

4 The Office of the Supreme Leader *Epicenter of a Theocracy*

Mehrzaad Boroujerdi and
Kourosh Rahimkhani

AS A THEOCRATIC state born through a popular revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has exhibited both democratic and authoritarian features since its inception. The Supreme Leader is considered the epicenter of Iran's theocratic authority structure and the ultimate arbiter of Iranian politics. Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has managed to mold the Iranian regime to his liking through both his talent and his fortunate institutional position. He has exhibited deft political skills and is the accidental beneficiary of a theocratic system that decided to deal with the challenges of its postcharismatic leader phase, after Grand Ayatollah Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini's demise, by concentrating more power in individual hands. Whereas Khomeini used his charisma to consolidate the office of the Supreme Leader, Khamenei strengthened this office through bureaucratic aggrandizement, reliance on security forces, and informal politics. Thanks to his long administrative career, hypersecurity outlook, and micromanager disposition, Khamenei has incrementally subdued his political and clerical opponents and amassed a great deal of power in the Office of the Supreme Leader. This position represents a parallel government that is powerful, not transparent, and unaccountable. Any discussion of the political evolution of the Islamic Republic needs to grapple with the hefty position of the Office of the Supreme Leader and the formidable assets at its disposal.

Agreeing with Niall Ferguson that the "power of any individual ruler is a function of the network of economic, social, and political relations over which s/he presides," this chapter presents an "institutional" approach by arguing that Khamenei's religious and charismatic liabilities forced him to rely more and more on "power institutions."¹ In particular, we address the following five major questions: How has the institutional/constitutional setup of the Office of the Supreme Leader evolved since the 1979 revolution? To what extent does the hard-line direction of the Office emerge because of the person who occupies it rather than an institutional/constitutional setup that determines this orientation? What

institutional assets and informal leverage does the Supreme Leader enjoy and how well can he bypass democratic rules, torpedo pacts, and restore factional balance? How does the Office of the Supreme Leader function? Finally, how has the Supreme Leader handled attempts by clerical rivals, reformist politicians, and the hard-line faction to curtail his power, and what conclusions can be drawn about any future transitional process?

Passing of the Torch

On June 3, 1989, the charismatic leader of the Iranian revolution, Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989), passed away. A day later the members of the first Assembly of Experts met in a special session to decide whether a “Leadership Council” or a single leader should succeed him. Four Ayatollahs—Ali-Akbar Meshkini (1921–2007), Seyyed Abdolkarim Mussavi Ardebili (1926–), Mohammad Fazel Lankarani (1931–2007), and Abdollah Javadi Amoli (1933–)—and three Hojjatoleslams—Khamenei (1939–), Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1934–), and Seyyed Ahmad Khomeini (1946–1995)—were proposed as possible members of the alternative “Leadership Council.” At the end, the vote was 45 to 23 in favor of electing a sole Supreme Leader.² In a second-round vote, the members of the Assembly of Experts voted 60 to 14 to elect Khamenei as the new Supreme Leader, while a minority pushed to elect Grand Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Golpayegani (1899–1993).³ The election of a man who was of a modest clerical rank; was younger than all those mentioned, with the exception of Khomeini’s own son; and did not possess any political charisma was met with raised eyebrows in many Iranian households.⁴

Khamenei’s election was technically unconstitutional since at the time of his election he was not a *marja’-e taqlid* (source of emulation) as required by Articles 107 and 109 of the 1979 Constitution, which was still in effect when he became the Supreme Leader.⁵ To somehow get around the problem, the ninety-five-year-old Ayatollah Mohammad-Ali Araki (1894–1994) was recognized as the new *marja’* while Khamenei worked to consolidate himself as the new Supreme Leader and build up his religious credentials. His standing in the clerical pecking order improved through the successive deaths of Grand Ayatollahs Shahabeddin Mar’ashi Najafi (1897–1990), Abolqasem Khoei (1899–1992), Hashem Amoli (1903–1993), Golpayegani, and finally Araki himself. With the demise of each of these clerical heavyweights, Khamenei’s lieutenants pushed for his recognition as the next *marja’* by asking the followers of the deceased ayatollahs to transfer their loyalty as well as charitable contributions to Khamenei as the supreme authority in charge of the welfare of Shi’is.⁶ Yet all these efforts failed because of the opposition of the Shi’ite hierocracy both inside and outside Iran.

Even though Khamenei had received all of Khomeini’s constitutional powers and had inherited his organizational network, the clerical establishment

was not yet willing to coronate him as the new source of emulation. In 1994 upon Araki’s death, the influential Society of Qom Seminary Teachers (*Jame’eh Modarresin-e Howzeh-ye Elmiyyeh-ye Qom*) put forward the names of the following seven ayatollahs as suitable candidates for becoming the *marja’*: Mohammad-Taqi Behjat (1915–2009), Fazel Lankarani, Khamenei, Nasser Makarem Shirazi (1926–), Seyyed Musa Shobeiri Zanjani (1927–), Mirza Javad Tabrizi (1926–2006), and Hossein Vahid Khorasani (1921–).⁷ Meanwhile, the Society of Combatant Clergy (*Jame’eh-ye Rohaniyat-e Mobarez*) endorsed only three of these names: Fazel Lankarani, Tabrizi, and Khamenei.⁸ For political reasons, the two organizations had glossed over Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani (the *marja’* of Najaf) and three reformist ayatollahs inside Iran who were at odds with the regime: Ayatollahs Hossein-Ali Montazeri (1922–2009), Mussavi Ardebili, and Yusef Sane’i (1937–). Two weeks after Araki’s death, Khamenei, who still faced the criticism of the Shi’ite hierocracy, ended his procrastination and declared on December 14, 1994, that because of his heavy responsibilities as the Supreme Leader he had no intention of becoming a *marja’* inside Iran. Yet he added: “but for the *marja’iyyat* for outside of the country, it is a totally different case. I accept this responsibility because doing otherwise will be harmful.”⁹

So how did Khamenei, who encountered such challenges initially, position himself at the fulcrum of Iranian politics so that all other offices of the state revolve around him? Surely much of his success can be attributed to his personality. A leading political psychologist who studied the leadership profiles of two hundred world leaders describes Khamenei in this manner: “Khamenei’s scores (low in belief that he can control what happens and high in need for power) suggest that he will challenge constraints but do so in an indirect, behind-the-scenes manner. And, indeed, although Khamenei does have ultimate authority in the Iranian political system, he prefers to maintain control and maneuverability by not being ‘out in front.’”¹⁰

Khamenei compensated for his lack of charismatic qualities and religious credentials by being a consummate micromanager with an intimate knowledge of the Iranian political machinery. Born into a clerical family in Mashhad, he attended seminary training in Mashhad and Qom and was imprisoned under the Shah for his political activities. Since the 1979 revolution, he has held a series of important positions including Tehran’s Friday Prayer Leader (1980), member of the Revolutionary Council (1979–1980), Deputy Minister of Defense (1979–1980), supervisor of the Revolutionary Guards (1980), Deputy of the First Parliament (1980–1981), member of the First Assembly of Experts (1983–1989), president (1981–1989), member of the First Expediency Council (1988–1989), and Supreme Leader since 1989. In many of these positions he experienced episodes that could only be construed as affronts. He was not an original member of the Revolutionary Council but was brought in later. While Khamenei was the first cleric to serve

as president, Khomeini made it known that he was a staunch supporter of the lay Prime Minister, Mir-Hossein Mussavi. Although before becoming the wartime president Khomeini had served as Deputy Minister of Defense and supervisor of the Islamic Revolution's Guard Corps (IRGC), Khomeini did not delegate the title of Commander in Chief to him as he had done with the first president, Seyyed Abolhassan Banisadr.¹¹ In 1988, Khomeini publicly admonished Khomeini for not understanding the principle of "the absolute mandate of jurist" (*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*). Khomeini became the Supreme Leader only after Montazeri, who had served as the officially designated Deputy Supreme Leader from 1985 to 1989, had been ousted by Khomeini.¹² Even as Supreme Leader, he has had to share the stage with four presidents (Hashemi Rafsanjani, Khatami, Ahmadinejad, and Rouhani) who have tried to outshine him.

Constitutional Augmentation of Power

The year 1989 proved to be monumentally important in the history of the Islamic Republic. The eight-year war with neighboring Iraq had ended the year before, and now Khomeini and his lieutenants were eager to ensure a smooth transition of power and to address some of the exigent problems of statecraft (i.e., factionalism, overlap of authority) that the revolutionary state had faced in its first decade of existence.¹³ The year, however, began with an international controversy after Khomeini issued a fatwa against Salman Rushdie on February 14, 1989. While the fatwa against the author of *The Satanic Verses* was dominating international headlines, things on the domestic front were about to change in important ways. On March 28, Khomeini ousted his designated successor Montazeri, the most prestigious of his pupils. The dismissal reopened the question of succession. Aware of his own impending death, Khomeini ordered the revision of the 1979 Constitution.¹⁴ On April 24, he wrote a letter to President Khomeini informing him that he had appointed a twenty-member Council for the Revision of the Constitution (plus five deputies to be chosen by Parliament). The main duty of this council was to solve the inherent contradictions of the 1979 Constitution. These included the competing prerogatives of the Supreme Jurist and the *marja'-e taqlid*, the tension between the president and the prime minister, and the conflict between the Guardian Council and the Parliament. The council, which had to finish its deliberations in less than two months, went to work immediately and amended 46 of the 175 original articles of the Constitution (26 percent) and added two more of its own.¹⁵ Khomeini, however, died on June 3 and did not live to see these results, which were approved in a referendum held on July 28 (the same day Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected president).

