



A comparative study of the political, analytical and operational capacity of fundamentalist and reformist political currents (2001-2021)

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Abstract

The examination of the political, analytical, and operational capacity of Iran's political movements at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels forms the theoretical foundation of this research. The relationship between the different levels of each of these capacities is also of great significance. The present study, with a foundational research approach, provides a conceptual framework for analyzing and explaining political, analytical, and operational capacities. Here, political capacity refers to qualifications, abilities, and capabilities. Analytical capacity addresses technical, scientific knowledge and analytical techniques at different levels, and finally, operational capacity emphasizes the ability to execute policies and the coordination between them. Accordingly, political, analytical, and operational capacities at individual, organizational, and systemic levels form a 9-base model in which the relationships between them are taken into account. Political movement analysis is, in fact, the identification of ideological waves inspired by political schools of thought, which have become the source of political opinion and action, creating movement and change in society. However, this is not merely an intellectual study but a sociological analysis. The research findings show that the challenge facing the Principlists movement, due to its adherence to ideological principles, lies in its analytical capacity at the individual, organizational, and systemic levels, which has affected all of its capacities. However, reformist movements, despite having a high analytical capacity, are unsuccessful in their political and operational performance due to a lack of control over the main centers of power at various levels.

Keywords: Political capacity, Analytical capacity, Operational capacity, Political movements, Reformists, Principlists

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Introduction:

The present research addresses the essential issue of understanding the political, analytical, and operational capacities of Iran's principlist and reformist political movements over the past two decades. Here, the capacity of political movements refers to their qualifications, abilities, and capabilities. Based on this, the capacity of these movements will be analyzed using a "9-base" model. This model creates a 3x3 matrix composed of analytical, operational, and political qualifications, as well as individual, organizational, and systemic capabilities. Additionally, the interaction of these levels is also considered.

This research adopts a qualitative approach to study the perceptions and understanding of actors in a comparative study of the political, analytical, and operational capacities of political movements (reformist and principlist) over the past two decades in Iran. Ultimately, the findings, with high validity and reliability, will be made available to experts, planners, and policymakers. From this perspective, the results and suggestions will position the current critical analysis as a case study in scientific forums, and the outcomes will serve as a learning tool for capacity analysis of political movements in academic circles.

Political capacity, based on a conceptual framework, refers to important talents and capabilities for policymaking. These talents, qualifications, and capabilities provide tools to identify gaps in the political development process and offer a critical insight into the strategies needed to overcome such gaps. "Flegg" argues that the concept of political capacity should include the nature and quality of

available resources for examining and drafting policies, as well as the methods and procedures through which these resources are mobilized and utilized by public services, the non-governmental sector, and society as a whole.

The present research offers a conceptual framework for analyzing and measuring political, analytical, and operational capacity, in which political capacity refers to significant talents and capabilities for policymaking.

Qualifications are categorized into three general types of essential skills for political success: analytical, operational, and political, while capabilities are evaluated at the individual, organizational, and systemic resource levels. Political failure is often the result of an imbalance in attention to these nine different components of policy capacity. The conceptual framework provided in this research offers a tool for identifying capacity gaps and provides a critical insight into strategies for overcoming such gaps in professional behavior, organizational activities, and the work of those involved in policymaking within the political system.

In other words, policy capacity is defined as a set of skills and resources or qualifications and capabilities necessary to carry out the specific work of policymaking.

Political Capacity: Refers to the outlook of political actors, particularly governments, regarding their influence or ability to rationally choose solutions, their ability to correctly perceive the environment and select the right strategy for action and guidance, assess the requirements of alternative policies, and finally,

make proper use of knowledge in decision-making.

Analytical Capacity: Helps ensure that political actions follow a technical path, which, if properly executed, can lead us to our goals.

Operational Capacity: At the level of "operational capacity," the resources available for political action are put into practice.

Political Capacity: At the level of "political capacity," we are helped to sustainably gain political support for political actions to achieve set goals.

Political Movement: A political movement is a group rooted in one of the recognized political schools, acting based on a particular political view or theory. It includes political parties, factions, and even political fronts. This means that within a political movement, multiple parties, factions, and fronts can emerge. A political movement is not limited or confined to a particular class, group, or status, and it does not belong to any specific ethnicity, tribe, or group. It also does not fit within specific time or geographical boundaries. A political movement may exist for centuries and spread across a wide range of countries and nations. Additionally, it may pursue a reformist approach for many years, but at some point, adopt a revolutionary stance, create movements or uprisings, and give rise to parties, factions, and organizations.

Reformism: Belief in the possibility of changing the political structures and fundamental economic system of a society through gradual change within existing institutions. This hypothesis of social change emerged in opposition to revolutionary socialism, which believes that a type of revolution is necessary for

fundamental structural changes. Reformism must be distinguished from pragmatic reforms: reformism assumes that accumulated reforms can lead to the emergence of an economic and social system entirely different from today's forms of capitalism and democracy, while pragmatic reforms represent efforts to preserve the status quo against fundamental and structural changes.

