Pathology of Iran's Political Culture in the Modern Period
(From The Pahlavi Monarchy to the Islamic Republic)

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Abstract

The political culture of Iran in the modern era has not only reflected the centralized governing structures but has also become one of the tools for consolidating this authoritarian order. This situation constitutes a significant barrier to the realization of active, pluralistic and decentralized participatory patterns in contemporary Iranian politics. This study aims to address the question of how the political system's structure has influenced Iran's political culture in the modern age? The research method is descriptive-analytical. Given the nature and subject of the study, data collection was conducted through library research and for data analysis, software tools such as Excel and GIS, along with tables, charts and maps, were utilized. The concentration of power in central institutions, the elimination or weakening of participatory bodies and the restriction of political agency at lower levels have led to the formation of an authoritarian order within the political culture which has consistently played a restraining role against democracy, institutionalization of political participation, and civil society development. The findings of this research indicate that Iran's political culture during modernity, particularly in the two historical periods of the Pahlavi Monarchy and the Islamic Republic has been directly shaped by authoritarian and centralized political structures. This culture emerged from a complex interaction between political power, the dominant ideology and historical conditions, articulated through two prevailing discourses: the ancient nationalism of the Pahlavi era and political Islam under the Islamic Republic.

Keywords: **Political culture, Nationalism, Political Islam, Authoritarianism, Centralization.**

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Political culture as a dominant pattern of political behaviors, beliefs, and values in a society, in modern Iran (from the Pahlavi monarchy to the Islamic Republic) has been largely influenced by the political structure of the Pahlavi monarchy and the Islamic Republic along with two major intellectual and political currents that played a fundamental role in shaping this culture. These two currents are:

- **Extreme Nationalism of the Pahlavi monarchy:** This current specifically emphasized a return to 2,500 years ago (the ancient period) and focused on an authoritarian, centralized structure centered on a neo-nationalism and Aryan identity.
- **Political Islam of the Islamic Republic:** This current emphasized a return to 1,500 years ago (the Islamic period) and focused on an authoritarian, centralized structure with the centrality of Shia Islam and the concept of Velayat-e Faqih.

Although these two ideological and political currents were sometimes in competition and sometimes overlapped but they ultimately have contributed a complex and contradictory identity to Iran's political culture. Nevertheless, both currents, with their emphasis on centralization and authoritarianism, have laid the groundwork for political apathy, charismatic leadership and the creation of a political culture characterized by centralization and authoritarianism, lacking a culture of civil dialogue and acceptance of the other. This is while such a centralized and authoritarian structure is incompatible with Iran's ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural and geographical diversity, as well as its vast expanse.

Data and Method

The methodology of this research is descriptive-analytical. Given the nature and subject of the study, the data collection method is library and internet sources (books, papers, reliable online sources, doctoral theses, etc.). Additionally, for data analysis, software such as EXCEL, GIS, along with tables, charts, and maps have been used. In this study, the pathology of Iran's modern political culture (from the Pahlavi monarchy to the Islamic Republic) has been analyzed.

Results and Discussion

The fundamental relationship between the political culture of submission and the structure of absolute power in modern Iran has been one of mutual reproduction. The power structure seeks to reinforce itself by reproducing the traditional components of political culture (ancient-oriented nationalism under the Pahlavi regime and political Islam under the Islamic Republic) and on the other hand, the prevalence of this political culture power to legitimize and reinforce the functioning of the power structure. Overall, it can be argued that the only major obstacle to the transformation of political culture in modern Iran is the structure of political power itself. Thus, political culture under changing social conditions is not merely a "cultural" issue but fundamentally a "political" one. In Iran, due to traditional and historical reasons (especially in the modern Period) the relationship between the state and society does not follow accepted patterns of civility and lacks a solid, healthy and progressive foundation. Governments in Iran during the modern period, for various reasons (including

reliance on foreign powers or oil revenues in recent decades) have never felt obligated to be accountable to the people. As a result, despite numerous political, economic, social and cultural challenges, the centralized authoritarian structure has remained intact throughout the modern era (from the Pahlavi monarchy to the Islamic Republic) and in instances where the inefficiency of these structures has exacerbated societal crises, their response has primarily been to justify the situation, evade responsibility and resort to suppression.This trend indicates a lack of genuine will for reform and improvement.

Under such circumstances, bringing about fundamental change in the country requires a profound transformation in the political culture and philosophy of society. For this purpose, essential institutions for strengthening and developing the country's material, spiritual and human capacities must be rebuilt and reinforced at both the individual and societal levels. Moreover, the country's overarching strategic orientations must be shaped based on a redefined political philosophy and culture.

Conclusion

In modern era, Iran's political culture has primarily been shaped under authoritarian and centralized structures, contrary to the requirements of a pluralistic society. These structures, whether during the Pahlavi monarchy or under the Islamic Republic have relied on dominant discourses such as radical ancient nationalism and political Islam. These discourses have not only restricted the emergence and institutionalization of a genuinely participatory political culture but they have also reproduced a pattern of "subject political culture," marginalizing citizens and obstructing their active participation in political processes.The outcome of this process has been the consolidation of a political-cultural order that prioritizes authority, centralization and the suppression of diversity over responding to the complex and pluralistic realities of Iranian society. Under such conditions, a genuine democratic transformation requires a cultural-political renaissance one that recognizes the objective realities of contemporary Iran, including its ethnic, linguistic, religious, sectarian and geographical diversity, as well as the global twenty first century world (such as the global standards based on democracy and human rights) are recognized and acknowledged.The transition to a modern and democratic political culture necessitates a fundamental reconfiguration of the structure of power. This includes structural reforms such as a shift from authoritarian centralism to decentralized and inclusive governance; the establishment of local governments and democratic local institutions; then it can the strengthening of civil society organizations; and the guarantee of legal rights and freedoms that enable meaningful citizen participation at all levels of decision-making. Only under these conditions can Iran's political culture be reconstructed in alignment with democratic development, social and spatial justice.

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