Perhaps the most consequential change in the amended Constitution was to concentrate even more power in the hands of the Supreme Leader than the

framers of the original document were willing to do.¹⁶ On January 6, 1988, Khomeini had issued a fatwa in which he stated in no uncertain terms that the Supreme Leader not only is the ultimate arbiter within the Iranian political system but can also—based on the interests of the state—even suspend religious rules such as praying, fasting, or pilgrimage. By this ruling, Khomeini had articulated what became known as the principle of "the absolute mandate of jurist" (*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*). Yet it was clear that no standing cleric could match both Khomeini's religious pedigree and political credence. The solution was to decouple the mandate of the Supreme Leader (*velayat*) from the position of *marja' iyyat*. A mere five days after he had appointed the Council for the Revision of the Constitution, Khomeini responded publicly to a query from the chair of the Assembly of Experts, Ayatollah Ali-Akbar Meshkini, by stating: "From the beginning I believed and I had insisted that the condition *marja' iyyat* is not necessary. A *mojtahed-e adel* (a just jurist) who is confirmed by the respected [members of the Assembly of] Experts from across the country is sufficient." Armed with this quotation, the council dropped all explicit references to the *marja' iyyat* requirement in the amended Constitution. "The 1979 stipulation (Article 5) that the Supreme Leader be 'recognized and accepted' by 'the majority of the people' (a requirement for the *marja' iyyat*) was also dropped. Thus, while the level of religious scholarship required for leadership was lowered, political experience was given greater weight."¹⁷

Furthermore, the amended Constitution dramatically extended the constitutional powers of the Supreme Leader. It transferred the responsibility for resolving the conflict between the three branches of powers (Article 113) from the president to the Supreme Leader (Article 110).¹⁸ The five-member Supreme Judicial Council (established in 1980) was dissolved in favor of a single "Head of the Judiciary" to be appointed by the Supreme Leader (Article 157). Moreover, the Supreme Leader assumed the power to appoint and dismiss the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (Article 175). The Supreme Leader was also given the power to appoint two personal representatives to the newly created Supreme National Security Council (Article 176). The size and power of the Council for the Discernment of the Expediency of State Interest (hereafter referred to as the Expediency Council), which had been created by Khomeini in February 1988, was expanded so that it not only arbitrates between Parliament and the Guardian Council (Article 112) but also advises the Supreme Leader on "determination of the general policies" of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Article 110). The status of the Guardian Council was also enhanced, as it was empowered to supervise elections for the Assembly of Experts (Article 99).¹⁹ This, however, created a circuitous path since the Supreme Leader appoints half (six clerics) of the sitting members of the Guardian Council, who in turn were to approve the qualifications of the same people who are supposed to oversee the performance of the Supreme Leader.²⁰

quite appropriate for the emergent system of post-charismatic, collective clerical rule."²³ According to Saïd Amir Arjomand, "Khamenei had begun as the weaker partner of the post-Khomeini diarchy."²⁴ Whereas Khomeini's charismatic qualities had enabled him to amass a great deal of power and yet present himself as an "arbiter" among warring factions, Khamenei was unable to achieve the same results. As Asghar Schirazi has put it, "After his election, Khamenei made every effort to emulate his predecessor's role as an authority positioned above all branches of the government which could balance among the rival camps. However, the more he failed in this attempt, the more pressure he came under to seek support from forces which shared his attitudes, had been successful in the struggle for a share of power and, because of their position in the religious academies, were able to guarantee support for him in those circles."²⁵

Subduing the Clerical Fiefdom

With his apprenticeship as the Supreme Leader over, Khamenei realized that he needed to dilute the power of rival Shi'ite *ulama* to bolster his own standing. One way to marginalize the Shi'ite hierocracy was to extend his bureaucratic and financial control over the religious institutions. The deaths of Grand Ayatollahs Mar'ashi Najafi and Golpayegani, who had fought to keep the clerical establishment independent from the state, paved the way for Khamenei to reorganize the clerical fiefdom.²⁶ As early as 1991, Khamenei had recommended the creation of the Supreme Council of Religious Seminaries of Qom (*Showra-ye 'Ali-ye Howzeh-ye Elmiyyeh-ye Qom*; SCRSQ), which was finally established in 1995.²⁷ The SCRSQ is responsible for all the administrative, educational, and financial affairs of the Qom seminaries.²⁸ This body also helped to standardize the content of the curricula and modernize the administrative system by digitizing library holdings and setting up a new computerized system of stipend disbursement to ensure how much each seminary student was receiving.²⁹ Today, most of the 228 to 270 residential seminaries (*madresehs*) in Iran follow the educational curriculum set up by SCRSQ.³⁰ According to Article 6 of the Charter, the members of SCRSQ are appointed based on the recommendations of the *Jame'eh-ye Modarresin-e Howzeh-ye Elmiyyeh-ye Qom* (Society of Qom Seminary Teachers), and approval of the Supreme Leader and the *marja'* of Qom.³¹ However, as a testimony to Khamenei's power within this body, most of the current nine conservative ayatollahs on the council have served as his personal representatives to various state bodies.

Another institution created by the Supreme Leader in 1991 is the Theological Seminaries Center for Services (*Markaz-e Khadamat-e Howzeha-ye Elmiyyeh*), which according to its former director provided social welfare services (insurance, housing, marriage loans, etc.) to over 160,000 clerics.³² The Leader appoints the members of the central council of this center.³³

Yet another important undertaking during Khamenei's tenure as Supreme Leader was the bureaucratization of the Friday Prayer institution. In 1984, Khomeini had appointed a seven-member committee named *Dabirkhaneh-ye Markazi-ye A'emmeh-ye Jom'eh* [Central Headquarters of Friday Prayer Leaders] to deal with the various issues facing Prayer Leaders.³⁴ According to Hashemi Rafsanjani's memoirs, the members of this body had differences with Khamenei, who was serving as president at that time.³⁵ In 1993, as Supreme Leader, Khamenei reconstituted this body as *Showra-ye Siyasatgozari-ye A'emmeh-e Jom'eh* (the Friday Prayer Policymaking Council—FPPC) by keeping only three of the original members and expanding the size to nine. He also ordered that the headquarters of FPPC move from Qom to Tehran in order to be closer to him.³⁶ The FPPC is in charge of the appointment, dismissal, and evaluation of all Friday Prayer Leaders throughout the country except for those dispatched to the provincial capitals, handpicked by Khamenei himself.³⁷ FPPC also coordinates the content of *khotbehs* (Friday Prayer speeches), publishes weekly bulletins containing the talking points for the imams, and sends them to over 830 preachers performing Friday prayers across the country. An army of thirty-two thousand functionaries are actively involved in the machinery that has been set up specifically for organizing weekly Friday prayers.³⁸ According to the FPPC's secretary, Mohammad-Reza Taqavi, no political party in Iran can match the FPPC's organizational muscle and outreach. Taqavi has further maintained that the Friday Prayer imams they seek to hire are relatively young (between ages thirty-five and forty-five) and are typically appointed to a three-year probationary term, after which they will be evaluated to see if they deserve an additional five-year term.³⁹ In order to enhance their chances of being picked by FPPC, young seminary students who aspire to become Friday Prayer Leaders gravitate toward studying with officially sanctioned clerical mentors. Their loyalty can pay off, as 43 percent of the members of the Fourth Assembly of Experts are Friday Prayer Leaders.⁴⁰

In addition to the Friday Prayer Leaders, the Supreme Leader also appoints personal representatives to each of Iran's thirty-one provinces. Most of these commissars lead the Friday prayer congregations, but their main duty is to represent the Supreme Leader in the provinces and manage the affairs of their constituencies above and beyond the government. Khamenei's personal provincial representatives often outflank the governors dispatched by the Minister of Interior. The Supreme Leader also has personal representatives to special constituencies (i.e., representatives in the Sunni minority community) as well as a number of foreign countries (Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and the United Kingdom). Khamenei even enjoys the protection of a military unit comprising clerics named "Imam Sadeq's 83 Brigade" (Qom), which was formed during the course of the Iran-Iraq War.