Principlism: If we look at political cultures, we will not find the term "Principlism" in them. Instead, we encounter the word "fundamentalism," whose positive interpretation is closer to what we call Principlism in today's political terminology. Fundamentalism has two different meanings that are opposed to each other. In the first sense, which is more often referred to as "Principlism" in Farsi, it refers to being principled in beliefs, convictions, and adhering to them. In the other meaning, which has a more negative connotation, fundamentalism is equated with dogmatism and adherence to outward appearances.

Theoretical Foundations

Migdal (1988) defined capacity as follows: capacity is "the ability of state leaders to compel people in society to do what they want them to do."

Kugler and Domke (1986), who took this concept to the international level, defined capacity in international politics as "a state's ability to control the behavior or fate of others" (Kugler and Domke, 1986, p. 39). In addition to Kugler and Domke's study on wartime capacities, an interesting application of this approach can be found in Gaventa's (1980) historical study on the Appalachian mines and

coal companies and unions. Another line of theorizing in the capacity literature has focused on the scope or range of a state's power. To avoid distinguishing between capacity and range, they shifted their attention to the interaction between the two—what they call “regulatory intent.” The outcomes of state policies are a product of what the state seeks to achieve (range) and what it is capable of implementing (capacity). For them, the theoretical issue of crisis concerns systems that they call “desperate states”: states that wish to exert much more control over society but are not organizationally capable of doing so.

Other definitions have adopted a more nuanced approach and have referred to state capacity as a government's ability to make decisions regarding policy-making. For example, Mann (1984) states:

“Infrastructural power, which is the ability to penetrate civil society and implement political decisions across its territory, is called state capacity” (Mann, 1984, p. 189). This is a nuanced conceptual definition. Similarly, Fukuyama (2004) defines capacity as “the ability of governments to plan and implement policies and enforce laws in a clean and transparent manner.” An example of empirical research in this area that involves the concept of capacity includes Geddes' ([1994] 1996) study on politicians and politics in Latin America.

It is important to note that above, Fukuyama refers to one of the normative competencies in the discussion of political capacity, which is that actions must be carried out “cleanly and transparently.” This normative approach is the same one common in medical literature. However, experience shows that capacity is not and should not be a normative concept. That is,

some countries use their capacity for “inhumane” purposes.

Skocpol and Finegold (1982) argued that political capacity is the power of political currents that stem from the independence of civil society and its power holders. Later, Skocpol developed Weber's concept of political capacity to argue that political capacity is a function of the independence of the state, honesty, bureaucratic refinement, and resources. While other definitions of political capacity have served the dominant current of thought, in most definitions, state independence forms an important part of both theoretical and empirical work. Examples of empirical work following the concept of state power include historical descriptions of federal New Deal-era economic interventions in industry and agriculture, as well as a study on the development of the automotive industry in Southeast Asia. Geddes argues, “If one wants to explain a state's development strategy preferences, for example, one must know who holds power and what they want and believe.” Despite this insight, elite decision-making in the developing world has still been overlooked.

Capacity here is defined as strategy (policy), similar to the definitions of thinkers who see political capacity as a set of skills and resources—or the competencies and capabilities necessary for political affairs. Accordingly, after analysis, “Moore” divided the skills or core competencies that can constitute political capacity into three categories: analytical, operational, and political. Each of these three categories includes resources or abilities at three different levels—individual, organizational, and systemic—which create nine key types of capacity related to policy. This model or basic framework is employed in this

research. This definition, which includes three sets of skills and competencies and three levels of resources and capabilities, is broad enough to encompass all aspects of political capacity mentioned by the above thinkers, allowing their similarities and differences to be clearly and transparently displayed. This framework, in turn, allows for better and more precise operationalization and interpretation of the concept of political capacity than before. Leslie Pal and Ian Clark, in their work on individual-political capacity, examine the key skill needed by policy actors: political knowledge and experience or "political mindset." Pal and Clark's paper represents a solution for policymaking not only within but also in relation to the broader environment, so that individual policy actors can also play an effective role in the policy process. They argue that identifying other key actors, understanding their core interests and ideologies, as well as the relationships between them, are essential traits of successful public managers, necessary for understanding the political deals required to reconcile actors and interests.

Clare Dunlop, by writing on organizational and political capacity, examines a fundamental challenge in the development of governance and public relations. For success, governments must define an issue and focus public attention on it, encouraging active participation in solving it. She argues that two-way communication allows citizens to monitor the actions of political factions, engage in dialogue with officials on matters important to them, and influence political outcomes. Finally, Wu, Ramesh, and Howlett argue that systemic-political capacity is broader and more comprehensive and has the ability to shape all other capacities. According to them, in conditions where an environment is created

for all political factions' activities, it is the "leadership-level capacity" through which all other aspects of political capacity can be shaped. This systemic-political capacity creates a level of trust in political, social, economic, and security domains, which scholars refer to as the "diamond." The level of trust provides a useful framework for thinking about various aspects of political legitimacy and identifying potential shortcomings in political capacity that a faction or political movement may face and need to address to gain public trust.

