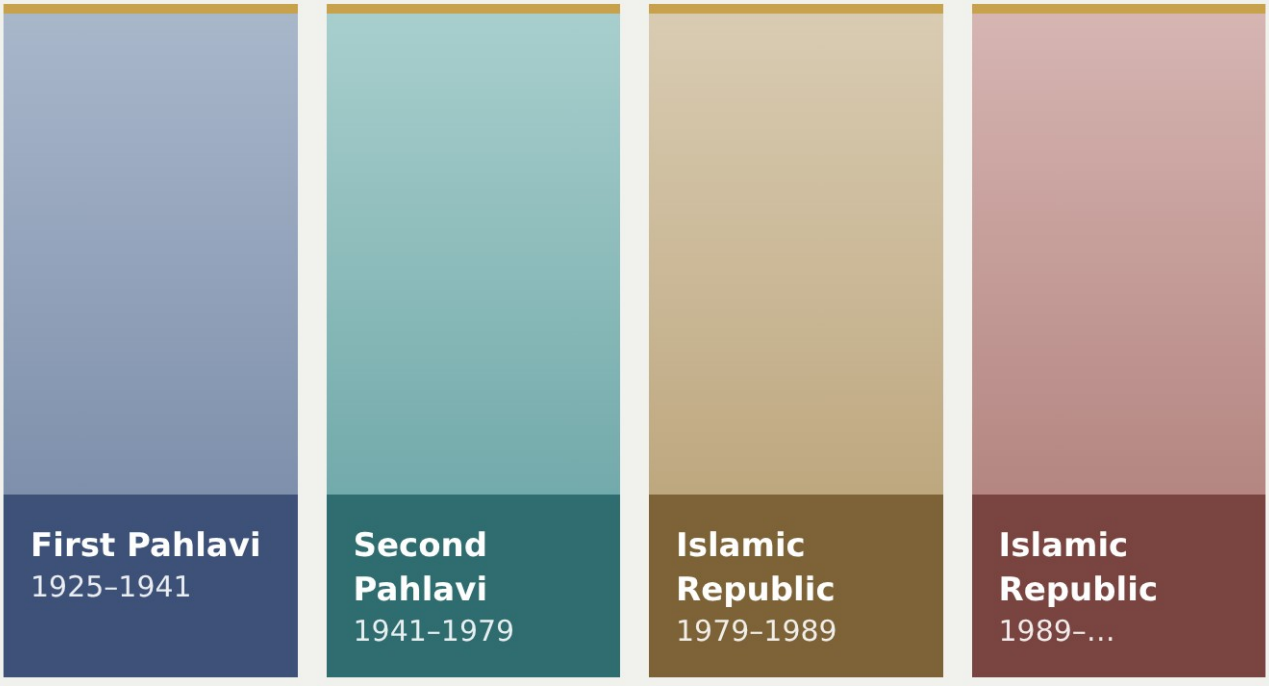
A statesman's analysis of a century of governance in Iran

Obstacles to Legitimate Governance

in Iran's Hundred-Year History

From the Constitutional Revolution to 1405 (2026)



Ebrahim Roshandel

ENGLISH EDITION

Obstacles to Legitimate Governance in Contemporary Iran

Managing Governance, Legitimacy, and Its Withdrawal in Iran's Hundred-Year History

From the Constitutional Revolution to 1405 (2026)

Ebrahim Roshandel

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Translated from the Persian original (1405 / 2026):
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Note on the English edition. This volume is an English translation of the author's Persian work. Transliteration of Persian and Arabic names and terms follows common English usage rather than a strict scientific system (e.g., Mosaddegh, Khamenei, velayat-e faqih). Iranian solar (Hijri Shamsi) dates are retained where the original cites them and are accompanied by their Gregorian equivalents. The tables, scorecards, and bibliography reproduce those of the original edition.

The analyses in this book are current to Mehr 1405 (October 2026).

Contents

Author's Preface 2
Introduction: The Power That Endured, and the Trust That Did Not 4
The Problem 4
The Question, and the Book's Answer 4
Why This Book Is Not a History 5
Map of the Book 5
What This Book Does Not Claim 5
PART ONE: Legitimacy, Wisdom, and the Withdrawal of Consent 7
Chapter 1. Legitimacy: The Right to Command and Its Three Pillars 8
1.1 Obedience, Consent, and Right 8
1.2 Weber's Three Types and What They Leave Out 8
1.3 Beetham's Three Layers: The Book's Principal Yardstick 8
1.4 Specific Support and Diffuse Support 9
1.5 Legitimacy and Effectiveness: Two Axes, Not One 9
1.6 Three Dimensions: Input, Throughput, Output 9
1.7 The Book's Working Definition 10
Chapter 2. Wise Governance: The Capacity to Act and the Capacity to Recognize Error 11
2.1 Two Capacities, Not One 11
2.2 Fukuyama's Three Pillars 11
2.3 Six Components of Wise Governance 11
2.4 Error Correction: The Component That Binds All the Others 12
2.5 The Paradox of the Competent Official 12
2.6 Wise Governance in One Sentence 13
Chapter 3. How People Withdraw Legitimacy 14
3.1 Four Stages 14
3.2 Exit, Voice, and Loyalty 14
3.3 Relative Deprivation and the J-Curve 15
3.4 Preference Falsification: Why Collapse Seems Sudden 15
3.5 Repression: An Accelerator That Looks Like a Brake 15
3.6 From Government to System: A Boundary Crossed Only Once 16
3.7 What This Chapter Passes On to Later Chapters 16
Chapter 4. The Reference Model: Six Countries, Six Lessons, and Eight Principles 18
4.1 South Korea: Development That Accepted Participation 18
4.2 Taiwan: A Ruling Party That Saw Its Survival in Competition 18
4.3 Spain: Rules Before Winners 19
4.4 Botswana: A Resource That Did Not Become a Curse 19
4.5 Norway: An Oil State That Remained a Taxpayer State 20
4.6 Indonesia: An Army That Left Politics 20
4.7 Two Warnings: Turkey and Egypt 20
4.8 Eight Principles of Legitimate and Wise Governance 21
4.9 What This Model Is Not 21
Chapter 5. Method: How We Measure a Government 22
5.1 Five Units of Comparison 22
5.2 The Ten-Part Template 22
5.3 Dissecting Decisions 23
5.4 Scorecard and Level of Confidence 23
5.5 Measuring the People's Will in an Era When No One Asked 23
5.6 Quantitative Data and the Limits of Their Validity 24
5.7 Four Dangers and Four Antidotes 24

5.8 The Rule of the Rival Narrative....24
5.9 Leadership Rationality: Five Criteria and One Test....25
PART TWO: The Constitutional Legacy (1906–1925)....27
Chapter 6. The Constitutional Revolution: The First Contract of Legitimacy....28
6.1 A Contract Written Before the State....28
6.2 Two Sources of Legitimacy in One Text....28
6.3 The First Test: Mohammad Ali Shah and the Moment of Divergence....29
6.4 The Shuster Test: When the Majlis Put the National Interest Before Its Own Survival. 29
6.5 A Neutrality No One Respected....29
6.6 The 1919 Agreement: The National Interest in the Elite Marketplace....30
6.7 Why the Constitutional Order Was Not Consolidated....30
6.8 Legacy: A Pendulum That Swung for a Hundred Years....30
Chapter 7. From the Coup of 1921 to the Change of Dynasty in 1925: When the Manager Became the Owner....31
7.1 The Demand to Which the Coup Responded....31
7.2 A Commander Who Employed Experts....31
7.3 The Republic Test: The First Intelligent Retreat....32
7.4 The Moment of Divergence: 9 Aban 1304 (31 October 1925)....32
7.5 The Strongest Defense....32
7.6 Scorecard: Reza Khan (1921–1925)....33
7.7 What Is Handed On to Part Three....33
Special Essay. The Constitution and the Legitimacy of Governance: A Text That Never Ruled 34
1. Constitution or Constitutionalism....34
2. Three Types of Constitution: Loewenstein's Typology....34
3. Why a Constitution Does Not Enforce Itself....35
4. What Makes a Constitution Legitimate, and What Burns Its Legitimacy....35
5. The Constitutional Law: Dissecting a Text That Never Ruled....37
6. Three Tests of Failure: The Constitution at Moments of Destiny....39
7. Legacy: The Constitution of the Islamic Republic and the Repetition of Duality....42
8. Comparative Lessons....43
9. Principles of a Legitimizing Constitution for a Future Iran....43
10. Summary of the Essay....44
PART THREE: The First Pahlavi—Legitimacy Through Order and Authoritarian Modernization (1925–1941)....46
Chapter 8. The Architecture of Power and the Management of Legitimacy: A Room in Which No One Said "No"....47
8.1 The Claimed Source of Legitimacy: Order, Nation, and Modernity....47
8.2 The Center of Decision: One Man....47
8.3 Instruments for Managing Legitimacy....48
8.4 The Step-by-Step Removal of Dissenting Voices from the Room....48
8.5 Was There Another Way? Atatürk....49
8.6 Scorecard: The Architecture of Power (1925–1941)....49
8.7 Summary....49
Chapter 9. Demands and Responses: A Modernization That Created Its Own Enemies....50
9.1 The Tribes: National Unity at the Price of Livelihood....50
9.2 The Clergy: From Ally in 1924 to Victim in 1935....50
9.3 The Bazaar: Financing Modernization on the Back of the Consumer....51
9.4 The Intellectuals: Modernity Without Freedom....51
9.5 Women: The Right Goal, the Wrong Method, and an Inverted Legacy....51
9.6 Peasants and Ethnic Communities: Those Who Were Not Heard....52
9.7 Chart of Demands and Responses....52