Unlike other clerics who had to rely mainly on the religious alms taxes (*khoms va zakat*) paid by the pious, the Supreme Leader has had access to substantial governmental and special funds. Many of the organizations that he and his clerical allies set up either had an official line item in the state budget or were free from any taxation or oversight by organs of the state such as the National General Inspectorate. Furthermore, parastatal institutions such as the Foundation for the Dispossessed (*Bonyad-e Mostaz'afan*) were able to set up businesses, publishing houses, and educational academies that didn't fall under the supervision of other *marja'* besides Khamenei.⁴¹ The Supreme Leader also had the added advantage of finding employment for his pupils within either the vast state bureaucracy or the colossal machinery that is run out of his *Beyt*.⁴² This helps channel students toward him despite the fact that he may not have the religious standing of some of his peers in the *howzehs*.⁴³

Over the years Khamenei has also extended his bureaucratic tentacles over the seventy thousand mosques operating throughout the country by gaining control of organizations like the Islamic Propaganda Organization (IPO)⁴⁴ or establishing new ones such as *Markaz-e Residegi be Omur-e Masajed* (Center for Supervision of Mosques' Affairs).⁴⁵ In addition, the Ministry of Culture's *Setad-e 'Ali-ye Kanunha-ye Farhangi Honari-ye Masajed* (Supreme Headquarters of Cultural and Art Centers of Mosques) claims to work with over 13,400 such cultural and art centers throughout Iran.⁴⁶ The main duty of these institutions is to monitor activities in the mosques and appoint and train imams for leading them. Finally, another means through which the Supreme Leader monitors events taking place in various mosques is by having allowed the paramilitary Basij forces to establish operational bases in the mosques. The cumulative impact of these activities has turned the mosques into the most significant players in every neighborhood from the urban centers to the faraway villages.

Use of Formal and Informal Powers

If the powers of the purse and persuasion were not enough to make the clerical caste acquiescent, Khamenei, like his predecessor Khomeini, has not been reticent about punishing dissident clerics.⁴⁷ The organ of retribution was often the Special Court of Clergy (SCC), which is under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Leader and operates outside the Iranian judiciary.⁴⁸ Mirjam Künkler, who has studied the SCC, writes: "When Khamenei succeeded Khomeini as the *Rahbar* [Leader], he significantly expanded the SCC. While the courts had hitherto functioned on the basis of no specific code, Khamenei commissioned an extraordinary ordinance of 47 articles, which was expanded in 2005.⁴⁹ Khamenei also expanded the court, originally only extant in Tehran, to ten other branches in the country (Ahvaz, Esfahan, Hamedan, Kerman, Mashhad, Qom, Rasht, Sari,

Shiraz, and Tabriz) and commissioned the creation of a separate prison network to serve the SCC."⁵⁰ Clergymen such as Ahmad-Reza Ahmadpur, Assadollah Bayat Zanjani (1941–), Azimi Qadimi, Hossein Hashemiyani, Mohsen Kadivar (1959–), Seyyed Hossein Kazemini Boroujerdi, Abolfazl Mussavian, Seyyed Mohammad Musavi Khoeiniha (1941–), Mojtaba Lotfi, Hadi Qabel, Abdollah Nuri (1950–), and Hassan Yusefi Eshkevari (1949–) have been subjected to trials at the hands of SCC for what could only be described as "political offenses."⁵¹

The Supreme Leader has not hesitated to invoke the official powers entrusted to him to reverse outcomes not to his liking. In 2000, he vetoed a less draconian Press Law being pushed by reformist members of Parliament (MPs). In 2005, he reversed the decision of the Guardian Council, which had disqualified the reformist presidential candidate Mostafa Mo'in. In 2009, he put an end to all the demands for recounting or canceling the results of the contested presidential elections by declaring them accurate and legitimate. Similarly, when supporters of President Khatami during his eight-year presidency were invoking the notion of "dual sovereignty" to emphasize his popular mandate, and when Ahmadinejad resorted to the authority of the Hidden Imam to bolster his version of "dual sovereignty," Khamenei made it clear that he was not amused by either.

There are other ways in which the Supreme Leader can short circuit and dilute the democratic features of the Constitution. Consider, for example, the manner in which many deputies of the Assembly of Experts—Iran's equivalent of the College of Cardinals—are elected. Khamenei dispatches his personal representatives to various provinces. These representatives, who as mentioned earlier often outrank local officials, get to know the local power brokers and solidify their networking ties. Then when the time comes for election to the Assembly of Experts, they run for office and often are easily elected. In the fourth round of the Assembly of Experts, 21 percent of the deputies have backgrounds as Leader's Representatives. Having owed their careers to the Supreme Leader in the first place, they are quite unlikely to vote against him in the Assembly.⁵²

However, it is not possible to appreciate the full weight of the powers of the Supreme Leader unless one takes into account his informal leverage as well. Khamenei employs a vast repertoire of measures and techniques—not often sanctified by the Constitution—to influence politics. Some of the ways in which he influences outcomes are by forming ad hoc committees⁵³ and kitchen cabinets; holding consultation sessions with key personalities; and offering nonbinding advice to presidents about policies or the performance of ministers, to MPs about legislative issues before Parliament, and to rival blocs about coalition building.⁵⁴ When the situation calls for it he simply drops a hint about his preferences only for his protégés to invoke those words as the "wishes and commands of the Supreme Leader."⁵⁵ For example, in 2009 Khamenei criticized the content of social science and humanities curricula in Iranian universities. Subsequently, the

High Council of Cultural Revolution commissioned the Institute for Human Sciences to reevaluate the content of 38 different academic fields of study.⁵⁶ Khomeini was not content with revising the pedagogical content of the soft sciences in Iranian universities but had expressed a concern that 2 million out of 3.5 million university students in Iran were majoring in social science and humanities while there were not enough faculty members committed to Islamic ideology to train them.⁵⁷ He has even objected to such mundane issues as the brand name of a car being built by Iranian engineers.

Finally, the Supreme Leader has exercised informal leverage through the expansion of the Basij organization, the employment of panegyrists (*maddah*), and perhaps even the organizing of plainclothesmen ruffians (*lebas shakhsia*) who serve as unofficial storm troopers.⁵⁸

Economic Muscle of the Supreme Leader

As partially shown in figure 4.2, the Supreme Leader has numerous economic foundations and advocacy organizations that fall within his jurisdiction. What is often ignored is how economically powerful these institutions are. Based on the Budget Law of 2011 (see table 4.1)—approved by Parliament and the Guardian Council and implemented by the president—the combined budget of four important formal institutions (Headquarters of the Armed Forces' General Command, Expediency Council, Guardian Council, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting) is less than half of the budget of one single social welfare organization, the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (IKRC).⁵⁹

Table 4.2 provides insights into how Iran's vast religious machinery is oiled and how the provision of social welfare programs can serve as "an important instrument of social control."⁶⁰ As one of us has written elsewhere:

Any discussion of Iran's informal economy should make mention of the role of myriad quasi-private foundations and religious endowments called *bonyads* that manage state-owned enterprises. These large state-affiliated conglomerates, which are often run by clerics and their lay allies, have a firm grip on Iran's economy through their monopolistic and rent-seeking transactions. Vast amounts of property expropriated from the Shah's family and other members of the old elite passed to state-run foundations and *bonyads*, which are charged with aiding the poor. These foundations became a key patronage mechanism, locking in the clergy's leverage over large sectors of the economy.⁶¹

What is remarkable about the plethora of parastatal organizations that mushroomed after the revolution is that they receive large subsidies, often are exempted from taxation, and are not subject to parliamentary supervision—and that they do not fall under Iran's General Accounting Laws to be subjected to financial audits. Because of lack of transparency, it is difficult to gauge their real

Economic Foundations	Advocacy & Mobilization	Foreign Affairs	Military and Law Enforcement	Clerical Affairs
Supervision and Audit Office	Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting	Islamic Culture & Communication Organization	Armed Forces' General Command HQ	Special Court of Clergy
Foundation for Dispossessed	Imam Khomeini Relief Committee	World Assembly for the People of the House of Prophet	IRGC (Navy, Army & Air Force, Quds Force)	Imam Sadeq's 83rd Brigade (Qom)
Imam Reza Foundation	Disenfranchised Foundation of the Islamic Revolution	Society for Reconciliation among Islamic Sects	Mobilization Organization (Basij)	Al-Mostafa International Seminary
Headquarters for Implementation of Imam's Order	Newspapers (<i>Kayhan</i> , <i>Ettela'at</i> , <i>Jomhuri-ye Eslami</i>)	Supreme Leader's Representative in Foreign Countries	The Military of Islamic Republic of Iran (Navy, Army & Air Force)	Supreme Council of Religious Seminaries
IRGC Cooperative Foundation	Islamic Propaganda Organization		Law Enforcement Forces	Islamic Propaganda Office of Qom Seminary
Pious Endowments Organization (<i>Owqaf</i>)	Center for Supervision of Mosques' Affairs			Al-Zahra Society (Women Seminary)
Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation	Supreme Leader's Representatives in Sunni Minority Community			Qom's Seminaries Center for Services
Abdolazim Shrine Foundation	The Friday Prayer Policymaking Council			Imam Khomeini Education and Research Institute
Ma'sumeh Shrine Qom	Headquarters for Performance of Prayers			Hajj and Pilgrimage (<i>Bes'he Rahbari</i>)
	Organization for Propagation of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice			
	Supreme Leader's Representatives in All Universities			

Figure 4.2 Institutional tentacles of the Supreme Leader

Table 4.1 Budget of formal institutions in fiscal year 2011–2012

Institution	Budget
IRGC (Navy, Army, Air Force, and Quds Force)	\$9,457,750,000
Law Enforcement Forces	\$2,629,840,000
The Military of Islamic Republic of Iran (Army, Navy, and Air Force)	\$2,572,910,000
Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting	\$658,679,000
Headquarter of the Armed Forces' General Command	\$80,986,700
Guardian Council	\$34,991,500
Expediency Council	\$26,920,500