Michael Howlett, citing individual analytical capacity, stated that all governments need a significant number of officials with analytical capacity, defined as the ability to access and use knowledge, including technical and scientific knowledge and analytical techniques, to design and implement policies efficiently and cost-effectively. This is especially important in the context of the growing emphasis on evidence-based policymaking, which requires that officials involved in policy work be able to absorb and process information across all aspects of policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. Many studies on the use of knowledge in government note that governments, even when evidence is available, do not use it because they lack the skills to do so. This argument suggests that governments, generally, have an uneven distribution of capacities, technical capabilities, and usage practices across different organizational and thematic areas, which can be problematic for policymaking.

Governments and their organizations also need sufficient organizational and analytical capacity, as defined by Valerie Patin, and Marlene Brans in their article as the

availability of individuals with analytical skills. They define analytical capacity as the presence of mechanisms and processes for collecting and analyzing data, and an organizational commitment to evidence-based policy if it is to be effective. From their perspective, an efficient information system for collecting and disseminating information within and among public sector institutions is particularly important in today's evidence-based context. In other words, policymaking not only requires the ability to analyze data but also its timely and regular availability. Patin and Brans studied the public's evaluation capacity, and their article on institutions in Belgium is prominent in understanding organizational-analytical capacity. They refer to the abilities that governments need to establish and enhance their own evaluation and, ultimately, organizational-analytical capacity as political capacity.

"Angel Hsu" defines analytical and systemic capacity as the general state of scientific, statistical, and educational capabilities in society that allow policymakers and agents to perform their analytical and managerial functions by accessing high-quality information. She acknowledges that the state of education in general, and specifically the training and education of public policies, along with the precise collection and wide dissemination of data in public affairs, has a significant impact on the capacity of factions and political movements to carry out their functions. She argues that this diverse analytical capacity of policy can be evaluated through observed gaps in policy areas such as environmental data monitoring and reporting between countries. She later stated that the diverse analytical needs are due to diverse global policies. She believed that to enhance political capacity, in the

field of environmental knowledge systems, there is a need for the participation of new institutions and actors.

"Ann Tirian" at the individual and operational level argues that the ability of individual managers to perform key managerial tasks is an important determinant of overall policy capacity. However, she points out the contradictions between the emphasis on leadership in the public sector reform debate and the promotion of managerial reforms with a focus on efficiency and technical skills. By focusing on senior civil servants in the UK, she mentions the challenges related to enhancing public services without specifying broader arrangements for it, such as accountability, which can weaken rather than strengthen the overall capacity Tirian has in mind at this level. By focusing on operational capacity, Peters in an article state that the performance of managers, agents, and workers in the policy domain depends largely on the internal organization of government institutions and the political-institutional environment in which they work. He believes that the relationships between organizations and legislative and executive actors, as well as the education and aspirations of civil servants, are key determinants of their capacity and effectiveness.

Alison Hughes and her colleagues then examine capacity at the systemic-operational level. They studied health policy workers and senior health managers in Australia, showing that this capacity (systemic-operational) arises from the coordination of governmental and non-governmental efforts to address collective problems.

Hughes and her colleagues highlighted the fragmented and incremental nature of health development, focusing on the broader political environment in which such incremental development occurs in this sector. Specifically, they emphasize leadership roles, shared vision, constituency, policy research (and healthcare services), and inclusive political dialogue that play a role in the development of policy capacity at this level.

Political stream analysis is essentially the identification of ideological waves that have drawn inspiration from political schools of thought, become the source of political ideas and actions, and created movement and change in society. However, this is not merely a study of thought or intellectual inquiry; it is a sociological study that seeks to differentiate political streams not only in their intellectual domain but also in the context of social and political relationships, interests, and institutions. Along with paying attention to the social dimensions of streams, both in terms of their resources and their origin and emergence, it also pays attention to their sociological processes and achievements. One of the sociological functions of political streams is to shape stable social organizations, the formation of which, in the context of political conflicts, is, according to Gramsci, indebted to hegemony and is therefore a political matter. Thus, political stream analysis is both a study of content and an understanding of distinctions in the dimensions of social life, paying attention to the political functions of streams and their political-sociological manifestations, such as the emergence of new social formations in the arena of political conflicts, which gives it a political and interdisciplinary dimension. From this perspective, political stream analysis focuses on the social backgrounds of political

phenomena, considering them within society as a whole and taking into account the interaction between the components of society. Political stream analysis also tends to have a more analytical orientation, meaning that in analyzing political phenomena, it seeks to build conceptual tools and establish principles that can be applied to a wide range of diverse political activities in various societies, paying attention to the theoretical sources of political phenomena being one of them. Political stream analysis is methodical because it organizes the researcher's mind and brings order to their study (Faramarz Gharamaleki, 2001, p. 25). Identifying streams, in addition to recognizing the roots and emergence of these tendencies as the main sources of social changes, also involves understanding interactions, trends, declines, and growths, as well as borrowing, influencing, and being influenced by one another. Political stream analysis aims to conceptually, interpretively, and in detail reveal how political streams are born, evolve, and transform, both within the stream and externally.

