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JOHN CABOT UNIVERSITY

The Dolphin Show: A Story of Consensus in the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

The scope of this dissertation serves to analyze the Islamic Republic of Iran not as a distinctive formation of state processes and legalities, as it is typically categorized, but rather as a standard model of authoritarian state organization. Through the use of the revised-WZB model proposed by Carsten Schneider and Seraphine Maerz, this claim of Iran's "uniqueness" is tested and exemplified in six frames of analysis to join the classic 'hybrid structure' that Iran is routinely classified as with to the more common authoritarian structure that is present in the majority of non-democratic states. This effort is conducted to establish how and why Iran utilizes public consensus-building techniques as a means to remain in power. The title of this work, *The Dolphin Show*, depicts the findings of this dissertation as an historical allegory from a brave journalist, Masoumeh "Masih" Alinejad-Ghomi. During the administration of Iran's sixth president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013), Masih wrote a groundbreaking article, *Avaz-e Dolphinha* (The Song of the Dolphins) published in the *Etemad Melli* (a former opposition newspaper that is now completely censored—including all copies *Avaz-e Dolphinha*). Masih claims that Ahmadinejad conducts his administration in the same manner a dolphin instructor would conduct training, handing out "food" (money) in exchange for a desired behavioral outcome. This example, although funny and equally individual, captures the complexity and accuracy of consensus-building-processes within Iran today.

*To all the amazing educators that have touched
my life directly and indirectly—
Thank you!*

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Introduction

This work of research centers on consensus-building in authoritarian states, but more specifically, concerns itself with consensus-generating techniques found within the Islamic Republic of Iran. The nation of Iran as a case-study evaluation of authoritarian practices offers a unique perspective due to its distinct assortment of institutions, leaders, and policies that are widely considered among the most diverse and irrational in the world. While Iran does display entirely authentic aspects of governance, this analysis seeks to go beyond this claim and show how Iran (and thus a wide array of *unique* authoritarian states) can be evaluated in a more systematized manner.

This dissertation is structured into six parts to orderly evaluate the origins, capability, resources, and impact of Iran's consensus-building apparatus. The first chapter deals with explaining the general background and features of nation-states today, such as how states can differ between democratic and authoritarian, why consensus and sovereignty are relevant to nation-states, and how Iran meets these criteria for being considered a nation-state. Chapters two, three, and four consist of exemplification of consensus techniques in contemporary Iran using the revised-WZB proposed by Carsten Schneider and Seraphine Maerz, as a template for understanding state control and consensus. The specific reason that the revised-WZB model was chosen as a conceptual framework for this thesis is due to the symmetry that Schneider and Maerz's model possessed in relation to two essential factors for studying authoritarian and hybrid regimes: (1) preservation of individual characteristics of the state that make it distinct and (2) application of governance explanation in a universal manner. This first point on 'distinction' is vital to studying Iran specifically because of its eccentric institutional organization that is considered one of the most "uncommon and peculiar in the world" according to Pejman

Abdolmohammadi, an expert of Middle Eastern studies at London School of Economics.¹ The second point on ‘universality’ from the revised-WZB model seeks to understand how and why a wide array of non-democratic states behave and use different techniques to govern and maintain control. In essence, the revised-WZB model is valuable because it offers the best possible technique to blend both nation-specific policies (that only exist inside one country, i.e. Iran presently) and universal, or more ubiquitous governance policies, that can be applied to all states (in principle). The revised-WZB model contains six frames of analysis that have been dissected into groups of two for each chapter. Chapter two pertains to the use of legitimization within the state via exemplification of ‘specific’ and ‘diffuse’ legitimacy narratives—a kind of national mythology or story that almost all states directly and indirectly display. Chapter three observes the use of state co-optation in both formal and informal arenas of society, illustrating how almost every individual in Iran is influenced by state organs in the form of employment, benefits, subsidies, or cultural inclusion—positive domestic policies that generate consensus by rewarding society to behave in a certain way. Chapter four contains the final two frames of the revised-WZB model and examines the use of state repression in the Islamic Republic of Iran from the viewpoint of either ‘hard’ or ‘soft’ coercion, with the example for ‘hard’ being state-sponsored executions and ‘soft’ being the condition of women under Iran's current Penal Code.

Due to the de-centrality and multifacetedness of the structure of Iran, the methodology that backs this piece of research derives from both a descriptive and analytical approach to academia, accessing both scholastic and historical texts, pre-existing studies of correlational functions within Iran’s institutional framework, and qualitative assessments from state-departments to non-governmental-organizations. When it is possible, each frame of the WZB

¹ Abdolmohammadi, P. and Cama, G. (2015). *Iran as a Peculiar Hybrid Regime: Structure and Dynamics of the Islamic Republic*. London: British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies.

model lists the appropriate “impact” of that specific technique. “Impact” in this sense can be defined as the percentage of individuals per year, within a given state, either benefiting or being coerced by the government. While the topics chosen for each frame of analysis under the revised-WZB model do not represent the only option for the State, it does represent the most prevalent in contemporary Iran. An example of this is how the executions as described in frame five does not represent the *only* way Iran controls people through hard repression, rather it is the most abundant topic with readily available sources, affecting the highest percentage of the Iranian populace.

This thesis is designed to give foreign observers a more solidly constructed idea of how and why authoritarian states survive and function in the manner they do through the example of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the conclusion, it will be assessed if Iran is at risk of undergoing regime change in the likely future, and if not, why an outcome as such would be possible.

Literature Review

The underlining theories, concepts, and arguments that have fostered this piece of work stem from a broad category of political literature to best grasp the complexity and multidimensionality of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since Iran is a hybrid government (containing both democratic and authoritarian features), theories to explain its rationale and behavior tend to settle on several smaller, institutional-related theories. Because of this factor, the structure of this review began with prior examination of the governmental configuration of Iran (*figure 1.1*) to see if its overall organization was more inclined to authoritarian or democratic means in order to choose an appropriate theory. Despite Iran's many features that can be considered quasi-democratic, the four pieces of theoretical literature chosen are aligned more

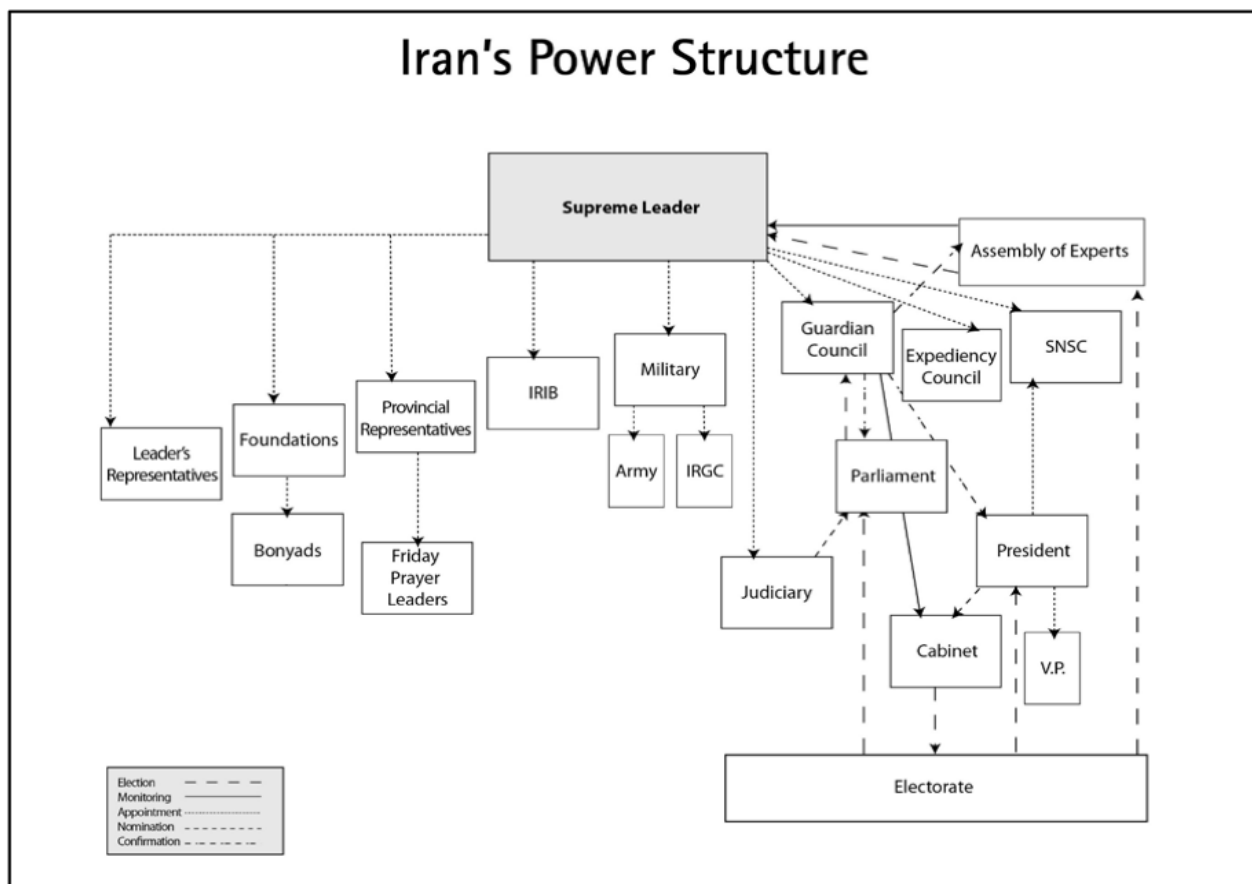


Figure 1.1, Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kouroush Rahimkhani. (2010). Iran's Power Structure. Washington, D.C: The Iran primer.

with authoritarian forms of governance because of the immense unchecked power that religious courts, committees, and individuals have within Iranian politics and society. This chapter will outline these theories, their backgrounds, and logical application to the remaining thesis.