Table 4.2 Budget of corporate bodies in fiscal year 2011–2012

Institution	Budget
Imam Khomeini Relief Committee	\$1,952,270,000
Mobilization (Basij) Organization	\$510,709,000
Qom's Seminaries Center for Services	\$151,204,000
Supreme Council of Religious Seminaries	\$131,191,000
Al-Mostafa International Seminary Qom	\$116,096,000
Islamic Propaganda Organization	\$94,234,700
Islamic Propaganda Office of Qom Seminary	\$51,077,700
Supreme Leader's Representatives in Universities	\$47,364,800
Pious Endowments Organization (<i>Owqaf</i>)	\$44,271,600
Friday Prayer Leaders	\$21,765,900
World Assembly for the People of the House of Prophet	\$20,862,700
Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution	\$18,265,100
Center for Supervision of Mosques' Affairs	\$13,603,700
Special Court of Clergy	\$12,680,100
Society for Reconciliation among Islamic Sects	\$12,080,300
Coordination Council of Islamic Propaganda	\$10,898,600
Al-Zahra Society (Women Seminary-Qom)	\$9,631,880
Headquarter for Performance of Prayers	\$6,348,400
Sadra Wisdom Foundation	\$4,988,030
Organization for Propagation of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice	\$4,262,500

economic power within Iran's economy. However, experts estimate that "bonyads own some 20 percent of the asset base of the Iranian economy and contribute 10 percent to the country's GDP."⁶²

Of one such *Bonyad*, the Disenfranchised Foundation of the Islamic Revolution (DFIR), Suzanne Maloney writes: "A conservative estimate would number its subsidiaries as at least 800 (although figures as large as 1,500 are regularly cited), employing up to 700,000 workers (or as much as 5 per cent of the male labor force), with a total value in the \$10 to \$12 billion range. The Bonyad's contribution to the national income is significant, although here too estimates vary (anywhere from 1.5 to 8–10 percent of GDP)."⁶³ With such economic muscle we can appreciate that *Bonyads* play an important social mobility function: they facilitate social mobility by supporting poor people in rural areas and members of the lower middle class. For example, the IKRC reportedly assists more than four million Iranians with services. This includes 24 percent (1.5 million) of all the elderly and 60 percent (1.5 million) of all women-headed households.⁶⁴ All in all, 59 percent of its aid recipients live in rural areas, and women account for 65 percent of its constituency.⁶⁵

In the postrevolutionary era, the Supreme Leader became the beneficiary of some important religious injunctions, such as collecting the alms tax and the administration of *Owqaf* (the Pious Endowments Organization), which was entrusted to a ministry under the Shah's regime. Perhaps the most important charitable foundation, which has been under the control of a representative of the Supreme Leader, is the Imam Reza Foundation (IRF) (*Astan-e Qods-e Razavi*). IRF is reported to have "an annual budget of \$2 billion, mostly from the alms given by pilgrims."⁶⁶ According to Mohammad Gholami, *Owqaf's* Deputy of the Shrines, in addition to IRF which operates the Imam Reza shrine, more than ten thousand other shrines across Iran draw millions of pilgrims each year.⁶⁷

Another important institution operating under the supervision of the Supreme Leader (according to Article 49 of the Constitution) is the Headquarters for Implementation of Imam's Order (HIIO) (*Setad Ejrayi-e Farman-e Emam*), which was formed in 1989. HIIO was entrusted with receiving the confiscated assets and properties of high-ranking officials of the old regime, representatives of American and Israeli companies, people who left the country, members of opposition groups, and all unclaimed properties, inheritances as well as money confiscated from criminals and drug traffickers. A reformist Iranian website puts the assets of HIIO at \$40 billion and considers it the second largest economic cartel in Iran after IRGC.⁶⁸ In September 2009, *E'temad-e Mobin*, a joint consortium of HIIO and IRGC, bought a 51 percent share in Iran's telecommunication company, minutes after it was privatized.⁶⁹ Worth almost \$8 billion, this purchase was hailed as Iran's largest-ever business transaction.⁷⁰

Yet another important foundation that answers only to the Supreme Leader is the Fifteenth of Khordad Foundation (FKF). FKF was established by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1981 as a charitable foundation to help solve the economic problems caused by the revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. According to Iranian newspapers, FKF has a number of production companies, cooperatives, and goods distribution outfits and uses the revenues generated from these activities to advance its goals.⁷¹ A clear example of how these foundations can impact the domestic and even foreign policy of Iran and become an instrument of factional politics came in November 1992. More than three years after Khomeini's fatwa against Salman Rushdie and in the midst of President Hashemi Rafsanjani's efforts to improve Iran's ties with the outside world, FKF increased its bounty for hunting down Rushdie to more than \$2 million. Interestingly enough, Khamenei, who at the outset of the Rushdie affair in February 1989 as Iran's president had suggested that Rushdie could be granted a pardon if he repented (i.e., uttered the *towbeh*) for his offensive novel, did not condemn FKF in his new position as the Supreme Leader. These examples, which represent just the tip of the iceberg, help demonstrate how formidable economic machinery available at the disposal of the Supreme Leader can represent an entrenched obstacle to reformist politics in Iran.

Role of the Office of the Supreme Leader

The organ that is directly responsible for the dissemination of the wishes of the Supreme Leader is his office, referred to as *Beyt-e Rahbari* (the Office of the Supreme Leader). Even though there is no mention of the office in the Iranian Constitution, there is no doubt that this office is Khamenei's executive arm. It is a customary practice among the *marja'* to have an office that collects religious taxes, responds to the inquiries and needs of their constituency, and deals with the affairs of theology students who study with them. These offices are often small and rely on a traditional bureaucratic style of operation. After the revolution, the requirements of dealing with these functions in addition to the day-to-day politics of the country led Khomeini to create an office in which his son Seyyed Ahmad Khomeini and Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Tavassoli [Mahallati] (1930–2008) played crucial roles. Since becoming the Supreme Leader, Khamenei has substantially expanded the role, size, and power of the *Beyt-e Rahbari*. The office is now much more opulent than traditional offices of *marja'* (including Khomeini's) and is a mixture of traditional clerical organization and modern bureaucracy. The ever-increasing power vested in the *Beyt* has come at the expense of such institutions as religious seminaries, the judiciary, the presidency, and Parliament as well as of other sources of emulation. Presumably the Assembly of Experts is designed to oversee the actions of the Supreme Leader (and by extension his lieutenants), but so far it has been reticent to challenge the Supreme

Leader even in a single instance. The same holds true for the Expediency Council, which has not demonstrated any proclivity to second-guess policies articulated by the Supreme Leader. Indeed, it is hard to think of any institution external to the Office of the Supreme Leader (besides the IRGC) that can potentially check its actions.

In addition to performing normal constituency services, the personnel of the office perform such functions as lobbying MPs and cabinet ministers (often behind the scenes); convey the wishes of the Supreme Leader to interested parties; serve as troubleshooters and go-betweens with political, military, and intelligence officials; conduct sociological studies of citizenry's needs and grievances; and supervise the colossal social and economic institutions operating under the umbrella of the Supreme Leader. Since the Iranian government does not have the right to monitor or tax the institutions that operate under the command of the Supreme Leader, the office has its own Supervision and Audit Bureau, headed by the former Speaker of Parliament Hojjatolislam Ali-Akbar Nateq Nuri. In addition, the office has other bureaus including Clerical Affairs, Cultural Affairs, Foreign Relations, Military Affairs, Public Affairs, and Security-Political Affairs.

Khamenei rewards loyalty and puts his trust in longtime acquaintances. Many of those who are close to him either hail from his province of birth (Khorasan) or served with him when he was deputy defense minister or president in the early days of the Islamic Republic.⁷²

While none of those who currently serve in the *Beyt-e Rahbari* have the stature to emerge as a future Supreme Leader, this group's collectivity will still affect a potential succession process. Since the issue of succession will likely be intertwined—just as it was in 1989—with internal struggles over the role, power, and authority of various individuals and governing institutions, one should not underestimate the ability of those sitting closest to the center of power in shaping the eventual outcome.

Dealing with the Rising Power of IRGC

Since the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the leverage of the IRGC has consistently been increasing in such institutions as the Expediency Council, the Assembly of Experts, Parliament, and the cabinet. In many ways this is a natural process as clerics have increasingly retreated from electoral positions toward nonelected offices and as the IRGC alumni of the Iran-Iraq War have come to enjoy political success thanks to their service in the war, name recognition, and the networks of economic and social privilege that they have come to enjoy.⁷³ The rising political fortune of the IRGC has led some commentators to conclude that it is monopolizing power and making the Supreme Leader and the clerical class ever more ephemeral and marginal. We find this alarmist argument suspect on

a number of conceptual and factual planes. The relationship between the IRGC and the clerical establishment during the past three decades has been both fluid and multifaceted. During the first decade of the revolution, the IRGC was a political factor but not a major political player independent of the clerical establishment. The entry of IRGC officials into the political realm started as soon as the war ended, as former IRGC officials entered the editorial boards of newspapers, national radio and TV, and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. A decade later, many guardsmen had exchanged their military uniforms for civilian careers as cabinet ministers or deputy ministers, members of Parliament, judiciary officials, provincial governors, mayors, ambassadors, cultural attachés, politicians, government employees, university administrators, directors of think tanks and foundations, business leaders, and chief executive officers of industrial companies.