The Political Reform Movement in Iran

In recent years, the term "reform" has become one of the most frequently used words, applied in various contexts and by people with different political perspectives. This term, equivalent to the word "reformism," refers to a set of methods and strategies that governments or ideologues adopt to change the unhealthy or problematic aspects of a government while maintaining its overall structure. In other words, a society that has not completely lost hope in the ruling regime is hopeful that reforms will change the prevailing conditions in such a way that, with minimal damage, the

people's demands will be met through the existing system. This movement takes place within the ruling system while preserving it. For example, although the Constitutional Movement is called a revolution, it was in fact a reformist movement that transformed the authoritarian system into a constitutional monarchy by preserving the Qajar dynasty and securing the consent of Mozaffar ad-Din Shah (Mohammadi, 2001, p. 24). The Prophets and the infallible Imams — peace be upon them — have been the greatest and true reformers in human history. Thus, reformism is not a new phenomenon created by a few individuals. As Amir al-Mu'minin Ali (peace be upon him) referred to his social activities as reform, saying, "I will manifest reform in your lands." Likewise, Imam Hussein (peace be upon him) in the gathering of his companions during the Hajj season in the time of Muawiyah, using the same words of his father, referred to his future activities as reform: "I have only gone forth to seek reform in the nation of my grandfather" (Motahari, 81). Motahari also states in this regard: "Reformism is an Islamic spirit. Every Muslim, by virtue of being a Muslim, is inherently a reformist or at least a supporter of reformism. For reformism is both a prophetic characteristic and a manifestation of enjoining good and forbidding evil, which are pillars of Islamic social teachings" (Motahari, 7). So, who are the reformists in our current society, and do their views and movements fall within the conventional meaning of reformism?

Every governmental structure and political system may, after a certain period of its existence, require reforms in some aspects, so that while preserving the entirety and integrity of the structure or system, some of its defects and inefficiencies are addressed. Certainly, the

Islamic Republic of Iran is not exempt from this rule.

If we assess the concept of political capacity in terms of the level of industrialization, economic growth, social mobilization, and political participation, new demands emerge in the form of participation and newer roles. Therefore, political systems must possess the necessary capability and capacity for the transition to democracy. Daniel Lerner also believes that the emergence of a society based on political participation entails the development of urbanization, public education, and communication (Bashiriyeh, 2001, p. 17). In this context, during the Reconstruction era, changes aimed at economic reforms, shifts in value systems, and consequently transformations in political culture, along with the influence of the international environment (globalization), strengthened the legal legitimacy of the system and created a favorable environment for institutionalizing political participation. However, during this period (1989-1997), the extensive focus on rebuilding the massive destruction caused by the imposed war led to neglecting the transition towards democratic processes and political development. If a society's political culture is to become rationalized, it initially requires political calm and movement towards the institutionalization of the political structure (Sariolghalam, 2014, pp. 74-75). Although during this period we witnessed the emergence of informal, personal participation based on relationships and the formation of pressure groups, the prevailing trends in this period led to greater political calm compared to the first decade of the revolution. This relative calm was on its way to providing the groundwork in the third decade of the revolution for institutionalizing the structure and rules of democratic life.

The victory of Seyed Mohammad Khatami in the 1997 presidential election marked the beginning of a new era in Iran. This new era, which some have called the post-Islamist period, signaled a significant shift in power in Iranian politics in favor of the reformists. The twenty million voters who cast their ballots for Seyed Mohammad Khatami were not solely aiming for a better economic and political life; their vote was also a protest against an ideological interpretation of social and political life that had dominated them for over 20 years. With Khatami's election as president and his promises of social reforms, the creation of civil society, and increased political participation, the path was paved for the growth of political parties and political development. In his political discourse, Khatami emphasized civil society, political development, political and civil liberties, the rule of law, religious democracy, dialogue among civilizations, and reducing tensions in foreign policy. One of the successes of Khatami's administration in domestic affairs was the expansion, both quantitatively and qualitatively, of the press and political parties, which can be seen as strengthening the fourth pillar of democracy and progress in freedom of expression and thought, as well as improving the open space for criticism. Consequently, after the May 1997 elections, democratic institutions were strengthened, and spontaneous civic participation replaced mass participation, experiencing significant growth (Bashiriyeh, 2013, p. 103). During the reform movement, efforts to expand the capacity for political participation among the people were encouraged, and, among other things, local council elections were held (Bashiriyeh, 2013, p. 187). If, within Huntington's theoretical framework, institutionalization is considered a unique criterion for

political development, then the revival of city and village councils can be regarded as a tangible indicator for assessing political development during the reform era. With Khatami's victory, the regime's strategy shifted from political homogenization to committed divergence. Thus, a new space emerged for the development of democratic indicators such as free competition, political parties and groups, and the expansion of press freedom. During this period, we also witnessed the rise of new values like freedom, the rule of law, tolerance, civil rights, political and social participation, civil society, political development, and social security, which indicated the emergence of a participatory and democratic political culture among the masses. Civil society institutions can play an important role in raising people's awareness of the political system. In total, considering structural and long-term factors such as economic development, the expansion of education and communication, social modernization, the growth of the new middle class, and the emergence of civil society, the groundwork for a transition to democracy was provided. Therefore, the period following the June 1997 elections can be named the era of democratization growth due to the political atmosphere that was created. The development of democratic indicators such as free competition among political parties and groups, the expansion of press freedom, the revival of some democratic principles of the constitution such as council elections, and the strengthening of participatory political culture are features of this period, which have also been referred to as a quasi-democracy. From the second half of the 1370s onward, new values such as the rule of law, civil liberties, and minority rights spread in the wake of the global wave of democratization and internal transformations.

