

THE HARMONY OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTIONS IN IRAN'S POLITICAL SYSTEM

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Annotation: The article is dedicated to analyzing the unique institutional architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which embodies both theocratic and republican elements of governance. The main focus is on the synthesis of religious and secular institutions formed as a result of the Islamic Revolution of 1978-1979 and their role in ensuring the stability of Iran's political system. It examines the constitutional interactions of key religious structures, such as the Supreme Leader institution, the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council, and the Expediency Council, within the framework of constitutional reforms. Special attention is given to the evolution of the Supreme Leader's powers, which balance traditional Shia principles with democratic governance mechanisms. Based on historical and legal analysis, the study reveals the adaptability potential of Iran's governance model in the face of internal and external threats.

Key words: Iran, "Velayat-e Faqih," Supreme Leader, President, Assembly of Experts, Guardian Council, Expediency Council, political system, Parliament, constitutional reforms, political stability.

Introduction. The uniqueness of the political model of the Islamic Republic of Iran increases the relevance of scientifically studying the harmonious interaction of religious and secular institutions within the country's governance system. A scientific analysis of Iran's governance system is significant due to the innovative nature of the current development of theocratic states.

Studying the institutional interaction between religious and secular structures provides an opportunity to understand the unique model of Iran's state governance. Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the transformation of Iran's political system resulted in the creation of a governance mechanism based on the synthesis of theocratic and secular elements. A theoretical understanding of Iran's state-building experience requires an awareness of alternative models of political development.

In particular, a comprehensive analysis of secular institutions allows for identifying the mechanisms that ensure stability in Iran. The study of institutional interactions, especially the relationships between secular authorities, also represents a certain scientific novelty. Examining the Iranian model reveals the ways in which the clergy influence the state governance system. Analyzing the institutional structure of Iran's political system sheds light on the mechanisms that ensure the legitimacy of power.

Main part. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 fundamentally changed the structure of the state in Iran. The constitutional formalization of the new state system was completed in December 1979 with the adoption of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The central element of power legitimization was the "Velayat-e Faqih" concept, developed by R.Khomeini[10]. According to this concept, supreme authority in the state should belong to the most prominent faqih, as this ensures the harmonization of modern governance forms with Shia political traditions.

This model of state structure represents an institutional compromise between the modern principles of republican governance and traditional Shia political-legal concepts, defining Iran's unique path of development.

The main institutional innovation introduced by the “Velayat-e Faqih” principle was the establishment of the position of Supreme Leader, who holds the highest authority within Iran's state hierarchy. The Supreme Leader's constitutionally enshrined powers are characterized by their broad scope. This role combines the functions of a religious leader with powers that influence all branches of government—legislative, executive, and judicial. To ensure the effective functioning of the theocratic system, a comprehensive institutional structure was established, including key bodies such as the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council (or Supervisory Council), and the Expediency Council. This system maintains the formal attributes of a modern state while upholding theocratic governance principles.

The Assembly of Experts holds a unique position within Iran's governance system. It is the only state body authorized to elect, oversee, and dismiss the Supreme Leader. Organizationally, this body functions as a collegial structure responsible for supervising the activities of the Supreme Leader.

The Assembly of Experts is formed through general and direct elections held in single- and multi-member constituencies. After the historically established eight-year term was extended to ten years, this change was reflected in the election cycle: following the elections in 1982, 1990, 1998, 2006, and 2014, the most recent election was held on March 1, 2024.

In this election, held on March 1, 2024, with the participation of 24.5 million voters (48% were women), 72 representatives of Shia clergy were elected. The distribution of the remaining 16 seats was postponed to the second round of elections, scheduled for May 2024[9]. These results indicate a certain strengthening of the conservative trend within Iran's political system.

The origin of the Assembly of Experts lies in its initial establishment for drafting the Iranian Constitution. However, through the process of institutional development, it acquired distinct powers. Article 107 of Iran's Constitution defines the Assembly of Experts' primary authority in electing the Supreme Leader, while Article 108 outlines the procedure for forming this body[1]. An important aspect is that the initial regulations governing the Assembly's activities are developed by the Guardian Council and approved by the Supreme Leader. However, these regulations are subsequently updated by the Assembly of Experts itself.

The Assembly of Experts consists of a governing board and six commissions. Members of the governing board are elected by secret ballot for a two-year term. The board includes a chairman, two vice-chairmen, two secretaries, and two assistants. Since its establishment, the Assembly has had five chairmen. The first chairman, Ali Meshkini, led the Assembly from 1983 to 2007. After his successor, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, passed away in 2014, a power struggle emerged within the Assembly, resulting in annual leadership changes for three years. In 2016, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati became chairman. Following the 2024 election, Mohammad-Ali Movahedi Kermani assumed this position [6; p.116].