The initial and most fundamental theoretical framework to emerge from research has been contributed by Milan Svolik, a professor of political science at Yale, in his work *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. In the piece, Svolik claims that academic research on authoritarian forms of government lacks a “unified theoretical framework that would help us to identify key factors in dictatorships, locate the sources of political conflict among them; and thereby explain the enormous variation in institution’s, leaders, and policies across a wide variety of autocratic nations.²” Iran is no dictatorship, yet it can be debated that the office and power of the Supreme Leader of Iran is so heavily saturated with formal and informal power that it could be equated to the same standard of autocratic input or governance as a dictatorial leader. Svolik attempts to generate a new theoretical framework to observe these states by examining the relationship between the *ruling coalition* of authoritarian societies (not just law-makers or political structures) and the Supreme Leader-like figures and institutions under their control. A *ruling coalition* in this definition can be considered the individuals, institutions, or other actors that compose the “inner circle” of any given regime, yet are completely independent of the dictatorial figure, their office, and their agenda. Svolik exemplifies this relationship as a balancing-act that attempts to satisfy needs, along with desires, between the masses, the elites, and the leader. Scholars, policy-makers, and journalists who are not familiar with studying authoritarian regimes tend to have a belief or idea that all power is concentrated in one place and pulsating vertically to the population through various state organs and mouthpieces, behaving as

² Svolik, Milan W. (2004). *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule*. Chicago: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. pg. 2-3.

the leader or regime solely intends and wills. Yet, Svobik flips this conception rather as a calculated use of repression and co-optation to reach a more stable situation (or coalition size) in any given country, and thus ensure the regime's survival.

This information and new perspective of how to view and explain autocratic societies influenced immensely the focus of this research towards the use of co-optation, legitimization, and repression as means to observe and explain social cohesion in authoritarian states. The work of Mary Gallagher and Jonathan Hanson expanded Svobik's claim and use of co-optation vs. repression and further generated several interesting results and phrases that have been utilized in the following dissertation. The two authors firstly explain the relationship between autocratic governments and their populations by examining coalition-building via the use of "carrots and sticks." A *carrot* here refers to a measure that builds support or acceptance of the ruler/regime and can range from the distribution of rents and patronage to programmatic redistribution and broad based economic growth³. Contrastingly, *sticks* are coercive or repressive measures that raise the costs of collective action for opponents of the regime with either violent, or simply negative, state-sponsored actions⁴. Gallagher and Hanson explain that carrots and sticks have real tangible costs (fiscally and morally) that vary across contexts based upon historical, geographic, economic, and institutional factors, as well as the international environment⁴. Following this claim, the two scholars attempted to follow inequality patterns from different autocratic nations and observe how governments prioritize the use, or access to, private and public goods as a means to build/stabilize coalition sizes. A *public good* in this sense can be defined as a mixture

³ Gallagher, Mary, and Jonathan K. Hanson. (2009). "Coalitions, Carrots, and Sticks: Economic Inequality and Authoritarian States" Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 668.

⁴ Gallagher and Hanson. [n 3] 668.

of *core* public goods, which are political liberties, and *regular* public goods like education, health care, and infrastructure⁵. A *private good*, by opposition, refers to all goods that are excludable from the general population and are intended for elite consumption in exchange for loyalty or support to the regime.

Carsten Schneider and Seraphine Maerz, two German political scientists (Schneider now a member of the Bundestag), further build off this work by constructing a complex algorithm to analyze the use of private and public goods quantitatively and systematically. They propose a re-evaluation of the WZB model, a theory originally authored by Johannes Gerschewski in 2013 that claims three ‘pillars of stability’ in authoritarian regimes (legitimation, co-optation, and repression), can determine if a regime will survive or not, but was highly contested in application due to its ‘limited explanatory power.’⁶ Carsten Schneider and Seraphine Maerz’s work however sought to expand and revise the model to consist of six frames of analysis that observe: (1) *specific support of legitimation*, (2) *diffuse support of legitimation*, (3) *formal co-optation*, (4) *informal co-optation*, (5) *hard repression*, and (6) *soft repression*.⁷ The outcome for this model can either be one of two possible outcomes: electoral defeat or no electoral defeat, yet this thesis will not concern itself with testing the model, and rather utilizing it conceptually. A key factor however to highlight about the WZB model as it pertains to this thesis, is the insistence by political scientist’s who use or test the model to conclude that it is impossible to look at any specific pillar of the model in isolation. Rather, to generate a better understanding of any autocratic state, observers must be prepared to embrace a full assortment of the carrots and sticks

⁵ Gallagher and Hanson. [n 3] 668.

⁶ Schneider, Carsten Q., and Seraphine F. Maerz. (2017). “Legitimation, Cooptation, and Repression and the Survival of Electoral Autocracies.” Berlin: Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft. 1,4,8-9.

⁷ Schneider and Maerz. [n 6] 3.

ensemble due to the fact that no regime can possibly govern through only one or several of the above mentioned frames. The thesis uses this firsthand by applying the six-frames of analysis by Schneider and Maerz's work as a template for understanding where consensus derives from in Iran

The final component of the theoretical backing that links together all of these pieces (with exception to Svolic) comes from Bruce Bueno de Mesquita in his study *Political Survival and Endogenous Institutional Change*. The key information of this work is the famed "selectorate theory." In this theory, it is understood that "regimes of all types have a *selectorate* of some size (S), which consists of members of the polity who possess the characteristics institutionally required to choose the governments leadership. To maintain power, rulers must maintain the support of a subset of the selectorate, a '*winning coalition*' of size W ."⁸ In order to "capture this winning coalition, leaders need to provide their supporters with rewards worth at least as much as they expect to obtain by defecting to a political rival."⁹ In this view of politics, leaders generate revenue and spend a portion of it on public and private goods intended to meet the demands of their winning coalition¹⁰. If we return again to the issue of public and private goods, Bueno de Mesquita insists that if all members of a society are given public goods when available, and private goods are solely for coalition members, "coalition size acts as an implicit price for private goods."¹¹ This means that regardless of an autocratic regimes ideological or

⁸ Gallagher and Hanson. [n 3] 668.

⁹ Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce. (2009). "Political Survival and Endogenous Institutional Change." *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, New York: New York University Press. 171.

¹⁰ Bueno de Mesquita [n 9] 171-2.

¹¹ Bueno de Mesquita [n 9] 172.

ethical backing, the way in which it governs (uses carrots and sticks to have a ruling coalition) is almost always dependent on actual revenue and resources at its disposal and not ideology or rhetoric.

These four pieces of academic literature together justify the use of coercive and co-optive measures within autocratic nations as a legitimate means to explaining state control, governance, and survival. The following thesis refers heavily to this review, the definitions and idioms found within it, and their underlining theories to facilitate explanation and exemplification of consensus building technique in Iran.

Chapter 1: The Nation-State Iran

From the very foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, international observers and political commentators have doubted the longevity and resilience of such a system headed by Shi'ite theologians. Yet forty years later, the Republic stands firm in its ideology, stability, and ability to thwart economic and political crises. With over 82 million citizens, 65% of which are below the age of thirty—equating to roughly 52 million children, teens, university students, and young adults—Iran hosts one of the youngest and largest populations in the Middle East today.¹² These facts together have lead commentators to question how such a regime can build consensus among its citizens and transmit this consensus indefinitely through time. My research question to tackle this phenomenon is thus accordingly: how does the Islamic Republic of Iran manage its winning coalition in order to sustain power from one generation to the next? After a lengthy reconciliation with differing political theories as listed in the literature review, I hypothesized that Iran sustains its continuity through formal and informal institutions that bring new members in via co-optation, while alienating reformists, radical- liberals, intellectuals, and secularists via repression and coercion. To begin to examine this phenomenon however, it is important to first understand how Iran is a “nation-state” and its general features.

The political concept of the “nation-state” is seen by many as being the most basic, natural, and precise unit of a collective society within today’s larger framework of international governance and relations. More simply, a nation-state is a population that identifies itself as being intrinsically linked to its territorial, linguistic, and ethnic traditions, accompanied by the

¹² Plan and Budget Organization, Presidency of the I.R.I. (2016). “Iran Consensus Data.” Tehran: Statistical Center of Iran. www.amar.org.ir/english/Population-and-Housing-Censuses.

legitimate use of force to safeguard these traditions.¹³ This chapter examines the contributing factors and characteristics essential to identifying modern nation-states today, but more specifically, illustrates this concept and its logical application through the example of the Islamic Republic of Iran. It firstly deals with defining differing state structures and characteristics from the generalized viewpoint of “democratic” or “authoritarian” states. It then exemplifies how Iran is neither a democratic nor authoritarian state, but rather a hybrid one utilizing theologic and revolutionary principles. This chapter lastly touches upon the concepts of *sovereignty* and *consensus* as they relate to ruling coalitions and regime survival within autocratic regimes.

