developing its executive programs within their respective organizations. Furthermore, based on the resolution of the Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers entitled "Driving Actions of the Islamic University Document," these 5 institutions are obliged to implement the driving goals of the Islamization of universities. In conclusion, the various levels of policy-making,

planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the Islamization policies of universities in the country are shown in the table below.

**Table 1. Different levels of the policy-making, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation process of the policies for the Islamization of universities**

<b>Level of Institution and Function</b>	<b>Macro Policy Making</b>	<b>Cross-Sectoral Planning and Steering</b>	<b>Sectoral Planning</b>	<b>Operational Planning and Implementation</b>	<b>Oversight</b>	<b>Macro Evaluation</b>
Institution	Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution	Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers	Ministry of Science, Research and Technology Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (Jahad Daneshgah) Office of the Supreme Leader's	Universities, Research Institutes and Educational Institutions	Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers First Vice President Supreme Council of Science, Research and Technology (SCSRT)	Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution



			Representative in Universities Islamic Azad University		Steering Headquarters for the Implementation of the Comprehensive National Scientific Plan	
Functions	Defining missions, principles and foundations, vision, overarching goals, institutional framework, and executive system. (Based on the approval of the Islamic University Document)	Examining, approving, and communicating executive policies, designing mechanisms for achieving goals, reforming structures and processes, updating and revising, coordinating and integrating policies and programs. (Based on	Institutional izing and implementing the document, and designing and developing executive programs. (Based on the approval of the Islamic University Document) The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology	Developing plans and executive programs for the implementation of the Islamicization of Universities Document. (Based on the approval of the Islamic University Document)	The Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Council for the Islamicization of Universities and Educational Centers are responsible for macro-level and executive supervision, respectively. (Based on the approval of the	Macro- level evaluation of the process of Islamicization of universities. (Based on the approval of the Islamic University Document)

		the approval of the Islamic University Document)	(MSRT) is responsible for preparing and enumerating related programs, measures, and proposals within the framework of general science and technology policies. (Based on general science and technology policies)		Islamic University Document) Based on the notification of the First Vice President dated 10/8/1394 [Persian Calendar: October 30, 2015], to monitor the implementation of general science and technology policies, reports of the actions taken are sent to the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Science, Research and Technology (SCSST) and	
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					the Office of the First Vice President. (Based on the notification of the First Vice President for monitoring the implementation of general science and technology policies. 2015)	
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The macro-level policies for the Islamization of universities stem from three sources: the Document on the Islamization of Universities, the Comprehensive National Scientific Plan, and specific resolutions of the Council for the Islamization of Universities. The Document on the Islamic University contains 56 strategies and 351 actions (Document on the Islamization of Universities, 2013 AD/1392 SH). In addition to the strategies and actions of the Document on the Islamic University, the Council for the Islamization of Universities has held 336 sessions until January 2020, and according to the statistics announced by the secretary of this council, it has had 300 resolutions until December 2016 (Shateri, 2016 AD/1395 SH). Furthermore, the Comprehensive National Scientific Plan includes 14 national strategies and 64 national actions (Comprehensive National Scientific Plan, 2010 AD/1389 SH). Policymakers, by formulating a large number of strategies, actions, and monthly resolutions, have caused entanglement, overlap, and concentration of policies, leading to confusion and functional disruption in policymaking and planning levels. Regarding this issue, after five years of the document's promulgation, a member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural

Revolution says in this regard: "It seems that we can determine parts of the Document on the Islamic University as an implementation priority in 2018. The Document on the Islamic University, as a demand of the system, must be implemented based on prioritization. Factors such as the time required for implementation, the necessary budget, and the impact of the strategy in terms of its level and depth can be used in this prioritization." (Rahimpur Azghadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH) At the very least, specific areas can be considered by determining the functional priorities of the document.

### **3. Abstractness of Executive Tasks**

Although the policies of the Document on the Islamic University have been formulated in three levels: objectives, strategy, and action, a look at the tasks and actions of this document, which should theoretically be at the operational level, shows that these actions still suffer from the characteristic of "Abstractness," and this leaves the door open for various tastes in divergent interpretations of the meanings of these actions. For example, consider the following actions:

3-15- Improving the quality level of large provincial universities to retain elites in their provinces;

4-4- Promoting the educational and ethical role and position of professors and institutionalizing it in society;

8-18- Deepening the cognitive and spiritual dimensions and promoting the spirit of piety as the basis for glorifying Islamic rituals;

6-20- Organizing cyberspace in the university environment and managing it based on a comprehensive passive defense system;

2-1- Revision and review of educational texts with an approach to transformation and promotion of various fields, prioritizing the humanities;

6-6- Institutionalization of the principles and values of Islamic ethics in the behavior and performance of university administrators.

The head of the Islamic Sciences Center for Academics and the cultural director of the Supreme Leader's Representation Office state: "There are solutions and strategies in the document that the professor, university president, deputy, etc., are not even aware of what the

document expects of them and what duties it places on their shoulders." (Harizavi, 2018 AD/1397 SH)

#### **4. Weak Communication between Policymakers and Stakeholders and Actors at the Operational Level**

Various political systems, with multiple values and interpretations and with diverse approaches to the redistribution of power among individuals and groups in society, employ a specific architecture in relation to policy advice from stakeholders in the policymaking processes, either promoting or limiting their participation in the process. As a result, the dimensions of stakeholder consultation in the policymaking process are formed, and its dynamics can be different. The mechanisms and how stakeholders are selected to participate in the policymaking process and the type of their intervention are of great importance (Khajeh Naini, 2024 AD/1403 SH). In the subject area of the present research, it must be said that the last link in the implementation of Islamization policies are university administrators, professors, and students, who in fact form the platform for the realization of Islamization policies. At this level (implementation), there are also many weaknesses. Another existing issue is the lack of communication between macro-policy and executive levels. In reality, universities and educational centers do not have an institutionalized, regular, and functional relationship with their superior institution in this area, namely the "Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers."

The secretary of the Board for Supporting Theoretical Chairs of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution states in this regard: "We wrote the Islamic University Document and spent a lot of time writing it. This document has been approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, but if we conduct a field study, I can say with certainty that more than 90 percent of university presidents are unaware of this document because the secretariat of the Council for the Islamization of Universities has only communicated with the Ministry and has not interacted with universities to implement this law." (Khosropanah, 2018 AD/1397 SH)

The Head of the Islamic Sciences Center for Academics and the Cultural Director of the Supreme Leader's Representation in Universities also stated in this regard: "I have visited almost all universities in the country. A significant number of university presidents did not

have the Islamic University Document and had not read it. Naturally, when a document is neglected, it will not be implemented." (Harizavi, 2017 AD/1396 SH) Therefore, one of the most important factors in the successful implementation of policies for the Islamization of universities is establishing a systematic and periodic communication between the Council for the Islamization of Universities and the university presidents. This will both provide the ground for the implementation of policies and, by obtaining necessary feedback from implementers, ensure that future resolutions of the council take into account the considerations at the implementation level. This will improve the quality of the council's resolutions and can prevent a large quantity of unenforceable resolutions.

Despite the fact that the resolution of the Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers, entitled "Pioneering Actions of the Islamic University Document by Separation of the Four Systems," was communicated in October 2018 (Council for the Islamization, 2021 AD/1400 SH), and the responsible bodies were required to take action in this regard and report to the council, this has not yet occurred. A noteworthy point is that one year after the communication of the policies, in October 2019, according to the secretary of this council, "In a meeting with the president of Islamic Azad University and his deputies, it was agreed that the pioneering actions of the Islamic University Document related to the aforementioned organization would be "Implemented" within the next year, and Islamic Azad University would provide a report every three months on the extent of the implementation of the pioneering actions." (Shateri, 2019 AD/1398 SH)

On the other hand, managerial changes at the executive levels also cause repeated interruptions in the implementation of policies. "The reason for the non-Islamization of the university is that just as we were about to receive results, Hassan left, Hossein came, and the story starts anew, and we have to prepare the ground again for Mr. Farhadi." (Shateri, 2015 AD/1394 SH)

Weakness in the cooperation of academic actors with the aforementioned policy can also lead to "Practical Resistance." The Secretary of the Council for the Islamization of Universities analyzes this policy in line with the demands of the target community: "The Islamization of universities was raised, meaning a product that is the result of the presence and demands of the academics themselves. We are preparing the ground for this discussion."

Therefore, the connection of policymakers, especially the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Council for the Islamization of Universities, with social realities can be

effective in enhancing the effectiveness of cultural policies and strengthening their function. Stakeholder participation in decision-making and policy-making is one of the tools of this connection. However, the Secretary of the Council for the Islamization of Universities' position, stating that "We do not do journalistic and media work, and we are supposed to move silently," (Shateri, 2017 AD/1397 SH) is self-defeating because, later on, he considers "Discourse Building" as one of the requirements for the implementation of the document: "At one point, I myself came to the conclusion that one of the prerequisites for the realization of the document and its implementation is the creation of "Discourse." No document will be implemented as long as it does not settle in the minds and language of the audience and stakeholders, and does not become their priority and demand. Most academics, when they do not know its provisions and contents and it does not become their wish, do not demand it from the university president and the minister, and whatever directives we issue, they go to the archives." (ibid.) A more institutionalized and effective form of this connection is the presence of some university presidents and university professors – or elected representatives from among them – as members of the Council for the Islamization of Universities, which can be considered in subsequent revisions of the document. To strengthen the connection of stakeholders with this council, it is suggested that more explanatory sessions and persuasive tools be used, and institutionalized feedback mechanisms from stakeholders of this policy be activated. The connection of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Council for the Islamization of Universities with various university groups, such as "Student organizations and associations within the university" and "Professors," must be greatly strengthened so that, while establishing understanding and national consensus, the possibility of receiving feedback from their opinions is provided, and the ground is prepared for awareness, culture-building, and implementation of the document.

Using bottom-up approaches and tools that systematically transfer the views of policy actors at the mid and micro levels to macro-level policymakers can greatly contribute to increasing the acceptance of policies and facilitating the ground for implementation and even evaluation of policies.

Furthermore, establishing a systematic connection between the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and the Council for the Islamization of Universities with governmental and non-governmental research centers can bridge the gap between expert institutions and the policymaking system, paving the way for the realization of goals.



### **5. Lack of an Effective Mechanism for Monitoring and Evaluating the Islamization Policy**

Evaluation, as one of the main stages of the public policymaking cycle, guarantees the effectiveness, accountability, and achievement of policy goals. This stage, based on analysis, examines the extent to which predetermined goals have been achieved, the efficiency of resources, and the satisfaction of stakeholders. Evaluation, by identifying successes and failures, dynamically reconstructs the policymaking cycle (Parsons, 2006 AD/1385 SH). It is not yet clear whether indicators for evaluating the Islamic university—or some of its sections—have been finalized and approved, and whether evaluations are currently being conducted based on them. In the meeting of October 1, 2019 (8 Mehr 1398) of the Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers, the issue of entrusting the development of indicators for the Islamic University Document to the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research was raised. It was decided that, with the focus of the Management Committee and considering the scientific background and research records of Jahad Daneshgahi, the initial draft of the indicators should be prepared by Jahad Daneshgahi in cooperation with the relevant organizations and presented to the Council (Fars News Agency, 2019 AD/1398 SH). Therefore, the issue of "indicator development" remains an unresolved problem in this area. The indicators related to the sub-policies discussed in the third policy, which are mentioned in the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country document, are presented in the table below.

**Table 2. Indicators for Measuring Concepts Related to Islamization Policies in the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
Morality and Faith	Level of influence of Islamic culture and values in academic environments
	Level of adherence to Islamic beliefs and convictions
	Level of commitment of individuals to Islamic precepts in academic environments
	Level of observance of professional ethics
	Level of confidence in domestic capabilities for national development

	Level of adherence to the law
	Level of commitment to the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic system, and the Constitution

Regarding the developed indicators, several points are worth noting: "First, these concepts are more in the nature of macro-criteria than operational indicators." Therefore, these criteria need to be further transformed into specific and more objective indicators at a more granular level. Second, there is a need to conduct periodic surveys at the university and societal levels to assess the status of the qualitative indicators determined. The results of a study published in 2006-2007 (1385 SH) show that both policymakers and students do not have a positive assessment of this policy and its results (Khan Mohammadi, 2006 AD/1385 SH).

In another study, the Islamization measures in Iranian universities have been evaluated from the perspective of academics. The academics included students and faculty members of Iranian universities, with a sample size of 1092 students and 592 professors. The evaluation of the programs by academic actors is not very favorable, and the success rate of most of these programs is assessed as average or below. Academic actors do not consider 30 programs to be beneficial for the Islamization of universities; they only have a positive evaluation of 4 measures taken by administrative bodies in universities and were indifferent to 39 programs. Therefore, the operational implementation of the Islamization of the political system does not have a favorable position in the minds of academic actors (Hashemzahi and Meira, 2013 AD/1392 SH). On the other hand, for effective evaluation, new criteria need to be added to the existing ones to encompass university mechanisms based on justice, meritocracy, ethics, and so on. Another issue in this regard is that no performance, monitoring, or evaluation reports have been published by the "Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution," the "Council for the Islamization of Universities and Educational Centers," the "Steering Headquarters for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country," the "Ministry of Science, Research and Technology," the "Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education," "Islamic Azad University," "Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research," "The Representation of the Supreme Leader in Universities," universities, research institutes, and educational institutions, each of which, according to the higher-level documents of the system, is responsible in some way for policymaking, monitoring, evaluating, and implementing the sub-policies under discussion. This obscures the

effectiveness of policies and actions and the mechanisms necessary to achieve the goals. Therefore, redesigning the executive, supervisory, and evaluation mechanisms in the policies under discussion is one of the most important current needs.

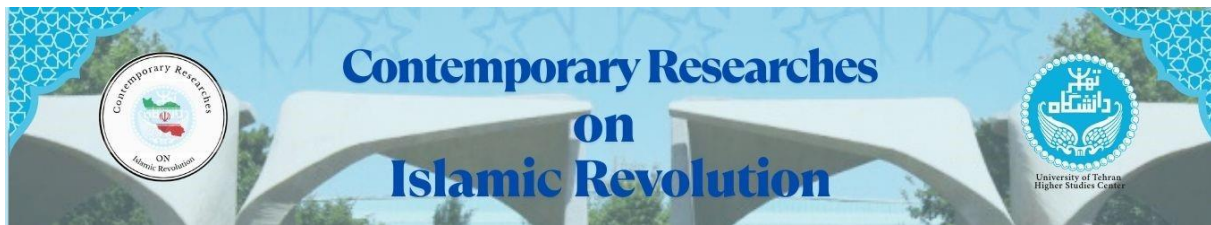
## **Conclusion**

After nearly three decades since the establishment of the Council for the Islamization of Universities, it is necessary to examine the policy of Islamization of universities from various angles and dimensions. In this regard, the present study seeks to answer the question: What theoretical and practical challenges do the policy of Islamization of universities in Iran face? Qualitative analysis was employed to answer this question, and the perspectives of policymakers and experts in this field were subjected to thematic analysis. The results indicate that stakeholder participation in policymaking and decision-making is an effective tool for improving policy efficiency. However, existing evidence suggests that policies related to Islamicization face weaknesses in this regard, and stakeholders do not have optimal participation in policymaking. The issue of "Indicator Development" also remains unresolved in this area. The proposed indicators in the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country suffer from problems such as being too macro-level (instead of operational). Furthermore, five different institutions are responsible for guiding and overseeing the implementation of policies, which creates issues due to this institutional multiplicity and policy density. It is also unclear what specific guidance and oversight each of these institutions should provide. In fact, there is no clear distinction between different types of oversight, such as macro-level oversight, executive oversight, etc. At the level of monitoring and evaluation, the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, the Council for the Islamicization of Universities and the Steering Committee of the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country has not yet published any monitoring or evaluation reports on the policies of Islamicization of universities. This approach obscures existing strengths and weaknesses, preventing the possibility of benefiting from the corrective suggestions of researchers and scholars. It is recommended that the mechanisms for guiding, monitoring, and evaluating the policies of Islamicization be redesigned, and that stakeholder participation be leveraged in this process. It is also necessary to create the necessary space to facilitate dialogue among public actors regarding the nature of this policy and its related requirements.



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## The Role and Position of Iranism in Political Development

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### ABSTRACT

**Abstract**

**Objective:** This article, based on the premise that national identity, as a country's definition of its place in various, diverse, and sometimes contradictory approaches, is one of the main axes of attention in this research. The aim is to answer the question of how Iran's political development, within the framework of "Iranism," has been defined, recovered, pursued, and ultimately led to specific outcomes. In response to this question, the authors' hypothesis is that, based on the definition provided for the variables of this research—Iranian culture and identity and political development—a part of Iran's political culture teachings has played both negative and positive roles in shaping the political transformations of Iranian society in different periods. To maximize the constructive capacity of Iranian identity in the path of the country's political development, a transformation in its role-playing and perspective is deemed necessary.

**Method:** To this aim, an analytical-descriptive method has been used, and data collection in this research is based on documentary library studies.

**Results:** The results indicate that three main axes were considered. In the first axis, titled "Definition of Concepts," the main concepts under consideration are explained, and a historical overview is provided. The second axis elucidates the fundamental characteristics of Iranian identity and Iran's political development from the perspective of experts. The third axis, by referring to the view on national identity and the lack of public participation in the Pahlavi era government, describes the existing obstacles and capacities for creating transformation towards Iran's political development in the present.

**Conclusions:** The conclusion is that a positive view of national identity is in line with strengthening and transforming political development, and in this regard, minorities, parties, and groups should be seen as opportunities for the comprehensive development of Islamic Iran

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## **Introduction**

Political development has been defined in various ways across different approaches. Each of these definitions considers different indicators or signs. More importantly, the definitions provided sometimes describe the processes that specify the mechanism for achieving political development, and sometimes they describe the goals of political development itself. Therefore, it is clear that a predefined and simple definition of this concept cannot be provided. However, clarifying the dimensions of this concept is not out of reach, given the large volume of existing works.

In this paper, we intend to address the important and fundamental question of how Iran's political development, within the framework of "Iranism" is defined, recovered, pursued, and ultimately leads to specific outcomes. The most important question this research seeks to unravel is how Iran's geopolitics and the ideas derived from it have played a role in the formation and development of Iranian political development.

### **۱. Definition of "Political Development"**

Various definitions of political development have been offered. In this paper, political development refers to the political participation of citizens and group competition, which scholars such as Robert Dahl, Adam Przeworski, David Apter, and S.N. Eisenstadt have identified as criteria for political development (Bashirieh, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 11). Daniel Lerner and Lucian Pye also identified participation in elections as an indicator of political participation (Badi', 1996 AD/1375 SH: 41). One of the concepts and goals of political development is the expansion of participation and competition in political life. In this sense, political development is largely considered synonymous with democracy (Bashirieh, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 11).

### **۲. History of Political Development**

The theoretical history of political development, in the sense of democracy, dates back to ancient Greece. Although ancient Greek political philosophers, namely Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, criticized the democratic political system with a negative approach, these very oppositions and agreements prepared the ground for the permanence of democratic thought.



After the Middle Ages and the emergence of representative political systems, the discourse of popular government and democracy re-emerged. Later, the political thought of John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and other modern thinkers gave special prominence to political theories. In the 18th century, French intellectuals, by proposing the "Progress" project, which in fact laid the groundwork for the French Revolution, provided the theoretical and social foundations for the theories of development and political development. Although the discussion of development existed in the historical horizon of the Enlightenment era and had political, economic, and social dimensions under the category of "Progress," development theories were mainly put forward after World War II. In fact, new theories of political development grew from the 1950s onwards (Saei, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 8).

### **۳. Political Development in Contemporary Iranian History**

Iran's political development in the pre-Constitutional era was characterized by the sultan's absolute power and dominance, the bureaucratic servitude of the people (Ra'īyyat), and authoritarian regimes relying on religious appearances, which led to political inactivity among the people (lack of participation and lack or ineffectiveness of social classes), thus placing it in a state of political underdevelopment.

In Article 57 of the Iranian Constitution, the ruling powers in the Islamic Republic of Iran are independent of each other, but these powers are administered under the supervision of the Supreme Leader (Velayat-e Faqih). What is stated in this article is the separation of the three branches of government—legislative, judicial, and executive—which operate under the supervision of the Leader. However, the Leader's supervision does not mean the elimination of the independence of the powers, as the Leader, based on paragraph 7 of Article 110 of the Constitution, is responsible for resolving disputes and regulating the relations between the powers. In other words, after accepting its most important principle—the absolute Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), which the general public has accepted—the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the Velayat-e Faqih and the leadership as the connecting point of the ruling powers, and the exercise of sovereignty by these powers is deemed legitimate and lawful solely based on the Leader's opinion and supervision. Therefore, Article 57 emphasizes two issues:

- First, there are three branches of government in Iran, and these three branches are independent of each other, such that none of them can dissolve another branch, prevent it from performing its duties, or influence it to take specific actions;
- Second, these powers are under the supervision of the Leader, who is himself elected by the people. In fact, the supervision of the Velayat-e Faqih over the three branches means that the drafters of the Constitution and the people who approved it deemed the supervision of their highest elected representative necessary to preserve the independence of the powers. In other words, the leadership in the Islamic Republic system possesses qualities such as justice and piety, and this provides reassurance to the people that none of the powers will be able to abuse or centralize power (Constitution, 1989 AD/1368 SH: Article 57).

The emergence of the Islamic Revolution is closely linked to the lack of political development during the Pahlavi era. Therefore, after its victory, the Islamic Republic endeavored to pursue political development in various dimensions, including the expansion of party activities, freedom of the press and media, and increased political participation. The forty-year experience of the Islamic Republic system serves as a criterion for evaluating the results of the Islamic Revolution in terms of achieving political development. This experience, which has been in line with the realization of the important ideals and slogans of the Islamic Revolution, covers the manner of achieving political development through increasing the system's capacity, equality, and structural differentiation. In this regard, indicators such as human development, achievement of social justice, economic and industrial independence, and freedom and democracy are noteworthy, which collectively indicate the capacities of the Islamic Republic system in terms of differentiation and specialization of affairs and the creation of equality (Shafieifar, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 108-109).