9.8 Scorecard: Reza Shah Facing Society's Demands....53
9.9 Summary....53
Chapter 10. The Record of Effectiveness and Resource Management: A State That Built but Did Not Render Account....54
10.1 The Abolition of Capitulations and the National Bank: Complete Convergence....54
10.2 The Trans-Iranian Railway: A National Project on the Budget of the Poor....54
10.3 The Oil Agreement of 1933: The Moment of Divergence at the Heart of the National Interest....55
10.4 Budget Priorities: The Army, the Capital, and the Shah's Estates....55
10.5 Scorecard: Effectiveness and Resource Management....56
10.6 Summary....56
Chapter 11. Silent Delegitimation and August 1941: A Country Absent from Its Own Fate....58
11.1 A Delegitimation No One Measured....58
11.2 A World Transformed, and a Government That Did Not Hear....58
11.3 The Moment of Divergence: The Notes of July and August 1941....59
11.4 Was There Another Way? The Witness of Turkey and the Witness of the Son....59
11.5 After the Attack: Monarchy or Country?....60
11.6 Meaningful Silence: Why No One Defended Him....61
11.7 Period Scorecard: The First Pahlavi in Ten Items....61
11.8 Summary of Part Three....62
PART FOUR: The Interlude—A Natural Experiment (1941–1953)....63
Chapter 12. When the Vote Mattered: Twelve Years of Freedom Without a State....64
12.1 The Opening of the Channels....64
12.2 What Freedom Built: Input Legitimacy....64
12.3 What Freedom Did Not Build: The State....64
12.4 Qavam and the Azerbaijan Crisis: The Majlis as Trump Card....65
12.5 Mosaddegh and Oil Nationalization: The Peak of Legitimacy, and Its Limits....65
12.6 28 Mordad: The Coup and Its Domestic Accomplices....66
12.7 The Result of the Test: What Becomes of the Hypothesis?....66
12.8 Scorecard of the Interlude....67
PART FIVE: The Second Pahlavi—Legitimacy Through Development (1953–1979)....68
Chapter 13. Rebuilding Authority After 28 Mordad: A Wound That Never Healed....69
13.1 The Original Sin....69
13.2 The Consortium Agreement: The First Moment of Divergence....69
13.3 The New Architecture of Power: SAVAK and Two Parties....69
13.4 Ebtehaj and Amini: The Pattern of the Competent Official, Again....70
13.5 Scorecard: Mohammad Reza Shah (1953–1962)....70
13.6 Summary....71
Chapter 14. The White Revolution and the Management of Legitimacy from Above: The Direct Bond Between Shah and People....72
14.1 The Referendum of 1963 and What Was Granted....72
14.2 What Was Not Granted....72
14.3 15 Khordad 1342 (5 June 1963): The First Moment of Divergence....73
14.4 The Immunity Bill of 1964: Reversing the Father's Legacy....73
14.5 The Decade of Growth: Technocracy Without Politics....74
14.6 Scorecard: The White Revolution and the Decade of Growth (1962–1973)....74
14.7 Summary....75
Chapter 15. The Government and the New Classes: A Development That Created the Middle Class but Rejected Its Participation....76
15.1 Developmental State, or Rentier State with Developmental Ambitions?....76
15.2 The Class the Government Built....76
15.3 The Intellectuals: From "Westoxication" to the Return to the Self....77

15.4 The Bazaar and the Clergy: Natural Allies Who Became Enemies....77
15.5 Rural Migrants: A Population That Went Unseen....78
15.6 Scorecard: The Government and the Social Classes (1966–1977)....78
15.7 Summary....78
Chapter 16. The Oil Boom, Inflation, and the J-Curve: When Wealth Blinded the Government 80
16.1 Unprecedented Money....80
16.2 Ramsar, Mordad 1353 (August 1974): The Moment of Divergence....80
16.3 Consequences: Inflation, Bottlenecks, and Discontent in the Midst of Boom....81
16.4 The J-Curve: From the Peak of Expectation to the Fall....81
16.5 The Strongest Defense....82
16.6 Scorecard: The Oil Boom (1973–1977)....82
16.7 Summary....82
Chapter 17. From Leniency to Collapse (1977–1979): A Government That Had Neither the Capacity to Repress nor the Capacity to Compromise....83
17.1 The Open Space: A Leniency That Came Late and Without a Plan....83
17.2 The Chain of Revelation....83
17.3 Oscillation: Leniency and the Fist in a Single Week....84
17.4 The Paris Error: The Moment of Divergence in Foreign Policy....84
17.5 The Shah Alone: Illness, Ambassadors, and an Army Without a Head....85
17.6 Scorecard: The Crisis of 1977–1979....85
17.7 Period Scorecard: The Second Pahlavi in Ten Items....86
17.8 Summary of Part Five: Father and Son....87
PART SIX: The Islamic Republic, the First Decade—Revolutionary and Charismatic Legitimacy (1979–1989)....88
Chapter 18. Two Sources of Legitimacy in One Constitution: When the Winners Wrote the Rules....89
18.1 The Referendum of Farvardin: A Vote for a Name....89
18.2 From Constituent Assembly to Assembly of Experts: The Moment of Divergence....89
18.3 Azar 1358 (December 1979): A Constitution in the Shadow of the Embassy....90
18.4 A Text with Two Pillars....90
18.5 The Strongest Defense....91
18.6 Scorecard: Founding the System (1979)....91
18.7 Summary....91
Chapter 19. The Elimination of the Revolutionary Coalition and the Parallel Institutions: A Revolution That Chose Among Its Children....93
19.1 Parallel Institutions: A Second State Beside the First....93
19.2 The Revolutionary Courts: Revolutionary Justice and Judicial Legitimacy....94
19.3 13 Aban 1358 (4 November 1979): The Moment of Divergence in Foreign and Domestic Policy....94
19.4 Banisadr: The First President and the First Test of Republicanism....95
19.5 Khordad 1360 (June 1981) and After: From Rivalry to Civil War....95
19.6 The Cost of Elimination: What Left with the Rivals....95
19.7 Scorecard: Consolidation of the System (1979–1983)....96
19.8 Summary....96
Chapter 20. War, Mobilization, and Distributive Justice: A Legitimacy Built from Sacrifice. .97
20.1 Defense of the Homeland: A Legitimacy the Enemy Gave the System....97
20.2 Khordad 1361 (June 1982): The Great Moment of Divergence of the Decade....97
20.3 Distributive Justice: What Actually Reached the Dispossessed....98
20.4 1988: The Year Two Files Were Closed....99
20.5 Scorecard: War and Distribution (1980–1989)....100
20.6 Period Scorecard: The First Decade of the Islamic Republic in Ten Items....100

20.7 Summary of Part Six: A Charisma Without a Successor....101
PART SEVEN: The Islamic Republic After 1989—Institutional and Security Legitimacy....102
Chapter 21. The Revision of 1989: The Transition from Charisma to Institution, and from Institution to Concealment....103
21.1 Four Changes in One Summer....103
21.2 The New Architecture: Two States, One Visible and One Invisible....103
21.3 The Moment of Divergence: The Revision of 1989 in the Dual-Benefit Test....104
21.4 Reconstruction: Technocracy Returns, Politics Does Not....104
21.5 The Strongest Defense....105
21.6 Scorecard: Transition and Reconstruction (1989–1997)....105
21.7 Summary....106
Chapter 22. The Value of the Vote: Choosing Among Permitted Options....107
22.1 Approbatory Supervision: A Gate Before the Ballot Box....107
22.2 2 Khordad 1376 (23 May 1997): The Second Natural Experiment....107
22.3 Moments of Divergence: Mordad 1379 (2000) and Bahman 1382 (2004)....108
22.4 2009: When the Valve Burst....108
22.5 From 2013 to 2024: The Vote as a Shield....109
22.6 The Strongest Defense....109
22.7 Scorecard: The Value of the Vote (1991–2024)....110
22.8 Summary....110
Chapter 23. The Record of Effectiveness: Achievements That Were Seen, and Costs That Were Paid....111
23.1 What Was Built....111
23.2 What Was Lost....111
23.3 Sanctions: Cause or Effect?....111
23.4 The JCPOA: An Error Correction That Went Halfway....112
23.5 The Economy of the Invisible State....112
23.6 Aban 1398 (November 2019): The Moment of Divergence in Resource Management....113
23.7 Resources and Priorities: "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon"....113
23.8 Scorecard: Effectiveness and Resources (1989–2025)....114
23.9 Summary....114
Chapter 24. Waves of Protest and the Stages of Delegitimation: From "Reform" to "Moving Beyond"....115
24.1 Tir 1378 (July 1999): Stage One—"Reform"....115
24.2 Khordad 1388 (June 2009): Stage Two—"Where Is My Vote?"....115
24.3 Dey 1396 (December 2017): Stage Three—"It's Over"....115
24.4 Aban 1398 (November 2019): Repression as Language....116
24.5 2022: Stage Four—"Woman, Life, Freedom"....116
24.6 Dey 1404 (December 2025–January 2026): The Bazaar, and the Bloodiest Repression of the Century....116
24.7 The Map of a Process....117
24.8 The Strongest Defense, and Its Answer....118
24.9 Summary....118
Chapter 25. Society Against Government, and the End of an Era (2022–2026)....119
25.1 Women: A Law That Is No Longer Enforced....119
25.2 The New Generation: A Society That Does Not Recognize the Official Narrative....119
25.3 The Periphery: Article 48 and Reality....120
25.4 Emigration: A Vote Cast with the Feet....120
25.5 2025–2026: The End of an Era....120
25.6 The Fourth Test of Succession....121
25.7 Period Scorecard: The Islamic Republic After 1989 in Ten Items....121