When examining any nation-state, a variety of attributes—unique and standard—may arise across a broad selection of different regions and populations. Two characteristics however that remain dichotomically opposed and exclusive, or at least generally do, are the type and structure of political governance found within any given state. These types can be divided superficially as either ‘democratic’ or ‘authoritarian’ states. Although there are many definitions and working theories of what a democratic state is, it can be best summed by the work of Robert Dahl (1982) accompanied by Collier and Levitsky (1997), where they together point to the role of political structure, voting procedure, universal access to candidacy, and routine rotation of lawmakers.¹⁴¹⁵ This is opposing to authoritarian forms of governance and structures which can be typically characterized as “limited political pluralism, legitimacy based on emotion, minimal

¹³Smelser, N. J. and Baltes, P. B.. (2001). International Encyclopaedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences. Vol. 15. Elsevier. <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/international-migration/glossary/nation-state/>

¹⁴ Krouse, R. (1982). “Polyarchy & Participation: The Changing Democratic Theory of Robert Dahl. *Polity*, 14(3), 441-463.

¹⁵ Collier, D., & Levitsky, S. (1997). Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research. *World Politics*, 49(3), 430-451. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25054009>

social mobility, and informally defined executive powers”¹⁶. When examining the entirety of the world from being either democratic or authoritarian, a victor can be crowned on the side of states leaning towards authoritarian, with over 55% of states (or 60% of the world’s population) considered authoritarian or partially-authoritarian¹⁷.

Iran specifically as a political unit though truly ‘breaks-the-mould’ in classifying it for several reasons, which is why it is considered a hybrid-regime. Firstly, Iran holds consistent and semi-free elections—so much so, that there is not one year in Iran where a political campaign is not unfolding at either the local, regional, or national level. Events such as the 2009 Iranian Presidential scandal however have severely weakened the prior-legitimacy of this process, but for the most part, Iranians do have a firm understanding and habit of electoral procedures and customs commonly associated with democratic states. Iran’s policies and procedures though cannot be entirely characterized as democratic due to the process associated with running for office and the sheer number of how many officials are appointed indirectly through the Supreme Leader or the Council of Guardians. From the birth of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini has been determined to instill an Islamic principle he himself invented and reinterpreted, “Velayat-e faqih” (Governance of the Jurist) which justifies the direct implementation of Shi'a Ulema scholars into political proceedings.¹⁸ Essentially whereas in a democratic state there are systematic ‘checks-and-balances’ by judicial and constitutional oversight, Iran has superseded this function with Shi’a Ulema guidance and Sharia law.

¹⁶ Linz, Juan J. (1964). *An Authoritarian Regime: Spain*. Aktiebolag.

¹⁷ Freedom House. (2013). “Overview Fact Sheet.” Freedom House. freedomhouse.org/report/overview-fact-sheet.

¹⁸ Zanconato, Alberto, (2019), In class lecture on, *Khomeini. Il rivoluzionario di Dio (2018)*. John Cabot University, Rome, Italy.

One example of how this theocratic element directly effects Iran's status as being a hybrid state is that internal institutions such as the Shūrā-ye Negahbān (Guardian-Council), constitutionally requires candidates for all elections to submit a bid beforehand to gain approval. This aspect to their electoral system expunges many liberals, reformers, and secularists from joining the *Majles* (Assembly or Parliament of Iran)¹⁹. This example of a quasi-democratic electoral process is the first of many façades to understanding the nation-state of Iran and it's qualification as a hybrid state from the political point of view.

With a more solid understanding of Iran as a mixed combination of democratic and non-democratic elements, it is time to move onto the remaining physical features that help to enable modern nation-states in general. Two key concepts that are indispensable to this interpretation of the nation-state are *sovereignty* and *consensus*. Sovereignty, according to Patrick O'Neil, simply implies that within a state there exists a supreme power that is above all other powers and actors. O'Neil comments: "A state needs to be able to act as the primary authority over its territory and the people who live there, passing and enforcing laws, defining and protecting rights, resolving disputes between people and organizations, and generating domestic security."²⁰ In essence, a sovereign state is one that is capable to control its territories domestically (by maintaining a monopoly of violence), implement laws, and engage in relations with other external sovereign states (via foreign recognition).

Consensus, typically refers towards how domestic affairs generate sovereignty within states, but more specifically, can explain how populations as a whole transmit their consent to the national level. O'Neil again defines consensus as a path of political organization under mainly

¹⁹ Lust, Ellen. (2017). "Chapter 6: Actors, Public Opinion, and Participation ." *The Middle East*. Washington D.C:CQ Press. 243–287.

²⁰ O'Neil, Patrick H. (2015). *Essentials of Comparative Politics*. 5th ed., W.W. Norton & Co. 33.

democratic states insisting that “Individuals band together to protect themselves and create common rules; leadership chosen from among people. Security through cooperation.”²¹ whereas at the same time he characterizes authoritarian political-organization as being “Individuals brought together by a ruler, who impose authority and monopolize power.”²² In Western liberal democracies (WLD’s) and literature, this concept has been present since the Age of Enlightenment with the work of the ‘social contract theory’ as found in Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* (1651). Yet in authoritarian and hybrid nation-states, this theory does not remain completely valid. Returning to Milan Svolik, it could be claimed that here we truly lack a “unified theoretical framework that would explain the enormous variation in institutions, leaders, and policies. . . .”²³ Svolik believes that authoritarian states are shaped by two fundamental conflicts, the first being between those ‘who rule and those who are ruled’, followed by the conflict of ‘authoritarian power-sharing’.²⁴ While this first conflict deals directly with the problem of general consensus between the mass population and the government as previously discussed, the second does not. *Authoritarian power-sharing* by contrast, entails consensus derived from elites within the industrial, political, or religious spheres of influence. Moreover, it concerns itself with how leaders and their institutions maintain power regardless of “sharing” it with other actors by building a winning coalition. Authoritarian states or dictators do not routinely control enough resources to sway entire nations under their own power. Instead, they must share this power between a group of actors or institutions to reach a winning coalition.²⁵ These forms of consensus, although foreign and odd to Western processes, are as valid and

²¹ O’Neil. [n 20] 40.

²² O’Neil [20] 40.

²³ Svolik. [n 2] 2-3.

²⁴ Svolik. [n 2] 4.

²⁵ Svolik. [n 2] 2-3.

important as consensus derived in democratic states. The only real difference, however, is that the instruments available to the regime to sway both forms of consensus is far broader than their Western counterparts, and more removed from a grounding in universal civil rights.

In any nation-state—democratic, hybrid, or authoritarian—there are constraints on power, even when none are guaranteed. By either revolutionary threats, electoral defeat, popular uprising risks, assassination attempts, foreign intervention, or coup d'état's—there is always a constraint on power that exists outside of the ruling governments control. Even in the most extreme totalitarian states, leaders are concerned with general opinion and impact of domestic policies. This shows that observing authoritarian states in the 'carrot vs. stick' manner is not farcical or shallow, but rather a legitimate way to conceptualize how consensus can be built between the populations, the elites, and the leaders in authoritarian states. To display this in contemporary Iran, these instruments of consensus building via 'carrots and sticks' will be applied to the six frames of analysis as proposed by the revised WZB model of Carsten Schneider and Serapahine Maerz. Positive measures (the carrots, frames 3-4) to build winning coalitions will be discussed first in Chapter 3, followed by negative measures (the sticks, frames 5-6) in Chapter 4. However before beginning this assessment, the first two frames of legitimation must be elaborated to understand the narrative that Iranian citizens justify their governments origins and continuity (Chapter 2).

Chapter 2: A Narrative, A Nation

As discussed in the previous chapter, the backbone of any nation-state rests in how the two elements of sovereignty and consensus are balanced amongst each other. Yet the final product of this balancing act is *legitimacy*, and how governments foster the process of *legitimization*. Legitimacy within this political context simply implies that any state-actor identifies itself as being the rightful and justified supreme power because its citizenry endorses and permits its legalization.²⁶ However, the unique trait of legitimacy is that it is the foundation for all power-sharing as examined through the nation-state model. Moreover, it deals with the ‘narrative’ that states’ portray themselves through and if this narrative is upheld by the general populace. In order to be a state, citizens must first respect and rationalize within their own consciousness why a specific nation, party, candidate, or administration is justified to rule or exist. This goes far beyond voting as noted when discussing consensus in democratic/quasi-democratic states, because in authoritarian states, legitimation involves the totality of the state’s existence—not necessarily one election cycle or feature. This can be simplified as an examination of the importance of an office/position within government, rather than the individual that occupies that position (ex. the importance of the office of the US president versus the importance of President Trump). This chapter will seek to examine and exemplify the first two frames of the revised-WZB model: (1) *specific support of legitimation* and (2) *diffuse support of legitimation*, as found within the Iranian state narrative.

Legitimacy within Iran is sourced from two distinct historical periods and has been significantly powerful in the collective memory of Iranians over the past forty years. The first period of time that is a tremendous force in this process of building legitimacy within Iran is the

²⁶ Schneider and Maerz. [n 6] 3.

revolutionary era of 1977 through 1979, while the second is the immediate eight years of conflict following the revolution in the Iran-Iraq War of 1980 through 1988. Despite the numerical order of the WZB model frames, I have decided to follow the chronological order of events and begin with the Iranian Revolution as it pertains to frame two, *diffuse support of legitimation*. The adjective “diffuse” in this expression relates to the breadth and “wideness” of support for legitimation, meaning it is an event or stimulus that effects most or all of national opinion and citizenry as opposed to “specific” as found in frame one of the WZB model.