In the third decade of the revolution, the process of transforming individuals in society into duty-bound and participatory citizens was being consolidated. During this decade, emphasis on faith as the core of religion, the individualization of faith, and the fluidity of understanding religion paved the way for an increase in the authenticity of citizens' opinions and votes in various areas, particularly in politics and governance. In other words, during the reformist discourse era, the people were central, and other concepts like rule of law, religious democracy, reforms, political development, and civil society revolved around the central axis of the masses. Therefore, for the first time, both in theory and practice, we witnessed the decisive importance and role of the masses and their participatory political culture in its true sense in the political development of Iran. From this point onward, the masses were transitioning from the traditional concept to the modern concept of an active, participatory citizen, aware of their destiny. During this period, the cognitive orientation and evaluation of citizens towards the political process, the system, and the inputs and outputs of the political system were significantly strengthened and grew.

The Political Movement of Conservatism in Iran

If we examine political cultures, we do not find the term "conservatism" in them; instead, we encounter the word "fundamentalism," which its positive connotation is closer to the term "conservatism" as it is used in our political context today.

Fundamentalism has two different meanings that are opposed to each other. In the first meaning, which is more often referred to in Farsi as "conservatism," it refers to the adherence to principles, beliefs, and holding on to them. In the other meaning, which carries a more negative connotation, fundamentalism equates to rigidity and attachment to outward appearances.

Conservatism, as it is commonly used in the political discourse of our country, is a new term that had no prior use in this form. According to this understanding, conservatives are individuals who adhere to a set of sacred ideals and beliefs rooted in their religion, and they are unwilling to compromise or deviate from these principles. In fact, conservatives are not people who change their colors every day; rather, they are individuals willing to sacrifice for their true beliefs and principles. The introduction of conservatism by the Supreme Leader came at a time when some individuals were willing to abandon revolutionary positions and some of their former beliefs to please the West.

As a result, conservatism means standing firm on beliefs and ideals rooted in religion and not deviating from these principles. Therefore, anyone with such a spirit and belief is undoubtedly a conservative.

In the intellectual and ideological realm, conservatism refers to a tendency based on pre-determined principles. This tendency not only has pre-designed criteria for assessing moral virtues and vices but also evaluates political matters according to fixed standards.

Therefore, politically, this concept pertains to developments in the last two decades in our country, rooted in the transformations

associated with the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West launched a propaganda and psychological attack, portraying the Soviet Union as a symbol of conservatism and similarly representing the Islamic Republic, condemning it to collapse and subjecting it to cultural attacks and a propaganda bombardment. After the Second of Khordad (1997) and the introduction of reforms by the Second Khordad Front, this trend intensified, and a process similar to the collapse of the Soviet Union was pursued for the Islamic Republic. Regardless of the West's goals and the validity of their interpretation of the Soviet collapse and its application to the Islamic Republic, inside the country, conservatism was precisely articulated in opposition to the reformism of the Second Khordad Front, particularly from 1999 onwards, to clarify the boundaries of existing political currents and their positions on the goals of the Islamic Revolution.

In light of this background, conservatism means adhering to the original and fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution that are still desired and sought by the people. A conservative is someone who still considers themselves committed to the principles and foundations of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic. It was based on this that conservatives, in contrast to reformists—whose behavior and actions reflected a reconsideration of these principles—called themselves conservatives and established the discourse of conservatism. From the 2002 elections onwards, they pursued the ideals of the revolution, such as justice-seeking, freedom-seeking, and fighting against oppression, deceit, poverty, corruption, and discrimination, as their main slogans. Especially in the ninth presidential election, they emphasized the

need for the future president to pay attention to leadership, the constitution, and justice, and in their major conference on December 17, 2004, titled "A New Step," they declared conservatism in thought, innovation in method, and convergence in action as their electoral and identity symbols.

Another aspect of conservatism is the emphasis on the fundamental principle of governance and political leadership, which is that intra-government factional disputes should never lead to the destruction of the foundational principles of governance and harm the main interests of society. From this perspective, the principles and foundations of the revolution and belief in the leadership and the Imam were considered the red lines of society to prevent factions within the country from engaging in intense political conflicts, organized sabotage, and even physical confrontations during every election. Therefore, conservatives were all in agreement on issues such as the centrality of Islam, the principles of the revolution, the Islamic Republic system, the constitution, Imam Khomeini, and the leadership, and these principles were in contrast, more or less, with the principles of the reformists, who gradually or explicitly crossed these boundaries, calling for a different republic, changes to the constitution, the passing of the Imam's era, and so on.