25.8 Summary of Part Seven: From Institution to Security.....122
PART EIGHT: Comparative Analysis—One Nation, Four Governments, One Pattern.....124
Chapter 26. Four Sources of Legitimacy, One Pattern: Why Order, Development, Faith, and Security Did Not Take the Place of the Vote.....125
26.1 Four Answers to One Question.....125
26.2 Why the Vote Was Set Aside.....125
26.3 An External Source Threatens the Evaluator.....126
26.4 Four Sources, Four Failures, One Cause.....126
26.5 A Cheap Source, an Expensive Cost.....127
Chapter 27. The Instruments of Legitimacy Management Compared: What Everyone Had, and What No One Had.....128
27.1 A Map of the Instruments.....128
27.2 Five Observations.....128
27.3 The Instrument No One Had.....129
Chapter 28. A Hundred-Year Index: How Far Iran's Governments Listened to the People's Vote and Will.....131
28.1 How the Index Was Built.....131
28.2 The Index in Fifteen Periods.....131
28.3 The Pattern: Freedom as a Product of Weakness.....132
28.4 Comparison with International Data.....132
28.5 Summary.....133
Chapter 29. The Anatomy of Discontent: Seven Rifts, and Governments Whose Rifts Built Their Successors.....134
29.1 Seven Rifts.....134
29.2 A Map of the Activation of the Rifts.....134
29.3 First Finding: Each Government Closed the Previous Rift and Opened the Next.....135
29.4 Second Finding: The Moral Rift, the Final Accelerator.....135
29.5 Third Finding: The Periphery, Always the First Victim and the Last to Be Heard.....136
29.6 Summary.....136
Chapter 30. Why Collapse Always Seems Sudden: Repression and the Destruction of the Instruments of Measurement.....137
30.1 The Dictator's Dilemma.....137
30.2 The Instruments of Measurement, and the Governments That Broke Them.....137
30.3 Why the Security Apparatus Does Not Replace the Instruments of Measurement.....138
30.4 Signs That Were Visible.....138
30.5 The Lesson for the Iran of Tomorrow.....138
Chapter 31. Iran Against the Reference Model: Where and Why Iran's Path Diverged from Korea and Spain.....140
31.1 Seven Moments.....140
31.2 The Common Element Missing in All Seven Moments.....140
31.3 What the Model Countries Had and Iran Did Not.....141
31.4 The Warnings of Turkey and Egypt.....141
31.5 Summary.....142
Chapter 32. Rival Explanations and the Condition of Falsification: Is This Book Right?.....143
32.1 The First Explanation: Oil.....143
32.2 The Second Explanation: Political Culture.....143
32.3 The Third Explanation: Geopolitics and Foreign Interference.....144
32.4 The Fourth Explanation: Ideology.....144
32.5 The Fifth Explanation: "The People Were Not Ready".....144
32.6 The Condition of Falsification: Did the Hypothesis Survive?.....145
32.7 Summary of Part Eight: One Nation, Four Governments, One Error.....145
PART NINE: Outlook—From the Lessons of the Past to a Design for the Future.....146

Chapter 33. Principles for Designing Legitimate and Wise Governance for the Iran of the Future....147
33.1 One Rule Before All the Principles....147
33.2 Three Pillars, Three Sets of Principles....147
33.3 The Fifteenth Principle: Security for Losers, and Justice Without Revenge....149
33.4 Institutionalizing Leadership Rationality....149
Chapter 34. Scenarios and Conditions of Transition: Four Roads Ahead....151
34.1 The First Road: Security Survival....151
34.2 The Second Road: Transformation from Within....151
34.3 The Third Road: Collapse and Transition....152
34.4 The Fourth Road: Collapse Without Transition....152
34.5 The Four Roads at a Glance....153
34.6 The First Hundred Days: A Test Every New Order Must Pass....153
Conclusion: From Authority to Trust....155
What This Book Has Shown....155
One Error, Four Garments....155
What Remains of This Book for Tomorrow....156
Closing Word....156
Appendix A: Outline and Conceptual Framework of the Book....157
About This Design....157
Questions and Hypotheses....157
Conceptual Framework....158
The Reference Model of Legitimate and Developmental Governance....160
A Uniform Analytical Template for Each Period....161
Proposed Detailed Table of Contents....162
Page Budget....164
Content Map: The Fate of the Material in the Original File....164
Necessary Corrections to the Original Text and Notes on Method....165
References....167
A. Persian Sources....167
B. English Sources....167
C. Documents, Legal Texts, and Data....170

Author's Preface

The politician, unlike the historian, has no right merely to understand. He must understand in order to decide. I have written this book with that obligation in mind: not to retell Iran's past hundred years once more—historians have done that better than I could—but to draw from it a lesson for tomorrow's decisions.

In the years I worked in the country's diplomatic apparatus, I learned one thing more than any other lesson: *governments err less often out of malice than people suppose, and more often out of deafness than they imagine.* There was no shortage of intelligent people in the rooms where decisions were made. What was in short supply was the voice of those standing outside those rooms. And a government that does not hear the voice from outside discovers one day that no one is waiting outside its door to be heard any longer—everyone has left, either for the street, for another country, or for a silence more eloquent than any cry.

In a hundred years Iran built a political order four times. Each time it arrived with a great promise, and none of these promises was a pure lie. Reza Shah truly built a modern state. Mohammad Reza Shah truly transformed the country in terms of economic development. The revolution of 1979 truly brought millions into the public arena. Iran's problem, then, was not a lack of achievement. *The problem was that no achievement was ever converted into trust*—into that invisible capital which accumulates in quiet times and, in times of crisis, keeps a government from falling. The Islamic Republic represented the peak of the people's distrust of a government that claimed to stand for justice and equality but in practice drifted away from them.

In this book I have tried to leave moral judgment to the end and first to understand. Understanding is not exoneration; but without understanding, every critique is merely a settling of scores. I have measured every government by the same yardsticks, and for every judgment I have also presented the strongest possible defense. The reader who looks in this book for the condemnation of one government and the exoneration of another will not find it. What he will find is a pattern shared by all four governments—and an error that all four repeated in four different guises.

This book was completed in days when Iran once again stands at one of the most fateful moments of its history. A war has been imposed on the country; a leader who ruled for thirty-six years is gone; and a society that only a few months ago witnessed the bloodiest repression of the past century, with thousands of rights-seeking citizens killed, is still holding its breath. At such a moment, writing about legitimacy may seem a luxury and a largely academic pursuit—but it is not. *The moments in which an old order collapses and a new order has not yet been born are precisely the moments in which the rules of the next hundred years are written.* Iran has had three such moments—1909, 1941, and 1979—and each time it squandered the opportunity. This book has been written so that, should a fourth moment arrive, we will at least this time have learned from the previous three.

The audience of this book is those who will build tomorrow's Iran: policymakers, political activists of every persuasion, students, and every citizen who asks why hope in Iran always begins in haste and ends in bitterness. If this book conveys a single idea to them, I would want it to be this: *in tomorrow's Iran, the main question will not be who takes power; the main question is whether the new power will preserve, with its own hands, the instruments by which it can understand its own errors.*

This book is dedicated to all Iranians who, over the past hundred years, paid the price of their governments' deafness with their lives, their freedom, or their exile—and who, despite it all, never stopped wanting.

Ebrahim Roshandel
Washington, D.C. — Mehr 1405 (October 2026)

Introduction: The Power That Endured, and the Trust That Did Not

The Problem

In the past hundred years Iran has never suffered from a shortage of state. Since 1925, every government that came to power had an army, a bureaucracy, revenue, and the capacity for repression. What it lacked was something none of these instruments could build: *the belief of citizens that this government has the right to command—even when its commands are unwelcome.*

This book is about that very gap: the gap between power and right. It is a gap that cannot be seen in ordinary times, because people pay their taxes, send their children to school, and stand in line for bread; but on the day of crisis it suddenly becomes visible—the very day on which the government needs its citizens to defend it and discovers that yesterday's obedience was not loyalty.