The “Iranian Revolution” is un-surprisingly not called the “Islamic Revolution” (as some within Iran would like the world to believe) due to the variety of ideas, ideologies, and supporting factors that lead to its advent.²⁷ It is because of this mass participation of society that the event can be credited to the “diffuse” aspect of the WZB model found in frame (2). In total, it is estimated that up to 25 million took part in the event over its three year course²⁸, between 2,000 and 60,000 deaths were reported (depending on which regime is questioned)²⁹, and up to 100,000 individuals were forced to or voluntarily migrate abroad.³⁰ The revolutionary period of Iran serves as the state’s metaphysical birth for political awakening and mass mobilization. The story began however many decades before the official beginning of the revolution on the 16th of September, 1941 when Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was crowned Shah of Iran after his father’s abdication by the British and Soviet invasion. The young and ambitious king wanted to bring Iran into the modern era, influenced heavily as a child by his father’s success and failures with a variety of modernity projects that centered on industrialization, transportation, and education.

²⁷ Axworthy, Michael. (2014). *Revolutionary Iran: a History of the Islamic Republic*. London: Penguin Books. 76.

²⁸ Jervis, Robert (2011). *Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons From the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War*. ISBN 0801457610.

²⁹ Axworthy, Michael. [n 27] 79.

³⁰ Amuzegar, Jahangir (1991). *Dynamics of the Iranian Revolution*. 253.

Before launching the White Revolution in 1963, King Pahlavi became increasingly interested in a concept he created “تمدن بزرگ,”—*tamadon-e bozorg*—*the Great Civilization*.³¹ King Pahlavi set out on materializing this dream of superiority by rapidly subjecting the Iranian state, economy, and people to immediate and rapid modernization efforts under the White Revolution from 1963 till 79'. Having learnt how to read and write in the hope of employment opportunities, millions of rural peasants flooded unprepared cities for the first time—abandoning traditional ways of life that their ancestors have survived on for millennia.³² As families continued to pour into urban areas, the cost of living began to expand exponentially while opportunities were equally unobtainable.³³ To further worsen the situation, the Pahlavis' rhetoric abroad discussed expanding personal and political freedoms at home and sustained economic prosperity for all parts of Iran—things that would never come to pass under his regime.³⁴

The groups that involved themselves in this *diffuse support of legitimation* event called “the Iranian Revolution” were composed of liberals, Marxists, constitutional-republicans, nationalists, the Shi'a establishment, students, poor individuals lost in the midst of the White Revolution, and essentially anyone not directly employed by the Shah. Their demands were broad and ideologically-malleable, allowing for almost everyone in Iranian society to find a reason to join the opposition against the Shah. The International Center for Non-Violent Conflict, based in Washington D.C., examines the Shah's reactions to this opposition as the main instigator to revolutionary escalation in an analysis conducted in 2009. The Center writes, “Open resistance began in 1977, when exiled opposition leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini called for strikes, boycotts, tax refusal and other forms of noncooperation with the Shah's

³¹ Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. (1974). *Toward the Great Civilization: a Dream Revisited*. Satrap Publishing.

³² Fanni, Zohreh. (2006). *Cities and Urbanization in Iran After the Islamic Revolution*. 23.

³³ Axworthy, Michael. [n 27] 45.

³⁴ Axworthy, Michael. [n 27] 56.

regime. Such resistance was met with brutal repression by the government. The pace of the resistance accelerated as massacres of civilians were answered by even larger demonstrations, followed by even larger repressive measures”³⁵. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s inadequacy to address the growing demands of his regimes failures and harsh ruling techniques led to a spiral of fast moving events that caught both him and his allies (the U.S. and U.K.) by complete surprise. Nonetheless, the revolution forty-years later is still seen by most of Iran as being the foundation of the state’s contemporary, diffuse legitimacy. Whereas many Iranians might criticize the Iran-Iraq War from its ethicality (as will be discussed shortly), very few would contribute the revolution of 1979 to a negative memory or historical time-period—unless of course you were a part of the Shah’s inner-circle or political groups that Khomeini displeased.

This ‘wide net’ however that the revolution was able to cast and spread among the people of Iran would quickly be jeopardized and eventually consolidated by internal fighting and external threat—both of which can explain the first frame of the WZB model: *specific support of legitimation*. On February 1st, 1979—Ruhollah Khomeini landed at Mehrabad International airport, bringing an end to his fifteen year game of ‘cat-and-mouse’ between the Shah, the USA, and Saddam Hussein that spanned the countries of Turkey, Iraq, Kuwait, and finally France— an unofficial coronation for the elderly Ayatollah. Despite Khomeini’s widespread popularity and prolific literature, many, if not all elements of the secular side of the revolution, did not believe that a 77 year old “*marja*” (‘Grand Ayatollah,’ literally meaning: “source of emulation”) was capable and resourceful enough to fulfill his rhetoric of establishing an “Islamic Republic.” This negligent under-estimation by the secular and liberal forces, and by Western intelligence services, proved to be fatal once Khomeini began to consolidate power immediately,

³⁵ Zunes, Stephen. (2009). “The Iranian Revolution (1977-1979).” Washington D.C: ICNC Press. www.nonviolent-conflict.org/iranian-revolution-1977-1979/.

assassinating members of the Shah's cabinet as early as February 15th on the rooftop of his personal headquarters and calling for purges within academia and the military.³⁶ Khomeini more legitimately took full control of Iran in late March with a “a national referendum on whether Iran should become an ‘Islamic Republic;’ the motion (which offered no alternatives) received near-unanimous support.”³⁷ It would be one year, five months, and twenty-two days until Iraq began its initial attack on Iranian oil fields and eventually cities, igniting the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88.

The Iran-Iraq war was portrayed within Iran itself as being a fight to exist, which it shortly was for the first several months—yet the narrative that the revolutionary state of Iran chose to contextualize the event during and after the conflict is what classifies it for the *specific frame of legitimation*. Iran is a very diverse nation ethnically and linguistically, yet it is dominated by the ethnic-linguistic Persian class which accounted for 63% of the population in 1979 and 61% today.³⁸ Other notable ethnicities found within the nation include the Azeri (16%), Kurds (10%), Lurs (6%), Baluchi (2%), Arabs (2%), Turkmen and Turkic tribes (2%), and more minorly, Judeo-Iranians, and Afro-Iranians (<1%)³⁹. One feature however that united this hodgepodge of backgrounds and differences was the Shia sect religion of Islam, which accounted for 89% of the population at the time of Khomeini's rise to power and over 91% today.⁴⁰

Where Sunni Islam insists that the succession of leadership from Prophet Muhammad (d. 632) should flow through the most able leader of the Islamic community, Shi'is maintain that only direct lineage to the prophet can dictate authority within the faith. Yet much more

³⁶ Sciolino, Elaine. (2001). *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran*. New York: Simon and Schuster. 55.

³⁷ Maloney, Suzanne, and Keian Razipour (2019). “The Iranian Revolution-A Timeline of Events”. Washington D.C. www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/the-iranian-revolution-a-timeline-of-events/.

³⁸ Lust, Ellen. [n 19] 456.

³⁹ Lust, Ellen. [n 19] 456.

⁴⁰ Lust, Ellen. [n 19] 480.

importantly to the process of legitimization were the events of 661 and 680CE—with the assassination of Ali ibn Abu Talib and eventually his son, Husayn ibn Ali (Imam Husayn) (both the closest surviving descendants of the Prophet Muhammad). According to Shi'a teachings, the death of Imam Husayn constituted the greatest crime committed against humanity, severing the 'direct-link' and spiritual authority to God. As the story is told, a Sunni tyrant named Yazid amassed a fortune under his brutal lordship in modern-day Iraq around 670 CE, intimidating many wealthy families and towns to pay hefty taxes and display unrelenting obedience to his regime and form of Islam (that did not even reflect the Sunni traditions of its day). Imam Husayn did not obey these demands, forcing Yazid to raise an army of reportedly 50,000 men to battle the 3rd Imam, his family, and 72 companions in a desert-town known as Karbala. The event ultimately ended with the Imam's humiliating death after a long siege that left his followers to die from dehydration and exposure to the elements.⁴¹

In order to understand the Islamic Republic's policy and rhetoric from its establishment till now, it is important to understand the event of Imam Husayn's death as being equivalent to say the death of Jesus Christ within Catholicism; an event that 1,986 years later still draws the attention and reverence of billions of followers world-wide. That said, the immediate post-revolutionary period of Iran relied heavily on this narrative of Imam Husayn's death, especially considering that Saddam Hussein's rhetoric leading up to the invasion heavily persecuted Shi'a minorities, sought to change or amend some parts of Islam to his liking, and that he invaded Iran via Khorramshahr (a border town linked to Bagdad via Karbala). Even Iranian military operations were named after the Imam's death, such as "Operation-Karbala" a named used so heavily during the siege of Basra that they have over 40 separate activities named in this way

⁴¹ Robinson, Chase F. (2010). "Chapter 5- The Rise of Islam, 600–700 AD". *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, volume 1: Sixth to Eleventh Centuries. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 211-215.

(ex. Operation-Karbala-1, Operation-Karbala-2, Operation-Karbala 3. . . Operation-Karbala-40).⁴² The main reasoning that the Iran-Iraq war is characterized to the first frame of the WZB model relates directly to this intersection between the conflict and the Shi'a narrative that Kohmeini's has instilled in the state's identity.

The legitimacy of any authoritarian state rests in its ability to reference these events not just as historical lectures, but rather the meaning to a society's existence itself—how, why, and for whom the state originated and sustained itself for. The film *Basij* (2009) by Mehran Tamadon is an excellent example of this aspect of legitimacy, it examines the Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij (a paramilitary force that originated as a civilian-militia and is now highly institutionalized—known more commonly as just the *Basij*—“*the mobilized one's*”). In the film, the battle-field of Nowruz-Iran is shown in present day with exploded tanks strewn around, simulated gunfire in the distance, helicopters flying overhead, and giddy Shi'a tourists by the thousands walking the “war-park.” An “Islamic-Coordinator” eventually starts to gather the young men and teens together to explain why the state had paid for their trip to a location in the middle of the desert. The coordinator begins, “We must follow the path of the Martyrs who lie below us now. The Martyrs who have always reminded us of one thing: the authority of our leader. Always follow and obey him. We should not invent our own beliefs and freewill. We are only strong through him. The Martyrs we cry for today are so much more than us; our small lives.”