The fundamental principles of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Republic are the same slogans and ideals of Imam Khomeini, and indeed our revolution and system were founded upon these ideals and will continue on this basis. Therefore, the fundamental principles of the revolution are most prominently reflected in Imam Khomeini's thoughts, which must form the precise basis for conservatism

so that this concept remains safe from misinterpretation and manipulation.

In the spectrum of conservatism, the political and religious dimensions are more prominent, and the lack of a social dimension does not imply a disregard for it, but rather indicates the prioritization of other aspects in their self-perception. Conservatives, politically, fall into four main categories: revolutionary, anti-Western influence, anti-arrogance, and leadership-based, and religiously, they are followers of pure Islam, duty-bound, and committed to sanctities.

For conservatives, the revolution is still ongoing, and they place more emphasis on actions aligned with the revolution's ideals. Furthermore, allegiance to leadership is one of the key points linked with revolutionary spirit. The connection between these two aspects reflects adherence to the principles of the revolution.

This suggests their perspective on time as well, meaning that the values of the revolution—reflected in allegiance to leadership and revolutionary spirit, i.e., the continuity and export of the revolution—are seen as transcending time and place and remain lofty values. Bashiriyeh, in his book "An Introduction to the Political Sociology of Iran: The Islamic Republic Period," discusses two reformist and anti-reformist movements. He outlines characteristics of the anti-reformist movement that correspond to the points mentioned above; for example, one characteristic of the anti-reformist movement, according to him, is the effort to solidify and strengthen the ideological state and the primary ideology of the revolution, and to prevent any reconsideration of it (Bashiriyeh, 2008, p. 189). The effort to establish the primary ideology of the revolution is

today expressed in "closeness to the leadership" and "acknowledgment of leadership," and actions aligned with the "goals of the Imam." On the other hand, their emphasis on "resisting Western influence" can now be linked to the "anti-arrogance" of the early revolution, and the conservatives' fixed and unchanging perspective on the West can be found in it.

From the religious perspective, conservatives define themselves as followers of "pure Islam," "duty-bound," and "committed to sanctities." The words pure, duty, and commitment indicate that from their perspective, these principles are unchangeable despite social changes. Likewise, the emphasis on sanctities refers to adherence to duties assigned to them by pure religion, as fulfilling these duties is of the utmost importance. Therefore, the conservatives' self-perception has so far been less influenced by conditions and has not changed much.

Findings of the Research: Political, Analytical, and Operational Capacities of Principlists and Reformists

Every political current has its own causes and factors for emerging and becoming prominent. However, the most important factors that can be cited as the causes for the emergence of the principlist current can be divided into two main sections: intellectual foundations and social contexts. In fact, the formation of a political current can be considered as a response to the threat to its intellectual foundations. Therefore, by understanding the intellectual foundations of the principlist current alongside social conditions, one can discover the main causes of the emergence of this current

within the revolutionary current analysis. Principlist thoughts viewed the rhetoric and positions of the reformist front as an attack by liberalism and a move toward secularism. Thus, by positioning themselves against the ideas proposed by Soroush, who intended to present the thought of "civil religion" and a new example of secularism as the path of reform, they sought to re-examine and redefine their own intellectual foundations. Consequently, the Islamic identity and the unity of religion and politics were introduced as the first intellectual foundations of the principlist current (Nazarpour, 2007, p. 101).

After the idea and discourse of political development failed to bring about an acceptable and substantial result from the reformists and could not deliver the democracy they promoted in their slogans to society, and with the reformist political elite prioritizing other approaches, economic development and social justice were largely neglected. Hence, the conditions were set for a return to the view of economic development in its social dimensions. This perspective, given the specific organizational power of the principlist current, opened the way for them, allowing them to prioritize slogans such as fighting corruption, poverty, and injustice, promoting equal distribution of wealth, and returning to pure Islam over political development (Jafarpour, 2010, pp. 229-231). The principlist political current generally criticizes the reformists' policies and speaks of an Islamic state and the establishment of justice. They adopt some authoritarian and non-democratic policies while at the same time promoting populist slogans, pushing political development and democratic values such as freedom of speech and thought to the margins. With this current gaining power, the political and cultural atmosphere of the

country moves closer to the idealism and idealistic spirit of the early revolution. Emotional and impulsive behaviors resulting from this idealism and idealistic ambitions are clearly visible in the interactions between the elites of this current and the general public, as well as in their interactions with one another. In reality, when this current, asserts itself as the dominant political current, the government emerging from it becomes more of a reflection of populism and support for lower social classes, such as farmers, workers, employees, and generally the deprived (Amir Ahmadi, 2002, p. 24), who, to some extent, have also managed to gain political power. These considerations to some extent reflect the multi-layered and complex nature of currents related to Principlism. Some researchers consider the prominent features of this current to be its complexity and multi-layered nature. They attribute it to a combination of deep fundamentalism and romanticism, populism reliant on oil and the petty bourgeoisie, the revival of traditionalist political discourse centered around the community, opposition to modernity and the West, and Western symbols such as freedom. They also note a lack of logic for production and capital accumulation, industrialization, aversion to democracy and civil society values, rejection of Western theoretical foundations, and resistance against them.