The Guardian Council (or Supervisory Council) is another theocratic institution that plays a crucial role in Iran's governance system. Of its 12 members, six are jurists appointed by the Supreme Leader, while the remaining six are lawyers nominated by the Majlis (Parliament)¹ and

¹ The Majlis (parliament) consists of 290 members, who are elected through direct, open, and secret voting. Elections to the Majlis, like presidential elections, take place in an environment of intense competition between

approved by the Supreme Leader. The primary function of the Guardian Council is to oversee the compatibility of laws passed by the Majlis with the Constitution and Islamic principles. If a law does not conform to Islamic Sharia rulings, it is sent back to Parliament for revision and amendment. Additionally, the Council has the authority to veto any decision made by the Majlis and introduce constitutional amendments. The Majlis cannot approve any legislation without the Guardian Council's approval. Even the intervention of Ruhollah Khomeini could not expedite the legislative process. As a result, he agreed to the establishment of an additional high-ranking state body, the Expediency Council, which serves as an arbitrator between the Majlis and the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council also plays a significant role in foreign policy by approving candidates for key government positions, including the president, members of Parliament, Assembly of Experts members, ministers, and decision-makers within the legislative and executive branches.

The Expediency Council is one of the key institutions in Iran's state system. There are two perspectives on analyzing this Council. First, it can be viewed as a political body responsible for resolving conflicts between the Iranian Parliament and the Guardian Council[2]. Second, it is also described as one of the main governing institutions that holds absolute authority after the Supreme Leader in times of crisis[3]. These approaches complement each other: the first provides insight into the legal aspect of this institution, while the second defines its role from a security perspective.

In 1989, the constitutional legitimacy of the Expediency Council was established amid major changes in Iran's political system, including the abolition of the prime minister's position, which strengthened the president's authority, and the granting of not only religious but also political powers to the Supreme Leader[4].

This council comprises a unified structure consisting of a presidium, a secretariat, six permanent commissions, and research centers. Each structure is headed by a chairman. Additionally, four specialized committees are responsible for managing relations with the outside world[6; p.100].

Since its establishment in 1989, Iran's institutional architecture has undergone numerous structural changes. Its personnel composition is determined by the decision of the Supreme Leader of Iran. The first category includes six representatives from the Supreme National Security Council, the heads of the three branches of government, a representative from the relevant parliamentary commissions, ministers, and the secretary of the Security Council. The second group consists of members directly appointed by the Supreme Leader.

The balance between these groups reflects the evolution of the institutional structure and the distribution of power. Despite its mediating function in resolving conflicts between Parliament and the Guardian Council, representation was granted only within the second group. This was due to the ideological dualism between the conservative orientation of the Supreme Leaders and the reformist tendencies within Parliament[5].

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran grants the Supreme Leader extensive powers in state governance. According to Article 110 of the Constitution, the Supreme Leader's authority covers key aspects of both domestic and foreign policy. He oversees the implementation of the overall political strategy and has the authority to propose the initiation of a referendum.

various political groups. During this time, different alliances and coalitions are formed, political parties become more active, or new parties are established.

In the military sphere, the Supreme Leader is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, makes decisions on war and peace, and declares military mobilization. Additionally, he appoints high-ranking military commanders and the heads of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). By appointing members of the Guardian Council, the Chief Justice, the Prosecutor General, and the head of the state broadcasting corporation, the Supreme Leader consolidates power by reshaping key state institutions. He also confirms the elected president in office and has the authority to dismiss them under certain circumstances.

The most complex relationships within Iran's political system have emerged between the executive and legislative branches. Under theocratic rule, even their composition has changed. According to the initial version of the Constitution, executive power was exercised by the government, headed by both the president and the prime minister. However, these two branches within the executive often had conflicting views. During the Iran-Iraq war, Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi managed to prevent a financial and economic crisis in the country by implementing a war-time mobilization economy. Although he had previously advocated for maximum state intervention in the economy and politics, after being appointed prime minister, he eventually became a leading opposition figure under the banner of the "Green Movement," demanding the liberalization of Iran's political and economic life. Mousavi's government was constantly under the control of both the Supreme Leader and the president. Sharp conflicts existed between the executive and legislative branches. A striking example of the strained relations between parliament and Mousavi's government is the fact that during his tenure, not a single significant economic law was passed.