Legitimacy gives not only purpose to how and why carrots and sticks are distributed, but also intent to how future actions between the state and population will unfold, abiding by a set of principles, rules, and processes that are emergent from a united historical-background. Through these initial two frames of the WZB model, (2) *specific support of legitimation*: the Iran-Iraq

⁴² Woods, K. M., Murray, W., & Nathan, E. A. (2011). Saddam's Generals: Perspectives of the Iran-Iraq War [PDF]. Washington D.C: Institute for Defense Analyses.

War (1980-88') and (1) *diffuse support of legitimation*: the Iranian Revolution (1977-79') we are able to conceptualize why and how the remaining four frames are delivered, amended, and justified among the general public.

Chapter 3: The Carrot

Following along in next two frames of the WZB model, (3) *formal co-optation* and (4) *informal co-optation*, this chapter will discuss the use of ‘carrots’ in the Islamic Republic as displayed through the use of the national military and state-Shia foundations, called *bonyads*. ‘Co-optation’, as discussed in the literature review, is a transitive verb that refers to ‘positive assimilation of people or citizenry’, meaning to win or take over their base of support into a larger establishment (generating a *winning coalition*) without the need of violence or coercion.⁴³ The adjectives “formal and informal” in their use here relate to the degree of institutionalization that these activities enjoy within a state’s general organization and structure (see *figure 1.1*). For each frame, I have chosen to analyze annual revenue and the impact these organizations have on the population of Iran as a whole. ‘Impact’ is defined in this sense as the percentage of the population that is benefiting per year.

National militaries have become less common when defining nation-states today, yet still remain relevant in their role of safeguarding physical territory by preventing foreign intervention and internally upholding laws generated by legitimate political processes. Additionally, national militaries are consistent large pools of middle-to-high-paying salaries offering well-off career opportunities and lifestyle choices that are in theory offered to the general population—making them an attractive life-long career prospect.^{44,45} This is especially true for the Islamic Republic of Iran when considering the two previous frames of legitimization, because the revolution of 1977 through 1979 was a rapid deconstruction of the Iranian military (the Shah’s military), while the

⁴³ M. (n.d.). Definition: ‘Co-opt’.

⁴⁴ Simonsen, S. G. (2007). Building “National” Armies—Building Nations?: Determinants of Success for Post-intervention Integration Efforts. *Armed Forces & Society*, 571–590.

⁴⁵ Lt. Shaw, D. (1979). *The Military as a contributor to National Development* (3rd ed., Vol. 9). Cape Town: Scientia Militaria.

Iran-Iraq war was a rapid redeployment of a new, heavily modified force, loyal to new leaders and ideas. This deconstruction and re-fabrication of the Iranian military was performed through a series of purges and reorganization strategies that heavily nationalized and deconstructed secularity among the leadership and ranks of the armed-forces as a whole. In contemporary Iran, the armed forces are consistently seen as an omniscient organ of the state that is driven by both secular and theocratic principles (depending on the situation and branch) and fulfilling a ‘check-and-balance’ role in relation to state survival and domestic protection of “revolutionary principles”⁴⁶⁴⁷. Just as the role of the military of the United States is to “support and defend the constitution”⁴⁸ so to is the role of Iran’s forces in the context of both traditional functions and Shi’a-Islamic one’s. Article 144 of the Iranian Constitution reads—“*The Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran must be an Islamic army, i.e. committed to Islamic ideology and the people. It must accept into its service deserving individuals who are true to the goals of the Islamic Revolution and devoted to realizing them.*”⁴⁹—meaning members of the security apparatus of Iran are directly involved in the winning collation of the nation: culturally and religiously.

Before untangling the annual revenue allocated to and generated by the military of Iran as a whole, it is important to first outline the armed forces’ structure, general bodies, and physical man-power. The largest of these bodies is the Islamic Republic of Iran Army (more commonly called ‘Artesh’ by Iranians: ارتش, or abbreviated ‘AJA’ in farsi) with a reported 350,000 active

⁴⁶ Steven R. Ward. (2005). The Continuing Evolution of Iran's Military Doctrine. *Middle East Journal*, 59(4), 559-576. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.jcu.idm.oclc.org/stable/4330184>

⁴⁷ Botenga, Marc. (2009). *The Iranian Leviathan State Formation, Progress and Democracy in Iran*. IMT Institute for Advanced Studies, p. 177-179.

⁴⁸ (2018). “Oaths of Enlistment and Oaths of Office.” Oaths of Enlistment and Oaths of Office - U.S. Army Center of Military History. history.army.mil/html/faq/oaths.html.

⁴⁹ Iran (Islamic Republic of), Constitution, Article 144, translated by Abdullah Yusuf Ali,

personnel in 2017.⁵⁰ The AJA, despite its numbers, is the most under-paid institution based on salary per-person in comparison to the remaining four branches, yet is considered the most accessible by general citizenry for uneducated (or at least lower level education) employment. The Artesh's directive is to maintain Iran's borders and respect national directives.⁵¹ The famed "Pasdaran" or Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) with 125,000 confirmed active personnel compose the second largest branch of military service for Iran in 2017. The IRGC is the most funded military related activity and is charged with protecting the state of Iran from "foreign intervention, domestic military coup d'etat's , and deviant-movements away from the [Iranian] Revolution" by creation and order of Khomeini himself in April of 1979.⁵² Paramilitary forces take third place amongst the largest and most funded groups in Iran's military today, with a confirmed 40,000 full-time personnel involved in the Niruyeh Moghavemat Basij —or just '*Basiji*' (as discussed in Chapter 2, '*the mobilized one*'s) and an additional 60,000 law enforcement officers (Disciplinary Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran). The Basiji in particular enjoy many benefits within Iranian society, despite its original formation as an informal militia group. In addition to its paid personnel, the group also organizes large-scale volunteer programs to assist in a variety of programs—most famously having 11 million volunteers in a single year (2009) in the aftermath of the election protests (if true, that is 14.6% of Iran's population at the time; quite impressive).^{53,54}

⁵⁰ Cordesman, Anthony H., and Nicholas Harrington. (2018) "Iran: Shifting Military Balance in the Gulf." Washington D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

⁵¹ Botenga, Marc. (2009) "The Iranian Leviathan State Formation, Progress and Democracy in Iran " Lucca: IMT Institute for Advanced Studies. 250.

⁵² Wehrey, Frederic M. (2014). "The Rise of the Pasdaran Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps." Washington D.C: RAND. 5.

⁵³ Alfoneh, A. (2014). The Basij Resistance Force. Retrieved from <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/basij-resistance-force>

⁵⁴ Cordesman, Anthony H., and Nicholas Harrington. (2018). "Iran: Shifting Military Balance in the Gulf." Washington D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The remaining branches of the armed forces of Iran will not be discussed in great detail, yet encompass the Navy (18,000 active personnel) and the Air-force (30,000 active personnel) for 2017. These two smaller groups together represent the more educated elite of Iran's military and society, pooling candidates from top families and universities in the nation and from IRGC recruits due to technical systems and reliance on high-IQ candidates.⁵⁵ In total for the year 2017 (the year with the most publicly accurate data-sets), Iran's military encompassed 563,000 fighters, technicians, and support employees.⁵⁶ Although this number only accounts for 0.695% of Iran's population at the time (81 million), these jobs are highly coveted and respected positions, with sometimes tens-of-thousands applying per available unit.⁵⁷ In addition to professional full-time military careers, the Islamic Republic of Iran also enforces mandatory military service via its Constitution, which mandates that all men over the age of 18 must serve for a period of 19 to 24 months.⁵⁸ While Iran does not always fulfill this mandate of conscription, due to economic constraints and lack of actual need of force, it is estimated that 1,394,500 candidates reach the legal age of service annually (an impressive 1.7% of the population per year or 8.5% over 5 years if 100% retention is reached)⁵⁹.

The annual budget for the armed forces of Iran is highly volatile and dependent on several internal and external factors. The first quintessential factor in Iran's budget for military expenditures is foreign sanctions, followed by the price of oil, and lastly, success of military-owned companies. *Figure 3.1* from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

⁵⁵ State Department Report 1: Iran's Support for Terrorism (2018).

⁵⁶ United Nations. (2016). *"Iran: Military Service"*. Toronto: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. www.refworld.org/docid/550fd7e64.html.