The history and performance of political currents and factions in Iran after the Islamic Revolution are highly complex, and it is not easy to make accurate assessments in this regard. There are very few resources and studies on this subject, and those that do exist often reflect differences in tastes and viewpoints, whether positive or negative, about the activities of these parties. Although the operational processes of these factions and currents in Iran

continue to fluctuate and have not yet reached stability, it may be possible to reach a theoretical consensus on their performance and potential based on their actual and potential capacities, which are generally referred to as "political capacity." However, emphasizing "political capacity" is a more recent phenomenon that has not yet received much focus in Iran. The process of transforming the relationship between the people and the government from a "people-ruler" relationship to a "people-agent" relationship has not yet been fully realized, due to the incomplete process of state-building in Iran.

"Political capacity" is interpreted as the ability of political actors, particularly governments, to make rational choices for solutions, to correctly perceive the environment and choose the right strategies for action and leadership, to evaluate the requirements of alternative policies, and finally, to use knowledge correctly in decision-making; all with the assumption that political capacity is a prerequisite for the success of policies. Political capacity falls under the category of general capacities, whose primary function is to control and guide resources, as well as to manage the development process in societies. "General capacity" emphasizes that every member of society, in order to achieve minimal efficiency or meet their own and others' needs, must possess or provide a definite set of essential capacities. Thus, sustainable development depends on these capacities. "Political capacity" in terms of skills, talents, and capabilities can be classified into three types: "analytical capacity" (discourse-based), "operational capacity," and "political capacity." Each of these capacities can be evaluated at three levels: "individual," "organizational," and "systemic." Together, they form a complex, interconnected three-by-

three matrix, comprising a total of nine basic types of "policy capacity." At the "individual level," political professionals, such as policy-makers, political managers, and analysts, play a key role in determining what types of tasks and functions should be employed in the political process. At the "organizational level," the availability and effectiveness of information infrastructure, capital resource management systems, including human capital, and political support can increase or decrease individual and social capabilities. At the "systemic level," what is important is institutionalization through systems and reducing the personal preferences and discretion of individuals in decision-making and judgments, so that non-personal matters are implemented.

The "analytical capacity" level helps ensure that political action is a technical path that, if properly executed, can lead to achieving goals. At the "operational capacity" level, the opportunity is provided to implement the available resources in political action. The "political capacity" level helps ensure sustained political support for political actions to achieve set objectives. To assess the political capacity of political currents in Iran, we must ask: in the past two decades, what capacities have the two main political currents, "Principlism" and "reformism," possessed?

Consciousness among the Principlists arises from an "ideological consciousness." Reliance on ideals and revolutionary concepts is considered the distinguishing feature of this group, which in practice has placed "idealism" against "realism." The central signifier of this movement is the "revolution," though they have not succeeded in providing a clear definition of what they call "being revolutionary" and "revolutionary behavior."

Analytical Capacity: The prominent figures of Principlism are deeply rooted in an ideological tradition in analyzing their own conditions and society. Therefore, at their level of analysis, they still rely on an ideological, ambiguous, and largely non-transparent classification of the world, dividing it into two camps of "good" and "evil," a division they extend to domestic affairs as well. This has almost eliminated the possibility of dialogue and the establishment of stable and effective relations in national development with a large portion of countries abroad and many sectors within the country.

Slogans such as fighting the West and East, anti-imperialism, the union of religion and politics, support for liberation movements, and the slogan of exporting the revolution have never been able to offer a clear shape or definition of what the Principlists were saying. Additionally, the relationship of these slogans with development, whether they hinder or align with development in the ideology of Principlism, has never been examined or clarified. This level of analysis has caused similar divisions within the country as well. Hence, Principlists are more influenced by their "ideological propositions" than "reality" at the analytical level, leading to minimal contact with reality.

Principlists suffer from severe perceptual errors in relation to realities at the analytical level and, by ignoring data and facts, persist in their "ideological propositions." Most Principlists largely fail to properly understand history and do not acknowledge the significant and influential changes that have emerged in political, social, educational, economic, and communication structures over time, which should drive them to adapt themselves. Or, if

they do acknowledge these changes, they proceed so slowly and sluggishly that their achievements are minimal.

Operational Capacity: Principlists are "more pragmatic" compared to other political movements in the country and, due to holding power centers, enjoy greater power as well. However, because of their analytical level, their actions and behaviors in political operations lack the necessary capacity to fulfill the goals and demands of a broad section of the people or a large portion of demands. Because of the power they hold, Principlists also have more tools and stronger organizations for operations than other political movements. This is an advantage that other political movements lack.