#### **۴. Capacity Assessment of National Infrastructures for Political Development**

To examine the capacities and potentials of national infrastructures for political development, we must refer to Iran's political thought and its encounters with Western modernism. In the history of political thought in Iran, the nineteenth century holds a special importance and position. This is because this century is considered the beginning of the modern era, which also brought about major changes in Iran's political structure and is referred to as the semi-

modernist rule. The rise and dominance of governmental and non-governmental semi-modernism in Iran were based on two pillars: first, the negation of all Iranian traditions, institutions, and values that were considered "Backward" and the source of national humiliations; and second, the superficial eagerness and emotional excitement of a small but growing group of the urban society. Hossein Bashirieh considers Reza Shah's rule as a period in which the modernization of Iran (in a Western manner), culturally and economically, was preferred over other goals, especially changing the relationship and method of exercising power and increasing political participation. The nature of the political system in Iran had such an impact on the level of social and economic life that independent classes such as the aristocracy, guilds, and clergy were unable to grow and influence the definitive limits of autocratic power, and often the will of the Shah was considered law (Bashirieh, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 67).

#### ◦. Obstacles of Iranian Culture in Political Development

Many factors and components influence Iran's political development as obstacles embedded in Iranian culture. Some of these are briefly mentioned here:

**Tribal or Mechanical Society Structure:** "Rational societies that have achieved relative development at all levels and have moved beyond the tribal structure possess, in a sense, organic solidarity. Specialized division of labor in these societies has led individuals to develop an organic dependence on the entire society. Just as hands, eyes, and ears all serve the person, while each undertakes a separate task, in an organic society, work is specialized, and its elements are not interchangeable, yet all serve the life of the main body. This analogy can, to some extent, clarify the differences in culture. In organic solidarity, the spirit of collective cooperation is significant and considerable. If one participates in overthrowing a government, they know the reasons for it and the nature of their participation. They participate for reform and improvement, not in the hope of engaging in trade or seizing the positions of former individuals. Organic solidarity does not believe in overthrowing the government to freely exploit national resources. Rather, it overthrows the government because it does not perform its specialized duties well, and because more qualified individuals should replace them. In a culture of organic solidarity, the interests of society are also noteworthy, and individuals see their interests within the interests of society. In mechanical solidarity, individual interests take

precedence over societal interests, and this alone is sufficient to dismantle society. In organic solidarity, society requires sacrifice and demands sacrifices for its growth, while in mechanical solidarity, individuals expect society to sacrifice for them, which is, of course, impossible. Such a distinction between the two models is an excellent example that does not appear purely in the social context; a mixture of these two exists. The more elements of one type are present, the more society tends towards that type." (Rezagholi, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 196)

**Short-Term Society:** "The lack of long-term continuity led to significant change from one short-term period to the next, such that history became a series of interconnected short-term periods. Therefore, in this respect, changes were more frequent and usually more fundamental, and social mobility from one class to another was much more intense than in traditional European societies. However, by definition, these conditions made it very difficult to accumulate long-term changes, including the long-term accumulation of assets, wealth, capital, social and private institutions, and even educational institutions. All of these progressed normally or existed in each short-term period, but in the next short-term period, they had to be re-established or fundamentally changed."

**Stability-Seeking:** "This is an activity that so integrates an individual into the present that they cannot imagine a future for themselves. Hence, activities aimed at earning a livelihood are pursued with despair. This despair drives us to submit to our current situation. It was in this adaptation to despair that we tried to be content with what we have or what is given to us, considering it our destined fate. For example, the concept of contentment has gained validity in Iranian culture because contentment is essentially an expression of adaptation to despair. In contentment, one confronts the act of striving to achieve something, not the hope of realizing it if they already possess it. So, all that remains is to try to be content with our current situation, lest it worsen. Adaptation to despair has so enslaved us that it seems we have lost the ability to imagine a better situation. Thus, we do not even know what work and effort are for. In this state, all that remains is to endure the undesirable present by waiting for what we know it is." (Qazi Moradi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 148)

**Concealment:** "The social and cultural structure of Iranian life is based on a fundamental oppositional structure between the inner and outer. For Iranians, the outer realm presents conflicts, insecurities, lack of trust and confidence, and a kind of unethical struggle for survival. However, the inner realm is one of trust, confidence, tranquility, predictability,

mutual understanding, fulfillment of rights and moral virtues, and is generally full of altruism and self-sacrifice for others. For this reason, the private sphere and the governmental sphere were in opposition in Iranian life, and the public sphere had little vitality. Living in such a situation leads to a situation in Iran where a person's outward appearance indicates a contrasting nature within them. Outwardly, especially in power relations, they are compelled not to engage in direct conflict in any way, and therefore, they tend strongly towards maintaining appearances and externalizing. The spirit of flattery and sycophancy, coupled with the politeness and respect that always accompanies Iranian behavior, reinforces this externalization. As a result, in Iran, everything is summarized in external appearance, and reputation is the most important tool for self-confidence." (Mirzaei and Rahmani, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 39)

**Self-Centeredness:** "Contrary to the theory that individuality or individualism is considered one of the strong foundations of human development and flourishing, and the basis of the social citizen's will in the process of forming political parties and organized groups. Of course, its cause must be sought in the traditional culture of Iranian society. This means that individuals at various social levels, while maintaining their individualistic pattern, have only subscribed to collective organizations in specific religious matters. In these gatherings, due to the traditional fear of the government, political and social issues were never raised; whereas individualism in the Western tradition had a different outcome. In Western societies, political participation takes place through influential parties and groups, which individuals consider a suitable place for achieving their individual goals, while in Iran; such a belief has not emerged and become internalized."

## **٦. Ruptures and Continuities of Political Development and Stability/Instability**

Achieving development is a complex, difficult, and time-consuming process. On the one hand, it requires great effort and perseverance, steadfastness, strong determination, and the mobilization of all resources to achieve it. On the other hand, it requires a calm and stable political and social environment as a prerequisite for its realization. Any goal we consider for development, including economic development, political or social development, or comprehensive development, requires political stability for its realization.

Essentially, a "Developmental State" that seeks to achieve development must first provide the prerequisites for its realization, including stability in various governmental spheres, such as policy stability, management stability, legal stability, and so on. Successive changes in policies, laws, strategies, and confusion in pursuing various development goals lead to the depletion of necessary societal resources and opportunities for development. Furthermore, any political instability such as war, coup, widespread riots, and threats to the survival of the system, shift development out of priority and divert societal resources and capabilities towards goals other than development. The importance of a stable environment for achieving development has been affirmed by various thinkers. For example, according to Huntington, "The difference between states in achieving growth and equality or failing to achieve either, depends on the environment in which growth occurs," and "The importance of political stability and instability in different countries is more significant than the difference between democracy and autocracy." (Huntington, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 5)

Dr. Sariolghalam writes in this regard and the necessity of political stability in achieving development: "Development requires political tranquility for individuals and human collectives to engage in innovation and creativity. Political ups and downs and indecision in the field of political legitimacy delay the realization of development and ultimately make it impossible. Political unrest disrupts confidence and hope for the future, which are the foundations of development, and pollutes the decision-making and policymaking environment of society, ultimately leading to reduced efficiency and desirability." (Sariolghalam, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 93).

Given that achieving development requires the strong will of elites and the government, mobilization of resources and facilities, and providing a safe and calm environment, political instabilities such as internal and external wars, social unrest, security threats to society and the political system, etc., have a negative and destructive impact on economic and social growth and development, domestic and foreign investment, and the flight of financial and human capital. In addition, they cause development to fall out of priority and attention to be directed towards goals other than development. Furthermore, instability in management, policies, and laws due to political disputes and the lack of agreement among elites and main groups in society, the lack of a clear strategy and plan, etc., by making the future unpredictable and increasing risk, lead to the destruction of a suitable environment for economic investment, and instead, short-term and mostly destructive economic activities become prevalent. Moreover,

with frequent changes in executives due to political and factional issues and a lack of attention to national goals, replaced by attention to group and party goals and continuous changes in development policies, priorities, and goals, none of those goals and priorities are achieved. The country's resources and facilities are wasted through fluctuations and repeated changes in pursuing different and sometimes contradictory goals and in political disputes. This very issue makes the achievement and realization of development goals impossible (Movathaqi and Karamzadi, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 338-339).

#### **۷. Nationalization of the "Political System" and the Rebirth of "Political Development"**

Essentially, the discourse of Iranian nationalism is characterized by components such as historical grandeur and glory, independence, and aversion to foreigners. The discourse of political expansion is characterized by attention to Western civilizational components, modernity, intellectual revolution, and structural reforms of power. According to this view, a country interested in development is obliged to achieve a kind of internal coherence in its intellectual sphere. This is because this coherence is the result of intellectual coherence, and the focal point of intellectual coherence is the elites who must reach a shared understanding among themselves (Tohidfam, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 154).

The decline of individuals, groups, and civilizations begins from within. Similarly, the flourishing and glory of individuals, groups, and civilizations also begin from within. What happens in the essence and nature of phenomena is more important than external forces that intend to influence and penetrate. Therefore, whether in underdevelopment, progress and dynamism, civilization-building, or backwardness, downfall, disintegration, and decline, the internal is more important than the external. The crisis of internal coherence—or, in other words, the nationalization of the political system—has always been one of the major obstacles to political development throughout Iranian history. If we consider political participation as one of the indicators of political development, the most important reason for the lack of political participation is related to internal issues of Iranian society. This issue is not only due to the lack of coordination among the wealthy, knowledgeable, and powerful in Iranian society but, more importantly, to the absence of intellectual coherence and the imaginary and dominant perceptions prevalent in this society. Solving this crisis and paving the way for the



realization of one of the indicators of political development—such as changing political participation, which itself guarantees security—requires fundamental reforms (Tohidfam, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 154-155).

#### **Λ. Waves of National Reforms as Discontent with Political Development**

Although academic discussions of political development at the international level only have a fifty-year history, the ideals and indicators of political development have always been humanity's lost quest. Especially in recent centuries, continuous and costly efforts and struggles have been made to achieve these indicators in various countries and societies, and Iran has been no exception to this rule, experiencing changes and transformations in the last hundred years to achieve this goal. Among the major political transformations in contemporary Iranian history, one can refer to the Constitutional Revolution (1906 AD/1285 SH), the open political atmosphere resulting from the change of power in the Pahlavi dynasty (1941 AD/1320 SH), the nationalization of the oil industry and the subsequent formation of Dr. Mossadegh's popular government (1950-1953 AD/1329-1332 SH), and the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 AD/1357 SH. These waves have played the most significant role in the country's political scene and its pursuit of development (Akhavan Kazemi et al., 2018 AD/1397 SH: 209).

However, it should be noted that the process of Iranian society achieving political development and its sublime indicators has become a time-consuming and lengthy cycle. This unusually long process has always threatened the institutionalization of political development with weakening and regression, despite the costly struggles and movements formed throughout contemporary history. Studying the trend of this cycle shows that after every developmental movement, a kind of fearful reaction has also formed in the political arena in Iran. Furthermore, studying the trend of Iranians' political development shows that the waves formed in contemporary Iranian history have so far been "Incomplete waves". Although each of these waves has contributed to the advancement of political development, there is still a distance to reach the desired point of political development in Iranian society. The trend research conducted, as well as the explanation of the conditions and situation of political development in Iran, indicate the existence of potential drivers on the one hand, and the continuation of existing structural and cultural barriers on the path of political development on

the other. This demonstrates that for the completion of the political development cycle, the formation of a new wave in Iranian society in this field is highly probable in the future, and the existing drivers herald its formation (Akhavan Kazemi et al., 2018 AD/1397 SH: 242-243).

Studies on political development in Iran show that the policies and orientations of governments have played a major role in achieving or not achieving political development. In fact, political development in Iran has been more "state-centric" and "Top-down" than "Society-centric" and "Bottom-up". However, the growth of civil society institutions and the expansion of development-oriented demands in the political sphere from below will lead to the formation of political developmental states in the future and will ensure the advancement of political development in Iran more than ever before (Akhavan Kazemi et al., 2018 AD/1397 SH: 243).

#### **۹. Centralism, Federalism, and the Theology of Iranian Political Development**

In contemporary Iranian history, centralization and decentralization, alongside political underdevelopment and development, have been accompanied by short and long fluctuations. During this period, we have sometimes approached political development and sometimes moved away from it. In the contemporary period of Iranian history, we have experienced centralization more and decentralization less, but more serious attention has been paid to the relationship between centralization and political underdevelopment, and decentralization and political development. Therefore, the impact of centralization and decentralization on the realization of development and political underdevelopment has not been discovered. Hence, the question arises: What is the meaningful relationship between centralization and decentralization with political underdevelopment and political development?

Centralization is a system and method in which decisions on all public matters (national and local) are made and implemented by the political and administrative center, usually located in the capital. In this state, the power and authority to administer and execute affairs are also completely concentrated in the central organization. In other words, the central government supervises all local administrations and determines their level of power; it may even temporarily assume the role of local administration in some cases. The central government can impose its decisions on all local units, regardless of whether these decisions are respected

and accepted by the people of those regions. The formation of a centralized geographical-political system in Iran dates back to the Constitutional Movement. Although the main basis for adopting a centralized system in democratic societies, in addition to preserving territorial integrity, is economic justice and social cohesion, in Iran, in the early years, the choice of such a system for managing the country might have stemmed from such intentions. However, during the Pahlavi eras and beyond, it must be stated with certainty that the preservation of territorial integrity was the focus of political managers. This system, in its short lifespan, has left the following strategic consequences in Iran: 1) The centralized political-administrative system gave heterogeneous Iran its modern shape and form. In fact, the genesis of the concept of a nation-state began with the Constitutional Revolution;

2) Country divisions with their centralizing characteristic have helped balance ethnic groups in the provinces by creating demographic-ethnic compositions.

Thus, in most cases, provincial borders do not coincide with ethnic settlement borders. The question here is, given the ethnic and religious diversity in Iran's geographical space and specific ecological differences across the land: Although a centralized governmental system has been considered a suitable model for countries facing separatism or war and conflict, is it the best governmental model for national cohesion? (Akhbari et al., 2015 AD/1394 SH: 43-44)

#### **۱۰. Ethno-Religious Policymaking, Security, and Sustainable Political Development in Iran**

Iran is a multi-ethnic country. What matters in this context are the varying degrees of power-sharing and different ethnic groups' access to various economic and political resources, which lead to differences in their sense of identity and belonging to collective identities such as belonging to Iran and Iranian nationality. Of course, various religious and cultural factors can strengthen or weaken cohesion. Based on the two distinct elements of religion and language, distinctions exist among Iranian ethnic groups, dividing them into several categories. A significant portion of Kurdish speakers in western Iran and Baluch people follow Sunni Islam, which differs from the country's official religion. Meanwhile, Turks, Lurs, and a large portion of Arabs belong to a linguistic sphere different from the country's official language—Persian;

however, religiously, since they follow Shia Islam, they have no difference with the country's official religion.

The existence of these differences, alongside the relative underdevelopment of the provinces inhabited by these ethnic groups compared to the Shia Persian-speaking provinces, creates a feeling of discrimination, inequality, and oppression. This forms the hypothesis that their sense of belonging to the collective Iranian identity is, at least politically, weaker. According to studies on Kurdish and Arab ethnic groups, a new development occurred in the relationship with ethnic groups in Iranian history from the time of Reza Shah onwards (and similarly in Turkey after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and in Iraq after the emergence of the Ba'ath regime), which was unknown and unprecedented in earlier history despite bloody conflicts and wars. This involved the implementation of a type of nationalism that led to the emergence of new forms of dominance and hegemony, based on an ideology that targeted the identity of the "Other" and their culture and language, resulting in subsequent conflicts, discriminations, and oppressions, and even legitimizing war and physical elimination (Haghmoradi, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 232).

It is important to note that in developed political systems, there is an organic relationship between the government and society. Governments are responsive and responsible towards people's participatory demands and political, social, cultural, and economic demands. As mentioned, political participation in a society is manifested through elections and people's votes. Therefore, the process of involving all popular or ethnic groups of a society in all stages of development will be effective in improving, emerging capabilities and capacities, and consequently, material and spiritual growth and elevation. To the same extent that political legitimacy and the participation of ethnic groups are weaker; the political stability of a system is undermined.

We have always witnessed political discrimination by the central government in our contemporary political history, which has been the most effective type of discrimination leading to the exclusion of these ethnic groups from the pyramid of political power. In fact, governments, with their predetermined plans and political authority, have led to the marginalization of ethnic groups. For example, in the second Pahlavi era, we witness the lack of participation of ethnic groups at various levels. This mutual lack of attention can be attributed, to some extent, to the lack of trust between the structure and ethnic communities on the one hand, and to the lack of interaction between the government and Iranian society on the

other, stemming from negative bilateral attitudes. This is because with the consolidation of the second Pahlavi and under the influence of its autocratic and cultural policies, about three decades of political inactivity and isolationist policies prevailed over ethnic groups and minorities within the country. On the eve of the Islamic Revolution, with the collapse of despotism, each of Iran's ethnic groups, factions, classes, and segments of society saw their political, social, economic, and cultural status in the social structure of Pahlavi Iran as unequal and oppressed. Alongside other political-social and professional groups, they cooperated in their struggles to overthrow the Pahlavi regime (Barzegar et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH: 434-435).

### **Conclusion**

The lack of political development during the Pahlavi era is considered one of the causes of the Islamic Revolution. After the Islamic Revolution, efforts were made to address various aspects of political development, including the expansion of political participation and party activities, and freedom of the press and media. These efforts were evaluated within the framework of increasing the system's capacity, equality, and structural differentiation, using indicators such as freedom and democracy, human development, achievement of social justice, economic independence, and industrial independence. Collectively, these indicate the capacities of the Islamic Republic system towards differentiation and specialization of affairs and the creation of equality.

The achievement or non-achievement of political development in Iran, due to the role played by governments based on their policies and orientations, has been more "State-centric" and "Top-down" than "Society-centric" and "Bottom-up." The slogan of the Republic and the central axis of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, based on the aspirations of the great architect of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini, has been the people. Furthermore, the growth of civil society institutions and the expansion of development-oriented demands in the political sphere from below have led to the formation of political developmental states and have given the advancement of political development in Iran increased growth and speed.

In the Pahlavi era, due to the government's lack of interaction with Iranian society, resulting from negative attitudes and the nature of rentier states, we witnessed the lack of participation of ethnic groups at all levels. With the adoption of autocratic and cultural policies, we witnessed political inactivity and isolationist policies towards ethnic groups and minorities within the country, and a threat to national identity. On this basis, each of Iran's ethnic groups,

groups, classes, and segments of society saw their political, social, economic, and cultural status—in a word, their identity—in overthrowing the Pahlavi regime, and cooperated with other political-social and professional groups in the struggles against the regime.

One of the manifestations of a society's political participation is the extent of public participation in elections and voting. The involvement of popular or ethnic groups in all stages of development contributes to the emergence of capabilities and capacities, and consequently, the material and spiritual growth and elevation of society. To the same extent that political legitimacy and the participation of ethnic groups are more prominent, the political stability of a system is greater and its foundation stronger. Therefore, political development requires the firm determination of elites and the government, mobilization of resources and capabilities, and providing a safe and calm environment. Political stability, in the sense of social security and tranquility, and the neutralization of internal and external security threats to society and the political system, contribute to economic and social growth and development, domestic and foreign investment, and the attraction of financial and human capital. Failure to address this leads to negative and destructive impacts, causing development to fall out of priority and attention to be directed towards other goals.

Furthermore, instability in management, policies, and laws due to political conflicts and a lack of agreement among elites and major societal groups, the absence of a clear strategy and plan, etc., by making the future unpredictable and increasing risk, leads to the destruction of a suitable environment for economic investment, and instead, short-term and mostly destructive economic activities become prevalent. Moreover, with frequent changes in executives due to political and factional issues and a lack of attention to national goals, replaced by attention to group and party goals and continuous changes in development policies, priorities, and objectives, none of those goals and priorities is achieved. The country's resources and capabilities are wasted through fluctuations and repeated changes in pursuing different and sometimes contradictory goals and in political disputes. This very issue makes the achievement and realization of development goals impossible.

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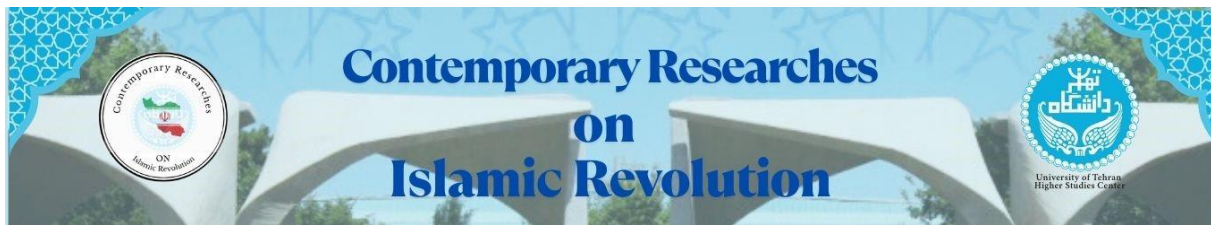
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## Reza Shah and the National Assembly: A Re-examination of Despotism in the Structure of Laws from the Sixth to Twelfth Sessions

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study aims to examine how Reza Shah's despotism influenced the Iranian legislative system in the contemporary era. This is primarily done through an analysis of the National Assembly's performance during its sixth to twelfth sessions. The study also aims to explain the mechanisms used to strengthen authoritarianism by intervening in the legislative process.

**Method:** This paper utilizes the theoretical framework of patrimonialism and employs a documentary method with descriptive analysis. Historical sources, official documents, and legislative texts form the basis for data collection and analysis.

**Results:** The research findings indicate that Reza Shah successfully manipulated the legislative environment to consolidate his personal power. He achieved this by undermining the Assembly's independence, interfering in the composition of its representatives, eliminating political opponents, and leveraging authoritarian legitimacy. These interventions not only impacted the selection process of representatives but also significantly influenced the content of the laws passed.