⁵⁷ The Iran Primer, U. (n.d.). Part 2: Fact Sheets on IRGC, Qods Force. Retrieved from <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/apr/08/part-2-fact-sheets-irgc-qods-force>

⁵⁸ The Iran Primer, U. (n.d.). Part 2: Fact Sheets on IRGC, Qods Force. Retrieved from <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2019/apr/08/part-2-fact-sheets-irgc-qods-force>

⁵⁹ GFP Country Analysis Team. (2019). "2019 Iran Military Strength." Global Firepower - World Military Strength, Jan. 2019, www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=iran.

shows this volatility from the years 2009 to 2017. Notice how the years 2013, 14', and 15' drastically plunge in comparison to the remaining years, this is due to a revision and

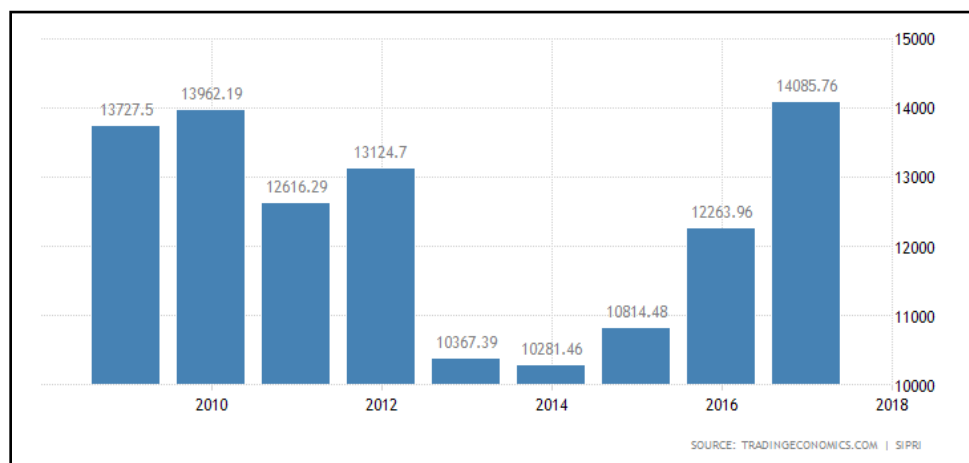


figure 3.1: Annual Budget: Iranian Military Expenditure: SIPRI (2018)

reinstatement of earlier U.S. backed sanctions from 2012 after it was discovered by the International Atomic Energy Agency that Iran was not forthcoming with its nuclear ambitions.⁶⁰ On March 17th 2012, under instruction of the United States and United Nations, the European Union ordered the Belgium based company SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications—the global standard in bank-to-bank transactions) to suspend all connections with the more than 30 Iranian banking institutions it conducted business with, including the Central Bank of Iran.⁶¹ For the first time ever in the company's history, workers physically had to unplug the fiberoptic cables linking Iran to the outside world (financially speaking). This had major consequences for Iran that directly affected how and where it could spend its ever devaluing currency at the time.

⁶⁰ Office of Yukiya Amano (Director General).(2012). "Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement and Relevant Provisions of Security Council Resolutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran ." IAEA Atoms for Peace.

⁶¹ Gladstone, Rick, and Stephen Castle. (2012) "Swift, a Banking Network, Agrees to Expel Iranian Banks". New York: The New York Times.

While many observers believed this would be a defeating moment for Iran that would offset their nuclear ambitions indefinitely, it was not, due to the decentralized nature of state revenue within the IRI. The sanctions could make business very difficult, yet indirectly promoted autarky and restraint in public budget planning for the future. In many ways, the successes of today's Iranian military revenue systems are the brainchild of these series of 'crushing' sanctions. For example, the IRGC according to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies claims the "military establishment controls a fifth of the market value of companies listed on the Tehran Stock Exchange and owns thousands of other companies, all of which generate revenue for the armed forces. Additionally, the IRGC controls a significant portion of Iran's underground economy."⁶² If these facts are true and substantial as claimed, the impact and depth of support for the 'carrots' as observed through Iran's formal co-optation role (*frame (3)* of WZB) could be drastically higher than the previously discussed number of 563,000 active personnel. This fact, coupled with the reality that almost *every* family (excluding the affluent) in Iran has a member who once served, is serving, or will serve in the armed forces, showcases how military institutions within the state are a co-opting mechanism for establishing and maintaining a winning coalition.

The following frame of the WZB model, (*4) informal co-optation*, is exemplified through the state *bonyad* system. Unlike militaries, that are standard in most countries, *bonyads* are uniquely Iranian, akin to a religious charity or foundation. Not as well centralized or documented, there are over 60 religious-foundations located within the Islamic Republic of Iran that account for up to 20% of the states GDP, yet there are 6 major ones that dwarf the remaining

⁶² Kahn, Tzvi, and Saeed Ghasseminejad. (2019). "New Iranian Draft Budget Slashes Military Spending" FDD, 7 Mar. www.fdd.org/analysis/2019/01/08/new-iranian-draft-budget-slashes-military-spending/.

in scale of operation.⁶³ This list of 6 *bonyads* contain: the Mostazafen Foundation of the Islamic Revolution (the largest welfare foundation previously owned by the Pahlavi dynasty), the Astan Quds Razavi Bonyad (Imam Reza shrine foundation), the Shahid va Omur-e Janbazan Bonyad (foundation of Martyrs and veterans affairs), the Pilgrimage Foundation, the Housing Foundation, and lastly, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (workers benefit foundation). Each *bonyad* is unique and has its own distinct source of income, reasoning for its location, and directive in Iranian society, making the *bonyad* system of Iran a flexible and ‘diffuse’ set of carrots for the populace of the state. Just as for frame three with discussing the revenue and ‘impact’ of these activities, so will be examined with *bonyads*, but due to sheer diversity of these institutions, only one in particular will be examined; The Astan Quds Razavi Bonyad.

The Astan Quds Razavi Bonyad located in Mashhad, Iran is the greatest example of the power of these religious foundations today. The foundation has a documented lineage stretching 1200 years since the death of Imam Reza in 819 AD.⁶⁴ In this long history of existence, this religious foundation has concentrated more than 90% of arable land in the Khorasan province—generating roughly \$210+ million USD annually, and valued at over \$17 billion USD.⁶⁵ It’s impressive size stems from the Islamic tradition of ‘*waqf*’, the charitable act of leaving behind one’s property or home to a *bonyad* or other religious institution upon an individuals death.⁶⁶ Through the centuries of Shi’i influence in the region, religious centers like that of Mashhad have allowed for Astan’s property portfolio to grow tremendously (tax free). Along with this gradual growth in power over generations, so to expanded the need for social services by the

⁶³ Thaler, David E., et al. (2010). “Mullahs, Guards, and Bonyads An Exploration of Iranian Leadership Dynamics” RAND: National Defense Research Institute. 50.

⁶⁴ Khalaji, Mehdi. (2008) “Apocalyptic Politics On the Rationality of Iranian Policy” Washington D.C: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

⁶⁵ Thaler, David E., et al. [n 63] 56-57.

⁶⁶ Botenga, Marc. “The Iranian Leviathan State Formation, Progress and Democracy in Iran ” IMT Institute for Advanced Studies, 2009, p. 143-44.

bonyads. Astan Quds Razavi Bonyad for example is now a massive economic conglomerate that directly employs over 19,000 people, provides services and products to millions of Iranians, and additionally fulfills religious functions to Shi'is worldwide. Their activities and ventures extend to tourism, real estate, agriculture, petrochemicals, car factories, publishing houses, and educational institutions from the level of kindergarten to university⁶⁷.

Because of this massive unchecked, and mostly undocumented power, (just like the Vatican, they are mostly unaccountable in oversight or taxes) it can be difficult to sum the impact of the Astan Quds Razavi Bonyad, much less all *bonyads* together, yet these informal institutions of co-optation are extremely resourceful, well integrated, and well defended by their patrons and supporters. Additionally, *bonyads* are indirectly protected by ex-employees that continue their career into more formal aspects of the Iranian government. The former chairman of the Astan Quds Razavi Bonyad, Ebrahim Raisi, in an excellent instance of this mixing between formal and informal powers of Iran. After completing his early-career as a 'director of executions' in the late 80's, Raisi eventually went on to control the Astan Bonyad for six years. His current role is now as chief of Iran's Judiciary branch, a role that Sarah Whiteson--director of Human Rights Watch, Middle East—says is “frankly disturbing and frightening”.⁶⁸

Employment, personal aid (in the form of food, housing and money—especially to 'guardian-less families', families without a father), and free education are the most common benefits from the *bonyads*, yet even more diverse and informal 'carrots' exist within the system, such as access to the black-market (if individuals need goods not readily available in Iran), access to 'élite-networks' (if individuals need political or commercial favors), and access to 'cultural services'

⁶⁷ Thaler, David E., et al. [n 63] 57.

⁶⁸ HRW. (2019). Iran: Serious Rights Violator to Lead Judiciary. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/07/iran-serious-rights-violator-lead-judiciary>

(such as paid trips to state-events that deal with consensus building or nationalism, much like the example from Chapter 2 of the Shi'i tourists in the battlefield of Nowruz, although that group was paid for directly by the state).⁶⁹ These carrots effect every economic class of the Iranian populace (from the richest to the poorest), yet do show a tendency or favoritism towards citizens located in *bonyads* immediate vicinity. This form of discretion in distribution of resources, along with former employees and directors that go-on to occupy formal political offices, ensures these *bonyad*'s survival and base-of-support by giving real economic and political incentives to protect and expand its system of clientelism.

While it is easy to group, objectify, and define the different military sects and foundations found within the state of Iran, it is not as simple to define the underlining authority, actors, and processes that govern their existence, function, and survival. Individuals that are appointed by the Supreme Leader or Guardian Council (as most are), are typically beholden to a specific age group of revolutionary principles and united history. This trend has exacerbated the reality of Iranian society because the population has become increasingly younger (remember 52 million individual under 30 years old vs, 30 million the opposite) while leaders of major state institutions have become older, or coming from entirely religious backgrounds. This internal friction between the more open minded youth and stricter, elderly clergy, is an important trend to watch for according to David Thaler, a senior international defense researcher working with RAND in D.C., Thaler examines the situation of the *bonyads* as one of constant conflict between the revolution and reality, he writes: "*The evolution of the relationship between the older generation, which overthrew the Shah and brought Khomeini to power, and a younger cohort of lay leaders (with some clerical allies) who were shaped primarily by the early years of the Islamic Republic*

⁶⁹ Thaler, David E., et al. [n 63] 12-25.