Shahrivar 1320 (August 1941) was such a day, when an army that had been Reza Shah's greatest project fell apart within a few days and no one came forward to defend the monarchy. Bahman 1357 (February 1979) was such a day, when a government with the largest oil revenue in Iran's history gave way before an unarmed population. And Dey 1404 (January 2026) was such a day, when a government that for four decades had relied on votes, mobilization, and security was forced to kill thousands of people within two days in order to silence its citizens.

The Question, and the Book's Answer

The central question of this book is simple: *Why were Iran's four political orders, despite their sometimes impressive achievements, unable to convert citizens' satisfaction into durable legitimacy; and by what mechanism did society withdraw legitimacy from them?*

The answer that the book tests across nine parts—and which emerges from the test intact—can be stated in one sentence: *durable legitimacy is possible only where three conditions hold simultaneously—a capable state, an open ear at the center of decision-making, and shared rules that keep the losers safe as well.*

In the past century Iran has sometimes had one of these three and sometimes two. Reza Shah had a capable state and a closed ear. Mohammad Reza Shah, too, had a capable state and a closed ear. The revolution of 1979, at the moment of victory, had an open ear but no shared rules—because the ideological victors of the revolution wrote the rules for themselves. And the Islamic Republic after 1989 could have had a capable state, but by securitizing the life of society it relied solely on a security and police center of power. We must therefore say: *no government had all three at once; and no government achieved durable legitimacy.*

This answer was not the book's initial hypothesis. The book began with a simpler hypothesis: that legitimacy was lost when the government's ear closed. But the test of the twelve-year interlude—the only period in which the government's ear was open and the order nevertheless collapsed—showed that an open ear is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Faced with this evidence, the book refined its hypothesis. The reader has a right to know this, because this honesty is itself part of the book's argument: *a government that does not acknowledge its error cannot reform; and a book that does not acknowledge its error cannot contribute to reform.*

Why This Book Is Not a History

The historiography of contemporary Iran is rich, and this book is indebted to it. But this book's question is not the historian's question. The historian arranges events in order and seeks causes in the past. This book sees government as a manager and asks: what did this manager do to win the consent of those over whom it ruled? Where did it hear their demands? When it did not hear, what price did it pay? And when it erred, did it have a mechanism that could tell it of its error?

The unit of analysis of this book, therefore, is not the "event" but the relationship between demand and response. And its principal instrument is three identical yardsticks applied to all four governments:

- **The ten-part template,** which measures each period, from its claimed source of legitimacy to the stages of its delegitimation, with the same questions;
- **The five criteria of leadership rationality**—understanding of public consent, management of resources, recognition of the national interest, use of experts, and response to discontent—which measure each leader at fateful moments;
- **The dual-benefit test,** which examines each key decision with a single question: did this decision serve the strengthening of the government, the good of the country, or the benefit of those who wielded power?

Map of the Book

Part One builds the measuring instruments: what legitimacy is, what wise governance consists of, how people withdraw legitimacy, and what pattern six international experiences—South Korea, Taiwan, Spain, Botswana, Norway, and Indonesia—offer us for measurement. Part Two returns to the Constitutional Revolution, where modern Iran's first contract of legitimacy was written, and a special essay on the constitution shows why that text, at three moments of transfer of power, determined only the form of the decision and not its content.

Parts Three through Seven examine each period with the same three yardsticks: the first Pahlavi, the parliamentary interlude, the second Pahlavi, the first decade of the Islamic Republic, and the Islamic Republic from 1989 to the end of the period that was sealed in 2026. Part Eight sets these periods side by side and extracts the pattern—including what may be the book's most important finding: that in Iran's last hundred years, *freedom has always been the product of the ruler's weakness, and never the product of the ruler's decision.* And Part Nine moves from the past to the future: fifteen principles for legitimate and wise governance, four paths that lie before Iran, and the test that any new order must pass in its first hundred days.

What This Book Does Not Claim

This book does not claim that all four governments were the same; the differences are real and are visible in every chapter. It does not claim that Iranians were unprepared for legitimate governance; the evidence of the Constitutional Revolution, the interlude, 1979, and 1997 shows the contrary. It does not claim that foreigners alone were the principal culprits; foreign interference was real, but it always entered through a breach that had already opened from within. And it does not claim to know the future form of Iran's government; it leaves that to the free vote of the Iranian people, and says only that any form, if it leaves power without accountability, will arrive at the same point. More

precisely, it offers the concept of power in a newer definition—*"the consensual distribution of responsibility among citizens"*—and not in the sense in which all four governments used it, namely the creation of rules of domination over the people.

PART ONE: Legitimacy, Wisdom, and the Withdrawal of Consent

CHAPTER 1

Chapter 1. Legitimacy: The Right to Command and Its Three Pillars

Any government can issue commands. Only a legitimate government can issue commands and expect them to be obeyed in the absence of the police. This difference is the difference between power and authority; and the political history of Iran in the past century is the history of governments that had power in abundance and authority always in short supply.

1.1 Obedience, Consent, and Right

Three things must be distinguished. *Obedience* is behavior that can be bought or imposed. *Consent* is an attitude about whether the government is doing its job well. And *legitimacy* is a belief that the government has the right to command—even when it does its job badly.

Iran's governments confused these three. When people obeyed, they assumed they were satisfied. When people were satisfied, they assumed they regarded the government as legitimate. But people who obey out of fear stop obeying the day the fear is lifted. And people who are satisfied by economic prosperity are no longer satisfied the day after a recession. Only legitimacy survives the bad days. A legitimate government has the right to make mistakes; an illegitimate government does not even have the right to be unlucky.

1.2 Weber's Three Types and What They Leave Out

Max Weber identified three bases of legitimate authority: tradition (it has always been so), charisma (he is chosen), and law (the rule says so). This typology is still useful, and the Islamic Republic in its first decade is an almost perfect example of Weberian charisma: a leader whose authority derived from his followers' belief in his exceptional qualities, not from law or tradition.

But Weber's typology is not sufficient for the two Pahlavis. Neither Reza Shah nor his son possessed Weberian charisma. What they claimed was a fourth basis that Weber did not address: *performance legitimacy*—"I have the right to rule because I deliver results." Reza Shah said he had brought security; Mohammad Reza Shah said he had brought progress. Both were telling the truth. And both discovered that results do not create right.

The reason is simple. Legitimacy built on performance is a conditional contract: "As long as you deliver, I accept you." Such a contract is renewed every day and may be cancelled any day. A government that relies solely on performance must be better every day than the day before; and no government is better every day than the day before.

1.3 Beetham's Three Layers: The Book's Principal Yardstick

David Beetham proposed a more precise approach. In his view, power is legitimate when it satisfies three conditions together:

1. **Legality:** Power is acquired and exercised in accordance with established rules.
2. **Justifiability:** Those rules can be justified in terms of beliefs shared by rulers and ruled.

3. **Expressed consent:** The subordinate express their consent in an open and observable way.

The value of this yardstick for Iran is that it shows in which layer each government broke. Reza Shah broke in the first layer: he preserved the Constitution but hollowed it out, so that the Majlis remained in place while legislation departed from it. Mohammad Reza Shah broke in the third layer: after 1953 he left no free channel for expressing consent or dissent, and in 1975, with the Rastakhiz Party, he forbade even silence. The Islamic Republic broke in the second layer: rules built on a particular religious interpretation gradually ceased to be justifiable in terms of the beliefs of a large part of society—especially its new generations.

Failure in one layer is enough. But what turns a passing crisis into a structural crisis is that failure in one layer erodes the other layers as well. A government that closes the channel for expressing consent no longer knows whether its rules are still justifiable; and a government that does not know usually assumes that they are.

1.4 Specific Support and Diffuse Support

David Easton drew a distinction that is more useful to the politician than any theory: between *specific support*—satisfaction with a particular policy or government—and *diffuse support*—loyalty to the system itself, independent of its short-term performance.

Specific support can be bought with good policies. Diffuse support cannot be bought; it must be built. And the only way to build it is for citizens to feel that they have a stake in the system: that their voice is heard, that their vote has an effect, and that if they are dissatisfied with today's government they can change tomorrow's government without breaking the system.

This is exactly what Iran's governments did not build. All four governments, in certain periods, enjoyed abundant specific support. Land reform created specific support among millions of peasants. The war in the first decade of the revolution created specific support among a large part of society. But in the absence of diffuse support, every crisis of performance turns directly into a crisis of the system. In a democracy, economic failure topples the government; in a system without diffuse support, the same failure threatens the system. No system can pay for every recession with its own existence.

1.5 Legitimacy and Effectiveness: Two Axes, Not One

Seymour Martin Lipset showed that legitimacy and effectiveness are two separate axes. A system can be legitimate and ineffective—and survive a crisis, because people change the government rather than the system. A system can be effective and illegitimate—and endure as long as it remains effective. The most dangerous situation is a system that has built its legitimacy on effectiveness and whose effectiveness then suffers.

Iran in 1976 and 1977 was precisely at this point. A government that for two decades had justified its right by economic growth had nothing to put in place of growth when faced with inflation, the post-boom recession, and the expectations it had itself aroused. There was no second pillar. And a structure that stands on one pillar collapses when that one pillar trembles.