According to the Iranian Constitution, the Supreme Leader is the commander in chief of the armed forces and appoints and promotes the commanders of the regular army as well as the IRGC (commander, deputy commander, and other top-level posts).⁷⁴ In addition to appointing its top brass, the Supreme Leader also appoints a personal representative to the IRGC who sits on its Command Council.⁷⁵ In contradistinction to regular armies where officers advance based on the principle of meritocracy, the personal relationship of the IRGC commanders with the Supreme Leader determines who gets the top post.⁷⁶ Hence the Supreme Leader has the power to replace IRGC commanders in a game of musical chairs so as to preclude any one individual from becoming too powerful. Another layer of protection for the Supreme Leader is an army of twelve thousand clerics who are employed as "moral guides" for the IRGC's rank and file but also serve as the eyes and ears of the Leader to guard the Guards. The guardsmen recognize that (a) thanks to the patronage of the Supreme Leader, the IRGC has remained autonomous from the government, political parties, and clerical circles and acquire lucrative (often no-bid) contracts; and (b) the protection umbrella of the Supreme Leader inhibits any other organ from investigating what goes on within the IRGC or its front organizations.

It is fair to say that the IRGC might wish to take advantage of a Supreme Leader who is old and frail or to play the role of a spoiler who can wield a veto power. After all, considering the tense nature of Iran's domestic and international politics, one can see the IRGC acquiring more agenda-setting power in the future. But Khamenei already shares many of the hard-line views of the IRGC because of the following lived experiences. First, it is reasonable to speculate that the assassination attempt that left him paralyzed in one hand in 1981 has contributed to his security-minded outlook and his distrust of others' intentions. Second, his first important position after the revolution was deputy minister of defense, where he supervised the IRGC during its period of infancy. Thus,

Khamenei knows the institutional culture and the leadership personnel of IRGC extremely well. Third, he was a wartime president for seven of his eight years in office, and this experience has left an indelible mark on his worldview. Finally, he receives daily intelligence reports and is aware of the plots against him both internally and externally. Hence, to maintain that such a shrewd political operator as Khamenei is cuckolded by the IRGC or is passively beholden to them is not convincing. Khamenei recognizes that under the present Constitution, no position is more secure than his. He recognizes that a good number of senior clergy are rather skeptical about the IRGC's rising status, and he can use this fact as leverage against the guardsmen. Finally, we should remember that his political cost-and-effect calculations are not the same as those of the Revolutionary Guards. For example, Khamenei did not succumb to the recommendation of the IRGC's top brass to punish Mir-Hossein Mussavi and Mehdi Karrubi more seriously after the 2009 Green Movement.

Sultanism or Praetorianism

The disputed June 12, 2009, presidential election, which brought forth the largest mass demonstrations against the ruling regime, was one of the most significant turning points in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian government brutally crushed the protest movement, imprisoned reformist leaders, and sidelined some of the Supreme Leader's chief rivals and critics. These events gave rise to the question of whether the post-2009 structure of political power in Iran was qualitatively different from the one preceding it. Two competing theories, Sultanism and praetorianism, came to the fore in this regard.⁷⁷ The first view, as articulated by some Iranian reformist thinkers, maintains that a new Sultanistic regime has emerged whereby Khamenei acts more and more like a sultan who is not responsive to anyone.⁷⁸ They maintain that the postelection uprising forced the Supreme Leader to become more reliant on the IRGC and "oppression" became the Iranian regime's "principal means of sustaining Sultanism." On the other hand, some scholars assert that the 2009 postelection repression testifies to the systemic intervention in politics by the Revolutionary Guards, who have emerged as the preeminent power brokers within Iran's bona fide "praetorian state."⁷⁹

We believe that while the Iranian state may have some of the characteristics of both Sultanism and praetorianism, it is still premature to label it as either. Max Weber defined Sultanism as an "extreme case" of patrimonialism and maintained that it arises "whenever traditional domination develops an administration and a military force which are purely instruments of the master."⁸⁰ Following Weber, several scholars have elaborated on the notion of Sultanism as a type of personalistic domination in which the sultan rules based on his own discretion

and through coercion and fear. For example, Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan define a Sultanistic regime as one in which “the private and the public are fused, there is a strong tendency toward familial power and dynastic succession, there is no distinction between a state career and personal service to the ruler, there is a lack of rationalized impersonal ideology, economic success depends on a personal relationship to the ruler, and, most of all, the ruler acts only according to his own personal unchecked discretion, with no larger, impersonal goal.”⁸¹ In a subsequent work, H. E. Chehabi and Linz further refine the notion of a Sultanistic regime by maintaining that “it is based on personal rulership, but loyalty to the ruler is motivated not by his embodying or articulating an ideology, nor by unique personal mission, nor by any charismatic qualities, but by a mixture of fear and rewards to his collaborators. The ruler exercises his power without restraint, at his own discretion and above all unencumbered by rules or by any commitment to an ideology or value system. The binding norms and relations of bureaucratic administration are constantly subverted by arbitrary personal decisions of the ruler, which he does not feel constrained to justify in ideological terms.”⁸²

We believe that some of the key features of Sultanism are absent in today’s Iran. The fate of the regime is not closely bound up with the fate of the ruler, and the legal and symbolic institutions of the regime are not a simple façade.⁸³ We don’t see any strong tendency toward familial power and dynastic succession.⁸⁴ The Supreme Leader’s preferences don’t always carry the day.⁸⁵ Moreover, he does not act only according to his own personal unchecked discretion but rather exercises the powers granted to him by the Constitution. Furthermore, even during his more than two decades as the Supreme Leader, he has been challenged by three presidents who have tried to emasculate him by emphasizing their popular mandates. Finally, the Supreme Leader has not been immune from the incessant factional infighting that has come to characterize the Islamic Republic.⁸⁶ Even after members of the reformist wing were effectively removed from the ruling power centers after 2005, the system remains pulsating and factionalized. The conservative camp—known as the principlists (*usulgarayan*)—is not a homogeneous group; to consolidate his power, Khamenei needs their assistance, and this perpetuates their interdependency.

The alternative theory of praetorianism also suffers from a number of shortcomings. According to Amos Perlmutter and Valerie Plave Bennett’s definition cited earlier, one of the classical institutional features of praetorianism is the military’s systemic intervention in politics. Yet it is hard to conceive of the IRGC’s interventions in Iranian politics as “systematic.” For much of the last three decades, the power of the clerical oligarchy has dwarfed that of the military establishment. There have not been any hard or soft coups d’état by the military or a decapitating of the clerical establishment. Nor can we consider the IRGC as

an ideological force, since, commensurable with rising political and economic interests, its praxis as a rational actor trying to protect institutional interests has grown. While those who formerly wore the epaulettes of the Revolutionary Guards have made their forceful debut on Iran’s political scene, it is an exaggeration to consider them the sole power broker in Iran.⁸⁷ In *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Samuel Huntington identified the “absence of effective political institutions” and unmediated group political action as hallmarks of a praetorian state.⁸⁸ The new elite who came to power in Iran in 1979 have developed institutions and made the state more muscular. They have also adopted the language of public goods (national defense), volunteerism, and public-mindedness to move beyond private interests and to contain political chaos in a country that has experienced an “integrative revolution,” that is, “an explosion of political mobilization and participation.”⁸⁹

The popular protests that erupted after the June 12, 2009, presidential elections demonstrate why the Islamic Republic can’t adequately be captured by such narrow terms as “Sultanism” or “praetorianism.” Yet the events of June 2009 also demonstrated the central role of the Supreme Leader in shaping the political outcomes of the country. His hands-on involvement demonstrated that the Supreme Leader is the crucial player within the ecology of authoritarianism in Iran. His unambiguous endorsement of the declared results, forewarning to opponents, and unwillingness to compromise showcased the leviathan proclivities of the Supreme Leader. The lesson was not lost on anyone that there was a zero-sum quality to the increasing assertiveness of the Supreme Leader as far as other political institutions were concerned. Yet Khamenei also came to pay a heavy political price at this time of mass political mobilization. More than three decades after the revolution, Iranians were witnessing a spontaneous movement—not led by clerics—capable of drawing millions of people into the streets. The way the regime handled the popular protests elevated the rifts and cleavages within the political hierarchy to a new level. Perhaps most importantly, the legitimacy accumulated by some thirty elections held previously was forfeited by the suspiciously lopsided vote for the sitting president Ahmadinejad. In this ambiance, Khamenei lost a great deal of his legitimacy as the disgruntled public held him accountable for all that transpired. His hold on power was now more firm than ever, yet the accompanying price tag was not at all negligible. He had alienated the supporters of the Green Movement and lost the allegiance of many reformist politicians and technocrats who were sitting on the fence.