**Conclusions:** The study concludes that Reza Shah's despotism, by dominating the legislative body, played a crucial role in weakening political institutions and reducing the transparency of the legislative process in Iran. By offering a clear depiction of the interplay between authoritarianism and legislation, this study contributes to a more profound understanding of institution- building in contemporary Iranian history

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## Introduction

Eight days after Ahmad Shah's coronation, World War I began. The young and inexperienced Shah, despite declaring neutrality at the outset of the war, could not prevent the warring states from entering the country's territory. The occupation of parts of the country, alongside numerous internal problems such as famine, poverty, contagious diseases, the failure of the constitution, a crisis of identity, and social and moral disarray, had plunged the country into a chaotic state. The emergence of various movements in different parts of the country made the situation difficult for the young Shah; these movements eventually stood against the central government and declared independence. Among them were Colonel Pesian's movement in Khorasan, Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani's movement in Azerbaijan, Mirza Kuchak Khan's in Gilan, Simitqo's in Kurdistan, Shaykh Khazal's in Khuzestan, the Na'ibians' in Kashan, and the Punishment Committee in Tehran, all of which began to seek independence from the central government, causing numerous problems for it. The Constitutional Revolution, although formed with the aim of eliminating despotism and establishing the rule of law based on justice, failed in practice to replace the despotic government with democratic institutions. Instead, "it altered the two factors of relative stability in society, namely the monarchy and Sharia." (Amanat, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 579)

On February 22, 1921, a coup led by Sayyid Zia'uddin Tabataba'i and Reza Khan Mirpanj, orchestrated by the British General Ironside, paved the way for the end of the Qajar monarchy. After the occupation of Tehran, Ahmad Shah was forced to appoint Sayyid Zia as prime minister, but he was ousted with the cooperation of Reza Khan, and Reza Khan became prime minister in November 1923. He then proposed a republican plan, which faced serious opposition from clerics (like Modarres) and intellectuals and was defeated. Finally, on October 31, 1925, the National Assembly deposed Ahmad Shah and made Reza Khan the monarch. Bureaucracy and a regular army formed the foundations of Reza Shah's monarchy. With the slogan of nationalism, establishing order, and suppressing rebellions, he garnered the support of some intellectuals like Taqizadeh, Foroughi, Kasravi, and Davar, who considered Westernization and authoritarianism as the path to progress. These individuals supported Reza Shah's actions, such as unveiling and opposing the clergy, but after the consolidation of his power, they themselves became victims of his despotism. Many intellectuals of the first Pahlavi era considered Iranian society to be lacking in literacy and social awareness. Reza

Shah, with the same view, although he did not believe in holding elections, was forced to do so to maintain a modernist facade. These were elections in which people were effectively deprived of the right to choose, and the Shah himself played a direct role in selecting the representatives. During this period, only men (ostensibly) had the right to vote, and women were deprived of this right. From the sixth National Assembly onwards, Reza Shah, by engineering the elections, formed a monolithic National Assembly supportive of the monarchy, with over 84% of its members being aristocrats, landowners, khans, government employees, and merchants affiliated with the court. This rubber-stamp National Assembly was tasked with securing the Shah's interests. This article examines how Reza Shah interfered in the elections of the sixth to twelfth sessions of the National Assembly to clarify the dimensions and consequences of this process.

### **1. Theoretical Foundations**

Patrimony is derived from the word "Pater," meaning father, and refers to personal property or property inherited by a son from his father. Based on this, Max Weber, the German sociologist, who is essentially a sociologist of domination, in his analysis of various political systems and types of domination, believes that there are three types of domination: traditional domination, charismatic domination, and rational-legal domination. In his view, traditional domination has various forms: patriarchy, gerontocracy, and patrimonialism (Sultani). He also used the term "Patrimonialism" to analyze pre-modern political systems that existed in feudal governments in East Asia. According to Weber, in a patrimonial government, the military apparatus is the most important tool available to the ruler for administering affairs. And in fact, the military forces are more loyal to the ruler than to the nation and serve to implement his wishes. Therefore, based on this, in this type of domination, there is no boundary between the private and public spheres; because all power emanates entirely from the person of the ruler. In Weber's theory, the characteristics of patrimonialism include the influence of the ruler's relatives and kin in governmental apparatuses, the disorder of the state system, and extra-legal actions. Furthermore, Max Weber considers the main characteristic of a patrimonial system to be "The existence of an administrative and military apparatus dependent on the person of the ruler." (Weber, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 364) In contrast to modern bureaucracy, which is a symbol of rationality and impersonal interactions, patrimonial

bureaucracy is defined by distinctive features such as dependence on the person of the ruler, the dominance of patron-client relationships, and the placement of the royal court at the center of the state (Weber, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 417-418).

Patrimonialism has also been translated as "Hereditary patrimonial rule." According to Weber, the origin and model of patrimonialism is "Patriarchy," and it lies at its core (Weber, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 419). This is because the patriarch derives his legitimacy and domination from ideas rooted in the accepted traditions of the people. Therefore, patriarchal domination can be considered as the natural background and precursor to patrimonial government.

Bashiriyeh, referring to the existence of three types of political culture – subject, parochial, and participant – believes that the patrimonial system, in fact, indicates a subject culture, because the Shah is at the head of power and the people are considered his subjects, having no participation in the process of advancing societal developments (Bashiriyeh, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 661-671).

While the Shah's decree is tantamount to law, he selects army and bureaucracy employees from among individuals loyal to him. Also, in this type of political system, pessimism and distrust towards the political system and the effort to get close to the ruler to protect one's property and life are very prominent. Another characteristic of the patrimonial system is that it requires an ideological backbone for its continuation and survival. Accordingly, having a connection to the origin of existence or having nationalistic and patriotic ideas are characteristics of patriarchal systems. Of course, in countries where rulers have inherited the government from their fathers, they may not call themselves kings nor claim kingship, but this does not change the essence of the matter, and they are considered examples of patrimonial governments. For example, the governments of Bashar al-Assad in Syria or Ilham Aliyev in Azerbaijan, who inherited power from their fathers, are examples of patrimonial governments. Although elections are held in these countries, kingship, in reality, continues under this guise so that they are not accused of establishing a monarchy and violating popular sovereignty and democracy; also, "Weber considers sultanism as the extreme form of patrimonialism." (Nemati, 2019 AD/1398 SH: 21)

Houshang Shahabi considers the nature of the Iranian state during the historical period of 1312-1320, i.e., the last eight years of Reza Shah's regime, as patrimonial. In these periods, the concentration of power and autocracy are accompanied by the personalization of power. Reza Shah, like rulers of patrimonial systems, removed those who helped him attain kingship

(who typically had significant scholarly and familial backing) from the political process through threats, rewards, encouragement, or banishment (the only exception in Reza Shah's case, where he did not kill his opponent, was Mohammad Ali Foroughi, whom he placed under house arrest). Another characteristic of this era, as described, was that the system turned to nationalistic ideas for its survival and endurance. Nationalism and patriotism were prominent features of Reza Shah's era, which had, of course, led to the support of the elite community for him. This set of processes (personalization of power, elimination of elites, and inclination towards nationalism) in practice led to the consolidation of a patrimonial structure during the period under discussion, which can be identified through the following characteristics (Shahabi and Linze, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 53). Therefore, the characteristics of patrimonialism can be summarized as follows:

1. Political and administrative bureaucracy is completely a private tool in the monopoly of the Shah, and the ruler is at the top of the political-economic pyramid;
2. The unilateral political sovereignty of the Shah under a patrimonial regime provides the ground for the growth of a deficient, comprador capitalist system. Therefore, a patrimonial regime, unlike feudalism, has no commitment to maintaining borders and social activities. Patrimonialism is present on the social scene without rivals;
3. The boundaries between the public and private spheres in patrimonialism are unclear and ambiguous.

It should also be noted that in Weber's thought, patrimonialism in modern conditions transforms into neopatrimonialism (new patrimonialism). Juan Linz, in defining neopatrimonialism, states: If superficial modernization occurs in a patrimonial state, then this type of government approaches a sultanistic aspect. And in the sultanistic state, the source of obedience to the ruler is neither tradition, nor an ideology, nor being a representative of God, but rather what causes obedience is a combination of fear and hope, prohibition and bestowal (Linz, cited in Shahabi, 1990). Goodwin and Skochpol also state: "In a neo-patrimonial regime, political power is concentrated in the hands of a dictatorial commander who does not allow the consolidation of any stable political group in the political sphere." (Goodwin and Skochpol, 1989)

Samuel Huntington presents different characteristics of neopatrimonialism. In his view, patronage and bestowal, nepotism, cronyism, and corruption are the four main features of neopatrimonialism (Huntington, 1996 AD/1375 SH: 91). He also notes that another

characteristic of new patrimonialism is the concentration of power in the hands of the ruler, and the exercise of power by subordinates depends on their proximity and expression of devotion to the ruler.

Neopatrimonialism systems also suffer from widespread administrative corruption and in the implementation of laws. This is because neopatrimonialism governments, to ensure their survival and endurance, resort to largesse and favors based on friendly and entirely self-serving relationships, without considering merit, which itself fuels widespread and structural corruption. In this type of regime (unlike patrimonial regimes), the private and public spheres are ostensibly separated, but in reality, there is no distinction or separation between these two domains. Dismissals and appointments, and the method of wealth distribution in these systems, depend on the personal opinion of the ruler and structures play little role. However, unlike patrimonial systems, structures are not without influence, and a minimal role can be attributed to them due to superficial modernization in these regimes.

## **2. Characteristics of the Neo-patrimonial System**

The characteristics of the patrimonial system, whose indicators can be seen in the Pahlavi government, are as follows:

### **2.1. Personalization of Power**

The individualization of politics was an important feature of the Pahlavi government, and people were excluded from the scene in this type of political system. Opposition groups were tolerated and superficially involved in politics only to the extent that they did not undermine the ruler's personal power. In a neo-patrimonial system, political power is monopolized by the sultan, and personal power does not tolerate any public oversight. In Reza Shah's era, the personalization of power, despite the existence of a bureaucratic apparatus and a modern legal system, ultimately led to the implementation of the Shah's decrees. Reza Shah's military background turned the army into the most important neo-patrimonial institution of the government. Thus, preserving the monarchy and the continuity of the Shah's personal power replaced the provision of national interests (Sardarabadi, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 330).



## **2.2. Patronage**

Another characteristic of neo-patrimonial states is the existence of patron-client relationships, or clientelism. As mentioned earlier, in neo-patrimonial regimes, the granting of public administrative positions and privileges is a favor bestowed upon cronies to ensure their loyalty and allegiance to the ruler. This characteristic is common to both regimes. The only difference is that in a patrimonial regime, the relationship between supporters and the ruler is direct and unmediated, based on achieving personal interests and benefits for individuals. In neopatrimonialism, the relationship is mediated and established based on achieving goals beyond personal gain.

## **2.3. Legal Hypocrisy**

According to Shahabi and Linze, neo-patrimonial systems ostensibly respect democratic mechanisms and constitutions, but their form and function are purely superficial. In such systems, political competition ostensibly takes place among elites, and democratic institutions like elections and political parties exist for their competition, but the prerequisites and conditions for them are missing. These regimes tolerate the political space only to the extent that it does not lead to a change in the political system (Ottaway, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 7).

## **2.4. Distorted Capitalism**

One of the characteristics that Shahabi and Linz mention for neo-patrimonial systems is unbalanced economic development. These systems always experience periods of economic growth, but ultimately, the corruption of the political system affects their economic development and prevents their balanced growth and development (Shahabi and Linze, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 53).

## **2.5. Ambiguity in the Structure-Agent Relationship**

As mentioned earlier, in this type of system, dismissals, appointments, and the assignment of positions to individuals are based on the personal whim of the ruler, his taste, and the degree of subordinates' closeness to him. Therefore, political and formal structures no longer play a specific role; although, unlike patrimonial regimes, they are not entirely without effect, and a minimal role can be attributed to them.

In conclusion, it can be acknowledged that, generally, neopatrimonialism can be called a dual-faceted phenomenon, as it is an incongruous combination of dual concepts such as despotism/democracy, tradition/modernism, and rule of law/nepotism.

### **3. Research Background**

Few studies have comprehensively and research-oriented examined the impact of Reza Shah's despotism and the patrimonial structure of his government on the results of National Assembly elections, particularly in the sixth to twelfth sessions. Although numerous works have been published on the despotic characteristics of Reza Shah and patrimonial rule, most of them have been in the form of dialogues, interviews, or historiography, and scientific and complete research in this area is very limited. The book "Index of Documents of the Library of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Volume Five): Documents of the National Assembly Elections, Sixth to Thirteenth Sessions (1926 - 1941 AD/1305-1320 SH) (Second Volume)," written by Zahra Gholamhoseinpour, Ali Tatari, and Maryam Nilqaz, provides a complete list of election documents from the first Pahlavi era (Reza Shah). The authors have presented significant documents on topics such as elections, constituencies, observers, invalid ballots, vote counts, candidates, qualified individuals, voter turnout, election fraud, and influential figures in organizing elections, to demonstrate why elections during this period deviated from democracy and became ceremonial.

The book "The National Assembly and the Consolidation of Reza Shah's Dictatorship" by Gholamreza Molaei Tavani, by examining the position of the National Assembly in the constitutional system and the obstacles to the realization of parliamentarism in Iran, analyzes Reza Khan's interaction with the Fourth and Fifth National Assembly. The author shows that the decisions and approvals of these two National Assemblies played an important role in the consolidation and continuation of Reza Shah's dictatorship.

Other books that can be mentioned in this context are the collection of books "Documents of the Clergy and the National Assembly." These books, by presenting documents, have addressed the role and presence of clerics in the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, and Ninth National Assembly. The book "Documents of the Clergy" by Farinaz Motasharrei and Neda Shahmari contains documents of the clergy, commission documents, and elections of clerical representatives in the seventh, eighth, and ninth sessions. In another book, "Documents of the

Clergy and the National Assembly" by Abdolhossein Haeri and Mansoureh Tadayyonpour, documents of clerics in the sixth legislative session of the National Assembly and "Credentials of Clerics in the Sixth Legislative Session of the National Assembly" are discussed, as well as the opposition of leading clerics in Tehran and the country, including Ayatollah Modarres, to the decisions and dictatorship of Reza Shah. Although these works are very thought-provoking and valuable, and refer to some of the events, decisions, and laws of the National Assembly sessions, and certainly display Reza Shah's despotism and dictatorship, they do not directly and explicitly address the subject of our investigation. Houchang Shahabi and Juan Linz, in their book "Sultanistic Regimes," have explained the characteristics of neo-patrimonial systems and have sought to examine these types of systems based on the personalism of rulers, their legal hypocrisy, as well as attention to their social base and political economy. They state that these characteristics correspond to the neo-patrimonial Pahlavi name, and they also consider other features of these types of systems, such as reliance on foreign forces and the high vulnerability of these systems. In the article "Theories of the State in the First Pahlavi Era," by Mohammad Salar Kasraei, the author, using a meta-study method, has sought to evaluate and meticulously analyze the various and numerous theories and attributes used for the first Pahlavi state and tries, by stating the conceptual differences and contradictions, as well as criticizing and reviewing the presented views, to find an alternative for the title of the state in this period of history.

#### **4. Reza Shah's Authoritarian Approach**

The political system in Iran during Reza Shah's time was traditional, hierarchical, and authoritarian, lacking flexibility (Azghandi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 114). During this period, although Reza Shah tried to take measures to quasi-modernize Iran, these measures were purely in the economic and social spheres and did not extend to the political sphere. For this reason, during this period, Reza Shah not only eliminated his opponents but also did not hesitate to sideline even his former supporters and allies. After coming to power based on the army, bureaucracy, and the court, Reza Shah strengthened his power by quintupling the defense budget and enacting conscription laws, thereby increasing the armed forces. He also, by strengthening the new state bureaucracy, increasing ministries and government employees, and changing the country's divisions, created a central government for the first time that had

access to provinces, counties, and even some large villages. In addition, by expanding the court and directly confiscating lands and properties, he transformed the court into a wealthy landowning military complex (Abrahamian, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 169-171). With the help of the two pillars of the army and bureaucracy, he held absolute power.

Reza Shah, with the transformations he created in the educational, administrative, financial, and military spheres, changed the form and content of social life and social relations, but this society lacked political and democratic institutions. In other words, during Reza Shah's era, institutions such as the National Assembly, parties, and political currents by no means returned to the freedom of the constitutional era, and although their outward form existed, in practice they were considered to lack any valuable role. Soraya Esfandiary, Mohammad Reza Shah's second wife, writes in her memoirs about Reza Shah's characteristics: "Reza Shah considered Iran his absolute property, and all matters and affairs of the country ended with him. He was apprehensive about delegating power to others, even his close friends. The combination of conceit and suspicion was one of his prominent characteristics." Reza Shah, during his 16 years of rule, instead of using the clash of modernist ideas with the traditional thoughts of society to help create an open political atmosphere and making the most of the emergence of new classes of bureaucrats and educated individuals resulting from the establishment and expansion of the administrative and educational system for political and social transformations, placed them in severe conflict and opposition with traditional forces. The result of this policy was nothing but the concentration of power in the hands of the Shah himself (Azghandi, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 115-116). Therefore, in practice, the authority of the National Assembly as the main legislative and supervisory body over the performance of ministers was severely weakened. With the weakening of the National Assembly by the Shah, legal participatory institutions became dysfunctional, and the opposition lost its presence in the political arena. Thus, representatives became tools for approving and ratifying plans and bills and were completely at the disposal of the executive branch. In fact, Reza Shah's conception was that the foundation of a modern state and economic and social modernization were achievable only through the suppression of democratic institutions, including the National Assembly. He was oblivious to the fact that using force as the primary method of relating to the people and society to compel others to obey would have irreparable political consequences (ibid: 132).

### **5. The Relationship between Reza Shah and the Sixth to Twelfth National Assemblies**

During the first to fifth National Assemblies, representatives in cities were elected through independent competition, and in villages, through the influence of powerful individuals. However, from the sixth National Assembly onwards, this precedent completely changed, and Reza Shah personally determined the election results and the composition of National Assembly members. From the sixth session of the National Assembly onwards, according to the constitution, five months before the end of each term, an election decree was issued, and three months before the end of each term, elections began throughout the country. Elections across the country were almost completed before the end of the National Assembly session (Morvar, 2013 AD/1392 SH). Reza Shah, in cooperation with the chief of police, prepared a list of candidates for the Minister of Interior. The Minister of Interior then sent the names to the provincial governors, and the governor, in turn, sent the list to the election supervisory council, which was appointed by the Ministry of Interior. Therefore, the National Assembly became a useless institution, transformed into an ornate garment covering the naked body of the military government (Abrahamian, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 171-172). In reality, Reza Shah needed the superficial appearance of the National Assembly in his efforts to quasi-modernize Iran and transform it into a Western-style nation. However, due to his despotic and authoritarian personality, he did not allow the genuine emergence of the National Assembly and only used it to fill the void of the legislative branch, or in other words, to approve the plans and bills he desired. Therefore, there was no need for free, independent, and potentially oppositional individuals. Reza Shah, as a patriarch and, in a sense, a benevolent dictator, had arranged everything according to his own will. Thus, the handpicked representatives approved the necessary laws, and the handpicked government implemented them fully. In fact, the legal hypocrisy of neopatrimonialism required maintaining the outward appearance of a legislative institution, but one that was devoid of any real influence from within. The Shah transformed the National Assembly into a ceremonial institution through which he could handpick his desired ministers. Whereas previous monarchs formed their cabinets after extensive consultations with prominent politicians, Reza Shah established a new method. According to this method, he would first select the prime minister and all other ministers and then send them to the National Assembly to obtain a vote of confidence, which was a necessary but

insignificant step. All executives and officials of this period received a vote of confidence from the National Assembly, and all of them remained in office until they lost not the confidence of the National Assembly, but the confidence of the Shah (ibid.: 172).

## **6. Reza Shah's Performance in Dealing with the Sixth to Twelfth National Assemblies**

### **1. Sixth Session**

The sixth session of the National Assembly was inaugurated in July 1926 and concluded in August 1928. The speakers of the National Assembly during this period were Sayyid Mohammad Tadayyon and Mirza Hossein Khan Pirniya (Mo'tamen al-Molk). Although Reza Shah had issued a decree for free elections for this session, this freedom existed only relatively in Tehran, and government interference was clearly evident. Yahya Dowlatabadi believes in this regard: "The elections for the Sixth National Assembly began. Government officials tried to get their desired individuals into the National Assembly. In Tehran, a supervisory committee was formed where if someone tried to cast a vote for a name contrary to their wishes, the ballot was taken from their hand, read, and the owner was prosecuted. However, due to the protests that took place, the chairmanship of the committee changed, and the government's view was not secured in Tehran, and several people were elected from outside the list that the court had given to the police." (Farhadnia, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 489-490)

With the change in the central committee and the intervention of nationalists, a number of opponents of Reza Shah made their way into the National Assembly, the most important of who were Sayyid Hassan Modarres and Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh. This group, numbering about eight or nine individuals, by deeming the elections militarized and being aware of press censorship, opposing Vosough al-Dawlah and Foroughi, opposing the railway bill, etc., tried to moderate Reza Shah's policies, but Reza Shah tolerated no opposition.

Regarding the construction of the railway, the opposing representatives in the Sixth National Assembly, including Mohammad Mosaddegh, Reza Shariatzadeh Gilani (Haj Reza Rafi'), Sayyid Reza Firouzabadi, and Sayyid Hassan Modarres, believed that the railway was a military line serving British interests and not a commercial line for the benefit of the people and Iran. Mahdi Qoli Hedayat writes in "Memoirs and Perils" that in March 1927, he brought

the railway construction plan to the National Assembly but faced opposition from Mohammad Mosaddegh, who considered the railway to lack direct material benefits and proposed the establishment of a sugar factory instead. Hedayat, in response, emphasized that the purpose of the railway was to connect the east and west of the country and create an economic route from Bandar Anzali to Tabriz (Hedayat, 1965 AD/1344 SH: 322). Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh first spoke about the Iranian railway on February 9, 1926, and then in sessions of the Sixth National Assembly, including on February 21, 1927, April 18, 1927, April 29, 1927, and April 17, 1928. While respecting the designers of the railway, he opposed the timing of its implementation and its southern route (Bandar Jaz - Mohammerah), considering it irrational from economic and strategic perspectives. He proposed an alternative route from the northwest to the east of the country, which he believed had greater economic justification (Minutes of the Sixth National Assembly, pp. 240-241). Mosaddegh himself notes in his book "Memoirs and Sufferings": "There was no reason to build the railway on this line except that they wanted to use it for strategic military purposes, and the British government also wanted to sell a large amount of iron to Iran every year and thereby bring the money that the government earned from oil mines into Britain." (Afshar, 1986 AD/1365 SH: 351)

Hossein Makki believes in this regard: "Mosaddegh also declared the north-south route completely futile and emphasized that considering transit issues and the international use of the Iranian railway, the west-east route that connects Europe and Asia is the only correct route, and the north-south route has no transit benefit. In this regard, he addressed the representatives and told them that voting for the construction of the trans-Iranian railway on the north-south route is treason and contrary to the interests of the country." (Makki, 1979 AD/1358 SH: 123-155) During Reza Shah's era, party activity almost ceased, and the National Assembly, under the influence of Teymourtash, became a legal tool for defending the regime. The four existing parties, all of which supported the Shah, were dissolved by his order to prevent the gathering of opponents. In the Seventh National Assembly, even the entry of a few independent figures faced the Shah's opposition. The conversation between Yahya Dawlatabadi and Taqizadeh with Reza Shah shows that Reza Shah's neo-patrimonial system, although eliminating opponents, maintained some supporters to preserve appearances (Jamshidian and Parvaneh, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 55-56).