1.6 Three Dimensions: Input, Throughput, Output

To measure each period, this book views legitimacy in three dimensions—a division developed by Fritz Scharpf and Vivien Schmidt in the study of governance:

- **Input legitimacy:** Do people have a share in determining who governs and with what program? Its measure is the free and competitive vote.
- **Throughput legitimacy:** Is power exercised through fair, transparent, and lawful procedures? Its measure is the rule of law and accountability.
- **Output legitimacy:** Does the government deliver what people need? Its measure is effectiveness.

The book's fundamental assumption is that none of these three can take the place of the other two. Iran's governments always tried to compensate for a deficit in one dimension with a surplus in another—above all, to compensate for a deficit of input with claims of output. But such compensation is impossible, because these three dimensions produce different goods. Output produces today's satisfaction. Throughput produces trust. And input produces a sense of ownership—the feeling that makes a citizen say *this government is mine*, even when he does not like today's administration.

1.7 The Book's Working Definition

With these preliminaries, the book's working definition is as follows: *Legitimacy is the citizens' belief in the government's right to command, provided that this belief is expressed in observable behavior.*

The second clause is decisive. The absence of protest is not evidence of legitimacy; it may be evidence of fear. Participation in official ceremonies is not evidence of legitimacy; it may be evidence of compulsion. Even participation in elections, if there is no real choice, is not evidence of legitimacy. Legitimacy is measurable only where citizens can say "no" and choose not to.

And here we arrive at the core of Iran's problem. A government that takes away the possibility of saying "no" also loses the possibility of measuring "yes." From then on, whatever it hears, it cannot tell whether it is the voice of consent or the voice of fear. This book will show that Iran's four governments, each in its own way, went blind at precisely this point.

CHAPTER 2

Chapter 2. Wise Governance: The Capacity to Act and the Capacity to Recognize Error

Wisdom in government does not mean the intelligence of rulers. Iran has not lacked intelligent rulers in the past hundred years. Wisdom in government means a structure that, even when an intelligent ruler errs—and all rulers err—can see the error, name it, and correct it. A wise government is not one that does not err; it is one that understands its error sooner than its enemies do.

2.1 Two Capacities, Not One

Governance requires two different capacities. *The capacity to act*: building roads, collecting taxes, running schools and hospitals, maintaining security. And *the capacity to understand*: knowing which road was needed, which tax is unjust, which policy failed to reach its goal, and who is dissatisfied with what.

The first capacity can be built by decree. The second cannot, because its source lies outside the government: in a press the government does not own, in a parliament whose members the government does not select, in a court whose verdicts the government does not dictate, and in citizens who say without fear what they want.

The tragedy of governance in Iran is that all four governments took the first capacity seriously and saw the second as a threat. Reza Shah built a modern bureaucracy, completed the Trans-Iranian Railway, and founded a modern judiciary—and at the same time silenced the independent press and turned the Majlis into a hall of approval. With every step that raised the capacity to act, he lowered the capacity to understand. The result was a state that worked very hard but knew very little about the satisfaction of its citizens.

2.2 Fukuyama's Three Pillars

Francis Fukuyama regards modern political order as resting on three pillars: *the state* (the capacity to exercise power), *the rule of law* (the limitation of power by rules that bind the ruler as well), and *accountability* (the answerability of rulers to the governed). In his view, countries that built the state before the other two pillars face a difficult task, because a powerful state has no incentive to limit itself.

Iran is a perfect example of this difficulty. The first pillar was built four times: in 1925, in 1953, in 1979, and in 1989. Each time with a different instrument—the army, oil, revolution, the security institutions—but each time only the first pillar. The other two pillars were not seriously built in any of these four periods. Once, between 1941 and 1953, the pillar of accountability was erected, but without the pillar of the state; and when the state is incapable, its accountability does not last either. These two failures are two sides of the same coin: *Iran has had either a state without accountability or accountability without a state.*

2.3 Six Components of Wise Governance

To measure each period, the book uses six components:

4. **Meritocratic executive capacity.** Peter Evans showed that the successful developmental states of East Asia had bureaucracies that were both connected to society and not captured by particular groups—what he called "embedded autonomy." A bureaucracy selected on the basis of loyalty cannot tell the ruler that he is mistaken, because its existence depends on the ruler's approval.
5. **The rule of law.** Law binds the ruler as well. A government that suspends, circumvents, or unilaterally rewrites the constitution teaches citizens that law is an instrument of power, not its limit. And citizens who have learned this no longer respect the law except when the police are present.
6. **Threefold accountability.** Vertical accountability (citizens hold rulers to account through elections), horizontal accountability (state institutions—parliament, judiciary, audit court—check one another, in Guillermo O'Donnell's term), and social accountability (the media and civil society expose error). Eliminating any one of these weakens the other two.
7. **Listening channels.** The government must know what people want before they shout it in the street. Parties, unions, professional associations, and a free press serve as an early-warning system. A government that silences them has switched off its own warning system.
8. **Error correction.** Karl Popper located the criterion of an open society not in its ability to choose the best rulers but in its ability to remove the worst without bloodshed. A wise government has a mechanism for changing a wrong policy without crisis and a wrong policymaker without revolution.
9. **Inclusiveness.** Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson showed that "inclusive" institutions—which distribute opportunity and power among a large number of citizens—make nations prosperous and durable in the long run, whereas "extractive" institutions—which siphon wealth and power off to a small group—eventually halt growth even if they bring it for a time.

2.4 Error Correction: The Component That Binds All the Others

Of these six components, one stands above the rest: error correction. All the other components are, ultimately, instruments of error correction. A free press exposes error. Elections remove those responsible for error. An independent court annuls legal error. And a meritocratic bureaucracy tells the ruler that his order cannot be carried out.

Iran's governments also sometimes corrected their errors. The acceptance of Resolution 598 in Tir 1367 (July 1988) was the correction of a great error. But the manner of that correction is itself a lesson: the correction was made through a single center, and only after the cost of continuing had become so visible and so heavy that no filter could any longer hide it from the decision-maker's eyes. Such a correction is possible, but it is late, it is costly, and it depends on the will of one individual. A wise government entrusts correction to a mechanism, not to the moment when one person awakens.

The difference between a wise and an unwise government is not that the former does not err; it lies in *the cost of recognizing error*. In a wise government, this cost is paid by a journalist with an article or a deputy with a question. In an unwise government, it is paid by a generation.

2.5 The Paradox of the Competent Official

One pattern recurs in all four periods and deserves to be named from the outset: Iran's governments sought out competent officials, employed them, and then eliminated them—precisely when their

competence turned them into an independent center of power. Teymourtash, Davar, and Nosrat al-Dowleh under Reza Shah; Qavam and Amini under Mohammad Reza Shah; Bazargan and Banisadr in the first decade of the revolution; and figures from the revolution's first generation in later decades—each, in one way or another, met this same fate.

This pattern is not without cause. In a system in which legitimacy comes from a single center, every official who acquires independent standing is a potential rival of that center. The system therefore has two options: the mediocre, loyal official, or the competent, threatening one. Iran's governments repeatedly chose the first and paid the price in the quality of their decisions. Wise governance resolves this dilemma with one instrument: when the source of legitimacy is the people's vote, the standing of a competent official is not a threat but an asset.

2.6 Wise Governance in One Sentence

If we were to compress this entire chapter into a single sentence: *wise governance is governance that keeps the cost of speaking truth to power low.* Wherever this cost rose—through prison, exile, dismissal, or mere indifference—wisdom departed from government, even though intelligent people continued to work within it. The next chapter shows what society does when government does not listen.

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3. How People Withdraw Legitimacy

Governments proclaim legitimacy, but people grant it; and what is granted can be withdrawn. The withdrawal of legitimacy is rarely a single moment. It is a process—slow, often silent, and almost always begun before the government notices. Governments see the moment of the end; society has already traveled the road.

3.1 Four Stages

The withdrawal of legitimacy from governments can be traced in four stages. These stages are not necessarily traversed in sequence or uniformly, but their logic is clear: at each stage, the citizen stands one step further away from the government.

10. **Issue-specific discontent.** The citizen objects to a particular policy: a tax, a law, an appointment. He still addresses the government and still asks it to correct itself. In any healthy system, this stage is the everyday business of politics.
11. **Institutional distrust.** The citizen has concluded that the official channels do not work: he wrote letters and no reply came; he voted and nothing changed; he went to court and saw no justice. He does not yet reject the system, but he no longer has hope in its instruments.
12. **Normative rupture.** The official narrative no longer justifies anything. Words that were once sacred or authoritative—"progress," "the gates of civilization," "resistance," "exporting the revolution"—become meaningless or ridiculous. This is the stage at which political satire replaces political protest, and the government, without knowing it, hears the first sign of its fall in the people's jokes.
13. **Behavioral refusal.** The citizen is no longer merely dissatisfied; he changes his behavior. Either he exits—emigration, withdrawal from politics, retreat into private life—or he disobeys, or he takes to the streets to change the system itself.

The decisive boundary lies between the second and third stages. Up to the second stage, society is disappointed with the government but still thinks within its framework. From the third stage onward, society thinks outside that framework. A government that drives society from the second stage to the third has turned from a "rival to be dissatisfied with" into a "tolerated alien."