Political Capacity: This is the most challenging and greatest weakness of the Principlists. Principlists have problems in this area both individually and organizationally, as well as systemically. The primary reason for this relates to their level of analysis. Individually, they face a lack of insight and sharpness in understanding the changing dynamics of the world and the changes that have occurred, and they still seek to interact and connect using outdated models. They also exhibit this weakness in understanding the social, economic, and political complexities within the society.

Organizationally, Principlists are not a "learning organization" in their interactions with the internal, regional, and international community, and this difficulty becomes more evident at the level of political-systemic capacity. This is particularly important when the government faces deficiencies in its capacities and needs to gain public trust and cooperation to solve them. Unfortunately, despite being powerful

pragmatists, Principlists suffer from severe weaknesses at the analytical level and, consequently, in political capacity, a process that worsens day by day.

Analytical Capacity: The Reformists, who entered the political arena with the central slogan of "reform" and the central signifier of "the people," had a better analytical capacity than the Principlists because they recognized the changing political, social, and economic contexts both domestically and internationally.

Moving away from purely ideological consciousness allowed the Reformists to establish more contact with reality, thus increasing their capacity at the analytical level. However, their weakness was that they failed to recognize the deep and powerful influence of the Principlists in society. They also failed in adjusting their relationships with this part of society, as they overlooked the influential reach and stable intellectual foundations of the Principlists throughout contemporary Iranian history.

Operational Capacity: Although Reformists enjoyed a strong voter base, they did not possess the individual or organizational capacity that the Principlists had. As a result, they had lower operational capacity compared to the Principlists. Most of the Reformists' operational capacity was focused on civil domains and, to a large extent, on foreign policy repair, which was largely neutralized by the power that the Principlists held as their rival.

On the individual level of operational capacity, the president during the Reform era and some prominent Reformist figures had high capacity. However, they faced a significant reduction in their organizational capacity. In terms of operational-systemic capacity, the Reformists made good efforts in establishing

institutions that aimed to increase "participatory capacity."

At the second level of political-organizational capacity, the greatest challenge was expanding the connection between the "government" and the "public sphere." Success at this level requires distinguishing the boundaries between these two realms. It is crucial that citizens can monitor the activities of political movements and engage in dialogue with the political sphere in ways that ultimately influence policy outcomes. Since the Reformists emphasized the expansion of "civil society" and had a suitable capacity for reducing the power of the state in relation to civil society, at the third level of political capacity, which is the most important of the nine levels, the Reformists had the capacity to reduce the barriers of mistrust between the "political apparatus" and "civil society," and they were somewhat successful, especially in the early years.

Conclusion

Here, the capacity of political currents refers to their qualifications, abilities, and capabilities in the process of political development. Accordingly, the capacity of these currents will be examined using a "9-base" model. This model creates a three-by-three matrix consisting of analytical, operational, and political qualifications, along with individual, organizational, and systemic capabilities. Of course, alongside these 9 bases, the connections between these levels are also considered.

With these explanations, it must be acknowledged that, based on the findings of the research conducted on the characteristics of the reformist and conservative currents, it seems

that awareness among conservatives stems from an ideological awareness. Conservatives at the analytical level are more influenced by their own ideological propositions than by reality. For this reason, their contact with reality is very limited, and since they insist on their ideological propositions, they largely fail to correctly understand history. Due to the analytical level they possess, their actions and behaviors in political operations lack the necessary capacity to meet the demands and goals of a wide segment of the people. It seems that political capacity is the most challenging and greatest weakness of the conservatives. Conservatives have problems in all dimensions of this area, and the main reason is related to the analytical level. We know that the government needs to gain public trust and participation to address the shortcomings in its capacities.

Distancing themselves from purely ideological awareness has allowed the reformists to establish more contact with reality and, as a result, increase their analytical capacity. The major operational capacity of the reformists is focused on the civil domain, which is largely neutralized given the reaction of their opponents. The political-organizational capacity is the biggest challenge in bridging the gap between governance and the public domain. The political-systemic capacity is the most important level among the nine levels, as it can remove the barriers of mistrust between the political apparatus and civil society, a field in which the reformists have been somewhat successful in recent years.

Ultimately, the points below highlight how political currents can address political deadlock and bring about policy changes.

First, for a policy to change, three events are needed: the "problem stream," the "solution stream," and the "political stream." If these three converge—meaning the "problem" reaches a point where a "solution" exists for it and a "policy principle" also emerges within it—a problem can be solved. From this perspective, political currents do not generate content, ideas, agendas, or problem-solving processes; rather, political currents are involved in the process of "producing votes."

Second, those who can "change policies" are individuals who are capable of changing the "policy image." This means their analytical capacity is such that they can, through tools like negotiation, lead to the modification and reform of policies.

Third, coalition-building for policy changes at the organizational and systemic levels is very important. Policies are always shaped and ultimately implemented through a coalition of agents.

Finally, the policy network refers to the fact that individuals who hold influential positions in policy areas form the policy network, which is significant even in the face of shocks.

Therefore, for political currents to change policies, they must create the opportunity for the emergence of "policy ideas" in society. Political currents should shape "policy ideas," not "political ideas."

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