In short, despite what may appear as an impressive list of victories and prerogatives, one should not underestimate the price that the regime in general and the Supreme Leader in particular have paid along the way. In the immediate aftermath of the 2009 election, intra-elite factionalism reached unprecedented levels as many former comrades-in-arms walked off the political stage.⁹⁰ Despite

the considerable efforts of his enthusiasts to promote a cult of personality around him, the Supreme Leader paid a heavy political price as he became the target of both fury and jokes after the 2009 contested elections.⁹¹ While Khamenei's supporters consider him an almost infallible guide, his detractors consider him the man most responsible for the regime's long list of shortcomings. Moreover, a new season of open criticism of the Supreme Leader himself began as former and present conservative members of Parliament objected to the legitimacy of the Supreme Leader's decision-making authority and political interventions.⁹²

After 2009, the bickering within the ranks of the conservative establishment intensified as Khamenei's behind-the-scenes urging for unity fell on deaf ears. In the lead-up to the 2012 parliamentary elections, in an unusual move for the Supreme Leader, Khamenei entrusted Ali-Akbar Velayati (one of his leading advisors) and Ayatollah Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi Kani (then chair of the Assembly of Experts) to unify a number of conservative factions, but the effort failed as each faction issued its own separate list of candidates. The sharp disagreements between conservative elites continued into the 2013 presidential elections as conservative candidates failed to reach consensus once again. At the end, four of the six candidates on the ballot belonged to the conservative camp, and together they failed to garner more than 44 percent of the votes, enabling Hassan Rouhani to come to power with the endorsement and support of the reformist camp.

As a further testimony to Khamenei's less-than-mighty ability to put his imprint on things, consider the following two telling episodes. The man who was the foremost beneficiary of Khamenei's blessing of the 2009 elections became the first sitting president to openly challenge him. In a Friday Prayer sermon delivered on June 19, 2009, Khamenei openly stated that his views were closer to those of President Ahmadinejad than to his longtime companion Hashemi Rafsanjani. However, a month later a public confrontation between the Supreme Leader and the president surfaced as Khamenei ordered Ahmadinejad to dismiss Esfandiar-Rahim Mashaei as his first vice president. In a telling case of resistance, Ahmadinejad ignored the Supreme Leader's request for a week, and when a number of his own ministers sided with Khamenei, he dismissed them and appointed Mashaei, his son's father-in-law, as his chief of staff. Less than two years later, another major rift between the two men emerged in public. Ahmadinejad dismissed intelligence minister Heydar Moslehi, who had previously served as the Supreme Leader's representative in the IRGC's air and ground forces. Khamenei asked Ahmadinejad to reinstate Moslehi, but to demonstrate his displeasure, Ahmadinejad did not show up in the presidential palace for eleven days, nor did he reappoint Moslehi to his post. In a break with previous protocol, Khamenei felt compelled to intervene by overruling the president's decision on April 19, 2011, and asking Moslehi to continue serving as the intelligence minister.

These two cases, which are emblematic of the contradictory trends discernible in Iranian politics, simultaneously illustrate the growing discretionary power of the Supreme Leader and the ensuing insubordination of his underlings. Loyalty to the Supreme Leader has become a prerequisite for career advancement, but a new generation of front-line bureaucrats who have been empowered by the revolution and war are not willing to be mere docile functionaries. Khamenei's lack of charisma has ensured that the cacophony within the system will not end anytime soon.

Conclusion

As we look into possible scenarios for Iran's political future, three competing pictures present themselves. The first is the continuity scenario, in which the Supreme Leader maintains the status quo, controls factional infighting, and keeps in check the power of any potential rival. In this scenario, nonelected institutions (such as the IRGC, cleric-dominated bodies, and the Office of the Supreme Leader) will be further boosted while the power of elected institutions will be diminished.⁹³ This scenario is most probable, since serious alteration to an institutional arrangement becomes more costly over time because of path dependency, bureaucratic inertia, and the opposition of front-line bureaucrats. In this scenario, the possibility of domestic political reconciliation or accommodation between competing political blocs becomes less likely. A despondent reformist camp may hang on to the hope that it is still possible to insist on a democratic reading of the Constitution, but the praxis of the Supreme Leader is making that ever more impossible. It is highly unlikely that, even with the handover of power to a new Supreme Leader, we will witness any lessening of the role of this office through constitutional amendments, short of a monumental political crisis. Khamenei has already been in power for more than two decades,⁹⁴ and since he is in his midseventies it is logical to expect that he has carefully planned his succession both to maintain his legacy and to ensure the least amount of dissonance in a factionalized polity. If he were to depart from the scene in a normal and gradual manner, his office could ensure a smooth succession by summoning the Assembly of Experts, controlling the news flow, and other means.

There are also a good number of ancillary factors that lead us to believe that the current order of things will continue. The Iranian state is less dependent on oil as a percentage of total government revenues than in prior decades. In addition to the diversification of revenue sources, the overall demographic composition of the country has also improved as the population growth rate hovers around 1.2 percent (circa 2014). If the present rate is maintained, the country's youth bulge will largely dissipate as this decade unfolds. The country is not burdened by heavy foreign debts or a serious shortage of goods. There are no

powerful unions that can paralyze the economy and no serious labor unrest that the government cannot handle with a mixture of rewards and brute force.⁹⁵ The citizenry may be living under the oppression of the state, but the fear of a chaotic future (à la post-Arab Spring) is not necessarily appealing. Resolving the nuclear dispute with the United States and other Western countries could also help to further perpetuate the current status quo.⁹⁶ The second and third scenarios are what could disrupt the continuity picture.

The second scenario is the revival of popular protests in a country that has been quite revolutionary in its modern history. Considering that the level of dissatisfaction among most social groups in the country is already high, there is always the possibility that an event could trigger an uprising. Over the last two decades, the Iranian state has faced two important shocks to its system: in 1997 when Khatami was elected president with more than twenty million votes, and in 2009 with the Green Movement. In both instances a social movement emerged at a time when there were deep cleavages among the ruling elite. While such a small number of cases does not allow for articulating any causal relationship, it can hint at the dormant potential of another round of mass protests considering the incessant factional fighting and worsening economic conditions.

Yet one has to remember that the 2009 protests dissipated because of the following set of factors: (a) lack of a coherent ideology on the part of the opposition; (b) absence of any major defections within the military establishment or the clerical caste; (c) inability of the opposition to paralyze the economy—since they didn't have much leverage over the country's domestic trade or credit system, nor did they enjoy an independent economic base of their own; (d) inability of a mainly Tehran-based opposition movement to galvanize the disenfranchised sections of the citizenry (i.e., urban poor, labor movements, ethnic and religious minorities, and women); and (e) the state's recourse to brute force. Indeed, the regime felt confident enough that eighteen months after the June 2009 presidential elections it removed decades-old subsidies for food and energy and held parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012 and 2013, respectively. Furthermore, by adopting a business-as-usual approach, the state managed to convince most reformists that instead of staying on the sidelines they should once again take part in electoral competition, which they did in 2013.⁹⁷ While Khamenei's track record over the last two decades demonstrates that he is not willing to concede any space to oppositional elites, he has demonstrated enough political acumen to prevent situations from spinning out of control. The approach that he adopted in the course of the 2013 presidential elections—which enabled a centrist candidate to emerge victorious—was widely different from the stand he took leading to the distressing experience of the 2009 election. In light of these factors, we consider the chances for the emergence of a viable social movement capable of mass mobilization to be rather slim.

The third scenario is one in which the Supreme Leader dies unexpectedly (of natural or unnatural causes) either without having left a will (highly unlikely) or with his wishes ignored by institutions like the Revolutionary Guards or the Assembly of Experts, leading to a new agenda based on the notion of the expediency of the state and national crisis. Here again one probable contingency must be entertained. Could the IRGC overrule the "unfavorable" choice of the next Supreme Leader by the Assembly of Experts and intimidate them into accepting its own choice?

It seems that at this point in time one can only offer conjectures in answering the preceding question. As demonstrated by the literature on transition to democracy, further securitization of the political ambiance, restriction of electoral participation and competition, heavy-handed treatment of adversaries and rivals, or tinkering with the current institutional setup could each ignite yet another popular protest more vociferous in its calls for the removal of the Supreme Leader. As far as the role of the Supreme Leader is concerned, some lingering questions will have to be answered. Did Khamenei feel compelled to walk down this hard-line path in the first place, and is he cognizant of the path dependency problem that state leaders like him have to deal with?⁹⁸ Does he have the requisite conceptual complexity and good sense of political timing to handle the moment of transition? Will he have the requisite brokerage ability to co-opt and cajole the behemoth bureaucracy and entrenched elites that have spun around him? What types of major institutional adjustments or bargains is he willing to entertain as the price for staying in power?

Notes

1. Niall Ferguson, "Complexity and Collapse: Empires on the Edge of Chaos," *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2010): 26. Eva Bellin has argued that three key features of an institutionalized organization are being "rule governed, predictable, and meritocratic." See Eva Bellin, "Coercive Institutions and Coercive Leaders." In *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, edited by Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2005), 28. Each of these characteristics needs to be a bit amended to account for the peculiar nature of politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

2. <http://www.siasi.porsemani.ir/node/1373>.

3. This vote tally is confirmed by Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani in his memoirs. See <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/217914/politics/parties>.

4. This was compounded by the fact that in November 1985, Khomeini had endorsed the appointment of Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri as his successor by the Assembly of Experts but disqualified him in 1989 when the latter objected to human rights violations in the country.

5. The amended Constitution—which removed the requirement of the Supreme Leader being a *marja'*—was officially approved in a referendum on July 28, 1989. For the full text of

the amended Constitution, see <http://www.princeton.edu/irandatportal/laws/constitutions/Constitution-English-1368.pdf>.

6. For one example, see Shaul Bakhash, "Iran: The Crisis of Legitimacy." In *Middle Eastern Lectures: Number One*, edited by Martin Kramer (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1995), 111.