3.2 Exit, Voice, and Loyalty

Albert Hirschman, an economist, wrote a small book that is more useful for understanding politics than many thick volumes. In his account, a dissatisfied member of an organization—the customer of a company, the citizen of a country—has two options: *voice* (staying and raising one's voice) or *exit* (leaving). What balances the two is *loyalty*: the bond that makes a member voice his objection at least once before leaving.

Hirschman's subtle point is vital for Iran: voice is the most valuable feedback for an organization, because it tells where the problem lies. Exit tells only that a problem exists. A government that raises the cost of voice drives citizens toward exit—and thereby loses its most valuable source of

information. And since the most capable citizens, who have more options, usually exit first, the government is ultimately left with citizens who can neither leave nor have anything left to lose.

The large-scale emigration of skilled people from Iran in recent decades must be read through this logic. It is often called the "brain drain" and regarded as an economic phenomenon. But within Hirschman's framework, emigration is a form of voting—a vote cast with the feet when a vote cast with the hand has no effect.

3.3 Relative Deprivation and the J-Curve

Ted Robert Gurr showed that people rebel not out of absolute poverty but out of *relative deprivation*: the gap between what they believe they are entitled to and what they have. And James Davies put it more precisely: revolutions usually occur not during long periods of poverty, but after a period of improvement followed by a sudden decline. Expectations rise with prosperity; when reality suddenly falls, the gap between expectation and reality becomes intolerable. On a graph, the shape of this pattern resembles an inverted letter J, and hence it is called the "J-curve."

The years 1973 to 1979 are a textbook example of this pattern. The multiplication of oil revenue after 1973 sent expectations skyward; the government itself fanned these expectations with the promise of a "Great Civilization." Then inflation, housing shortages, infrastructure bottlenecks, and the contractionary policies of 1976 and 1977 created a gap that no speech could fill. The statesman's lesson of the J-curve is clear: *the most dangerous moment for a government that has built its legitimacy on performance is the moment of its greatest success*—because at that very moment it creates expectations it cannot meet.

3.4 Preference Falsification: Why Collapse Seems Sudden

Timur Kuran, a Turkish-American economist and thinker, developed a concept that explains better than any other theory why the collapse of authoritarian systems always takes everyone by surprise: *preference falsification.* In a system in which expressing dissent is costly, people hide what they really think and express what the government wants to hear. As a result, no one—not the government, not the opposition, not even the citizens themselves—knows how widespread discontent really is.

This situation appears stable until a small event prompts a few people to express dissent openly. Each person who reveals his dissent lowers the cost of revelation for the next. And suddenly a chain of revelations begins that carries the government within a few weeks from "stable" to "collapsed." Charles Kurzman, in his study of the 1979 revolution, showed that even the principal actors in that event regarded it as impossible a few months before its victory.

The statesman's lesson of this theory is bitter for any government: *a government that makes dissent costly loses the ability to know how much dissent it faces.* Security reports cannot replace this knowledge, because the same fear that drives the citizen to concealment also drives the security official to report what his superiors want to hear. Repression blinds the government before it silences the dissenter.

3.5 Repression: An Accelerator That Looks Like a Brake

From these four theories a conclusion emerges that is at the core of this book's argument. Repression works in the short term—and a book that denies this will not be taken seriously. It stops protest,

empties the street, and buys the government time. But repression does not stop the process of delegitimation. It does three other things:

- **It eliminates stages one and two.** When protest against a specific policy becomes costly, the citizen skips issue-specific objection and moves directly to distrust and normative rupture. Repression turns correctable discontent into uncorrectable discontent.
- **It hides the process from the government's view.** As Kuran showed, a repressed society conceals its preferences. The government reads silence as consent.
- **It enlarges the community of the injured.** Each act of repression is an event that ends; but those harmed by it—prisoners, their families, the relatives of the dead—form a population that only grows. This population has a memory, and memory cannot be repressed.

Repression, then, is not a brake; it is an accelerator that for a short time behaves like a brake. It converts a crisis of legitimacy into a security cost—that is, it moves the problem from a domain in which it can be solved to a domain in which it can only be maintained. And the cost of maintenance, unlike the cost of a solution, rises every year.

3.6 From Government to System: A Boundary Crossed Only Once

One further distinction is needed. A citizen can withdraw legitimacy from the *government*—from today's cabinet, from the current head of government—without withdrawing it from the *system*. In a democracy this withdrawal is routine and is called an election. Elections are a safety valve that keeps discontent with the government separate from discontent with the system.

When this valve is closed—when citizens discover that the government cannot be meaningfully changed by voting—discontent with the government has no option but to turn into discontent with the system. The experience of the Islamic Republic over the past three decades shows this transition with rare clarity. In 1997 and 2001, millions of people, by voting for the reform option, sought legitimacy within the framework of the system—voice in Hirschman's sense. In 2017, a slogan was heard in the streets that told both factions within the system that the game was over. And the official turnout in the presidential election of 2021, the Majlis election of 2024, and the first round of the presidential election of 2024 fell to the lowest levels in the history of the Islamic Republic. This process is the transition from voice to exit—an exit that, in a country one cannot leave, takes the form of withdrawal from the ballot box.

Crossing this boundary is almost always one-way. A citizen who has withdrawn legitimacy from the government returns with a better government. But a citizen who has withdrawn legitimacy from the system does not return with a reformed government. He may return only with a change in the rules of the game—a question to which the final part of the book will turn.

3.7 What This Chapter Passes On to Later Chapters

From this chapter, three instruments are carried forward into the period chapters of the book. First, *the four-stage scale*, for determining where society stood on the path of delegitimation in each period. Second, *Hirschman's question*—voice or exit?—for reading citizens' behavior. And third, *Kuran's rule*, which warns us not to mistake the silence of any period for its consent.

With these instruments, we can return to the four governments and ask: when, for what reason, and through which stage did each lose the legitimacy it once had—or claimed to have?

CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4. The Reference Model: Six Countries, Six Lessons, and Eight Principles

Judgment about governance without a yardstick is merely the expression of taste. If we say that Iran's governments failed, we must say in comparison with what. This chapter builds that "what": six international experiences, each of which untied precisely one of the knots in which Iran has remained entangled for a hundred years.

The choice of these six countries is not random. None of them was a ready-made, trouble-free democracy. Most began from authoritarianism, some from military dictatorship, and at least two possessed enormous natural resources that have been a curse in many countries. What separates them from Iran is not their starting point; it is a decision they took at a fateful moment.

4.1 South Korea: Development That Accepted Participation

General Park Chung-hee came to power in a coup in 1961 and ruled Korea with an iron hand until his assassination in 1979. In those eighteen years, a country poorer than many African countries became one of Asia's most industrialized economies. In terms of method, Park differed little from Mohammad Reza Shah: authoritarian development, repression of opponents, and reliance on American support.

The difference lay in two things. First, before industrializing, Korea had carried out a radical land reform in the 1950s, which meant that a relatively equal society entered the era of growth. Second, and more important: when in June 1987 millions of Koreans, led by the very middle class that development had created, took to the streets, the military government set aside the option of mass repression—which it had used seven years earlier in Gwangju. Roh Tae-woo, the government's own candidate, accepted direct presidential elections on 29 June 1987. Ten years later, in 1997, Kim Dae-jung, an opponent whom the military government had once sentenced to death, became president through the ballot box.

Lesson for Iran. Development creates a middle class, and the middle class wants a share. Korea and Iran both created this class. Korea paid its share in 1987 and endured; Iran in 1975, at the height of that same class's strength, founded the Rastakhiz Party and took away even its right to silence. *A government that creates a middle class and then fears it has raised its own enemy with its own hands.*

4.2 Taiwan: A Ruling Party That Saw Its Survival in Competition

The Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) ruled Taiwan under martial law from 1949 to 1987—one of the longest periods of martial law in the world. But this same party, in the 1980s, reached a conclusion that Iran's governments never reached: that the party's survival in the long run is guaranteed by competition, not by monopoly.

The opening was gradual. In 1986 an opposition party was formed and the government tolerated it. In 1987 martial law was lifted. In 1996 the first direct presidential election was held. And in 2000 the

Kuomintang handed power to the opposition through the ballot box—and eight years later, again through the ballot box, took it back.

Lesson for Iran. Transition from within is possible, provided the rulers understand that electoral defeat is not their end. The Kuomintang handed over power and survived. Iran's governments, all four of them, believed that losing their monopoly meant annihilation—and this very belief led them toward that annihilation. *A government that regards defeat as intolerable will ultimately have to endure something worse than defeat.* It must be said that political figures reach the end of their political careers when they regard electoral defeat as the end of their political life and resort to illegitimate means to turn that defeat into victory.

4.3 Spain: Rules Before Winners

Francisco Franco died in November 1975, after thirty-six years of dictatorship that had begun with a bloody civil war. Spanish society bore deep wounds: left and right, monarchist and republican, Catalan, Basque, and Castilian. Many observers predicted a second civil war.