*and are less beholden to the older establishment. The leaders of the older generation are entrenched politically and financially and do not retire voluntarily from politics. Yet, as gatekeepers, they have been instrumental in admitting the younger generation into the governing elite. The new generation of “revolutionary” leaders is seeking to carve out independent centers of power and influence, sometimes in ways that may challenge the positions and power of their elders.”*⁷⁰ Thaler is insisting that, as long as the elderly cohorts that laid the foundation of the Islamic Republic are still alive and in power, they act as an institutional baseline for ideology within the context of the regime. If you were a young professional (say 35 years old), and wanted to run for public office, or join an elite branch of the military, these elders would be the first goal to beginning a fortunate and lasting career.

The institutions and polices found within frames (3) *formal co-optation* (the military) and (4) *informal co-optation (bonyads)*, conveys how entrenched— politically, financially, and ideologically—these mechanisms of state consensus are. While the military acts as a base of well-respected and well-paying careers, the Shia *bonyads* act as a diffuse set of spiritual and material ‘carrots’, offering a diverse set of goods and services to the populace of Iran. Whereas during the time of the Iranian Revolution, the allied groups of the *Bazaaris* (shop owners; merchants) and Ulema clergy were instrumental in winning over the people to Khomeini’s message, contemporary Iran is shaped by the influential relationship between the *bonyads* (managed by clergymen linked to political offices) and the armed forces of the nation. Understanding this new alliance is essential to deciphering consensus within Iran and how it is generated via ‘carrot’ consumption.

⁷⁰ Thaler, David E., et al. [n 63] xvii.

Chapter 4: The Stick

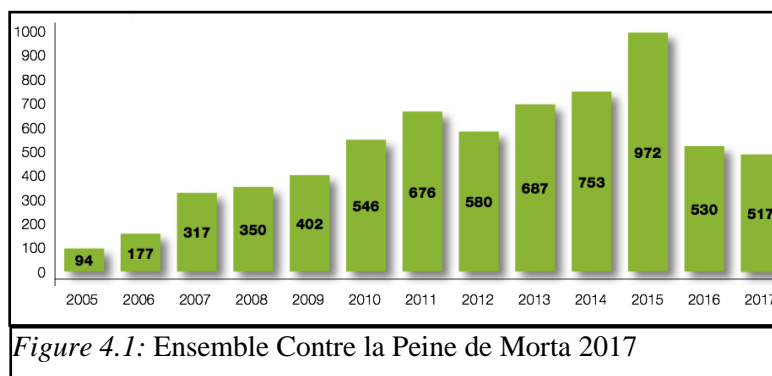
The final two frames of the WZB model, (5) *hard repression* and (6) *soft repression*, emanate both from formal state judicial branches of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These institutions include the Revolutionary Courts and Criminal Courts of the state of Iran. For frame five, the use of public and private executions has been chosen to represent the most common example of ‘hard repression’ within contemporary Iran. While for frame six, ‘soft repression’, the extensive use of Iran's Penal Code illustrates how the state projects its power and policies into the daily life of its’ citizens. The adjectives ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ in their use here relate to these actions’ degree or use of violence to achieve objectives, with ‘hard’ including the use of lethal force or serious injury via military or law-enforcement intervention, and ‘soft’ denoting to more petty applications of state violence, such as fines (also including extortion of money), short-term prison sentences, and public lashings.

The use of capital punishment among authoritarian states (and the U.S.) is common, yet Iran executes the second most amount of people annually, surpassed only by the Peoples Republic of China. In the year 2017 alone, at least 517 people were killed within the state of Iran after being found guilty under a court of law.⁷¹ That is a relatively fair number if we consider *figure 4.1* on the following page that documents executions within Iran from 2005 to 2017, provided by the NGO’s: ECPM (Ensemble Contre la Peine de Morta) and IHR (Iran Human Rights). These NGO’s have been instrumental in documenting capital punishment within Iran, and publish annual reports to aid in foreign policy development. Their work shows that there are currently three main groups of crimes with the highest rate of executed capital punishment.

⁷¹ The Death Penalty in 2017: Facts and Figures. (2018). Retrieved February 2, 2019, from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/04/death-penalty-facts-and-figures-2017/>.

These crimes included: murder (46%), drug related offenses (45%), ‘moharebeh’ (crimes against God—mainly used on political dissidents)(4%), rape (3%), and unknown (2%).⁷² While the

history and criminal reasoning behind this state practice can be somewhat rationalized and even exemplified elsewhere, the primary function of executions in Iran today specifically play’s a



unique role in the consensus building of the wider society (the populace). This is because for capital punishments, once a verdict is reached, executions can become either public or private. While the majority of these executions in Iran for 2017 were private, almost every major city outside of the capital Tehran had at least one public execution, with West Azerbaijan and Khorasan Razavi having the highest (4 public executions for 2017).

These public executions are advertised weeks in advance on internet, newspaper, and radio medias with sometimes thousands of persons in attendance.⁷³ The annual report produced by IHR also suggests the extensive presence of children at these events, it reads: “The High Council for Human Rights of the Iranian Judiciary issued an official statement saying, ‘public executions take place only in some limited and special circumstances, including incidents which distort public sentiment, to act as a deterrent to decrease the number of crimes. It should also be noted that the publicity is provided to avoid the presence of minors at the scene of executions’”⁷⁴ The report claims that minors were consistently and perhaps intentionally present at the scenes of

⁷² Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran [PDF]. (2018). Iran Human Rights and ECPM. 12.

⁷³ Iran-Human Rights (2018, March 19). Iran; Public Executions in 2017. Retrieved February 8, 2019, from <https://iranhr.net/en/articles/3264/>

⁷⁴ Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran [n 72] 11.

these executions, despite U.N. pleads to prevent the public events altogether. This quote shows firsthand the directive of these executions within Iranian society, as a public event designed to scare, intimidate, and coerce mass sentiment, while promoting exemplification of state ideology and power.

The reason there are so many executions in the State all together stems from the broad and diverse laws of the Islamic Penal Code that encompasses both Sharia law and Iranian Civil law, containing some 1335 articles together, 14% of which carries the death penalty.⁷⁵ As previously mentioned, these laws and capital-punishment-cases are reviewed and enforced by the Revolutionary Courts and Criminal Courts of the state, with the former enforcing more deaths annually (3364 vs. 1749: 2017).⁷⁶ For the exceptional case of murder, there can be auxiliary jurors coming from the victims' family. The Islamic principle of *qisas* (retribution) states that if the family of the victim expects a retaliatory killing for a proven-murder, they are entitled to it, but can alternatively settle for *diyya* (blood-money) or forgiveness. Qisas killings still remain the greatest source of executions within Iran, yet the forgiveness-option has been especially prolific in larger cities over the past five years, in Tehran especially where 108 forgiveness-cases were approved for 2017 alone, canceling their execution figure entirely.⁷⁷

However more serious trends can be seen in the amendments made to Iran's Civil code over the past decade that have resulted in many new laws with odd or confusing wording that has created difficulties since its implementation. Crimes falling under 'moharebeh' made up only 4% of executions for 2017, yet represented 21% of public executions for the same time period.⁷⁸ A

⁷⁵Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran [n 72] 17.

⁷⁶ Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran [n 72] 13.

⁷⁷ Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran [n 72] 25.

⁷⁸ Annual Report on the Death Penalty in Iran [n 72] 18.

slightly older work of research conducted by the International Federation for Human Rights, titled, *Iran/Death Penalty, a State Terror Policy* (2009) documents the confusion surrounding ‘moharebeh’. The Federation writes,

“The scope of the ‘moharebeh’ cases that carry the death sentence has been widened under the draft bill. Anybody who commits the following vaguely-worded offenses on an ‘extensive level’ shall be found to be ‘corrupt on earth’ and receive the punishment for moharebeh: actions against the internal or external security of the country, disruption of the economy, arson, destruction and terror, distribution of dangerous poisonous and microbiological matters, and establishment of prostitution and corruption centres (Article 228-10). The draft bill is, however, contradictory regarding the punishment for the ‘corrupt-on-earth’ and mohareb persons. On the one hand, “a mohareb shall receive the death penalty if s/he has killed somebody” (Article 228-5-1). On the other hand, even if it is not certain whether s/he has killed anybody, s/he shall be sentenced to death, e.g. “any group that wages armed insurrection based on political theory against the Islamic Republic of Iran is an insurgent group[and its members] who use arms and explosives shall be regarded as mohareb and sentenced to death” (Article 228 – 11). Therefore, one may be sentenced to death only for being armed without having committed murder.”⁷⁹

The executions and laws that bring-fourth this outcome of mass capital punishment (or at least *fear* of mass-capital punishment) are a part of a much larger strategy within the state to control peoples’ actions, relations, and ideas. While capital punishment is at the polar extreme of this spectrum of state violence, it is a topic and punishment that gains the most of people’s attention, especially if you are living in a city where it is occurring on average every 4-6 months. If capital punishment is the extreme of one spectrum, then the following frame of the WZB model, (6) *soft repression*, would be its complimentary opposite.

This final frame (6) examines the more day-to-day offenses and punishments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, since this category is so tremendously large and multifaceted, the condition of women within Iranian law has been chosen to restrain the topic choice. While Civil

⁷⁹ Iran/Death Penalty: A State Terror Policy [PDF]. (2009). Brussels, Belgium: International Federation for Human Life FIDH. p 17.