7. <http://jameehmodarresin.org/index.php/etelaiyeh/40—1373/330-252>.

8. "Grand Ayatollah Khamenei as Marja' of Shi'ite Muslims," *Keyhan Havai* (December 7, 1994/16 Azar 1373), no. 1110.

9. *Iranian State News Agency* (IRNA), December 14, 1994.

10. Margaret G. Hermann, "Content Analysis." In *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*, edited by Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (New York: Palgrave, 2008), 161.

11. The title of Commander of Armed Forces was instead bestowed upon the Speaker of the Parliament, Hashemi Rafsanjani.

12. It fell upon Khamenei to keep Montazeri under pressure and/or house arrest from 1989 to 2009, but this only helped to augment the latter's popular support.

13. In June 1987 Khomeini had agreed that the Islamic Republican Party be dissolved because of intense factional infighting.

14. Khomeini had handed over his will to the government for safekeeping in December 1987.

15. <http://tarikhirani.ir/fa/events/3/EventsList?Page=&Lang=fa&EventsId=149&Action=EventsDetail>.

16. The principle of *velayat-e faqih* had been approved by the Constitutional Assembly of Experts in 1979 by a vote of 58 for, 8 against, and 4 abstentions. See the newspaper *Iran* (September 16, 2002/25 Shahrivar 1381), appendix. For a review of the entire proceedings, see *Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami, Majles-e barrasi-e nahayi-ye qanun-e asasi-ye jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran, surat-e mashruh-e mozakerat-e majles-e barrasi-e nahayi-ye qanun-e asasi-ye jomhuri-ye eslami-ye Iran*, 4 vols. (Tehran: Edareh-e Kol-e Omur-e Farhangi va Ravabet-e Omumi-e Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami, 1985–1989).

17. David Menashri, *Post-Revolution Politics in Iran: Religion, Society, and Power* (London: Frank Cass, 2001), 17.

18. The eight-year war with Iraq, which was the largest example of mass mobilization in modern Iranian history, had forced the Iranian state to develop new administrative capacities. The question of how these capacities were to be channeled and supervised in the postwar era was causing endless friction among the various centers of power in Tehran.

19. It already had the power to supervise the presidential and parliamentary elections.

20. The tangible impact of this change was felt a year later in 1990, when elections were held for the second session of the Assembly of Experts. Armed with its newly bestowed powers, the Guardian Council set new qualifications for clerics running for the Assembly of Experts. To block the entry of radical clerics, the qualification criteria were changed and many of the candidates were rejected or forced to withdraw as they saw it demeaning to subject themselves to a religious knowledge test (see Ayatollah Asadollah Bayat's interview on the 1990 Assembly of Experts election in *E'temad Melli*, March 4, 2009). All in all, 42 percent of registered candidates (77 out of 183) were either rejected or forced to withdraw (*Ettela'at*, October 27, 1998). This trend continued in all future elections as well.

21. Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic* (London: Routledge, 1995), 49.

22. Since the aim of the 1989 amended Constitution was to concentrate power in fewer hands, it had also created a stronger presidency by abolishing the office of the Prime Minister.

23. Saïd Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 37.

24. *Ibid.*, 179.

25. Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic* (London: Tauris, 1997), 78.

26. The subsequent departures of Ayatollahs Behjat, Fazel Lankarani, and Tabrizi further eased Khamenei's reshaping of the seminary system.

27. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/others-note?id=10312>.

28. The charter of SCRSQ can be seen at <http://www.princeton.edu/irandatportal/laws/charter-supreme-council-sl/>.

29. In early 1997, SCRSQ established the Islamic Seminaries Management Center for Ladies. See <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/MarkazView.html?MarkazID=12219>.

30. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/others-note?id=10312>. The number of seminaries does not include those in Esfahan or Khorasan provinces (Northern, Southern and Razavi). See *Shahrvand-e Emrooz*, no. 67 (October 2008/Mehr 1387): 62–63.

31. <http://www.princeton.edu/irandatportal/laws/charter-supreme-council-sl/>.

32. <http://hawzahnews.com/TextVersionDetail/237542> (May 27, 2010).

33. <http://www.csis.ir/NSite/FullStory/News/?Id=130>.

34. *Sahifeh-e emam*, vol. 19. http://en.imam-khomeini.ir/en/c5_3203/Book/English/SAHIFEH-YE_IMAM_Volume_19...

35. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Be su-ye sarnevesht: Khaterat-e Hashemi Rafsanjani sal-e 1363* (Tehran: Daftar Nashr-e Maaref Enqelab, 2006), 47.

36. *E'temad-e Melli* (July 26, 2009/4 Mordad 1388).

37. *Ibid.*

38. *Fars News Agency*, (July 25, 2015/3 Mordad 1394). <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13940503000340>.

39. The age factor is important here as these young preachers (a) have almost no history of political activism before the revolution and (b) have the stamina to serve as the vigilant eyes and ears of the clerical establishment in the four corners of the country.

40. Kourosh Rahimkhani, "The Institutionalization of the Clerical Establishment in Post-Revolutionary Iran: The Case of the Friday Prayer Leaders," paper presented at the biannual conference of the International Society for Iranian Studies, Los Angeles, CA, 2010.

41. In addition to Khamenei, the Society of Qom Seminary Teachers recognizes Ayatollahs Vahid Khorasani, Shobeiri Zanjani, Makarem Shirazi, Safi [Golpayegani] and Sistani as the other *marja'*. See <http://www.jameehmodarresin.org/index.php/2014-01-23-07-32-22/599-495>.

42. The patronage network of the Supreme Leader also extends to foreign students from the Muslim world (primarily from Arab countries, Central Asia, the Far East, and South Asia) who come to Al-Mostafa International Seminary in Qom to study Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Mostafa International Seminary also has branches in several other countries.

43. By most accounts the highest-learned present Grand Ayatollah in Iran is Ayatollah Hossein Vahid Khorasani (1921–). Born in Mashhad, he attained the status of *ijtehad* in 1948 (when Khamenei was merely nine years old) and underwent further training in Najaf. Vahid Khorasani has not accepted any important political position in the postrevolutionary period.

44. <http://www.rasanews.ir/NSite/FullStory/?id=128706>. IPO was founded in 1981, but Khamenei expanded its mandate in 2001 and gets to appoint its director. Its mandate is to promote religious literature (<http://www.ido.ir/myhtml/sazman/sazman.aspx>). One important subunit of IPO is *Setad Eqameh-ye Namaz* [Headquarters for Performance of Prayers] that coordinates prayer ceremonies throughout the country by training preachers, holding workshops and exhibitions, evaluating prayer rooms and facilities in schools and offices, and so

on. This headquarters was established on the orders of Ayatollah Khamenei (see <http://center.namaz.ir/page.php?page=showarticles&cat=32&id=1&office=center>).

45. This center was established in 1989 on Khamenei's orders (see <http://www.masjed.ir/fa/aboutus/history>).

46. <http://www.rasanews.ir/NSite/FullStory/?id=128912>.

47. A prominent group of clerics, including Grand Ayatollahs Seyyed Kazem Shari'atmadari (1903–1986), Hossein-Ali Montazeri (1922–2009), Seyyed Hassan Tabatabai Qomi (1907–2007), Ahmad Azari Qomi (1925–1999), Seyyed Mohammad Shirazi (1926–2001), Mohammad-Taher Shobeir Khaqani (1909–1985), and Mohammad-Sadeq Rouhani (1926), were put under house arrest under Khomeini and Khamenei.

48. The full name of this organization is *Dadsaraha va Dadgahha-ye Vizheh-ye Rohaniyat* (Special Prosecutor's Offices and Courts of the Clergy). It was established in 1987 by the personal order of Ayatollah Khomeini even though it had not been mentioned in the Constitution. The mandate of SCC, which is functionally independent of the regular judicial framework, is to investigate transgressions of the clerics (murder, rape, stealing), and defrock them if necessary.

49. The articles were first approved by Khamenei in 1990. The originals and the amended articles can be read at <http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/laws/scc/> and <http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/laws/scc-amendments/>.

50. Mirjam Künkler: "The Special Court of the Clergy (*dâdgâh-e vizheh-ye ruhaniyât*) and the Repression of Dissident Clergy in Iran." In *Constitutionalism, the Rule of Law and the Politics of Administration in Egypt and Iran*, edited by Said Amir Arjomand and Nathan Brown (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 90–139.

51. Khamenei has also been equally tough on his lay detractors. Almost anyone who has written a critically worded open letter to him has faced mistreatment, imprisonment, exile, or death.

52. Because the clerical members of the Guardian Council, whom Khamenei appoints, are also responsible for approving the credentials of Assembly of Experts candidates, he can keep out noncompliant personalities. Khamenei can also ensure an outcome agreeable to him by discouraging too many candidates running from the same province.

53. For example, he appointed a committee to investigate the outcome of the 2009 elections, and in the lead-up to the 2012 Majles elections he appointed a personal representative to try to unify the conservative bloc so that they would not publish multiple lists of candidates (the effort failed). One such ad hoc body is the Supreme Board of Arbitration and Adjustment of Relations among the Three Branches of Government (SBAARATBG), which the Supreme Leader created in July 2011. While it has not been hugely active yet, this body can potentially usurp some of the functions of the Expediency Council. It is not clear whether SBAARATBG, which has not been sanctioned by the Constitution, is a temporary or permanent council.