## 2. Seventh National Assembly

One of the most important approvals of the Seventh National Assembly was the law authorizing the sale of one thousand seven hundred square meters of Dazdab (Zahedan) lands to the Imperial Bank of Persia, approved on November 29, 1928. One of the main opponents of this approval was Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi, whose most severe speeches in the Seventh National Assembly were delivered in rejection of this bill, which allowed the British Imperial Bank to buy land and property in Iran. Farrokhi likened this bill to the entry of the East India Company into India and said that this bill was a prelude to colonizing Iran. Despite this opposition, since there was no other opposing voice in the legislature, the National Assembly approved this law on November 29, 1928 (The Legislature during the Pahlavi Era; Case Study: The Seventh Session of the National Assembly, Historical Documents Review Center website, published 2024/11/03, accessed 2025/04/21). The Uniform Dress Code Law of December 27, 1928, was another approval of the National Assembly, which, despite much opposition outside the National Assembly, did not provoke much opposition within it. According to Article 1 of the Uniform Dress Code Law, all Iranian nationals without official occupational attire were required to wear a uniform dress, and government employees were also required to wear official judicial or administrative attire at work and uniform dress at other times. This law, in addition to its cultural and social consequences, also had economic consequences. Petitions sent to the National Assembly show that this law disrupted the livelihood of some professions. Because part of the clothing, including hats and clothes, was imported from abroad, it harmed domestic production. As a result, some domestic businesses were destroyed, and some people became unemployed. For example, a group of Yazdi weavers, in a letter to the National Assembly, criticized the decrease in purchases and the halt in exports of their fabrics, considering the approval of this law as a factor in weakening national production and increasing imports. This trend led to the stagnation of the textile industry and the migration of some Iranian weavers to countries like India (ibid., accessed 2025/04/21).

From the seventh session onwards, the National Assembly representatives were not independent and popular representatives and had no will to oppose government bills.

In this regard, Fakhreddin Azimi writes: "Many of the representatives were obedient and weak-willed men who were easily influenced and succumbed to various temptations. Most of

them were incurable opportunists who had an insufficient understanding of their civic responsibilities and the meaning of parliamentarism. They could not distinguish national interests and often considered their private and local interests as national interests. Many of them were poorly educated individuals who neither knew their rights and duties nor understood the complexities of the economy or socio-economic problems. Like other ruling elites, before undertaking any action, they calculated whether that action would be to their immediate and future benefit, as well as that of their relatives, friends, supporters, and allies... the majority of them were steadfast opportunists whose words did not match their deeds." (Azimi, 1992 AD/1371 SH: 47)

### **3. Eighth National Assembly**

The Eighth National Assembly was inaugurated on December 15, 1930, and concluded on January 14, 1933. This National Assembly was entirely supportive of Reza Shah, and no dissenting voice was heard from it. The repression was so severe that the Shah did not even allow a single opponent to enter the National Assembly. Its inauguration date also coincided with the anniversary of Reza Shah's ascension to the throne. Continuing Reza Shah's actions to weaken the meager authority of the National Assembly from the seventh session onwards, Reza Shah revoked the parliamentary immunity of representatives. Since Reza Shah did not tolerate even minor opponents, the entry of two opposing representatives in the seventh session led to the revocation of parliamentary immunity for representatives. In the midst of Reza Shah's reign, despite all government measures, activities contrary to the Shah's opinion sometimes took place in the National Assembly, and in fact, revoking the immunity of representatives was the government's last resort to confront and immediately suppress opponents (Molaei Tavani, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 373). Although the parliamentary immunity of representatives was stipulated in the Constitutional Law, and the law absolutely protected representatives from any assault, in this period, revoking immunity became a political tradition and was implemented many times, especially from the Eighth National Assembly onwards. The Constitutional Law states regarding parliamentary immunity: "Under no circumstances and under no pretext does anyone have the right to interfere with its members without the knowledge and approval of the National Assembly. If, by chance, one of the members openly commits a misdemeanor or a felony and is arrested while committing the

crime, the execution of policy regarding him must still be with the knowledge of the National Assembly." Nevertheless, in order to further assert the sovereignty's control over the National Assembly representatives, the revocation of immunity from representatives became a political tradition from the mid-Reza Shah era. The National Assembly approved the bill to revoke immunity from representation on August 30, 1932. Therefore, if a representative engaged in critical discussions in the National Assembly, their immunity was quickly revoked. This caused National Assembly debates on bills and proposals to be confined to "it is correct" and "I agree," and representatives, fearing the revocation of immunity, imprisonment, murder, etc., vied with each other in flattering Reza Shah. (The Legislature during the Pahlavi Era; Case Study: The Eighth Session of the National Assembly, Historical Documents Review Center website, published 2025/02/12, accessed 2025/04/21).

Some of the most important laws of the Eighth National Assembly include the following, all of which were approved unanimously and without opposition: Law for five million two hundred and fifty thousand Tomans credit for the expenses of completing the southern railway and related expenses for the northern railway in 1310 SH (1931 AD) – approved April 20, 1931; Law authorizing the employment of three American specialists for service on the southern railway – approved April 25, 1931; Law authorizing the employment of Belgian employees to manage customs for a period of three years – approved May 20, 1931; Law authorizing the employment of four Belgians for the Ministry of Finance for a period of three years – approved May 20, 1931, and Law authorizing the payment of one million five hundred thousand pounds for the shortfall in credit for procuring military ammunition – approved March 16, 1932 (Wikisource, accessed 2025/04/21).

#### **4. Ninth National Assembly**

The chain of revoking immunity from opposing representatives continued in the ninth session. On May 21, 1933, Haj Sayyid Habibollah Amin (Amin al-Tojjar), representative of Isfahan, was stripped of immunity. In the 53rd session on Sunday, December 10, 1933, Mohammad Taqi As'ad Bakhtiar (War Head), representative of Dezful, and in the session of December 10, 1933, also Amir Hossein Khan Ilkhani (Ilkhan Zafar Bakhtiar), representative of Najafabad, were stripped of immunity (Molaei Tavani, 2011 AD/1390 SH: 375). The most important example of revocation of immunity was related to Teymourtash; an individual who, after

Reza Shah came to power, became the second most powerful figure in the country as Minister of Court. He was the representative of Neyshabur from the fifth to the eighth sessions, although he did not attend National Assembly sessions. However, at the beginning of the Ninth National Assembly, due to falling out of favor with Reza Shah and a judicial conviction, his credentials were rejected. The head of the third branch announced that due to his conviction to solitary confinement and deprivation of social rights, he was not qualified for representation, and the National Assembly agreed with this opinion. Teymourtash, who had previously controlled political institutions, was ultimately killed in prison by Dr. Ahmadi. Another example of the revocation of immunity relates to Esmail Khan Qashqai and his son. Although the Qashqai tribe had initially supported Reza Shah, the Shah treated them with caution and sent some tribal leaders to Tehran as representatives to keep them away from the tribe and under surveillance. In 1929, a rebellion occurred among the Bakhtiari and Qashqai tribes, accompanied by arms smuggling and British dissatisfaction with the policy of disarming the tribes. After the clashes, the government, by transferring the properties of the dissidents and accusing Sardar Ashayer and his son of participating in the rebellion, proceeded to revoke their immunity and arrest them. Sardar Ashayer died in prison, and Naser Khan remained imprisoned until the fall of Reza Shah (ibid: 376-378).

Another case is Hossein Dadgar (Adl al-Molk), a political figure from the Qajar period and a representative in the third to ninth sessions of the National Assembly. During Reza Shah's era, he first became the head of the Tehran election committee and then the representative of Babol and Speaker of the National Assembly. In the ninth session, he was also elected from Tehran with the highest number of votes and again became Speaker of the National Assembly, but he faced Reza Shah's dissatisfaction. Before the inauguration of the Ninth National Assembly, he faced political and legal accusations and was given the choice between leaving the country and surrendering to the court. In June 1935, his credentials were rejected, and he left Iran for Belgium.

However, the most important resolution of the Ninth National Assembly concerned the abrogation of the D'Arcy Concession on December 1, 1932, which led to a strong reaction from the British government and the threat of referring the matter to the International Court of Arbitration in The Hague. The result of renewed negotiations was the signing of a new oil agreement, which effectively renewed the terms of the D'Arcy Concession for another three decades. Dowlatatabadi writes about this: "One of the demands of the British government from

the Pahlavi Shah's government was to add thirty years to the duration of the D'Arcy Concession. A concession that had not yet passed our National Assembly and according to law is not official, and of course, its entirety is in favor of the concessionaire and to the detriment of Iran, and in recent years, the Iranian government has always been in dispute with the company regarding its rights. Finally, the Pahlavi Shah canceled the said concession, with the condition that the company's representative go to Tehran and renew it with better terms. Soon, the company's representative went to Tehran, and by adding a sum to Iran's share, which is considered nothing compared to what it takes, and by adding the 30 years that they had previously requested, the matter was concluded." (Dowlatabadi, 1982 AD/1361 SH: 427-428) The 1933 Agreement (1312 SH), approved by the Ninth National Assembly, was far more unjust than the D'Arcy Concession and trampled upon the interests of the Iranian nation. According to Hossein Makki, people soon realized that behind the scenes of the abrogation of the D'Arcy Concession, a more disgraceful and detrimental agreement would be concluded such that people would have to search for the D'Arcy Concession with a lamp! (The Legislature during the Pahlavi Era; Case Study: The Ninth Session of the National Assembly, Historical Documents Review Center website, published 2025/03/14, accessed 2025/04/21).

### **5. Tenth National Assembly**

The Tenth National Assembly was in session from June 1935 to June 1937, during which the approval of granting an oil concession to an American company was among its most important resolutions. Accordingly, for a period of 60 years, the "Non-exclusive right to inspect, explore, search, and prospect for oil" in the eastern and northeastern regions of Iran was granted to the American company, Delaware. This concession bill was approved unanimously by the National Assembly in the same session, without any debate or argument, and without the slightest opposition. During this period, Reza Shah suppressed the Mashhad people's uprising in the Goharshad Mosque with coercion and bloodshed, and shortly thereafter, he implemented the compulsory unveiling law. Nevertheless, the National Assembly, whose main function was to stand against dictatorship and strive to limit the Sultan's power, instead of supporting the people, remained silent in the face of the Shah's oppression and thus became complicit in Reza Shah's betrayal of the Iranian people (The

Legislature during the Pahlavi Era; Case Study: The Tenth Session of the National Assembly, Historical Documents Review Center website, published 2024/09/01, accessed 2025/04/21).

## **6. Eleventh National Assembly**

The procedure of the Eleventh National Assembly continued like the previous ones. The most important legal issue in this period was Reza Shah's desire for the Crown Prince to marry Princess Fawzia, which was not possible according to the Constitutional Law of the Constitution. The thirty-seventh article of the supplement to the Iranian Constitution (approved December 29, 1906) stipulated that the Crown Prince's mother must be of Iranian descent: "The heir apparent will be the eldest son of the king whose mother is of Iranian origin. If the king has no male offspring, the appointment of the heir apparent will be made according to the Shah's proposal and the approval of the National Assembly." Thus, under Reza Shah's compulsion, the National Assembly provided the following interpretation of the above law: "Interpretation of Article 37 of the supplement to the Constitution; The meaning of an Iranian-born mother mentioned in Article 37 of the supplement to the Constitution includes a mother who, according to the second clause of Article 976 of the Civil Code, has Iranian lineage, or a mother who, before marriage to the king or crown prince of Iran, due to the supreme interests of the country, upon the proposal of the government and the approval of the National Assembly, has been granted Iranian nationality by decree of the reigning monarch." (Detailed Minutes of the National Assembly - Eleventh Session, 62nd Meeting, November 5, 1938)

Reza Shah dominated the political scene to such an extent that he not only eliminated opposing representatives but also effectively deprived the National Assembly of its supervisory role in foreign policy. A prime example is the Sa'dabad Pact, signed in July 1938 between Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan at the Sa'dabad Palace. This pact conceived with prior British planning and in line with that country's interests, although ostensibly considering the interests of the four countries, was detrimental to Iran in various aspects. According to Abdolreza Houchang Mahdavi, the idea for this defense pact took shape among British statesmen after World War I to prevent Soviet influence in the Persian Gulf and on oil resources by creating a regional alliance (Houchang Mahdavi, 2002 AD/1381 SH: 390). The Sa'dabad Pact aimed for the unity of these four countries in the region and their mutual

support in case of danger. The signatory governments of this pact pledged to refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs, respect common borders, abstain from any aggression towards each other, and prevent the formation of associations and factions with the aim of disrupting peace among neighboring and allied countries. Through this treaty, the member states, while committing to confronting the danger of communism and also committing to non-interference in each other's internal affairs, stipulated that they would consult on all international disputes related to their interests and would not carry out aggressive operations against each other (Amini, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 27).

The Sa'dabad Pact was detrimental to the Iranian government both materially and politically, and beneficial to Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iraq, because part of the Ararat highlands, which had an important strategic position, was ceded to Turkey. In determining the Iran-Iraq border line, Reza Shah also ceded the oil resources of western Iran and half of the Shatt al-Arab, which according to international principles and regulations is the Thalweg line, to Iraq, so that Iran would pay substantial sums to the British-protected Iraqi government for the passage of oil tankers from Abadan (Amini, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 30). Afghanistan also, by signing this pact, was spared from the possible efforts of an Iranian nationalist movement to reclaim the Tajik-populated areas of this country. Ultimately, the old colonial power was the real absent winner in this pact, which, with the signing of this agreement, achieved its goal of creating a barrier against communism (Contemporary History Research Institute, 2016 AD/1395 SH). This pact went to the National Assembly for approval eight months later, in March 1938.

The detailed minutes of the National Assembly discussions on this matter state: "Chairman - The second reading of the Foreign Affairs Committee's report regarding the Sa'dabad Pact is under consideration. The Committee's report is read: The Foreign Affairs Committee considered Government Bill No. 29847 regarding the Sa'dabad Pact in the presence of the Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs for the second reading. Since no objections were received during the first reading, the Committee confirmed its initial report, which was based on agreement with the single article proposed by the government, and its report is submitted for approval. Chairman - The exact single article proposed by the government is read: Single Article - The National Assembly approves the Non-Aggression Pact between the Imperial Government of Iran and the Royal Government of Afghanistan, the Republic of Turkey, and the Royal Government of Iraq, which consists of ten articles and was signed on July 8, 1937, corresponding to the 17th of Tir, 1316, at Sa'dabad Palace. Chairman - No objections have



been received regarding articles one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, and ten. No objections have been received in the second general discussion either. Those in favor of the single article proposed by the government, please rise (All representatives rose) Chairman - Approved." (Library, Museum, and Archives of the Islamic Consultative Assembly)

The approval of the Sa'dabad Pact showed that the separation of the Ararat and Arvand Rud regions was of no importance to the National Assembly representatives, and no opposition was seen from official institutions or social currents. Baqer Kazemi, the then Foreign Minister, recounts in his memoirs that Reza Shah, in response to the request of Nuri Said, the Iraqi Minister, for the cession of Arvand Rud, accepted without serious opposition (Ettihadieh, Kazemi, 2014 AD/1393 SH). Consequently, even if there were objections, they were silenced in the face of Reza Shah's will. Thus, in the complete silence of the National Assembly, a pact led to the separation of parts of Iran, without any representative expressing opposition. This issue illustrates the personalization of power and the disregard of the newly established patrimonial system for the national and territorial interests of the country.

## **7. Twelfth National Assembly**

The Twelfth National Assembly, which was in session from 1939 to 1941, witnessed the resignation and abdication of Reza Shah Pahlavi and the proclamation of the monarchy of his crown prince, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, during the turmoil of the country's occupation. The National Assembly ratified this on September 16, 1941, and on September 17, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, as the Shah of Iran, read and signed his oath in the National Assembly. Within five days, on September 21, 1941, another law was passed by the National Assembly, which involved the transfer of Reza Shah's properties and assets to his son, Mohammad Reza. In the text read by Majid Ahi, the then Minister of Justice, in the National Assembly, Reza Shah had written: "In the name of God Almighty, since the beginning of the establishment and formation of my monarchy, I have constantly thought about the development and prosperity of the country and have placed this matter at the forefront of my country's reform program. I have always intended that this development approach should serve as a general model for all landowners and property owners so that in due time I can make all the inhabitants and subjects of my country benefit from the fruits of these properties. This opportunity has arisen now that my dear esteemed son, His Majesty Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, has taken over

the affairs of the country. Therefore, I have reconciled all my movable and immovable properties and assets (including factories, etc.) of whatever kind to him for the settlement price of ten grams of rock candy, so that according to the interests of the country, they may be spent on charitable, cultural, and other purposes in any way he deems appropriate; thus, the National Assembly also quickly and without delay approved this law." (Text of the transfer deed of properties and assets of His Majesty Reza Shah Pahlavi on Wiki source, accessed 2025/04/21)

## Conclusion

The present study was written with the aim of examining the impact of Reza Shah's despotism on the sixth to twelfth National Assemblies and how he influenced the composition of members and the method of legislation. Reza Shah, within the framework of a patrimonial approach as an authoritarian ruler throughout his reign, used legal institutions such as the National Assembly merely as approvers of government bills and in no way tolerated criticism or opposing views. This is demonstrated by not allowing opposing representatives to enter the Seventh National Assembly and by ordering the exile and elimination of opposing representatives in the Sixth National Assembly. Individuals like Teymourtash and Dadgar, who headed the court and the National Assembly respectively, were also not immune to royal wrath and were ultimately eliminated. Reza Shah's absolute dictatorship, even in cases like the Sa'dabad Pact where Iran's interests were at stake, did not allow for opposition. He presented this pact, which ceded regions of Iran primarily for British interests and then for the interests of Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as a desirable agreement and a kind of victory, saying: "Because the general situation of the world required that we too strive more than ever to consolidate the foundations of peace. After resolving the border disputes with Iraq, we concluded the agreement, the draft of which had previously been agreed upon, with our friendly and neighboring countries Afghanistan, Turkey, and Iraq, under the name of the Sa'dabad Pact. This pact was unprecedented in the East, and at this time when world affairs are in turmoil, it will be a great help to the preservation of peace."

Reza Shah's authoritarian approach in eliminating the clergy and establishing secularism affected the composition of clerical representatives within the National Assembly. The clergy held 24 percent of the National Assembly seats in the first term, which decreased to less than eleven percent in subsequent terms. In other words, the number of representatives decreased

from seventeen in the Sixth National Assembly to two in the Thirteenth National Assembly. Merchants, despite their active participation in the Constitutional Revolution, were marginalized by the ruling classes during the institution-building and consolidation phase of this movement. Apart from the First National Assembly where they constituted 41 percent of the representatives, they held 9 percent in the Second National Assembly and 7 percent in the Third National Assembly, and this downward trend continued until the end of Reza Khan's era, although this percentage increased in later periods.

Finally, it is worth noting that with the establishment of Reza Shah's rule, a new chapter opened in Iran's contemporary history, possessing unprecedented characteristics. At this juncture, the National Assembly rapidly lost its function as the guardian of national interests, the foundation of the constitutional system, and the most popular pillar of the political structure. It distanced itself from its former position. Through widespread interference and fraud in elections, changing the composition of National Assembly representatives at his discretion, and eliminating his opponents from the political scene, the National Assembly was placed at Reza Shah's service. Its task became the immediate and unquestioning approval of laws and bills desired by the Shah, and the institutionalization of his decisions as a powerful tool, in fact, aimed at creating legal and lawful obstacles to civil liberties and political participation and competition. The abolition of political immunity for National Assembly representatives and ministers, the cancellation of the activities of free parties and press, and similar actions were among Reza Shah's measures.

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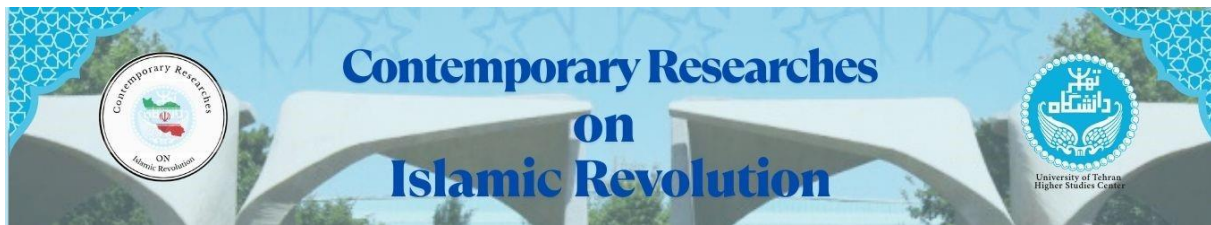
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# Reflection of Iran's Islamic Revolution in Iraq: A Case Study of the Sadr Movement

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The absence or weakness of political structures and institutions in the new Iraqi political and social sphere has led to a political leader, whether in power or in opposition, playing the most significant role in political actions. Therefore, an analysis of political and social trends in Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003 indicates that the Sadr Movement has become the undisputed actor in the Iraqi political and social arena. This is attributed to its reliance on doctrines such as Arab nationalism, adopting an independent approach from other regional actors, fighting corruption, advocating for justice, equality, and eliminating political and social discrimination, and solving Iraq's economic problems.

**Method:** The present study aims to systematically examine the evolution and development of the Sadr Movement in Iraq, stemming from the reflections of the Islamic Revolution. It will achieve its objectives and findings through a scientific, integrated approach combining historical, documentary, and in-depth, purposeful interview methods.

**Results:** The findings and documentation of the article indicate that the Sadr Movement, throughout its formation and evolution, which originated from the anti-American and anti-authoritarian discourse of Iran's Islamic Revolution, has gradually, under the leadership of Muqtada Sadr and according to the exigencies of the Iraqi political and social arena, reproduced itself from an anti-authoritarian and anti-occupation movement into a new political and social movement opposing the status quo. It has adopted a pragmatic approach and actions that are often contradictory to other Shia parties and groups by highlighting pluralistic identities, symbols, and policies based on Arab nationalism.

**Conclusions:** The overall process of the Sadr Movement's evolution and development shows that Muqtada Sadr's activism has been very turbulent amidst transformations, and this personality has never considered himself to have a fixed role. Furthermore, Sadr has consistently adopted contradictory and unpredictable stances in his actions and statements, which has surprised political observers. This has caused ambiguity and confusion for other domestic and foreign actors in their interactions with him.