What happened instead was one of the most brilliant transitions of the twentieth century. In November 1976, the rubber-stamp parliament of the Franco era voted for the Law for Political Reform—a law that led to the dissolution of that very parliament—and the people approved it in a referendum in December of that year. In 1977 free elections were held. In October of the same year, parties from the right to the communists, together with trade unions and employers, signed the Moncloa Pacts: an agreement on the economy and on political rules, before the competition for power began. In 1978 the constitution was approved by referendum. And in February 1981, when a group of officers stormed parliament, the coup failed within a few hours.

Lesson for Iran. The most important agreement in a transition is not an agreement about who will govern; it is an agreement on the rules that keep the losers safe as well. Spain first wrote the rules and then competed. Iran in 1979, and earlier in the Constitutional Revolution, began the competition before agreeing on the rules—and the winner of the competition wrote the rules in its own favor. *In a transition, whoever wins before agreement on the rules will turn his victory into everyone's defeat.*

4.4 Botswana: A Resource That Did Not Become a Curse

In 1966 Botswana was one of the poorest countries in the world. A year later diamonds were discovered—the same resource that in Sierra Leone and Angola produced civil war and catastrophe. In Botswana, diamonds led to one of the highest sustained growth rates in the world over several decades.

The secret of this difference lay in the channel of distribution. Diamond revenue flowed through the state's official budget and under the oversight of an elected parliament; the state took an equal share in a joint company with De Beers; and regular elections have been held every five years since before independence. Traditional institutions of collective consultation—called the *kgotla*—also brought into the modern state a tradition of the ruler's accountability to the community.

Lesson for Iran. A natural resource is not inherently a curse; the curse lies in who holds the key to the treasury. In Iran, from 1953 onward, oil revenue increasingly escaped the oversight of the Majlis and came directly into the hands of the center of power. *Oil did not make the Iranian government independent of the people; it handed the key of oil to someone who did not want to depend on the people.*

4.5 Norway: An Oil State That Remained a Taxpayer State

Norway discovered oil in 1969 and began producing it in 1971. In the same year, the Norwegian parliament adopted a set of principles for managing oil that became known as the "Ten Oil Commandments." In 1990 the state petroleum fund was established, and in 2001 a fiscal rule was adopted that limited annual withdrawals from the fund to a small percentage of its value. Today this fund is one of the largest sovereign wealth funds in the world.

But the main point for Iran lies elsewhere: Norway never allowed oil revenue to replace taxation. The Norwegian citizen still pays taxes, and as a result still has the right to ask where his taxes are spent.

Lesson for Iran. There is an ancient bond between taxation and representation. A government that becomes independent of its citizens' taxes also feels independent of accountability to them. The limitation of this comparison must be stated honestly: Norway had a consolidated democracy before oil, and Iran experienced the reverse sequence—oil came before democracy. Nevertheless, Norway's lesson is that even with oil, one can build an institution that places a distance between revenue and power.

4.6 Indonesia: An Army That Left Politics

For more than three decades Suharto ruled Indonesia by relying on an army that was not only a military force but also a political and economic power. The army held appointed seats in parliament, was present in local governments, and controlled an extensive network of companies. This structure bears instructive similarities to what has taken shape in Iran in recent decades.

After Suharto's resignation in May 1998, Indonesia—the world's largest Muslim-majority country—began a transition that many had thought impossible. In 1999 free elections were held. The police were separated from the army. Power was devolved from Jakarta to the provinces and districts. And by 2004, the army's appointed seats in parliament had been abolished and the first direct presidential election had been held.

Lesson for Iran. This experience calls into question two common claims in Iranian political discourse. One is that Muslim society is incompatible with democracy; the other is that a military force rooted in the economy never leaves politics. Indonesia showed that both are possible—but step by step, with guarantees for the army, and over several years. Indonesia is not perfect: corruption persisted and there have been setbacks. But its path showed that an economic army cannot be expelled from politics by a single decree; *one must build an exit route that makes staying more costly than leaving.*

4.7 Two Warnings: Turkey and Egypt

If we read only the successful cases, we fall into selection bias. Two other cases show how an opening, without the necessary conditions, can be reversed.

In 1950 Turkey did something that Iran never did: the ruling party was defeated in a free election and peacefully handed over power. But in the following decades the army intervened in politics directly or indirectly several times, and in recent years power has once again become concentrated in a single center. Turkey's lesson is that *free elections without the containment of the armed forces and without independent institutions are a reversible achievement.*

In 2011 Egypt experienced a popular uprising that removed a ruler of thirty years, and in 2012 it chose its first freely elected president. A year later the army took power again. An army that had kept its economic empire intact, and political forces that had not agreed on rules before competing, returned the transition to its starting point. Egypt's lesson is the bitterest of this chapter: *the overthrow of a ruler is not a transition. A transition begins when the rules change.*

4.8 Eight Principles of Legitimate and Wise Governance

From these eight experiences, eight principles emerge. These principles are the yardstick by which each period of Iran is measured in the chapters that follow:

1. **The source of authority is the people's vote**—a free, periodic, and competitive vote, with a rule of succession fixed before the candidates are known.
2. **Power is restrained**—a constitution the ruler cannot unilaterally suspend or rewrite, and a judiciary that does not take its verdicts from power.
3. **The government listens**—a free press, parties, trade unions, and professional associations that serve as the government's measuring instruments and early-warning system.
4. **The bureaucracy is meritocratic**—selection and promotion on the basis of competence, not loyalty; and the competent official is an asset of the system, not a threat to it.
5. **Development is inclusive**—economic achievement leads to the expansion of participation, not to a greater concentration of power in the hands of those who managed it.
6. **Rent is restrained**—the channel for distributing natural-resource revenue is transparent and under the oversight of an elected institution, and the government does not become independent of its citizens' taxes.
7. **The armed forces are neutral**—the army and security institutions stand outside politics and the economy and are subordinate to elected civilian authority.
8. **Error is correctable**—a wrong policy changes without crisis and a wrong policymaker without revolution, and power changes hands peacefully.

4.9 What This Model Is Not

This model is not a blueprint for copying. No country has imported democracy from another. Korea and Taiwan had American security support; Spain had the European horizon; Botswana a small population; Norway a prior democracy; and Indonesia circumstances that cannot be repeated. Iran has none of these advantages in full, and it has some advantages they lacked: a century-old tradition of struggle for law, an educated society, and a historical memory of what must not be repeated.

The model, then, is a yardstick, not a road map. When we ask in later chapters what score each period of Iran receives against these eight principles, we are not asking why Iran did not become Spain. We are asking what Iran's governments chose at the moments when Spain, Korea, and Taiwan chose their path—and why.

The short answer is this: in all six countries a moment came when the rulers accepted that they must have less than they could have. *Legitimacy begins where power voluntarily gives up part of itself.* And the hundred-year history of Iran is the history of powers that either did not see such a moment, or saw it and passed it by.

CHAPTER 5

Chapter 5. Method: How We Measure a Government

The politician always faces three enemies: selective memory, accumulated anger, and the desire to be right. Method is the wall the author builds between himself and these three enemies. This chapter builds that wall—not so that the book will appear neutral, but so that its judgments will hold up before a dissenting reader as well.

5.1 Five Units of Comparison

This book divides the century into five units: the first Pahlavi (1925–1941), the parliamentary interlude (1941–1953), the second Pahlavi (1953–1979), the first decade of the Islamic Republic (1979–1989), and the Islamic Republic after 1989.

Two choices in this division require explanation. First, the interlude of 1941 to 1953 is an independent unit, not an appendix to the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah. In those twelve years the king was not the center of final decision; the Majlis, governments, the press, and parties truly affected the country's fate. In this twelve-year period Mohammad Reza Shah merely reigned; after the coup of 28 Mordad 1332 (19 August 1953) he governed. This period is the book's "natural experiment": the only span in a hundred years in which the principal variable—the distribution of authority—changed. If the book's hypothesis is correct, we should see different signs in this period. And if we do not, the hypothesis must be revised.

Second, the Islamic Republic is two units, not one. The transition of 1989—the death of the founder, the revision of the constitution, and the removal of the requirement of *marja'iyat* (supreme religious authority) from the qualifications for leadership—shifted the system's source of legitimacy from personal charisma to institutional (military-intelligence) selection. A system that constructed the basis of Seyyed Ali Khamenei's legitimacy within a different structure.

5.2 The Ten-Part Template

Each unit is measured with the same ten items. The uniformity of the template is the most important guarantee of fairness: no period is judged by a stricter or more lenient standard than another.

Table 5.1. The ten-part template

Item	Question
1. Claimed source of legitimacy	On what foundation did the government rest its right to command?
2. Architecture of power	Where was the center of final decision, and was it visible or hidden?
3. Instruments for managing legitimacy	Persuasion, performance, co-optation, or coercion—which predominated?
4. Demands of society	What did each stratum want, and through what channel did it speak?
5. Attention to the people's vote and will	Could votes change the center of power? Did protest lead to policy correction?
6. Record of effectiveness	What did the government deliver, and to whom?
7. Institution-building and executive capacity	Which institutions did it build, which did it hollow out, and what was its executive capacity?

Item	Question
8. The gap between demand and response	Which gaps were activated, and in what order?
9. Stages of delegitimation and the government's response	At which stage was society, and did the government reform, buy off, or repress?
10. Measurement against the reference model	What score does the period receive against the eight principles of Chapter 4?