54. For example, Khamenei made clear his objections to Hashemi Rafsanjani's economic reconstruction plans and to the Khatami administration's cultural policies.

55. One notorious interpreter and advocate for the wishes of Khamenei is Hossein Shari'atmadari (b. 1947), the Supreme Leader's representative at the newspaper *Keyhan*.

56. By November 2011, the director of the Institute for Human Sciences reported that they had completed revising the content of 555 university courses. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2011/11/111126_144_universities_humanitie.shtml.

57. The Supreme Leader has a personal representative in most important Iranian universities, and the power of these individuals can rival that of the university president.

58. <http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,4521706,00.html>.

59. IKRC was established on March 5, 1979, with the prime objective of providing services and relief (pensions, loans, and grants) to the poor and those in need. See <http://www.emdad.ir/en/history.asp>.

60. Mahmood Messkoub, "Social Policy in Iran in the Twentieth Century," *Iranian Studies* 39, no. 2 (2006): 251.

61. Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Iran." In *The Middle East*, 13th ed., edited by Ellen Lust (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2014), 501.

62. Arang Keshavarzian, *Bazaar and State in Iran: Politics of the Tehran Marketplace* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

63. Suzanne Maloney, "Agents or Obstacles? Parastatal Foundations and Challenges for Iranian Development." In *The Economy of Iran: Dilemmas of an Islamic State*, edited by Parvin Alizadeh (London: Tauris, 2000), 155. According to the official website of DFIR, in 2002 it employed more than fifty-six thousand workers.

64. <http://faryabnews.ir/press/index.php/1392-01-19-05-38-02/8083.html> (February 24, 2015). For a more comprehensive account of the activities of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee, see <http://www.emdad.ir/upload/nashriat/nashriyeh/No13.pdf>.

65. <http://old.ana.ir/Home/Single/3748> (January 1, 2013).

66. See Ali A. Saeidi, "The Accountability of Para-governmental Organizations (Bonyads): The Case of Iranian Foundations," *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 3 (2004): 483.

67. ISNA news agency, March 14, 2011. Some of the more well-known shrines in Iran are Ma'sumeh Shrine, Abdolazim Shrine, and Shah Cheragh Shrine, which have their own foundations.

68. <http://www.rahesabz.net/story/20436/>.

69. In 2009, this company served twenty-five million landline subscribers and thirty-one million mobile subscribers. *Fars News Agency*, August 29, 2009.

70. The director of HIIO, Mohammad Mokhber, was placed on the European Union's sanction list on July 26, 2010.

71. *Ettela'at* (August 12, 1981/21 Mordad 1360), and *Jomhuri-e Eslami* (February 10, 1994/21 Bahman 1372).

72. Khamenei has appointed many of those who served as ministers in either one of his two cabinets as his advisors or members of the Expediency Council. Among these are Gholam-Reza Aqazadeh, Habibollah Askarowladi, Javad Ejei, Hassan Habibi, Mohammad Javad Irvani, Alireza Marandi, Bijan Namdar Zangeneh, Mohammad Reyshahri, Ahmad Tavakkoli, and Ali-Akbar Velayati.

73. At the outset of the Iran-Iraq War, the IRGC was a force of no more than 20,000 to 30,000. Today educated estimates put the number of the Guards between 120,000 to 150,000 with some 50,000 retirees. See Rand Corporation, *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2009), 8; and Alireza Nader, "The Revolutionary Guards," *Iran Primer*, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/revolutionary-guards>.

74. Khomeini delegated the position of commander in chief of the armed forces first to President Baniadr and then to Speaker of Parliament Rafsanjani, whereas Khamenei has decided not to delegate any portion of his military mandate.

75. Khomeini was represented by such individuals as Hassan Lahuti Eshkevari (1927–1981), Fazlollah Mahallati, Seyyed Hassan Taheri Khorramabadi (b. 1938), Mohammad-Reza Faker (1945–2010), and Abdollah Nuri (b. 1950). Khamenei was represented by Ayatollah Mahmud Mohammadi Araqi (b. 1952), Ayatollah Mohammad-Ali Movahhedi Kermani (b. 1931), and Hojjatolislam Ali Sa'idi.

76. For example, Mohsen Rezaei was tapped at the young age of twenty-seven to lead the IRGC for sixteen years (1981–1997) because of his involvement in armed struggle before the revolution and his having served in the committee providing security for Khomeini upon his return from exile.

77. Praetorianism has been defined as “a situation where the military class of a given society exercises independent political power within it by virtue of an actual or threatened use of military force.” Amos Perlmutter and Valerie Plave Bennett, eds., *The Political Influence of the Military: A Comparative Reader* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 199.

78. See Akbar Ganji, “Rise of the Sultans,” *Foreign Affairs* (June 2009).

79. See Elliot Hen-Tov and Nathan Gonzalez, “The Militarization of Post-Khomeini Iran: Praetorianism 2.0,” *Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2011): 45–59; and Ali Alfoneh, *Iran Unveiled: How the Revolutionary Guards Is Turning Theocracy into Military Dictatorship* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 2013).

80. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 231.

81. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 52.

82. H. E. Chehabi and Juan J. Linz, *Sultanistic Regimes* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 7.

83. It is also important to remember that whereas the Supreme Leader does not have the authority to dissolve Parliament or the Assembly of Experts, the latter can theoretically dismiss him.

84. Khamenei’s older brother, Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini Khamenei (b. 1935), retired from Parliament in 1988 and now heads both the Sadra Philosophical Foundation and the Iranology Foundation, whereas his younger brother, Seyyed Hadi Hosseini Khamenei (b. 1947), left Parliament in 2004, and the two reformist newspapers he founded were banned by the judiciary on the charge of castigating political leaders. Khamenei’s second son, Mojtaba (b. 1969), is reputed to be a powerful behind-the-scenes player in his father’s operations, but he does not hold any official positions.

85. For example, during the 1997 presidential election it became obvious that Ali-Akbar Nateq Nuri was Khamenei’s favorite candidate, but he lost the election to Mohammad Khatami by a 44 percent margin.

86. Political disagreements have reached such a threshold that at least four members—Abdollah Nuri, Karrubi, Mussavi, and Mussavi Khoeiniha—of such a stately body as the Expediency Council have been tried or put under house arrest.

87. Mehrzad Boroujerdi and Kourosh Rahimkhani, “Revolutionary Guards Soar in Parliament,” *Iran Primer*. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/sep/19/revolutionary-guards-soar-parliament>.

88. He writes: “in all stages of praetorianism social forces interact directly with each other and make little or no effort to relate their private interest to a public good.” Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 196, 197.

89. Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini*, 112.

90. Unlike his predecessor, Khamenei did not play an impartial role in preventing the tilting of the balance of power in favor of one faction.

91. As the saying goes, the greatest enemy of authority is contempt.

92. In January 2012, in a live controversial television interview in the state media, Emad Afrugh (b. 1957), a former conservative MP, maintained that even the Supreme Leader can be

subjected to impeachment. In 2012, one outspoken and prominent Majlis deputy, Ali Motahhari (b. 1957), publicly complained that Parliament had become a de facto unit of the Office of the Supreme Leader. Furthermore, in 2014 Motahhari also publicly opposed the continuing house arrest of Mussavi and Karrubi.

93. The facts that the Eight Majles (2008–2012) voted to deprive itself of the right to monitor institutions under the umbrella of the Supreme Leader and that Khamenei told the leadership of the Assembly of Experts in 2012 that they can’t question him about the details of his choices point to this direction. Furthermore, in the area of sensitive foreign policy issues (nuclear negotiations, Iraq, and Syria), the Supreme Leader is the ultimate arbiter.

94. With the exception of Mohammad-Reza Shah, Khamenei’s tenure as ruler exceeds that of any other person ruling Iran since 1900.

95. Only 20 percent of Iran’s workers are employed in workplaces that have more than thirty-five employees. Most labor protests in Iran revolve around unpaid wages and short-term employment contracts and don’t galvanize the working public. Furthermore, according to the Iran Statistical Center, 80 percent of the 1.4 million Iranians with higher-education degrees are public sector wage and salary earners. This means they can be cowed by the power of the purse.

96. While it can be argued that a “grand bargain” can undercut one of the key ideological props of the Supreme Leader’s power, history shows us that such a radical reversal is not necessarily hard to justify for the regime. After all, the Iranian state had promised to rid Iraqi people from the tyranny of the Ba’athist regime but ended up signing a cease-fire agreement with it in 1988.

97. For the reformists, the surprising election of Rouhani as president once again demonstrated that in Iran’s fluid political scene, “defeat is by no means total, victory is in no way unqualified, [and] grief not at all permanent.” See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, “The Reformist Movement in Iran.” In *Oil in the Gulf: Obstacles to Democracy and Development*, edited by Daniel Heradstveit and Helge Hveem (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 66–67.

98. See Mehran Kamrava, “Preserving Non-Democracies: Leaders and State Institutions in the Middle East,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 2 (2010): 251–270.

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Mark Tessler, *General Editor*

POWER AND CHANGE
IN IRAN

Politics of Contention and Conciliation

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and Farideh Farhi

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Contents

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