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## **Introduction**

Iraq, as one of the states established in 1921 AD/1299-1300 SH following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, has faced numerous crises and political and social transformations since its inception. The administrative and political structure of Iraq, formed under the British mandate as one of the victorious superpowers in World War I, was established without regard for demographic and ethnic divisions. As a result, despite Iraq's decades-long history, significant political and social developments have occurred in the country. The rule of a Sunni Arab minority over Shias, who constituted about 65% of the population of this newly established country, led to the formation of latent and permanent protests in Iraq. Consequently, Shias have always been dissatisfied with the existing governance in Iraq and have raised objections to governmental authority in the country. In this context, the religious authority (Marja'iyya), in the absence of politicians and political parties, played a crucial role in managing Shia protests. Especially after the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 AD/1357-1358 SH, Shias, under the guidance of religious authorities and institutions, organized their first political uprisings against the Ba'ath regime's dictatorship. Amidst these developments, the Sadr Movement took on the role of managing all struggles. This movement, despite the assassination and killing of its esteemed religious figures in the 1980s and 1990s, continued its political struggles, and this trend has persisted to date. Currently, Muqtada Sadr and his movement are considered one of the main and dominant actors in Iraq's political and social arena.

To understand the origins of the Sadr Movement and analyze Muqtada Sadr's political actions, it is essential to consider the history of political struggles and the formation of this movement. Many authors trace the movement's formation back to the 1960s and 1970s, with the joining of Martyr Muhammad Baqir Sadr to the al-Da'wa Party. The popularity of Muhammad Baqir Sadr grew after his execution by Saddam Hussein's regime, creating a support network for his cousin, Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, which enabled him to lead a popular movement primarily involving charitable activities for rural migrants who arrived in Baghdad from various parts of Iraq in the 1990s. Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, like his cousin, was martyred along with his two elder sons by Saddam's regime. After his martyrdom, the movement largely continued its social and charitable activities until the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH.



After the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Muqtada Sadr, the younger son of Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, mobilized a militia group called Jaysh al-Mahdi (Mahdi Army) with the aim of fighting American forces. Jaysh al-Mahdi also participated in fighting Sunni insurgents as a Shia militia group until 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH, when Nouri al-Maliki's government took harsh measures against Sunni militias. Muqtada then traveled to Iran to study at the Qom seminary as part of his political activities. Upon his return from Iran, he presented himself as an Iraqi nationalist who opposed not only the U.S. presence in Iraq but also Iran's influence in Iraqi politics. When ISIS captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, in June 2014 AD/June-July 1393 SH and declared the establishment of its caliphate, Shias formed various militia groups, including Saraya al-Salam, to fight ISIS alongside Iraqi security forces (ISF). Saraya al-Salam was organized by Muqtada from among his supporters and former Jaysh al-Mahdi fighters who remained loyal to him.

With the defeat of ISIS in Iraq and the strengthening of peaceful political competition among various Iraqi elites and political parties for political power, Muqtada Sadr and his movement emerged as the dominant and victorious actor in the Iraqi parliamentary elections of 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH and 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH. They remain a key player in Iraq's political and social developments. To achieve its theoretical objectives, this research first examines the Sadr Movement's role in initiating political and social struggles against the internal authoritarianism of the Ba'ath regime, and then delves into the maturity and growth of the Sadr Movement under Muqtada Sadr's leadership.

### **1. Historical Roots of the Sadr Movement in the 1960s and 1970s**

In July 1958 AD/July-August 1337 SH, a military coup led by General Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew the Hashemite monarchy of King Faisal II of Iraq. The military government, inspired by Pan-Arabism ideology, managed to gain the support of the Iraqi Communist Party and began spreading communist ideas. The Iraqi clergy and religious authority were divided on how to deal with this new situation. Traditionalist clerics continued to emphasize political isolation and staying out of politics and government, while others adopted a more active and engaged approach, calling for a struggle against the regime and its anti-Islamic policies.

In this context, Sayyid Muhammad Baqir Sadr, as a young cleric who had not yet joined the supreme circle of Mujtahids, led the protests against the Iraqi political system (Aziz, 1993).

Muhammad Baqir Sadr theorized the foundations for confronting contemporary ideologies, such as capitalist democracy and communism, by authoring two books, *Our Philosophy* and *Our Economy*. As a result of this active engagement in political and social spheres, his popularity and that of the Sadr family significantly increased in Iraqi society (Thurber, 2014). With the Ba'ath Party's rise to power in 1968 AD/1346-1347 SH, led by General Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, Muhammad Baqir Sadr, as one of Iraq's high-ranking Mujtahids and religious authorities, took on the leadership of the struggle against the Ba'ath government's authoritarianism. With the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 AD/1357-1358 SH, he showed his support for it through public statements and articles that presented his understanding of an Islamic governance system.

Saddam Hussein's rise to power on June 16, 1979 AD/June 26, 1358 SH (Macfarquhardec, 2006), further complicated the Sadr family's conflict with the Ba'ath regime. Ultimately, Muhammad Baqir Sadr was martyred by Saddam Hussein's government in 1980 AD/1358-1359 SH after refusing to condemn his previous fatwa, which prohibited Muslims from joining the Ba'ath Party (Aziz, 1993). The martyrdom of Muhammad Baqir Sadr transformed him into a symbol of resistance against the oppressive regime for Iraqi Shias, elevating the Sadr family's standing among them and laying the foundations for the Sadr Movement's formation in the 1990s by Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, Muhammad Baqir Sadr's cousin (Thurber, 2014).

After the martyrdom of Muhammad Baqir Sadr, his cousin Muhammad Sadiq Sadr<sup>1</sup>, who was a student of Muhammad Baqir Sadr, Muhammad Baqir Hakim, and even Imam Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian Islamic Revolution (Thurber, 2014), quickly managed to connect with and gain the support of Shia tribes who had migrated to Baghdad from southern Iraqi provinces due to the eight-year Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988 AD/1359-1367 SH) and economic pressures and unfavorable living conditions. Like his cousin, he was a staunch critic of the

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<sup>1</sup>. The Sadr movement consists of a social body of activists linked not by formal ideological or organizational structures, but by a shared identity and devotion to their deceased leader, the martyr Sayyid Muhammad Sadiq Sadr (Harling and Hamid, 2007). The movement has a distinct social and geographical origin among tribes who migrated from the southeastern regions to the suburbs of Baghdad, Basra, and other cities during the Ba'ath regime (Batafu, 2012). Muhammad Sadiq Sadr strengthened his popular bases in the *al-Thawra* area of Baghdad and in the *Maysan* province, and over time, the Sadrist movement established a strong base in Najaf as well, developing a different culture and conflicting interests with the Shia elites in Najaf and Karbala (Crisis Group, 2006). Muhammad Sadiq Sadr accused the seminaries known as the "Silent Hawza" of political passivity towards political power. Lamenting their "silence," he advocated for an active alternative under the title of "Vocal Hawza."

regime and, through his Friday prayer sermons, was able to directly communicate with a large number of Iraqi Shias, gradually creating the necessary grounds for the Sadr family, especially Sadiq Sadr, to establish their movement (Abood, 2013).

Sadiq Sadr's activities differed significantly from his cousin's. While Muhammad Baqir Sadr's activities can be categorized as political activities targeting mostly the Iraqi elite and educated class, Muhammad Sadiq Sadr was primarily a social activist who established informal networks with the underprivileged classes of Iraq (ibid.).

Sadiq Sadr addressed the problems of poor Shias in his Friday prayer speeches and criticized Saddam's regime, which in turn led the government to target him. On February 19, 1999 AD/February 30, 1377 SH, he was assassinated along with his elder sons, Mustafa and Mu'ammal, by Saddam's regime (Thurber, 2014).

After Muhammad Sadiq Sadr's assassination, the movement was forced underground, and funding became very difficult. The subsequent years until the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH at the hands of the United States and its international allies were accompanied by relative inactivity for the Sadr Movement. However, with the U.S. invasion, Iraqi society in general and the Sadr Movement in particular entered a new period of their political and social life.

## **2. Muqtada Sadr and the Revival of the Sadr Movement After 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH**

Muqtada Sadr was born in Najaf in 1973 AD/1351-1352 SH.<sup>2</sup> Muqtada began his seminary studies at the age of 14 and, over 16 years of study, successfully completed preliminary and intermediate levels and engaged in advanced studies (Dars Kharij). Although Muqtada did not reach the rank of Ijtihad in seminary sciences, his followers refer to him as "Ayatollah." He is a follower of Ayatollah Kazim Ha'iri, who resides in Qom (Felter and Fishman, 2008: 30).

Muqtada Sadr was 17 years old when the Shia uprising in southern Iraq in 1991 AD/1369-1370 SH was suppressed by Saddam, and 24 years old when his father Muhammad Sadiq was martyred. After the martyrdom of his father and two brothers, the young and inexperienced Muqtada took over the leadership of the Sadr political and religious movement. However,

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<sup>2</sup> . Muqtada, in an interview with the Iraqi website "al-Kataba," stated that he was born in 1974, corresponding to 20 Dhu al-Hijjah 1393 AH.

Muqtada was not alone in this position and benefited from his father's advisory staff, including Qais al-Khazali, Sayyid Mustafa Yaqubi, Sayyid Haider Musawi, and Ayatollah Sayyid Kazim Ha'iri.

Muqtada continued his activities by focusing on religious and social duties and avoiding any open confrontation with the then-regime, taking steps to strengthen his political teachings and skills. Unlike other Iraqi leaders, both Shia and Sunni, he was able to operate and be present in Iraq under the Ba'ath regime without arousing the regime's sensitivities.<sup>3</sup> Muqtada had, in fact, taken on the seminary and cultural responsibilities of his father's extensive organization before his father's assassination and had tried to establish strong relationships with his father's followers and associates since that time. After his father's assassination, he formed the initial core of the organization that later became known as "Jama'at Sadr al-Thani" (Second Sadr Group) (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 26-28).

Parallel to the institutionalization of the Ba'ath Party's dictatorship, relying on the core principle of ethnic and Arab nationalism, Muqtada was waiting for an opportunity to emerge as a popular political leader like his father and create a personality cult among Iraqi citizens. Thus, the grounds for leading the movement quickly became available for Muqtada, and four years after his father's martyrdom, the necessary space was provided in 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH for Muqtada Sadr's emergence and entry into the Iraqi political and social arena.

### **2.1. The Sadr Movement, Flag-bearer of Anti-American Struggles in Iraq**

The U.S. invasion of Iraq on March 20, 2003 AD/March 29, 1382 SH, created a power vacuum in the Iraqi political sphere, and political and social movements opposing Saddam's regime found a favorable breathing space. In this regard, on April 9, 2003 AD/April 20, 1382 SH, Muqtada Sadr resumed Friday prayer sermons, which had been suspended during Saddam Hussein's era.<sup>4</sup> He even criticized other clerics for not taking a stance against the

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<sup>3</sup>. Muqtada has consistently used the lever of presence and struggle in Iraq during Saddam's rule against Shia leaders who resided outside the country in his political rivalries with other Shia parties. According to him, these leaders did not understand the pain and suffering of the Iraqi people during Saddam's era and, therefore, are not legitimate representatives of Iraq. Muqtada has always used this tactic to present himself as an authentic Iraqi and a man of the people.

<sup>4</sup>. It is interesting to note that Muqtada al-Sadr still uses Friday prayer sermons as a tool to mobilize his supporters. In July 2022, amidst the developments and political instability in Iraq regarding the formation of a government, Muqtada al-Sadr stated in a declaration: "Unified Friday prayer is a sincere act of worship, and

Ba'ath regime and for not confronting American forces, specifically criticizing Ayatollah Sistani, the spiritual leader of the majority of Iraqi Shias. Supporters of the Sadr family, in appreciation of Muqtada's father, Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq Sadr, changed the name of "Saddam Madina" to "Sadr City" and placed his picture on every street corner (Haugh, 2005: 4). After the fall of Saddam, Muqtada, following his father's path, emphasized the necessity of establishing an Islamic government and opposing the presence of foreign forces in Iraq. He reactivated the charitable and missionary offices affiliated with the Sadr family and his father and, with the support of Shia forces in Sadr City, formed the initial nuclei of a political, social, and military movement. The anti-occupation discourse, fiery speeches, and his taking control of religious centers and reactivating charitable institutions and religious offices, along with his exploitation of the semi-revolutionary atmosphere, led to his social acceptance (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 40). Muqtada, who was 30 years old in the post-occupation period, with his fiery speeches and by displaying a brave, militant, and charismatic personality, was able to attract millions of poor, deprived, and passionate people from Shia cities in Iraq, especially Sadr City in Baghdad, and gather many followers around him (Haugh, 2005: 6).

In his first political stances, Muqtada Sadr, on August 14, 2003 AD/August 23, 1382 SH, declared his opposition to UN Security Council Resolution 1500, which approved the establishment of a temporary governing council in Iraq. In Sadr's view, this resolution, because it was issued by Western countries and the United States, lacked legitimacy and was invalid. During this period, Sadr primarily sought to establish an Islamic government in which religious authorities would be at the head of governance (Salah, 2010). Muqtada Sadr encouraged his followers to hold various demonstrations in 2004 AD/1382-1383 SH and in 2005 AD/1383-1384 SH expressed his opposition to holding parliamentary elections in Iraq to establish a permanent government; because, in Sadr's view, this government and the elections, being under American supervision and control, lacked legitimacy.

In general, in the early years after 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH, Muqtada Sadr sought to increase his movement's political weight by advocating against government corruption and fighting against the presence of foreigners in Iraq. Sadr repeatedly requested Iraqi military forces to

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therefore, you must adhere to the instructions and order. He emphasized that the voice of Friday prayer is louder than any other protest."

cease cooperation with the American occupation forces. Therefore, in the post-Saddam era, due to the existence of a common enemy, the United States, and the necessity of fighting the occupying force, the movement became closer to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and consequently, Iran began its comprehensive support for this movement (Kaymaz, 2019: 9-10). Muqtada Sadr had important differences from his father in his fighting style, and his speeches had a realistic approach (Cockburn, 2008: 117). There was little room for humor or lightheartedness in Muqtada's life. He always sought to push the Americans out of Iraq and reclaim the country. He criticized Ayatollah Sistani for staying out of politics and disparaged the Hakim family for migrating to Iran during the Shia uprising between 1991 AD/1369-1370 SH and 1992 AD/1370-1371 SH (Katzman, 2008: 1-2).

## **2.2. Muqtada Sadr and the Formation of Jaysh al-Mahdi**

During the years of Iraq's occupation, due to the coalition forces' failure to provide law and order in all parts of Iraq, including the south and the Kurdistan region, Iraq experienced unprecedented sectarian violence during the first four years of occupation, creating an environment for the growth of Sunni and Shia militia groups (International Crisis Group, 2006: 7). Among these militia groups was Jaysh al-Mahdi, affiliated with Muqtada Sadr's movement (Bayless, 2012). Muqtada became a symbol of resistance against the occupiers by forming Jaysh al-Mahdi and attacking the invading forces (Matthew Jeffrey Godwin, 2011). Jaysh al-Mahdi declared its goal to be expelling the occupying forces from Iraq and establishing order in the country; a goal that Muqtada Sadr still claims and pursues. However, they also participated in the bloody sectarian civil war against Sunni armed groups and in defending the Iraqi Shia community against their attacks (Abood, 2013).

As a result of Muqtada Sadr's anti-American actions from the very beginning of 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH, Paul Bremer, the U.S. military administrator in Iraq, placed Muqtada Sadr on the list of rebellious and lawless individuals who, along with his supporters who continuously held street protests, were not subject to any legal immunity (Abdul Ameer, Al Khairalla, 2007). The establishment of Jaysh al-Mahdi was by no means acceptable to American officials, to the extent that they considered this group to be the most extremist Shia group in Iraq and America's fiercest enemy in the country. For this reason, American officials used the actions of some of Muqtada Sadr's supporters against coalition forces in the spring of

2004 AD/Spring 1383 SH as a pretext and arrested many of his associates, and made efforts to arrest Muqtada Sadr himself, which led to widespread clashes between his supporters and foreign forces. With the escalation of clashes to the cities of Karbala and Najaf, criticism of Muqtada increased, which ultimately led to a calm situation through the mediation of Ibrahim al-Jafari's government and Ayatollah Sistani. However, most Shia scholars emphasized the urgency of the occupiers' withdrawal but did not endorse Muqtada Sadr's practical approach (Cockburn, 2008: 163).

As a result of these developments, the military power of Jaysh al-Mahdi grew day by day, and the popularity and public standing of the Sadr Movement dramatically increased between 2004 AD/1382-1383 SH and 2006 AD/1384-1385 SH, which witnessed the largest volume of clashes and violence in Iraq. Following these events, a war of attrition began between Iraqi and American security forces and Sadr-affiliated military forces, which continued until 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH, after Jaysh al-Mahdi was dissolved by Muqtada Sadr. During these years, Sadr City in Baghdad and the cities of Najaf and Basra also became centers of protests by Sadr's supporters who demanded the withdrawal of American forces from Iraq (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 43).

From late 2004 AD/late 1383 SH, the Sadr Movement joined the Iraqi political process after Saddam, but still harbored doubts about relations with the Americans and their continued presence. However, this participation did not lead to good relations with the Americans. From 2004 AD/1382-1383 SH to 2010 AD/1388-1389 SH, the majority of the Sadr Movement's organizational efforts were spent on confronting coalition forces, both militarily and politically, in an attempt to expel the Americans from Iraq. Even in 2006 AD/1384-1385 SH, the Sadristes conditioned their continued presence in Nouri al-Maliki's government on the establishment of a timetable for American forces; otherwise, they would withdraw from the government, which is what happened.

### **2.3. Civil War 2006 AD/1384-1385 SH to 2007 AD/1385-1386 SH and the Dissolution of Jaysh al-Mahdi**

After the first parliamentary elections on December 15, 2005 AD/December 24, 1384 SH, and the formation of the first parliamentary term with the participation of all different Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, and other minority groups and parties, the difficult task of forming a permanent Iraqi



government began. In the December 2005 AD/December 1384 SH elections, Shias participated with greater cohesion and unity, and a complete agreement was formed among all Shia political figures and leaders. The United Iraqi Alliance (consisting of the Supreme Islamic Council, the Dawa Party, the Sadr Movement, and the Fadila Party), although it won a large share of parliamentary seats, did not have enough seats to form a cabinet alone (Wong, 2006). Therefore, the formation of the government became a challenging and prolonged process due to disagreements and conflicting views among various groups (Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and secular Shias) regarding important ministerial posts, especially the premiership of Ibrahim al-Jafari, as well as the distribution of ministerial positions.<sup>5</sup>

In the absence of a strong central government, the terrorist attack on the al-Askari Shrine in Samarra on February 22, 2006 AD/March 3, 1384 SH by members of al-Qaeda in Iraq and other terrorist acts unleashed an unprecedented wave of violence in Iraq. In July 2006 AD/July-August 1385 SH, over three thousand civilians were killed as a result of military attacks. Almost daily during this period, bombings occurred against Shia or Sunni civilians in gathering place, including mosques, shrines, and markets. The recorded average number of civilian casualties was fifty per day (Haddad, 2011). In this context, Jaysh al-Mahdi was a significant part of this civil war. Although the civil war lost its intensity in late 2007 AD/late 1386 SH, the problems caused by the presence of Jaysh al-Mahdi militias<sup>6</sup> and pressure from the U.S. government forced then-Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to act against armed groups in the country (Cbsnews, 2009).

Continuing the political tensions between Nouri al-Maliki's government and Muqtada Sadr, one of al-Maliki's important actions during his premiership (May 6, 2006 AD/May 16, 1385 SH to September 8, 2014 AD/September 17, 1393 SH) was confronting the Sadr-affiliated militias in Basra. Nouri al-Maliki believed that there was strong evidence and reasons for the connection of smugglers, criminal gangs, and organized crime in southern Iraq with the Sadr Movement. Therefore, in March 2008 AD/March-April 1387 SH, he ordered the Iraqi army to retake the port city of Basra in the south, which was under Jaysh al-Mahdi's control. Maliki

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<sup>5</sup> . As political disputes escalated, on April 20, 2006, the United Iraqi Alliance nominated Nouri al-Maliki, another member of the Da'wa Party, as a candidate for the post of Prime Minister. After a month of negotiations between Maliki and political groups, Maliki finally introduced his cabinet to the parliament, and his cabinet won the vote of confidence from the parliament on May 20, 2006.

<sup>6</sup> . Nouri al-Maliki had previously stated publicly in a press interview that the Mahdi Army was worse than al-Qaeda and emphasized the need to fight it.

believed that Sadr Movement representatives had turned government organizations into sites for their economic corruption<sup>7</sup> and even prevented Iraqi oversight bodies from inspecting their ministries.

As political disputes intensified between Maliki and Muqtada, British forces withdrew from Basra, and control of the city thus fully fell to Jaysh al-Mahdi, and gradually insecurity spread throughout Basra.

With the beginning of 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH and the approaching provincial and municipal elections, Jaysh al-Mahdi's movements against other Iraqi parties, such as the Supreme Islamic Council and the Dawa Party, increased, and Sadr Movement supporters set fire to the offices and buildings of these parties in the cities of Basra and Diwaniyah. A report by Barham Salih, Deputy Prime Minister and Maliki's special representative, on the dire situation in Basra at a cabinet meeting, regarding theft, murder, kidnapping, and arbitrary actions by Jaysh al-Mahdi-affiliated groups, led Maliki to launch a large-scale military operation against Jaysh al-Mahdi with U.S. support while stationed in Basra. Maliki stated that the goal of this military operation was to confront criminal and violent groups and emphasized that he had no intention of restricting the political space against the Sadr Movement.

The Iraqi army, in its first operation known as "Charge of the Knights," faced heavy resistance from Jaysh al-Mahdi forces. The U.S., by supporting the Iraqi army, helped its penetration deep into Basra, and ultimately this battle ended with a ceasefire mediated by Iran.<sup>8</sup> Muqtada Sadr announced the dissolution of Jaysh al-Mahdi in 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH and declared his decision to go to Qom to continue his religious studies (International Crisis Group, 2008). Apart from residing in Tehran and regularly traveling to Qom for studies, little is known about his activities in Iran. Even his teacher's name is not known (Rahimi, 2010). Many observers believe that the main reason for Muqtada's staying out of public view was to distance himself from his militias' actions and the threats from American forces against Muqtada (Bayless, 2012).

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<sup>7</sup> . According to the agreement of the Shiite groups of the United Iraqi Alliance, the Sadr movement held about four ministries in the cabinet of the Maliki government.