Law is heavily retained in these volumes of Iranian law, Shi'i-Sharia law (known as *Jafari*, or *Twelver-Imam Islam*) is still a centerpiece for the majority of legal instances. Luiza Gontowska, an honors graduate of Pace University, mentions in her dissertation that: "The word Sharia has romantic meanings in Arabic such as 'the right path' and 'the path to water.' It is the traditional law as derived and interpreted by scholars of the Qur'an (the word of God given to Muhammad) as well as Muhammad's sayings and traditions as recorded in the *Hadith*. No detailed legal code exists. There is merely an existence of basic moral standards that humans should conduct themselves by."⁸⁰ Irani legal code is not completely centered on this 'right-path' of Sharia however, and derives greatly in addition from Civil Law as previously mentioned. This Islamic-blended Civil Law found in Iran is derived from Ayatollah Khomeini's use of 'ijtihad' (reasoning) to amend, update, or merge contemporary and Qur'anic principles.⁸¹ The final product is a legal system that is heavily unequal, outdated, inefficient, and hated by the majority of the people who do not stand to benefit from its function.

The condition of women in Iran specifically tends to be unpredictable and ever-changing due to the variance of policies and whichever regime is currently in power. During the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-79), feminism from above was imposed, women were encouraged to become educated, and join public society. Yet this history and policy is/was rejected by Iranians because these women were seen as not necessarily becoming more free or equal, rather just more uniform to the already 'serf-like citizen' that was the Iranian man at the time under Pahlavi. Remember, women could vote in Iran much earlier than even some Western European countries such as Portugal (1968) and Switzerland (1971 at the federal level), with

⁸⁰ Gontowska, L. M. (2005). *Human Rights Violations Under Sharia: A Comparative Study of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran* [PDF]. New York, New York: Pace University.

⁸¹ Banakar, R. and Ziaee K. (2018). The Life of the Law in the Islamic Republic of Iran, *Iranian Studies*, 51:5, 717-746, DOI: 10.1080/00210862.2018.1467266

universal suffrage announced on February 27, 1963. Moving forward in history, the Iranian Revolution projected itself as a moment of breaking with the ‘barbarity of modernity’ (the Shah’s modernity), and called upon all citizens of Iran to free themselves. Women played an instrumental role in this moment of liberation from the monarchy, with Ayatollah Khomeini even saying in a speech: “We must not forget the activities which women performed, notably confrontations. Iranian women were able to turn into a revolutionary, political, conscious fighting element through their conscious faith. . . Truly, women never lagged behind in any area or on any battleground.”⁸² In the aftermath of the revolution and during the Iran-Iraq War, women increasingly joined the public sphere as large portions of the male-population were sent to the frontlines. The laws and principles Khomeini was promoting in the new *Islamic Republic* of Iran centered on traditional views of women within *Jafari-Islam*, yet still heavily preserved rights and recognition of females. *Still however at the same-time, and paradoxically*, the ‘brave women’ that Khomeini complimented and cheered as the forbearers of the revolution gradually met a new world after February of 1979 as traditional views of Jafari became the new norm of public life. Veiling became mandatory and punishable by flogging for disobeyers. “Cosmetics were also banned. Some young women who defied the new regulations and wore lipstick in public were treated to a novel punishment by the enforcers of public morality—removal of lipstick by razor blade.”⁸³ Despite these documented histories of attacks, this type of governance for now is just a collective memory and legacy of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary phases of the Islamic rise to power within Iran.

⁸² Khaz Ali, Anisa (July 2010). "Iranian Women After the Islamic Revolution". A Conflicts Forum Monograph: 4–20.

⁸³ Moghadam, V. M. (2005). Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal Status, Social Positions, and Collective Action [PDF]. Washington D.C.: The Wilson Center. 1-2.

While these new tactics to control people were humiliating and brutal, far more worse is Iran's modern protection and condition of women under its Penal Code, containing several-hundred articles that dictate a women's value and word as being half that of a man's. If a father dies and leaves an inheritance, his daughter is entitled to only half of what the son is to receive. If a man is accused of rape, there must be four men or alternately eight women depositions to find any fault. Divorce is a serious event and decision for women due to the fear and fact that Men (fathers) are the determinant bearers of deciding child custody, unless the mother can prove incompetence. And lastly, if a women is murdered by a man, that man can only be tried for killing half of a person (in principle). These unfair and degrading policies effect 40.18 million women per year, 49% of Iran's population.⁸⁴

Women's current condition in Iran represents the most significant point of conflict between the regime and the people, although it receives still too little attention abroad. Activists and even professional lawyers who have taken up this fight of equality among sexes in Iran have consistently been the target of repression within the State. The case of Nasrin Sotoudeh, a female lawyer within Iran, is a great example of this targeted repression of women who question the establishment. Sotoudeh has represented imprisoned opposition leaders, minors facing the death penalty, journalists, women facing legal repercussions for choosing not to wear the *hijab*, and now herself. Sotoudeh currently is serving up to 38 years in prison and 148 public lashings for "crimes committed against national-security", a claim she denies.⁸⁵ Among only seven human rights lawyer's currently in Iran (a country of 82 million), Sotoudeh's case and punishment far outstretches her 'committed crimes' in an effort to intimidate and coerce the Iranian population.

⁸⁴ Cincotta, R., & Sadjadpour, K. (n.d.). IRAN IN TRANSITION The Implications of the Islamic Republic's Changing Demographics [PDF]. p 7.

⁸⁵ BBC. (2019, March 11). Nasrin Sotoudeh: Iran lawyer who defended headscarf protesters jailed. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47531312>

These frames of repression are only two possible ‘sticks’ at the disposal of the Iranian regime (with many others unnamed) and yet play a direct role in the daily lives of an entire nation. Frame five, *hard repression*, has been exemplified through the state's use of public and private executions to scare the populace into submission, while frame six, *soft repression*, displayed the day-to-day challenges of women within Iran's legal, social, and political framework.

Conclusion

In closing, this thesis has sought to answer how the Islamic Republic of Iran could manage its winning-coalition in order to sustain power from one generation to the next. The hypothesis used to assess this research-question claims that Iran sustains its continuity through formal and informal institutions that bring new members in via co-optation, while alienating reformists, liberals, and secularists via repression and coercion. To answer this research-question and prove the validity of this hypothesis or not, the theoretical framework of the revised-WZB model, proposed by Carsten Schneider and Seraphine Maerz, has been employed to conceptually reify how consensus in Iran is generated and maintained.

As chapter one explained the features and formations of nation-states today, and how Iran meets these requirements while still utilizing theocratic and secular principles, the remaining chapters (2, 3, and 4) have sought to explain Iran's mechanisms of consensus generating techniques and control. Chapter two exemplified legitimacy and the process of legitimization that Iran has undergone from the viewpoints of "diffuse" legitimization (the Iranian Revolution from 1977 to 1979) and "specific" legitimization (the Iran-Iraq War of 1980 to 1988). Chapter three delved into co-optation in Iran, seeking to rationally understand how large portions of society could be co-opted or 'won-over' by formal and informal institutions, with the two examples of the *bonyad*-systems and the national military. And finally, Chapter four conveyed Iran's coercive measures (the sticks) under the dichotomy of "hard" and "soft" repression, with capital punishment for the former and Iran's Penal Code treatment of women in the latter.

While the hypothesis that Iran brings new members in via formal and informal institutions, utilizing coercive and co-optive measures to accomplish or meet a winning coalition is correct, the six examples found within this dissertation only represent a portion of the largest of these measures and policies—with many more numerous niche institutions (formal and

informal) left undefined. To further develop the revised-WZB model within contemporary Iran, this dissertation would recommend the adoption of an examination of Iran's tax policy (for both co-optation and repression), Iran's nuclear propaganda (as an additional frame of "specific legitimization"), Iran's environmental planning for the future (carrot and stick, depending on where and for who it is invested), censorship in all its forms, and the power and role of leaders and administrations to any researchers, students, NGO's, or governments studying the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Returning to the fact that even though Iran has formal laws, institutions, and procedures, the true powers of the state are ever changing and evolving with the individuals that populate the highest offices of the county. This characteristic of ever-changing political norms within Iran, and many authoritarian states in general, can best be summed as the "role of recalibration"—a term developed to identify how, where, and when political changes might occur in any given regime. When one formal pillar of state control (including individual law-makers too) is questioned, contended with, or seen as invalid, the system as a whole will be "recalibrated" to make up for lost consensus in an effort to prevent regime collapse or change. Relating back to Iran, this role of recalibration is abundantly effective at preventing the government from ever losing control of its winning-coalition, which is why Iran's political structure will likely not change in the coming decades. For a regime change to occur within the State, Iran's revenue generating apparatus for institutions such as the national government, the national military, and the Shia *Bonyads* must be severely diminished or weakened, an unlikely correlation to occur considering how diverse and distinct each institutions' portfolio is.

Another interesting topic and paradox to emerge from this question of "how a regime change would occur in Iran?" relates to the role of sanctions and explicitly how the United State's

attempts to 'contain' Iran's ambitions. Sanctions have long been the West's 'non-intervention' solution to many different types of authoritarian regimes, yet their success is limited, unproven, and often having disastrous effects for the poorest of targeted states. The main problem in Iran specifically with this policy of reoccurring sanctions is due to the reality that Iran now understands how to not only 'shield' itself from the worst effects of sanctions, but how to also grow its informal institutions; *bonyads* in particular. These aspects combined show how resilient, effective, and efficient consensus-generating techniques can be within authoritarian regimes.

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