In the period following the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the priorities were economic recovery and improving the well-being of the population. Achieving these objectives required the institutional strengthening of the executive branch and the formation of an appropriate legislative framework in the economic sector.

During R. Khomeini's era, the initiative to adopt the first five-year plan sparked heated debates in parliament. After his passing, the government was allowed to implement constitutional reforms, including the abolition of the prime minister's position and changes to the qualification requirements for the Supreme Leader. The use of a mechanism to alter the state's political course in coordination with the Supreme Leader became a significant innovation and initiative.

These constitutional reforms enabled President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani to implement a liberal economic policy. Despite reformist initiatives between 2003 and 2017, Iran's political system maintained its adaptability to current conditions while preserving the constitutional norms related to theocratic authority and the religious nature of the electoral system unchanged[8].

In Iran, the institution of the presidency is based on the principles of general elections through secret voting. The presidential term lasts for four years and is limited to two consecutive terms. The legitimacy and legality of the president are determined by these norms. As the head of the Council of Ministers, the president has the authority to appoint the vice president. The president forms the Council of Ministers, develops the government's action program, and submits it to parliament for approval. The composition of the Council of Ministers can be presented to parliament either in full or partially for approval. However, a vote of confidence from parliament is required for each minister individually.

According to Iran's political system, the responsibilities of ministers encompass political, economic, and administrative functions. Their activities are integrated into the financial network

that connects the parliament and its relevant committees, the government, the Assembly of Experts, and the institution of the Supreme Leader.

The decision-making process in parliament regarding the approval of ministers reflects a complex financial balance system. Ministerial candidates often prioritize advancing the position of their political factions in parliament rather than the president's interests. This trend is also observed in the functioning of various government bodies. For example, during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency, members of the security apparatus dominated the Cabinet, whereas in Hassan Rouhani's administration, pragmatic politicians advocating for fundamental reforms held the upper hand.

In Iran, the process of forming the Cabinet is increasingly transforming into a field of confrontation between parliamentary factions and the president's team. In this context, establishing control over the ministries traditionally overseen by the clergy—such as the Ministries of Internal, Justice, Culture, and Islamic Affairs—holds particular significance.

The parliament fully supported Hassan Rouhani's government composition. However, it is noteworthy that as a result, the number of parliamentary seats held by representatives of the reformist bloc, which had supported him in the elections, sharply declined. This situation is explained by the political statements made against the president by members of this parliamentary bloc. At the same time, Iran's economic bloc within the government preserves the reformist institution through vice presidents. However, under these circumstances, the appointment of General Amir Khatami, who had no ties to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as Minister of Defense is considered President Hassan Rouhani's greatest political achievement in this process.

Within the executive branch of the Islamic Republic of Iran, there are specialized organizations headed by vice presidents, such as those responsible for planning and budget, atomic energy, and others. Since these structures are overseen by the parliament, they effectively perform ministerial functions.

The institutional characteristics of Iran's state governance are reflected in the presence of leading state-owned companies within the ministerial structure as subsidiaries. Among them, strategic enterprises such as the National Iranian Oil Company, the Development and Innovation Industry Company, military industry enterprises, and production companies affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps hold particular significance[7; p.108-109].

The practice of appointing clerics to the positions of Minister of Justice and Minister of Information ensures the support of these institutions by the Supreme Leader. In the context of power dualism (between the parliament and the Supreme Leader), the legal status of ministers aligns with the model of a presidential-parliamentary republic.

During President Hassan Rouhani's tenure, the international agreement on Iran's nuclear program, achieved as a result of this institutional cooperation, can be cited as evidence of the aforementioned practice. Despite the transfer of authority from the Supreme National Security Council to the government with the Supreme Leader's approval, the ratification process of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 faced serious opposition in parliament. However, through the mediation of Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani, the complex situation was successfully resolved in favor of Rouhani's government.

Conclusion. The institutional architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran represents a unique development model that integrates elements of both theocratic and republican governance. The central element of this system is the institution of the Supreme Leader, who holds absolute authority in state administration. The effectiveness of this state model is ensured by its stability

in the face of internal and external threats and challenges. The goal of the Shia clerical elite was to establish a new model of governance in Iran based on Islamic principles. Therefore, the leadership functions of the clergy have been significantly expanded within the country's political system.

After the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the transformation of the political system demonstrated the ability to adapt to current realities while preserving theocratic governance methods. The constitutional reforms of 1989 optimized the state administration system by abolishing the position of prime minister and modifying the qualification requirements for the Supreme Leader. Subsequent institutional changes aimed to enhance governance efficiency while maintaining the stability of religious development.

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