<sup>8</sup> . The negotiations between the Iraqi government and Muqtada al-Sadr, who was in Iran during these conflicts, took place independently, and the Iraqi officials reminded the Iranian side of the Iraqi government's duties regarding ensuring Iraq's security. In the negotiations, the representatives of the Iraqi government, consisting of Ali al-Adib, Qasim al-Sahlani, and Hadi al-Amiri, representing the United Iraqi Alliance, with Muqtada al-Sadr in Iran, Muqtada finally admitted that some groups affiliated with him had engaged in illegal actions and, by issuing a 9-article statement, declared his disavowal of individuals and groups fighting government forces, and thus the conflicts ended.

After his trip to Iran, the Sadr Movement primarily focused its activities on political participation and engaging in elections, to the extent that in future political processes, representatives of this movement had an active presence in temporary and permanent parliaments, as well as in the governments of Jafari and Maliki (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 45).

While many analysts considered the Basra war to be a war between the legitimate Iraqi government and illegal militias (International Crisis Group, 2009: 11), this battle should be seen as an internal power struggle between Iraqi Shia parties. Maliki and the Supreme Council, as his partners in government, had begun an intense political rivalry with the Sadr Movement to gain the political support of the Shia majority in Iraq (International Crisis Group, 2006: 8-9). In this political competition, which was evident in the Basra war, the U.S. stood by one of the warring parties, and Iran adopted a neutral approach.

#### **2.4. Muqtada Sadr's Revisionist Activism in the Iraqi Political Sphere**

In early 2010 AD/early 1389 SH, Muqtada Sadr returned to the Iraqi arena as a political leader after the success of his electoral list in the March 2010 AD/March 1389 SH Iraqi parliamentary elections in alliance with other Shia parties. Although Muqtada sought to reorganize Jaysh al-Mahdi by helping Iraqi security forces in securing Shia neighborhoods (Rahimi, 2010), his movement's primary focus until 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH, when ISIS rose to power and finally officially declared its Islamic caliphate in Iraq by capturing Mosul, was primarily on political and social activities. Despite the dissolution of Jaysh al-Mahdi in 2008 AD/1386-1387 SH, armed struggles by military forces loyal to Sadr continued until the withdrawal of U.S. army forces from Iraq in 2011 AD/1389-1390 SH. However, after 2009 AD/1387-1388 SH, following Muqtada Sadr's consent to participate in provincial council elections, the military activities of groups affiliated with the Sadr Movement decreased, and Muqtada, as a political leader, while opposing the division of Iraq and advocating for the country's unity, has emphasized the unity of all Shia, Sunni, Kurdish, Turkmen, and even non-Muslim ethnic groups (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 47).

The Sadr Movement did not participate in and boycotted the first elections in Iraq after the fall of Saddam on January 30, 2005 AD/February 11, 1383 SH, which aimed to elect 275 representatives for the transitional national assembly, essentially a temporary parliament or

transitional house of representatives, as well as the provincial council elections for the eighteen provinces in the same year (Schmidt, 2009: 126). However, in the first general Iraqi parliamentary elections in December 2005 AD/December 1384 SH, Shia Islamist political forces, namely the Da'wa Party, the Supreme Islamic Council, and the Sadr Movement, which had previously been active in opposing the Ba'ath regime, along with a group of independent political figures, formed the seven main members of the "United Iraqi Alliance" (the Da'wa Party with the Da'wa Party - Iraq Organization, the Supreme Council with the Badr Organization, and the Sadr Movement with the Fadhila Party). As a result of these elections, Nouri al-Maliki was elected as Prime Minister of Iraq.

The Sadr Movement's first effective participation in the Iraqi provincial council elections was in 2009 AD/1387-1388 SH. In this period, the Sadr Movement succeeded in winning 43 out of a total of 440 seats in the provincial councils of 14 out of 18 Iraqi provinces. A significant fact in these elections was the emergence of intra-Shia differences. The result of disagreements among Shia groups was the separate participation of each party and political group in the provincial council elections, which also led to different results for each group (Asadi, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 64).

One of the reasons for the lack of a Shia alliance in the 2009 AD/1387-1388 SH elections was the Shia groups' attempt to determine their political standing and weight within the Iraqi political and social structure. Since in the December 2005 AD/December 1384 SH parliamentary elections, Shia groups had participated as a united alliance and specific quotas and therefore positions had been predetermined for each group, the actual weight of small and large groups within the alliance was not clear. Therefore, in these elections, to clarify their political and social weight and role, the Shia parties voluntarily agreed to participate individually in the elections and then form an alliance after the election results were clear.

While until these elections, the Supreme Islamic Council was considered the most important Iraqi Shia party and participated as the leading party in the United Alliance in the first Iraqi parliamentary elections in December 2005 AD/December 1384 SH, in the 2009 AD/1387-1388 SH provincial council elections, the "State of Law" list, supported by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, won the elections, and the Supreme Council's list, "Shahid Mehrab" (Martyr of the Altar), and the list attributed to the Sadr Movement, "Al-Ahrar al-Mustaqqillun" (The Free Independents), came in subsequent ranks (Eslami, 25 Mordad 1401, The Author In-person Interview).

The Sadr Movement achieved great success in the second parliamentary elections in March 2010 AD/March 1389 SH. In this period, the Sadr Movement participated in the elections as part of the "Iraqi National Alliance," consisting of Shia parties such as the Supreme Council led by Ammar al-Hakim, the Fadhila Party, and the "National Reform" movement led by Ibrahim al-Jafari (Strategic Research Center, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 5). In these elections, the Sadr Movement, by winning 40 out of 70 seats obtained by the Iraqi National Alliance, emerged as the most powerful political party in the alliance and demonstrated its influence in Iraq (Nouriyan, 14 Tir 2022 AD/1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

The third Iraqi parliamentary elections in 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH were held after American forces had withdrawn from Iraq, making them the first governance experience that Iraqis themselves planned and implemented independently and completely. This political campaign to elect 328 representatives began with voting by Iraqis residing abroad, followed by security forces, prisoners, and patients casting their votes. Iraqi citizens also went to the polls on April 30, 2014 AD/May 10, 1393 SH, and the participation rate of Iraqis in these elections reached 62%. In the third parliamentary elections in 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH, the trend of Shia alliances continued, and two alliances turned into three: "State of Law," "al-Muwatin" (Citizen), and "Ahrar" (Free), formed respectively around the Da'wa Party, the Supreme Council, and the Sadr Movement (Nouriyan, 14 Tir 2022 AD/1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

The Sadr Movement participated in the third Iraqi parliamentary elections in 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH as part of the independent "Ahrar" alliance and, through three factions – "Kutlat al-Ahrar," "Tayyar al-Nukhba," and "Tajammu' al-Sharaka al-Wataniya" – succeeded in winning 9.49% of the Iraqi popular vote. This movement also secured 10.93% of the total seats in Iraq and 15.38% of the seats in Shia-majority areas. However, the number of seats for this movement decreased by 12.5% compared to the second parliamentary term (Zari'an, 2015 AD/1395 SH: 213). In the 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH elections, the Sadr Movement, as part of the Ahrar alliance, won 34 parliamentary seats, becoming the second-largest political alliance in parliament; whereas in the 2010 AD/1388-1389 SH parliamentary elections, despite participating in the Iraqi National Alliance, its affiliated representatives won 39 seats. However, in the 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH elections, the Sadr Movement faced a decrease in the number of its parliamentary seats, indicating a weakening of its popular base. The Sadrist lost 5 parliamentary seats in these elections compared to the previous term. But the Ahrar list,

by winning 6 out of 69 Baghdad seats, showed that Sadr City in Baghdad still constitutes the center and core of the Sadr Movement in Iraq (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 49-50). The Ahrar Bloc in the 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH elections, despite being Shia, widely promoted Iraqi nationalism and, on the other hand, claimed to form a technocratic government. By "Technocratic Government," Muqtada meant a government that, regardless of religious values or identity, could hold government positions solely based on expertise. In this regard, Muqtada Sadr even supported a Marxist person simply because they were a technocrat. In the discourse realm, the Sadr Movement and the Ahrar alliance stood against some other ethnic discourses, such as Shiism or Sunnism, and seriously called for the preservation of Iraq's independence and respect for its national sovereignty at the national and regional levels. Based on this, Muqtada also strongly opposed any presence of foreign forces inside Iraq (Nouriyan, 14 Tir 2022 AD/1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

## **2.5. War on ISIS Terrorism and the Reproduction of the Sadr Movement's Smart Power**

In June 2014 AD/June-July 1393 SH, the terrorist group ISIS, known as the "Islamic State of Iraq and Sham," captured Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city after Baghdad, and ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared himself caliph of Muslims in a sermon in Mosul. Ayatollah Sistani issued a fatwa calling on all able-bodied individuals to take up arms to defend their country. Thousands quickly volunteered and formed new militia groups or joined existing ones. Muqtada Sadr also formed a new group called Saraya al-Salam to fight ISIS (O'Driscoll and van Zoonen, 2017).

Although in the fight against ISIS, militia groups, numbering over 60, participated in an organization called "Popular Mobilization Forces" (PMF), known as Hashd al-Sha'bi, which was united under the Prime Minister's Office, Shia militias were divided into three ideological lines:

- A) Groups that volunteered at the call of Ayatollah Sistani;
- B) Groups that were already active in Iraqi political and military developments and were loyal to Iran, such as the Badr Organization, Nujaba, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Kata'ib Hezbollah, and Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada;

C) Sadrists who had a more independent ideological and operational approach toward Iran and its Iraqi allies and were organized as Saraya al-Salam militias (O'Driscoll and van Zoonen, 2017).

Throughout the years of fighting ISIS, despite the existence of a common enemy between Iran and the Sadr Movement and Iran maintaining communication and support channels for Muqtada Sadr, the Sadr Movement increasingly distanced itself from Iran and its allied groups in Iraq. By late 2017 AD/late 1396 SH, Muqtada Sadr began to criticize the PMF-led militias, calling their nature and actions "sectarian" and emphasizing that "Hashd al-Sha'bi has no place in Iraq." (Rasheed, 2018; Steele, 2017)

In 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH, then-Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi announced victory over ISIS and that Iraq would hold parliamentary elections in May 2018 AD/May 1397 SH. Before the elections, various alliances were formed among different political actors, including Iranian-aligned Shia militias, former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, and Muqtada Sadr. However, for various reasons, these political alliances were not stable and were dissolved; because an examination of the Sadr Movement's political behavior in the recent Iraqi elections had shown that this movement pursued a pragmatic approach, and its main goal was to achieve the largest number of parliamentary seats and ultimately hold government positions. Their non-electoral political participation also indicated an anti-elite viewpoint with a demand for effective governance. A notable example in this regard was the storming of Baghdad's Green Zone by Sadr Movement supporters in 2016 AD/1394-1395 SH, during which Sadrists breached the Green Zone's security walls and protested against corrupt government officials, bureaucrats, and politicians, demanding the replacement of the government with a non-partisan technocratic cabinet (al-Tarafi and Jawad, 2016).

Of course, this event led to a split among some important military and political leaders of the Sadr Movement, such as Sheikh Qais al-Khazali, Shaykh Akram al-Ka'bi, and Shaykh Tabataba'i. At the intellectual core of the Sadr Movement, the differences between Muqtada and Qais al-Khazali led to a complete separation between the Sadrist line and the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq group. Based on this, since 2016 AD/1394-1395 SH, Muqtada Sadr, by raising the slogan of fighting corruption and carrying out reforms in the country, has called his followers and supporters to rallies and demonstrations at various times (Abbasi and Salimi, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 61).



The parliamentary elections in 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH were of great importance in the Iraqi political and social arena for various reasons, such as Iraq entering the post-ISIS phase, the Kurdistan Region's demand for independence, the specific situation of Sunnis at that time, and the relative divergence among Shias compared to previous elections.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, while the war with ISIS crisis, economic crisis, government service crisis, administrative and political corruption were all problems that had turned the Iraqi government into a failed state, Muqtada tried to lead popular protest movements by raising slogans of reform and fighting corruption and pressuring al-Abadi's government to gain the largest share for himself in Iraq's political future. Therefore, in these elections, the Sadr Movement participated in the Iraqi political arena with a populist discourse. By emphasizing the employment of any qualified Iraqi, regardless of their religion or ethnicity, in political and administrative positions, and the absence of differences between Shia, Sunni, and Kurdish groups in Iraq's political power structure, Muqtada Sadr managed to attract many supporters among various social strata in Iraq.

Finally, in the May 2018 AD/May 1397 SH elections, the Sadr Movement, by forming an alliance with the "Iraqi Communist Party," adopted the title "Revolutionaries' Alliance towards Reform," known as the "al-Sairoon" (Forward) alliance. The Sairoon alliance, led by Muqtada, although it won 54 seats, could not secure an absolute majority of seats. The "al-Fatah" alliance, led by Hadi al-Amiri and Qais al-Khazali and composed of figures allied with Iran, and the "Al-Nasr" alliance, led by Haider al-Abadi, secured 48 and 42 seats in the Iraqi parliament, respectively. Also, the Sadr Movement, which had spoken of the necessity of non-interference by Iran in Iraqi affairs for years, in this period emphasized maintaining a distance from Iran more than ever before and allied itself with communist and secular (non-religious) civil parties (Afshoun, 25 Tir 1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview) .

The final understanding of the attitudes and political behaviors of Iraqi Shia political forces in the 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH elections was that there was a kind of consensus among them regarding the theoretical and practical frameworks of domestic and foreign policy, which could broadly be termed "Shia-Iraqi nationalism." Although some individuals or parties might not have a strong inclination towards it, in practice and in the face of Iraqi public opinion,

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<sup>9</sup> . The participation rate in the 2018 Iraqi parliamentary elections was less than 45%. Although this rate of participation is sufficient under the constitution to recognize the election results, it represents a decrease of approximately 15 to 20 percent compared to previous elections, such as those in 2010 and 2014.

they were compelled to accept and go along with it, and only resistance groups outside the political process and the official government framework freely expressed their true views. The main elements of this discourse were:

- A) Emphasizing the priority and precedence of Iraq's national interests over international Islamic and Shia interests;
- B) Emphasizing the necessity of maintaining neutrality in international and regional conflicts and competitions and maintaining equal distance from various parties (in other words, maintaining balance in foreign policy and avoiding axes);
- C) Maintaining independence from Iran;
- D) Developing relations with Arab countries;
- E) Moving away from Islamism and towards alliance with secular and non-religious political forces.

What made the situation more difficult for the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH elections were Muqtada Sadr's stances. Perhaps Muqtada Sadr is not entirely opposed to Iran's presence in Iraq, but this movement has a specific approach to foreign policy, which is a balancing approach. According to the balanced view in Iraqi foreign policy, other foreign actors, including Saudi Arabia and Turkey, should have the same share and role as Iran in Iraqi developments (Eslami, 25 Mordad 1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

Iraq witnessed widespread street gatherings and unrest in October 2019 AD/October-November 1398 SH in protest of corruption, government and state institutions' inefficiency in providing services, poverty, unemployment, and also opposition to the Iraqi political system which divides important positions such as the presidency, premiership, and parliamentary speakership based on sectarian systems and general ethnic and religious lines. Therefore, protesters demanded widespread reforms in Iraq's political and economic structure. Amidst these protests, Muqtada tried to gather the revolutionary demands of the protesters under his unified leadership by strengthening Arab and Iraqi nationalist variables in his political actions and presenting revolutionary slogans. In these protests, known as the "Tishreen Revolution," demands were made regarding blaming Iran for the inefficiency of Iraqi Shia governments in solving people's livelihood and welfare problems, and slogans such as "Iran out of Iraq" were raised, and attacks were also carried out on Iranian consulates in Najaf and Karbala. The continuation of these demonstrations and unrest led to the instability of political and

economic continuity in Iraq and ultimately resulted in the resignation of then-Prime Minister Adil Abdul-Mahdi's government (October 2018 AD/October-November 1397 SH to February 2020 AD/February-March 1398 SH), a political figure aligned with Iran and a member of Iraq's Supreme Islamic Council, and the rise of the fragile governments of "Adnan al-Zurfi" (March 17, 2020 AD/March 27, 1398 SH to May 7, 2020 AD/May 18, 1399 SH) and "Mustafa al-Kazimi" (May 7, 2020 AD/May 18, 1399 SH to October 28, 2022 AD/November 6, 1401 SH), and finally the holding of early parliamentary elections in October 2021 AD/October-November 1400 SH (Afshoun, 25 Tir 1401 SH: The Author In-person Interview).

In the October 2021 AD/October-November 1400 SH elections, the Sadr Movement won the election campaign by a significant margin over its rivals, securing 73 out of 329 seats in the country's parliament (Qolizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 2). In his 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH election campaign, Muqtada Sadr unveiled an exceptional characteristic that other parties and groups do not possess to the same extent: the ability to mobilize street protests and disrupt order and security to gain his desired concessions. For example, in the short time remaining before the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH parliamentary elections, when Muqtada intended to withdraw from the political process and, in a way, boycott the elections, most political groups tried to prevent this decision from being implemented. It seems that political parties at that time believed that Muqtada's participation or non-participation in the elections would be threatening to his rivals; but certainly the Sadr Movement's non-participation would ultimately lead to the government's defeat and fall. In such a situation, political leaders like al-Kazimi, al-Amiri, al-Hakim, and Barham Salih asked Muqtada Sadr not to abandon the political arena; because they believed that his absence would be a more serious threat to the next government and other parties; therefore, they called for Muqtada's return to the political arena (Qolizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 3). This return ultimately led to the decisive victory of the Sadr Movement in the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH elections.

After winning the elections, the Sadr Movement's representatives entered parliament clad in shrouds, declaring their readiness to serve Iraq to their last breath with slogans of reform and establishing a majority government, not a quota-based one. During the months following the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH elections, the two main blocs in the Iraqi parliament, "Inqadh al-Watan" (National Salvation Alliance) with 173 representatives and the "Shia Coordination

Framework"<sup>1</sup> with 83 representatives<sup>0</sup>, competed with each other to form a government. The National Salvation Alliance (consisting of the Sadr Movement Alliance, the Kurdistan Democratic Party, and the Iraqi Sovereignty Sunni Alliance) led by Muqtada Sadr sought to form a national majority government (Hukumat Aghlabiya al-Wataniya), while the Shia Coordination Framework—as Shia parties aligned with Iran—sought to achieve a consensus and inclusive government (Muhasasa). This disagreement and confrontation between the two main Shia poles in Iraq led to the failure to reach the quorum (220 out of 329 representatives) for the election of the president. This is because, according to Iraqi law, until a president is elected, a prime minister cannot be nominated. Therefore, the failure to elect a president also led to a delay in the election of a prime minister; so much so that after two sessions for the election of a president, the Shia Coordination Framework in Iraq, led by Nouri al-Maliki, Muqtada Sadr's long-time rival, using a legal interpretation by the Iraqi Federal Supreme Court<sup>1</sup> and bringing together the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and some independents, and forming a bloc with more than 110 seats, engaged in obstruction<sup>1</sup> and the "Suspension of one-third" option (preventing the parliamentary session from reaching quorum for the presidential election), preventing the election of "Riber Ahmed," the Kurdistan Democratic Party's candidate, as president, and Muhammad Jafar Sadr, Muhammad Baqir Sadr's son, as prime minister of Iraq. This led to a political deadlock in Iraq (Alizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 4). During this period, Muqtada Sadr also tried to act in the Iraqi political arena through various methods of political action, including isolation, political silence during the holy month of Ramadan, a forty-day deadline for the Shia Coordination Framework, the independents' option, and turning towards opponents; however, in all these cases, the movement's plans failed (Qolizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 7).

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<sup>1</sup> . The most important groups<sup>0</sup> forming the Shiite Coordination Framework (Ittar al-Tansiqi) are: "State of Law" (Nouri al-Maliki), "Fatah" (Hadi al-Amiri), "Hikma Movement" (Sayyid Ammar Hakim), "Nasr" (Haider al-Abadi), "National Contract" (Faleh al-Fayyad), "Al-Fadhila Party" (Abdul Hussein Mousavi), and "Huquq" (Hussein Mounes), Humam Hamoudi (Head of the Supreme Islamic Council).

<sup>1</sup> . Supporters of the Sadr movement consider "Faiq Zaidan," the head of the Federal Supreme Court of Iraq, to be Iran's preferred candidate and view the court's interpretation as a result of pressure from the Quds Force and the Iranian side. Therefore, they have launched extensive negative publicity campaigns against Iranian officials and Quds Force commanders on virtual networks affiliated with the Sadr movement, including "Qanat Hozah Natiqa" and "Uruk News."

<sup>1</sup> . Abstruction or breaking the quorum is the intentional absence of a group of parliament members during voting, with the aim of depriving the parliament of a majority and preventing the approval of a bill or plan.

Following the political deadlock and failure to form a government, in June 2022 AD/June-July 1401 SH, the resignation of 73 representatives of the Sadr Movement from the fifth parliament brought a new crisis to Iraqi politics. The leader of the Sadr Movement, considering the deadlock in forming a government in Iraq to be artificial, stated, "I was not concerned with power and politics; I only wanted to expose every corrupt oppressor. The majority is for us (and not for others)." Addressing the Shia Coordination Framework, he emphasized, "I will not participate in a consensus government and have decided to withdraw from the political process so that under no circumstances will I be with the corrupt (Shia Coordination Framework) neither in this world nor in the afterlife." (Alizadeh, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 4-5)

After the resignation of the Sadr Movement representatives, the Shia Coordination Framework issued a joint statement, respecting the Sadr Movement representatives' action and emphasizing the formation of a "National Service" government. Despite all the differences within the Shia Coordination Framework, this committee, on July 25, 2022 AD/August 3, 1401 SH, in a meeting at Hadi al-Amiri's house, unanimously agreed to nominate "Muhammad Shia' al-Sudani,"<sup>1</sup> a politician and former<sup>3</sup> member of the Dawa Party and the State of Law coalition led by Nouri al-Maliki, as prime minister to the parliament;<sup>1</sup> a decision that was met with strong reaction from Muqtada Sadr and his supporters and ultimately led to the occupation of the Iraqi parliament by Sadr Movement supporters, once again entangling Iraq in a confusing web of increasing political instability caused by political and ethnic differences.

It seemed that Muqtada Sadr's main goal in encouraging his supporters to continue their sit-in in parliament was to dismantle the Shia Coordination Framework; thus initiating the project of holding new early elections and electing his preferred individual as interim prime minister. However, in October 2022 AD/October-November 1401 SH, finally, after a year since the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH Iraqi parliamentary elections and the events that occurred in the country during this period, Iraqi political parties, centered around the Shia Coordination Framework, reached a final agreement to elect Abdul Latif Rashid as president and

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<sup>1</sup> . As a result of the Tishreen Revolution protests in 2019, Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani separated from al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition and founded the al-Furatain party.

<sup>1</sup> . On October 13, 2022, Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani was tasked by the then President of Iraq, Abdul Latif Rashid, with forming a cabinet, and his government officially began its work on October 27, 2022, after obtaining a vote of confidence from the Iraqi Parliament.

Muhammad Shia' al-Sudani as prime minister. Now, the challenge related to the election of the president and prime minister has been resolved with the agreement of the Shia, Kurdish, and Sunni factions, and Iraq is on the right path. Al-Sudani is also a personality close to the religious authority and accepted by Shias, Sunnis, and Kurds. However, in the future, Muqtada Sadr, who still has high influence among the Iraqi masses, may obstruct al-Sudani's cabinet and bring people to the streets. In any case, the election of these two figures, Rashid and Sudani, was a smart move, after a year of disagreement and instability in the Iraqi political arena, the faction leaders concluded that Iraq should return to its true position in the region and the world.

### **Conclusion**

One of the significant figures among Iraqi politicians, who has had a remarkable impact on Iraq's political equations in the last two decades, is Muqtada Sadr. In fact, Muqtada Sadr, as a young politician benefiting from his family's good reputation, became an active player in the Iraqi political arena after 2003 AD/1381-1382 SH. He was initially placed on the blacklist of Paul Bremer, the American administrator in Iraq; then he began his armed struggle against the American occupation; subsequently, with the official end of the armed struggle, he entered the political competition, and in the years after the emergence of ISIS in 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH, he reorganized his affiliated military forces, Saraya al-Salam, among the Popular Mobilization Forces.

This overall trend indicates that Muqtada Sadr's activism has been very turbulent amidst transformations, and this personality has never considered him to have a fixed role. Furthermore, Sadr has consistently adopted contradictory and unpredictable stances in his actions and statements, which has surprised political observers. This has caused ambiguity and confusion for other domestic and foreign actors in their interactions with him. What is observed in the genealogy of Muqtada Sadr's actions is that Muqtada has repeatedly made high-level decisions in the course of Iraqi political and social developments but has then reversed them after a while. For example, Muqtada Sadr announced in 2013 AD/1391-1392 SH that he would boycott the Iraqi political mechanism and system, but then participated in the 2014 AD/1392-1393 SH elections and in the 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH elections formed a large part of the government.

Despite presenting itself as the flag-bearer of political system reforms and fighting corruption in Iraq's political and administrative structure, the Sadr Movement continues to have an active and effective presence in Iraqi government centers and positions. In the period before the 2018 AD/1396-1397 SH elections, Muqtada Sadr adopted a civil and secular approach and even allied with Iraqi communists and participated in the elections. At that time, Muqtada called resistance groups aligned with the Islamic Republic of Iran "Impudent Militias" and spoke of the necessity of dissolving the Popular Mobilization Forces. However, to the utter surprise of all ideological currents, including seculars and Islamists, after winning the elections, they formed an alliance with a supporter of the Popular Mobilization Forces and these so-called militias, namely the Al-Fatah alliance, an alliance called the Al-Bina (Construction) alliance, and both sides worked together to elect Adil Abdul-Mahdi as prime minister. Perhaps it was based on this that there was little reaction in the Iraqi political arena and public sphere to the Sadr Movement leader's stances and his decision not to participate in the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH elections.

Another point that strengthened suspicions about the publicity nature of Muqtada's actions before the 2021 AD/1399-1400 SH elections was that he stated in a video message that he would soon be martyred; because he had risen to establish reforms, and the corrupt would kill him. However, elsewhere he attributed the cause of his martyrdom to his opposition to recognizing Israel and establishing relations with this regime, emphasizing that he is the only obstacle to establishing relations with Israel, and this would be a strong reason for his elimination by ill-wishers.

Muqtada Sadr's decision to suspend all political activities of the movement for at least one year with the aim of reforming it on April 14, 2023 AD/April 25, 1402 SH brought Iraq into a new phase of political developments. This decision confirms all the author's statements and field findings regarding Muqtada's unpredictability in political action, character distortion, and severe fluctuating and unstable decision-making. Based on this, it can be expected that Muqtada will soon, by adopting new stances, continue to subject Iraq's political future to uncertainty, complexity, and political and social instability.

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## The Place of Incrementalism in Policymaking: Challenges in the Political Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The present study aims to analyze the conditions that led to the lack of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran by utilizing the tenets of Incrementalism theory and its related perspective (path dependency).

**Method:** Historical institutionalism and a descriptive-analytical approach.

**Results:** The strategy of incrementalism is considered a tool in the policymaking arena of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which leads to policy accumulation and creates an impasse in the country's political development. This is deeply conservative and serves anti-political development forces.

**Conclusions:** The research results show that incrementalism is considered an obstacle in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which, as much as any conceptual framework related to the policymaking process, has created challenges in the field of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran

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## **Introduction**

Despite the formation of foundational bases for political development in Iran after the Islamic Revolution—such as the growth of civil institutions, periodic elections, the growth of new technologies, the development of digital media, the formation of various parties, and elite circulation—this concept still faces various levels and degrees of political instability. There is a distance to achieving the desired aspects of political development in various facets of governance, and it has not yet achieved a stable and established meaning in the discourse of politics in post-revolutionary Iran. The present study aims to provide an analytical and theoretical framework to understand the reasons for the weakness of political development in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. One of the serious problems in Iranian society in recent years is that the elite spectrum has not been able to achieve a common causality (a coherent causal apparatus) for the lack of political development in Iran in the field of policymaking.

The policymaking process is convoluted and complex, which is why researchers have tried to simplify its various stages into an easily understandable "Policy Cycle." Strategies like incrementalism, which will be analyzed in this article, can be helpful in understanding the policymaking process in the context of political development. Since the empirical reality of incrementalism is primarily the result of policy accumulation, it continuously entails the operationalization of political actions. In such conditions, it increases the demand for fundamental political discussions. Consequently, accumulated incrementalism becomes one of the sources that puts pressure on the three cornerstones of legitimate government: effective policy implementation, the complexity of policy discussion, and evidence-based policymaking (Adam, 2022: 525).

It is generally argued that the tool for analyzing gradual institutional changes is path dependency, "Which includes elements of continuity and (structured) change." This insight may be considered a deviation from a long-standing tradition in the study of institutional change (Heijden and Kuhlmann, 2016: 4).

These issues raise theoretical challenges and necessitate examining the obstacles that have contributed to the lack of modernization and political development in the Islamic Republic. It is believed that modernization and political development encompass goals whose realization can reduce the gap between political institutions and other institutions in the economy and society, thereby paving the way for progress, advancement, and public welfare. Considering

these discussions, the aim of this article is to evaluate the theory of incrementalism as an obstacle to political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is as influential as any conceptual framework related to the policymaking process in political science and has stimulated thought and research for more than two decades. Over time, with changes in the needs of society, and considering the intractable problems currently plaguing Iranian political society, as well as the need to pay attention to flexibility in developmental decision-making, incremental theory and the belief in applying gradual changes are deeply conservative and serve anti-development and anti-modernization forces. This critical perspective is not merely about criticizing, but rather about taking a deeper look at events. The application of this analysis is not to predict the future, but rather to open up current and past discussions to create spaces for transformation to create alternative futures, allowing us to provide a range of transformative actions in this research. From this perspective, this paper intends to answer the main question: ‘ Under what policy did the inhibiting factors of political development in Iran emerge after the Islamic Revolution?’ The hypothesis presented in this research states that over time, with changes in the needs of society, and considering the intractable problems currently plaguing Iranian political society, as well as the need to pay attention to flexibility in developmental decision-making, incremental theory and the belief in applying gradual changes are deeply conservative and serve anti-political development forces.

Despite this, no study or research has yet been conducted to examine the obstacles to political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran from a structuralist perspective and through the lens of incrementalism theory. However, there are resources and research that, with different approaches, have addressed the lack of political development in Iran. For example, Ranjbar et al., (2021 AD/1400 SH) argue in their article "Path Dependency as an Obstacle to Correct Policymaking; with Emphasis on Iran," that path-dependent processes are considered a significant and influential obstacle in policymaking. They demonstrate how and in what context this factor originates and how and through what mechanism it interferes with decision-making and non-decision-making. Additionally, Shafieifar (2015 AD/1394 SH), in his article "The Trend of Political Development in the Islamic Republic," argued that after the formation of the Islamic Republic system and the establishment of elected institutions, governments have had different orientations in their programs and policies in line with political development. However, given the relative distance of these programs from the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, there is still considerable potential for the realization of political



development in the Islamic Republic. Vafaei (2014 AD/1393 SH) also argued in his article "Political Development and Modern Politics: Damages and Challenges of Political Development in Contemporary Iran" that political development has always faced various damages and challenges. The origin of one of its fundamental challenges in our society is a misunderstanding of the relationship between political development and modern politics.

Despite the considerable research on political development and its obstacles in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the present study differs from the aforementioned works in that it incorporates incrementalism theory, taking time and history as influential components in shaping the policymaking process. It demonstrates that one of the reasons for the lack of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the adherence of agents and policymakers to a path established in the past. These positions reflect gradual conservative changes based on maintaining the status quo due to risk aversion and the unpredictability of policy consequences, a subject not considered in previous research.

## **Method**

### **1. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

Theories in political-historical research have at least five diverse roles. Theories can serve as a guide for selecting research data, as the goal of research, as a research tool, as a subject of research debate, and finally, as the explanatory configuration of research (Hatami, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 126-141). In studying political processes, researchers can turn to various theories in the field of institutional change. When examining these theories, a broad distinction can be made between those studying major changes implemented at critical junctures, times, or as a result of external shocks, and theories studying gradual change (Heijden and Kuhlmann, 2016: 1). This article aims to analyze, from a structuralist perspective, the conditions that have contributed to the lack of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran, utilizing the teachings of incrementalism theory and the related perspective of path dependency. Each of these approaches will be outlined below for a deeper understanding.

#### **1.1. Incrementalism Theory**

The credit for developing the incremental model of public decision-making is usually attributed to Charles Lindblom (Howlett and Migone, 2011: 54). Despite Lindblom's clear commitment to incrementalism as a preferred decision-making strategy (Atkinson, 2011: 10);

he illustrates the problems of decision-making by considering analytical limitations and conflicting preferences (Adam, 2022: 525).

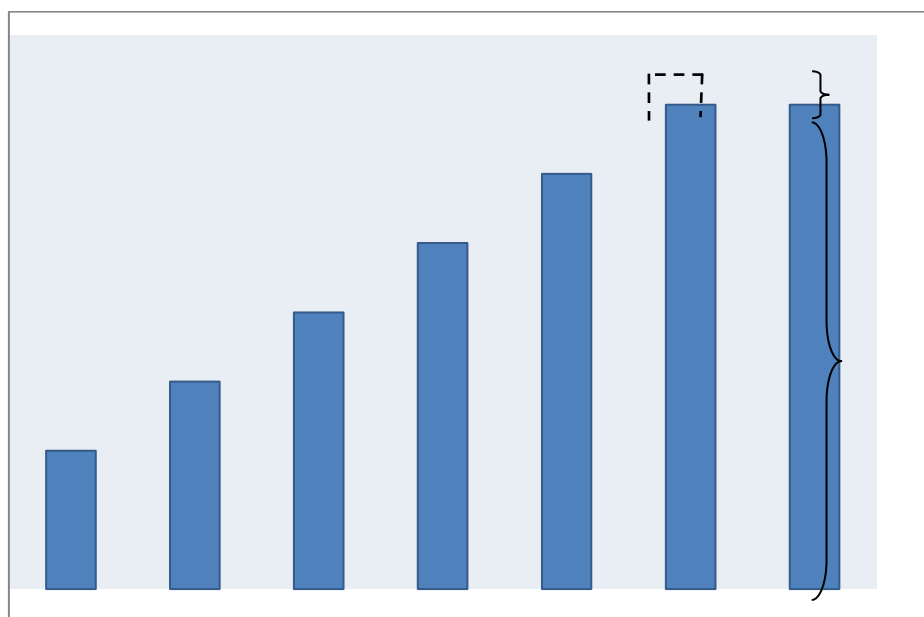
This decision-making method is in stark contrast to the rational decision-making model and relies on "Successive limited comparisons" to simplify decision-making (Lindblom, 1959: 81). It goes so far as to consider rational decision-making impossible due to a combination of disagreement over goals and insufficient knowledge base for most issues (Hayes, 2006). The limitations of rational policymaking necessitate research to develop the necessary recommendations for rational policymaking. In this regard, incrementalism can be seen as an awareness of the inherent political challenges in policymaking (Deegan, 2017: 3), and continuously creates solutions outside the current situation, step-by-step and in small degrees, which are "Far Superior" to the efforts of the rational approach and are considered more comprehensive for policymaking (Lindblom, 1959: 86). Indeed, this concept is one of the results of a system of checks and balances in which politicians may disagree about what we, as a nation, want to achieve or what policies best achieve common goals (Hayes, 2002). Hence, it demonstrates a pluralistic process of policymaking that involves mutual adjustment between multiple actors who typically start from very different concepts regarding goals (Hayes, 2012: 287).

Although policies show changes over time without responding to major exogenous "Shocks," (Thelen, 1999) policymakers prefer to stick with existing policies rather than embrace new programs with uncertain consequences (Talebi et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 117).

According to Lindblom, decision-makers do not annually review the entire range of existing and proposed policies, but rather identify social goals and investigate the benefits and costs of alternative policies in achieving these goals. They also rank the order of priorities for each alternative policy in terms of maximum net benefit and then choose based on all relevant information.

Conversely, time, information, and cost constraints prevent policymakers from identifying a full range of alternative policies and their consequences. Political constraints hinder the establishment of a transparent commonality of objectives and an accurate calculation of costs and benefits. Therefore, the incrementalism model describes a more conservative decision-making process because existing programs, policies, and expenditures are limited and considered as a base (Dye, 2013: 21). Thus, small and marginal changes occur based on existing institutional arrangements (Dimitrakopoulos, 2001: 1).

In this way, incrementalism suggests that policy choice at any given time is a marginal adjustment of a previous policy choice (Jones and Baumgartner, 2004: 325). Insofar as, one of the main assumptions of incrementalism is that a project is carried out through many small incremental changes rather than a few large leaps (extensive planning), and these changes are reversible. The manager sees their decisions merely as "A Step" in which "They can often correct a past error relatively quickly." (Pal, 2011: 31) In this manner, incrementalism, slowly applied, reflects larger changes in public policy over time (DeCooman, 2023). Hence, incrementalism, in contrast to dramatic changes, is conventionally praised in law as the prudent path of change, a path that gives credence to history and precedent (Levmore, 2009: 3). Overall, the theory of incremental decision-making states that decision-makers use previous activities, programs, and policies as the basis for their decisions and focus their efforts on incrementally increasing, decreasing, or modifying past activities, programs, and policies (Dye, 2013: 21).



(source: Dye, 2013: 21)

## Gradualism Policy

Past policy commitment

Figure 1. The Incrementalism Model

In fact, the incrementalism model assumes that policymakers rarely review past policy commitments, but rather focus their attention on changes in policies and expenditures. Furthermore, incrementalism is politically expedient. Agreement in policymaking is easier when the issues in dispute are only increases or decreases in budgets or reforms.

Program conflicts intensify when decision-making focuses on significant policy changes yielding substantial gains or losses. This is because political alignments will be extremely high during the annual approval of new programs or policies (Dye, 2013: 22).

### 1.2. Path Dependency

The concept of path dependency has its origins and is now well-established in the multidisciplinary fields of history, economics, policy studies, and political science. The path dependency perspective remains popular using political science studies in historical-institutionalist research (Opara et al, 2022: 365). Similarly, it is common for social scientists to describe political processes as "Path-dependent." (Pierson, 2004: 251) It is generally argued that path-dependent policy paradigms influence institutional development. This is an issue that can include institutional transitions from democracy to authoritarianism, from federalism to centralization, and vice versa. In this regard, policy ideas are more important than material interests for the evolution of historical paths. Second, the sequence of path construction is equally important because the significance of policy ideas for constructing two sequences – a layering-conversion-drift path – points to institutional drift (Mukherji and Zarhani, 2021: 78). From this perspective, it is believed that the concept of path dependency is almost exclusively employed in institutional theories in political science, which relates to the institutionalist emphasis on the strategic orientation of actors to the contexts in which they find themselves in the unintended consequences of purposeful action and the importance of the historical legacy inherited from the past to the present. This is a historical-institutionalist tendency that explains historical structures rather than norms and the culture of rational behavior, which is the most relevant (Heron and Richardson, 2008: 4). William Sewell believes regarding path dependency: "What happened in the previous time period affects the probable outcomes of a

sequence of events that occurs in the subsequent time period." (Pierson, 2004: 252) This often implies the claim that "History matters." (Pierson, 1997: 3 and Greener, 2004: 3)

In political theory, path dependence indicates how historical factors, imprinted at a particular moment, can determine subsequent changes and outcomes. Thus, upon embarking on a path, any institution finds itself increasingly committed to the chosen route, and although this does not mean the path is irreversible, it does mean that the initial choice is reinforced (Fernandes, 2010: 143). Indeed, past choices may have been purely random or considered insignificant events at the time, but these early choices may later have important consequences. This also means that the sequence of events matters and influences outcomes. Furthermore, early events are amplified and locked in due to increasing returns (Rixen and Viola, 2015: 306). Hence, it can be argued that the core concept behind the path dependence perspective is that institutions, organizational structures, and technological systems are related to prior historical events. This indicates that the future path of any organizational and institutional structural system is dependent on the historical path of the system. Therefore, the motivation/desire of institutions, technologies, or systems to develop in certain ways is fundamentally a result of inherent structural characteristics, actor beliefs, and intrinsic values. In short, the path dependence perspective on a geographical environment is the idea that, within an organization or institution, previous historical events contextualize and determine future events (Opara et al, 2022: 365). Another key aspect is the concept of change that follows the prior path of pre-existing or deeply rooted institutions, technologies, and systems. Since path dependence assumes relative stability in political and institutional systems, it provides a useful starting point for examining transformative changes, given existing institutions and policies (Opara et al, 2022: 366).

## **2. The Impact of Incrementalism in Evidence-Based Policymaking**

"Politics is the art of the possible," is one of the most famous phrases attributed to Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of the German Empire from 1871 to 1890. Reaching agreement on radical departures is more difficult than agreeing on marginal deviations from the status quo. After all, the status quo is the result of lengthy decision-making processes involving intense conflict, bargaining, and reflecting long-standing power structures in which actors from all sides of the political spectrum are, to some extent, invested. This is why incrementalism is so common in democratic decision-making and politically appealing (Adam, 2022: 530).

According to Lindblom, there are two reasons why decision-making typically does not stray far from the status quo. First, since bargaining involves distributing limited resources among various participants, it is easier to continue the existing distribution pattern than to attempt to negotiate redistribution. Major changes are more difficult to agree on because the benefits and costs of existing arrangements are known to policy actors, in contrast to the uncertainties surrounding new arrangements. The result is usually either a continuation of the status quo or agreement on small, incremental changes. Second, the standard operating procedures of bureaucracies also tend to promote the continuity of existing practices. The methods, by which bureaucrats identify options, and the selection procedures and criteria, are often predetermined, preventing innovation and perpetuating existing arrangements (Hewlett and Migone, 2011: 56).

Political decision-making models begin with an important observation about the information processing requirements in public policymaking. Political actors are constrained by a scarcity of time, resources, and political attention. Because political decision-makers must deal with a large number of different issues on a daily basis – negotiating budget allocations, designing regulatory policies, sitting in hearings, and engaging in casework – they cannot devote the time and resources required to engage in a comprehensive search for a solution to every policy problem (Araral Jr et al, 2013: 139).

While alternative policies exist, the cost of collecting all the necessary information is exceedingly high. Consequently, policymakers lack sufficient foresight to understand all the implications of each option. They are also unable to calculate the cost-benefit ratio for alternative policies, thus putting various political, social, economic, and cultural values at risk (Dye, 2013: 21). According to Pierson, political actors within political institutions tend to act in accordance with previously established paths, due to the high costs that deviation from the path entails. It is logical to assume that this inertia inhibits entry and departure from previously established policies. The more actors follow a path, the more likely they are to take further steps in the same direction. The costs of exiting the path and breaking the pattern of development increase over time. Pierson describes this process of behavior among political institutions as self-reinforcing mechanisms and increasing returns (Pierson, 2000: 252). Furthermore, given the nature of politics as a collective action, political actors within political contexts tend to adapt their behavior to existing conditions. Therefore, the claim of adopting

policy initiatives that deviate from existing standards is debatable, and thus explains why policy development stagnates (Pierson, 2000: 257).

Under such circumstances, governments may decide to focus on improving previous policies as a more efficient method of policymaking. Alongside this, we can consider policymaking that occurs in stages or over time to be more reasonable, as it reduces the likelihood of creating large, lasting changes that have not been properly considered and evaluated over a period of time (Deegan, 2017: 3). Given this, uncertainty about the consequences of various policy alternatives compels policymakers to adhere to previous policies as much as possible to reduce the likelihood of unforeseen negative consequences. The segmented nature of policymaking in large bureaucracies makes it difficult to make decisions that take into account the views of all the various experts involved (Dye, 2013: 19).

On the other hand, a lack of governmental accountability ensures that the same group of political leaders are frequently re-elected for extended periods, and thus are disinclined to enact fundamental changes. In their governance approach, based on the principle of path dependency, there exists, effectively, a mutually reinforcing and symbiotic relationship. When a stable team of political leaders is repeatedly re-elected, they interpret their re-election as a mandate from voters who either interpret or dislike change. Therefore, they only implement minimal or limited changes in accordance with a path-dependent perspective (Opara et al, 2022: 365).

However, when public understanding of current political issues transforms, broad changes occur in one or more policy areas. Government policies and strategies sometimes change dramatically, but more often operate in a manner similar to the past. In this context, the political sphere is understood identically to the concept of a policy subsystem, that is, a segment of public policy (Czapiewski, 2015: 38). The subsystem approach suggests that interest groups, operating in a more limited environment than traditional group theorists, take action at the mid-level of government in decision-making systems organized around discrete programs and issues (Worsham, 1998: 486). These actions can sometimes be identified as an impediment to political development, due to a belief in the status quo and the unpredictability and high risk inherent in political decision-making.

Overall, most political scientists now take some form of disjointed incrementalism and partisan mutual adjustment for granted (Wood and Collingridge, 1993: 3). However, aspects of the political system may prevent policies from being regularly re-examined, that is,



preventing the rapid succession of small steps that Lindblom predicts. Under such circumstances, incrementalism can rightly be accused of a conservative bias (Hayes, 2012: 296). In any case, the current state of policy reflects a long history of conflict and bargaining. While this history is usually known to policy actors, the impact of entirely new arrangements is uncertain (Lindblom, 1959: 84).

Path dependency also refers, more narrowly, to the idea of institutional "Lock-in," whereby change becomes impossible or unlikely (Rixen and Viola, 2015: 302). According to Lindblom, the idea of continuous and incremental change is summarized through small wins. In short, the marginal costs of failure and the benefits of small steps reduce resistance and political competition for success (Banha et al, 2022: 544). Successes that can be achieved in light of political modernization and development. Political experts, NGOs, and citizens regularly criticize the inadequate nature and status quo of political action (Kersh and Morone, 2011: 169 and Roberts, 2019). This frustration is particularly evident in the context of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where incrementalism is prominent, a matter that seems to be a major obstacle to the political development of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **3. Obstacles to Political Development in the Islamic Republic of Iran**

With the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the path of political development in Iran underwent a fundamental difference from the period before it. This stemmed from the fact that the revolution, by its very nature, uprooted and transformed all those unfulfilled concepts, aspirations, and desires. The presence of the entire nation on the political scene of the revolution, while presenting a high degree of political maturity, familiarized and engaged them in the cycle of political issues and other related subjects, and, compared to the past, enhanced their intellectual strength and political insight. In fact, the Islamic Revolution of Iran led to a revision of people's views and orientations towards the political system and politics, and as a result, brought about a transformation in the political culture of the masses and their perception and orientation towards the functions of the political system (Sadeghi and Ghanbari, 1396: 143-144). In analyzing the relationship between the political culture of the masses and political development, it can be said that in the first decade of the revolution, especially in the early days of the victory of the revolution, the first presidential elections and subsequently, the parliamentary term of the Islamic Consultative Assembly took place. This

election period was held in completely revolutionary and competitive conditions with the widespread participation of various groups. The ideology of the Islamic Revolution, by weakening class, ethnic, and environmental identities and strengthening the superior Islamic identity, greatly influenced the expansion of the mass society of the people.

In other words, the participation of the masses during this period was not based on specific professional or group interests. The nature of social policies in the early years of the revolution, until 1989, led to the establishment of a populist government, the most important feature of which was mass participation and political mobilization, especially under the influence of the imposed war (Sadeghi and Ghanbari, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 144-145).

Also, during this period, we witness the growth of a manifestation of political culture that emphasized characteristics such as elitism, paternalism, obedience, and discipline, and did not herald the opening of opportunities for spontaneous civil and democratic activities. This is despite the fact that examples of active participation manifest themselves as participation in parties, aggregation of interests, articulation of interests, the right to vote, the creation of political parties, or voluntary associations, and active participation to change the various policies of the political system in an institutionalized manner (ibid.: 145).

However, the traditional view of government and governance, which can be called a paternalistic and authoritarian approach, has hindered political development in various ways. Although economic and social development has provided favorable conditions for establishing the principles of democratic movement, and although democratic institutions have been established in Iranian society, the influence of traditional culture has prevented these modern institutions from realizing their full potential. Institutions such as elections, separation of powers, legislative assembly, and political parties have not had the functions they have in Western and democratic societies in Iran. In fact, these institutions have been used in ways that are compatible with authoritarian approaches, not with the principles of democracy. In fact, these institutions have been transformed and co-opted under the influence of the long-standing political culture of society, which has had a profound impact on people's attitudes and beliefs (Abdolkhani et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 193).

A deep connection with traditional values can inevitably affect political development. Even revolutions cannot quickly affect them. On the other hand, the behavior of political leaders and the beliefs and tendencies of the masses regarding rational political behavior are largely influenced by traditional behavioral patterns. Understanding the relationship of power and its

connection with the behavior of political leaders and the approaches of the people is one of the important issues of political development.

When the concept of democracy and modern governance methods entered Iran, it did not integrate with the traditional system of thought and beliefs. Furthermore, it was received with specific understandings by both rulers and the people. Politicians interpreted this concept in a particular way, according to their own understanding and interests, and utilizing popular notions, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions, democracy was understood with the substance of autocracy. In Iran, institutions were established during a political movement to ensure public participation. However, deeply rooted structures in the traditional political culture created conditions that significantly altered the nature of these institutions. Political institutions derived from the modern state, such as elected government, legislative assembly, and political parties, faced serious transformation in their challenge with traditions and the perception of religious government (Abdolkhani et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 194).

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution is important from several perspectives in the discussion of political development: "Firstly, the Islamic Revolution had popular, almost pan-class, and populist aspects; secondly, freedom and liberation from the tyranny of the Pahlavi absolute state was the common goal of all political and social forces participating in this revolution; thirdly, with the victory of the revolution, a constitution was drafted based on two pillars: "Islam and republicanism." Islam represents the content of the government and the basis of legislation, and republicanism represents the sovereignty of the nation and mechanisms of popular sovereignty or democracy. Therefore, the constitution was drafted in a way that integrates Islam and popular sovereignty or republicanism. In the constitution, the objective requirements of political development, including fundamental freedoms, political and social rights, civil organizations, parties, social groups, and the scope and extent of their political and social participation, are included and formulated in a special chapter entitled "Rights of the Nation." Article 26 of the Constitution stipulates: "Parties, associations, political and professional organizations, and Islamic societies or recognized religious minorities are free, provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, Islamic criteria, and the foundations of the Islamic Republic. No one can be prevented from participating in them or forced to participate in one of them." (Afzali, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 345)

From this perspective, the main argument of this paper is that the obstacles to political development in Iran, in light of the pathology of parties, are subject to incrementalism strategy and a path-dependent process that constantly emerges in the past and becomes determined as an arena for policymaking in the future. Below are the factors that have strengthened incrementalism and path dependency in Iranian policymaking and have led to the failure of political development.

### **3.1. Bureaucracy and Factional Conflicts in Light of Path Dependency**

One of the most important and prominent features of most modern societies today is the emergence of a powerful state bureaucracy. The goals of bureaucracy are significantly influenced by politics, and as long as these goals are clear and specific, there should be no inherent problem in bringing bureaucrats and politicians together. However, there are accidental sources. A fundamental difference between a bureaucrat and a politician is their accountability (Besley et al, 2019: 23). This raises the issue of the power of bureaucracy, which bureaucrats can abuse for selfish purposes or in dealing with private citizens. Given this latter point, attention is usually drawn to the weak position of citizens in relation to the powerful state bureaucracy (Uguru and Ibeogu, 2014: 139). On the other hand, the existence of political groups and parties in the modern era is undeniable. Political parties are one of the four fundamental pillars of democracy and contribute to its advancement. They are such a fundamental force in the development of a country that they also influence development patterns. Elections without the presence of political parties can hardly be called democratic (Koolae and Mazarei, 2018: 57). A vast literature in empirical political science covers party systems, the performance and inefficiency of political parties, campaigns and elections, party identity, and many other topics. The intellectual history of parties is largely a story of anti-partyism. For every attempt to articulate a unified and stable order, parties and partisanship introduce political pluralism and, with it, division, discord, and fragmentation.

That is why political thought, in its aim to describe a just and stable political order, has been inherently anti-partisan (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2020: 96 and 99). On the other hand, researchers have examined bureaucracy as a social phenomenon and as a bridge between the leaders of a society and the people (Ghaffari and Torjoman, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 171). Historically, Iran, like other countries, faces a challenge between politics and administration. The interest of politics in controlling administration and the interest of administration in

dominating matters related to implementation are unavoidable in Iran, as in many countries. In this way, the political orientation of public administration is a very important issue. This issue becomes even more important given Iran's strategic position. The rotation of power and the coming to power of a new government undoubtedly lead to fundamental changes in the administrative structure, and the change of individuals from director-general to ordinary experts in government departments is proof of this claim. The incoming president changes the ministers, the ministers appoint new deputies, and the new deputies appoint new director-general. In many cases, the director-general change the heads, and the new heads bring new experts into the administrative system. The changes that occur in government departments following a change of government are visible to everyone. In this way, the politicization of public administration is not a far-fetched phenomenon and has consequences (Sadeghi et al., 2016 AD/1396 SH: 112). In this regard, political parties in Iran suffer from significant organizational chaos, a lack of strong leadership, and a lack of internal democracy (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 42); so much so that the literature on politics in Iran contains extensive references to political parties as well as frequent observations regarding the prohibition or absence of political parties. In this context, Sayfzadeh believes that factional infighting, with its dominance over the Iranian political landscape, has led to factional leaders making ambitious promises that are not fulfilled due to the populist nature of Iranian politics. This inevitably leads to public discontent and creates a rift among political factions (Bradley, 2007: 19 and 21).

Under such circumstances, it is argued that the institutionalization of a factional system in Iran has been path-dependent and, consequently, difficult to neutralize due to the existence of a self-reinforcing feedback loop (Mohammadi, 2014: 3). This issue can be attributed to the inflexibility and lack of rational mechanisms within the bureaucracy. In fact, the lack of bureaucratic capacity leads to coping mechanisms, such as the creation of red tape, administrative burden, the search for organizational workarounds, and non-compliance through delays in decision-making and failure to meet deadlines. Furthermore, the difficulty in identifying accountable actors increases the incentive for politicians to avoid blame and the incentive for bureaucrats to evade responsibility or abuse power (Park, 2021: 2).

Given this, it is believed that bureaucracy in Iran has played no role in the political development process, serving only as an agent of the political and governmental structure, with no other strong or influential role. The bureaucracy's function has primarily been to

facilitate and expand the dominance of the political structure in Iran. Due to structural weaknesses and a lack of institutional capacity, the bureaucracy, through its increasing size, cost, and corruption, has exacerbated the situation, adding to the inefficiency of the state institution instead of increasing efficiency (Mayeli et al., 2011 AD/1391 SH). In some instances, bureaucracy in Iran has led to widespread cronyism and governmental corruption, whereby individuals, through early access to information, awareness of upcoming events, and control of power and wealth resources, create a chain of influence that generates golden opportunities in political, economic, and social spheres for specific individuals within the administrative and governmental system. Indeed, in political, economic, and informational rent-seeking, the will of influential individuals dictates granting privileges to a specific individual or group, often with bureaucrats using their influence within the system to award these privileges to those who benefit them and whose favors they can later repay (Shahrokhi, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 9-10).

In light of incrementalism theory and path dependency, bureaucracy, when inflexible to environmental changes, becomes entangled in red tape and lacks creativity, which diminishes the efficiency of human resources and slows down system agility. The incremental model, emphasizing the impractical nature of public policy analysis based on complete rationalism, portrays a conservative decision-making process. Incrementalism is conservative in that it grounds itself in existing programs, policies, and expenditures, focusing primarily on modifying previous policies (Vahid, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 112-113). For example, the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Interior (one of the most important ministries of the Islamic Republic of Iran) has structural weaknesses, lacking proper organizational mechanisms for incorporating new specialists into the ministry's structure. Moreover, the existence of parallel structures within the ministry complicates decision-making and the execution of affairs. These structures lead to conflicts of interest in major decisions of the Ministry of Interior, and as a result, influenced by bureaucratic weaknesses in lack of clarity and transparency in policies, result in the exertion of bureaucratic influence, the imposition of opinions and beliefs, and the continued dominance of a particular faction. In setting public policy, excessive concentration and overlap of duties between the formal structure and parallel structures within the Ministry of Interior minimizes the participation of organizational units and public associations, reducing the richness and effectiveness of the decisions made.

### **3.2. Critical and Sensitive Junctures**

As Pierson explains, critical junctures are "Brief periods during which opportunities for major institutional reform appear, followed by long periods of institutional stability." They are those historical windows during which opportunities for new institutional arrangements become available, albeit for a limited time. Path-dependent processes begin with the adoption of a particular institutional arrangement from among two or more options available at these moments. Once a particular option is chosen, returning to the initial point when multiple options were still available gradually becomes more difficult (Mohammadi, 2014: 5).

These opportunities or critical junctures mostly occur in the early stages of institutions' life. After investing time, money, and other resources along that path for an extended period, the path chosen at the critical juncture becomes difficult to reverse. Consequently, the organization becomes less dependent on human agency, giving rise to more of an autopilot situation (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 30).

In light of this, one of the challenging debates among public administration theorists are the relationship between the two concepts of politics and administration. The concept of government today encompasses both bureaucracy and politics; the fundamental characteristic of bureaucracy is that it serves as an important instrument for political unity and is seen as having the permanent function of creating conditions and spaces supportive of politics. Particularly in developing countries, there is an imbalance between policymaking institutions and the bureaucratic structure that implements policy. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a risk that these gigantic and rigid bureaucratic mechanisms disregard the right to dissent. This can occur both in the relationships between superiors and subordinates within the bureaucracy itself and in the relationships between those in power and the general public (Lapalombara, 1963: 107-108). This is while understanding the nature of politics and bureaucracy and their relationship is difficult, and each can influence the other. In this context, some theorists believe that politicization can create challenges and tensions in administrative and bureaucratic relationships, ultimately leading to a departure from the structural and fundamental characteristics of Weber's ideal bureaucracy, such as hierarchy, meritocracy, and specialization; it also creates conditions in which bureaucrats seek political solutions to organizational and administrative problems (Honarmandi Choukami and Kenarroodi, 2024 AD/1403 AH: 65-67). In this regard, following the victory of the Islamic



Revolution, the laws of the administrative system were formulated with the aim of creating a state-run economy.

Many of our structures, laws, and regulations were established and shaped when we were in specific circumstances, such as during wartime or particular economic conditions. Under those conditions, governments generally believed they needed to establish organizations and enact laws to control the situation and improve affairs. It is expected that when those special circumstances are resolved, their mechanisms should also be eliminated. However, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, we have rarely encountered the removal of previous regulations. So much so that despite changing circumstances, the laws and structures remain in place. Even with changing conditions, newer laws are enacted and added to the previous laws and regulations. Thus, over time, we have faced a vast collection of governmental structures, laws, and regulations that are not functional but pose a significant obstacle to development and progress. This accumulation of regulations creates problems for developmental activities and slows down their process (Mashayekhi, 2018 AD/1398 SH).

Policymaking during sensitive and critical junctures, and its continuation due to self-reinforcement over time, creates problems that need to be addressed and require an incremental approach. According to this approach, for example, the implementation of the Targeted Subsidies Law caused problems and challenges that some economists consider a form of shock therapy (Momeni, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 93). Continuing the implementation of a policy may lead to new problems, which makes changes in that policy necessary (Malek Mohammadi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 94). Currently, only the cash payment to households remains from the implementation of the Targeted Subsidies Law, and the government has not yet succeeded in changing the payment method or ending it, and in the current sensitive and critical juncture, it is still caught in the trap of path dependency. Furthermore, in the early years of the revolution, especially in the initial years, due to the conditions of the imposed war, there was no opportunity for the formation and growth of political parties. Therefore, the press, media, and individuals assumed the roles and functions of political parties. During this period, known as the era of the ideological government, the Islamic Republic Party played the role of the dominant single party in order to monopolize power (Sadeghi and Ghanbari, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 145). This role, after the imposed war and in the present era, has been dominated by two parties: "Principlists and reformists."

Meanwhile, among experts, there is a consensus that political parties play a key role in consolidating democracy. As Pasquino (1990) argued, "All transition processes have not been dominated by the party, but all transition processes have been dominated by parties. In fact, the processes of democratic consolidation have indeed been dominated by the party." (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 30)

In other words, the institutionalization of the party system is considered a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the healthy functioning of democracy. Accordingly, the institutionalization of an individual party is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the institutionalization of the party system. This is important because "paths" or policy choices, although easily changed at the start of an institution, become very difficult to deviate from once a path is set and significant progress is made along the way. The path or policy that actors of an institution choose from among various options at the rare "critical junctures" in the institution's history is likely to affect them for a long time, and the longer this process lasts, the more complex the reverse operation becomes (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 30).

### **3.3. Self-reinforcing Mechanism within the Framework of Incrementalism Strategy**

Self-reinforcing dynamics are the main driver behind any given instance of path dependency. Initial decisions, choices, and developments within institutions become deeply embedded in the structure of these institutions, and changing these embedded policies after years of investment in them will entail significant costs on the part of those who have benefited from the old arrangements for a long time, especially when these benefits feed back into the organization as a good, which in turn reinforces the desired path. Positive feedback dynamics capture two key elements of analysts' more intuitive sense of path dependence. First, they clearly show how the costs of switching from one alternative to another increase significantly over time in specific social contexts. Second, and relatedly, they draw attention to issues of timing and sequencing, distinguishing formative moments or times from periods that reinforce divergent paths (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 31).

This issue can be understood within the framework of bureaucratic problems and the pursuit of path dependency by agents. For many politicians, survival in power is often the primary goal, and there are two broad complementary strategies for achieving this: coercion and the creation of a social contract. The first diverts the state's priority toward strengthening state

power through the creation of a police force or army. Politicians then coexist with effective bureaucratic control in some dimensions of the government. For other countries, the goal may be to establish a social contract in which staying in power is based on providing public goods for citizens in the form of infrastructure, health, and education in exchange for citizen support. This incentive leads to the creation of a state whose bureaucracy can deliver these goods. With either of these strategies, other dimensions of state bureaucracy, such as strong and independent legal systems that limit the power of incumbents and bureaucrats, and strengthening the independence of the legislature as a tool to control the executive branch, may not be built (Besley et al., 2019: 25). In fact, bureaucrats, in addition to public policymaking, are also influential in the specific decisions and actions of political officials; decisions that cannot be considered public policymaking. However, they are taken in order to exert political authority in various fields, both domestic and international. In both areas, the issue is the bureaucracy escaping from being a tool under the control of political institutions and becoming a power that pursues self-sufficient and independent goals (Gorji Azandariani and Ghahremanzadeh Nimgazi, 2015 AD/1395 SH: 14).

Within the framework of political parties, it is easier to change the policies and choices that party leaders make in the early stages of a party than when the party has consolidated. These early actions can set a precedent that will be difficult to break after a while, not because of the bias or conservatism of the party leaders, but because those policies trigger a chain reaction that feeds the path. For example, the reason for the difficulty in breaking the cycle of the rentier state in many oil-producing countries is the fact that investing in other industrial sectors other than the oil sector is less profitable.

Consequently, all available capital in the market is channeled towards the oil industry, and other sectors of the economy suffer from underinvestment. More importantly, over time, most people adapt their lifestyle, business practices, and politics to the consequences of an oil-based economy, such as the Dutch disease and rentier state. When the livelihood of the majority of people in a country depends on that type of economy and state, changing course from the situation they have become accustomed to is difficult. In this context, Bashiriyeh believed that the strengthening of the structure of political power in Iran has led to the inefficiency of political development, because in such a structure, various spheres of society are usually deprived of the necessary autonomy for free internal growth (Bashiriyeh, 2008 AD/1388 SH: 124).

In this regard, in the electoral system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, there exists an image of a representative who is, in some respects, obligated to a constituency but independent in others, which is rooted in the era of 19th-century parliamentarianism. Parliamentarianism was characterized by a personal trust relationship between citizens and their elected representatives, distinguished by "Local connections, social prominence, or the respect they inspired." (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2020: 96) Furthermore, the party system is complicated by the fact that individuals can belong to multiple parties, and that parties do not practically introduce candidates in Iranian elections. Instead, parties publish a list of candidates they support, and parties within a particular faction rarely support the same candidates. Additionally, funding is highlighted as a vital factor for improving any political party. In countries like the United States, political parties are financially supported through "contributions and subsidies provided by a few supportive businessmen, industrial corporations, banks, etc." (Duverger, 1964: 1) The absence of a party system also imposes a significant financial burden on potential candidates (Bradley, 2007: 22), which can be particularly difficult for women who need to negotiate campaign financing with their husbands. Indeed, political parties in Iran lack such substantial support.

Given the absence of major private companies active in developed countries, most companies and banks in this country are state-controlled and disinclined to support political parties. Furthermore, in Iran, people are not inclined to join parties that require membership fees; consequently, there is no public funding for political parties.

Another problem for parties in Iran is the electoral system. Political parties are effectively "Election machines that guarantee the nomination of a candidate" (Duverger, 1964: 21-22) and "The party system and the electoral system are two realities that are inextricably linked, and it is sometimes difficult to separate them analytically." (Duverger, 1964: 205) This indicates that political parties cannot be separated from the electoral system. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, however, elected representatives are not necessarily members of a party and only decide to become active within a party after the election. Considering the above, it appears that the weakness in strengthening and the lack of desirable political development in Iran are due to the strategy of incrementalism and path-dependent policies that occurred in the past.

## **Conclusion**

Political development in post-revolutionary Iran demonstrates the logic of incrementalism's reactive sequence reasoning based on path dependency. Within this trajectory, three main sequences can be identified: modernization, environmental, and cultural. The modernization sequence contains events that directly undermined the interests, values, and culture of the Pahlavi regime and laid the groundwork for people's participation in the first decade of the revolution, aiming to realize their rights. However, this sequence was perpetuated by a contingent event of increased demands and desires from the people, which, in turn, grew from a combination of environmental and cultural sequences. The environmental sequence was triggered by the intrinsic characteristics of the Iranian people, such as public participation in elections and freedom. These conditions, involving the strong reliance of various segments of the population, implied an innovation that unfolded in the elections from the seventh to the thirteenth administrations. This strengthened the political system based on the Islamic Republic and enhanced the dynamics of political development.

In formulating this research, cultural sequence is identified by a set of values such as participation, self-determination, freedom, etc., in which new ways of thinking were outlined in the life of the Islamic Republic of Iran. With all that said, politics and bureaucracy are inextricably intertwined in policy failures, regardless of their scope and degree. Politicians and bureaucrats have a symbiotic relationship in political and administrative systems; while politics and bureaucratic capacity differently affect policy-making processes. Therefore, whether a policy failure is politically or administratively driven largely depends on the temporal and spatial scope, along with policy cycles. In this regard, a political party is a means of linking the political process with society and helps improve the political system. The development of political parties in Iran dates back about a century, but parties have not been able to play a significant role in the Iranian political system, and obstacles such as political culture, rentier state, concentration of power, civil society, and the separation between elite groups and the masses have existed. From this perspective, it is argued that socio-political events since the Islamic Revolution have experienced a path-dependent, backward-looking cycle based on incrementalism, resulting in consequences such as the lack of a developed political culture, lack of publishing and press freedom, a rent-seeking economy and people's dependence on the government, concentration of power, lack of civil society, and separation between elite groups and the masses. This has become an arena for the inefficiency

of political parties and, consequently, an obstacle to political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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