5.3 Dissecting Decisions

The ten-part template gives a picture of a period, but a picture does not show cause. To understand cause, the book dissects one or two key decisions in each period—a method called "process tracing" in political science. The questions are simple: what did the decision-maker know? What options were before him? Who was in the room where the decision was made, and who was not? What information reached him, and what information was lost along the way? And was the outcome foreseeable on the basis of what could be known at the time?

This last question is decisive. Judgment about a decision whose outcome was unforeseeable with the knowledge of the day is judgment about luck, not wisdom. The book calls an error of governance only those decisions whose cost was knowable at the time of decision—and was not known, or was known and ignored.

5.4 Scorecard and Level of Confidence

At the end of its chapter, each period receives a score against the eight principles of the reference model, from 0 (absent) to 4 (fully present). Each score is accompanied by a level of confidence:

- **High confidence:** several independent types of evidence, including contemporaneous documents and quantitative data, point in the same direction.
- **Medium confidence:** the evidence is sufficient but of one type, or there are serious competing accounts.
- **Low confidence:** the evidence is scant, ambiguous, or dependent on sources with a clear motive for distortion.

No score appears in the text without evidence. And one further rule: the scorecard does not replace argument. The number is a summary of the judgment, not its reason. A reader who reads only the numbers has not read the book.

5.5 Measuring the People's Will in an Era When No One Asked

The most difficult methodological problem of this book is this: how can we know what people wanted in a period when no reliable surveys were conducted and the public expression of opinion was dangerous? National surveys of values and attitudes in Iran exist only from the late 1990s, and even these were conducted in an atmosphere in which an honest answer carried a cost.

For earlier periods, the book relies on six types of indirect evidence: *electoral behavior* in periods when there was real competition; *the press* in periods of relative freedom; *petitions and complaints* to government institutions; *strikes and protests*, with their slogans; *emigration*, especially of skilled

personnel; and *meaningful silence*—moments such as Shahrivar 1320 (August 1941), when society showed no defensive reaction to the fall of the government.

None of these types of evidence is sufficient on its own. But when several of them point in the same direction, they reveal society's will with reasonable confidence. And Kuran's rule from Chapter 3 is always kept in mind: *silence is data; but it is not data of consent.*

5.6 Quantitative Data and the Limits of Their Validity

The book draws on international indicators, especially the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project, which covers Iran from 1900, and the World Bank's governance indicators, which begin in 1996. These data have two values: they compare the book's judgment with that of external observers, and they reveal gradual trends that get lost in narrative.

But a fundamental warning must be stated from the outset. Comparative governance indicators measure *visible* state power: the government, the parliament, the courts. In a system in which the center of final decision lies outside these visible institutions, these indicators record the concealment of power as its limitation. In V-Dem data for Iran, the indicator of legislative constraints on the executive is higher in the Islamic Republic period than in the 1941–1953 interlude—not because power was more limited in the Islamic Republic, but because its decisive part did not lie in the visible executive. *An indicator that reads concealment as restraint shows the system as more democratic the more complete the concealment is.* The book therefore uses these data for trends, not for final judgment on the distribution of power.

5.7 Four Dangers and Four Antidotes

- **Archival asymmetry.** Documents of the Pahlavi era are more accessible—in Iranian, British, and American archives. Documents of the Islamic Republic are less so. The danger is that the Pahlavi periods appear more error-prone merely because they are better documented. In every comparison, the book states explicitly which side is better documented and adjusts its judgment accordingly.
- **Judging by today's standards.** Reza Shah cannot be measured by the standards of twenty-first-century democracy. Therefore each period is first measured by the standards of its contemporaries—by what the constitutionalists, Majlis deputies, and intellectuals of the same period expected of the government—and then against the reference model.
- **Selecting cases on the outcome.** The decisions dissected have been chosen for the importance of their consequences, not at random.
- **Structure instead of human beings.** The danger is that the book attributes everything to structure and ignores the role of individual choice. Therefore, in every dissection, the book asks whether another ruler in the same structure could have made a different decision—and wherever the answer is yes, it says so.

5.8 The Rule of the Rival Narrative

The last rule, perhaps the most important: every period chapter must present the strongest narrative of that period's defenders—not the weakest—and respond to it. The defender of Reza Shah will say that without his centralization Iran would have fallen apart. The defender of Mohammad Reza Shah will say that in the 1970s Iran experienced the fastest growth in its history. The defender of the

Islamic Republic will say that the system has survived war, sanctions, and external pressure and has expanded access to education and health care in the villages. Each of these claims contains part of the truth, and a book that ignores them persuades only those who were already persuaded.

A politician who wishes to build tomorrow must be able to state his opponent's argument better than the opponent himself. A book that condemns everyone persuades no one; and a book that persuades no one changes nothing.

5.9 Leadership Rationality: Five Criteria and One Test

Structure explains the field on which the leader played; but the game was played by the leader. In addition to measuring structure, this book measures the policymaking of the leaders themselves at fateful junctures. The question is not whether they were intelligent—they were. The question is what they put their intelligence in the service of.

Five criteria of leadership rationality:

9. **Correct understanding of public consent.** Did the leader know what creates consent and what creates mere obedience? Did he read society's will correctly, or what his entourage told him?
10. **Management of resources in the right direction.** Were oil, the budget, land, and human capital used in the service of the country's long-term development, or in the service of the government's security, personal prestige, and the loyalty of the inner circle?
11. **Accurate recognition of the national interest.** Did the leader correctly identify the domains of national interest—security, territorial integrity, the economy, international standing—and correctly read the global balance of power? Did he distinguish between the national interest and the interest of his own government?
12. **Use of expert personnel.** Did he employ the most competent people, and more importantly, could they tell him that he was mistaken?
13. **Response to social and political discontent.** Faced with discontent, did he reform, buy off, or repress? And was his response timely, or did it come when it no longer had any effect?

The dual-benefit test. The interests of the government and the interests of the country often coincide: the railway served both the country and the king's authority. Judging a leader's rationality at these points of coincidence is not difficult and does not teach much. The instructive moment is *the moment of divergence*: where what served the leader's survival diverged from what served the country, and the leader had to choose what served his own survival.

One conceptual distinction sharpens this test: *instrumental rationality* versus *national rationality*. A leader can be highly rational in preserving his power—knowing his goal and choosing the most efficient means to reach it—and at the same time deeply irrational from the standpoint of the national interest. Many of history's most durable rulers have been of the first type. This book measures the two separately, because the fate of legitimacy is decided in the gap between them.

Junctures of measurement. Leadership rationality is measured not across a whole period but at specific junctures at which real options existed. The period chapters dissect these junctures, including: the change of dynasty in 1925, the extension of the oil concession in 1933, and the crisis of August 1941 for Reza Shah; acceptance of the 1953 coup, the 1954 Consortium Agreement, the White Revolution, the spending of oil revenue after 1973, and the response to the crisis of 1977–

1979 for Mohammad Reza Shah; the hostage-taking of 1979, the continuation of the war after the liberation of Khorramshahr in 1982, and the acceptance of Resolution 598 for the first decade of the revolution; and the revision of 1989, the decisions of the nuclear file, and the responses to the protests of 2009, 2019, and 2022 for the period that followed.

At each juncture, the leader receives a score from 0 to 4 on the five criteria, the decision is placed in one of the four cells of the dual-benefit test, and—in accordance with rule 5.8—the strongest possible defense of that decision is also presented. *We measure the leader not against our wishes but against the options that were actually before him.* But when a better option existed, was seen, and was set aside, this book names it.

With these instruments—the concept of legitimacy, the yardstick of wise governance, the theory of delegitimation, the reference model, and the method of measurement—Part One comes to an end. Part Two returns to the beginning of the story: to the Constitutional Revolution, where Iranians for the first time tried to bind power to law and the vote, and to the reasons that left this attempt incomplete.

PART TWO: The Constitutional Legacy (1906–1925)

CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6. The Constitutional Revolution: The First Contract of Legitimacy

Every government in modern Iran, whether it wished to or not, governed in the shadow of the Constitutional Revolution. The Constitutional Revolution for the first time put a question before Iranian power that has never since been answered and has never gone away: *where does the right to command come from?* Before 1906, the answer was self-evident—from the monarchy, from tradition, from God. After 1906, Iran's official answer became that *the powers of the realm derive from the nation.* Every government that came afterward was either obliged to respect this answer or obliged to pretend to respect it. And pretending is itself a confession.

6.1 A Contract Written Before the State

The constitutional decree was issued on 14 Mordad 1285 (5 August 1906), the first Majlis opened in Mehr of that year, and the Constitution was signed by Mozaffar al-Din Shah in Dey—a few days before his death. The Supplementary Fundamental Law was adopted in 1907. In less than a year and a half, Iran became on paper one of the most advanced political systems in Asia.

But the contract of legitimacy was written on paper before there was a state to implement it. Iran at that time had no national army; the Cossack Brigade was under the command of Russian officers. It had no effective tax system; the treasury survived on foreign loans and the sale of concessions. And the authority of the central government was nominal in many provinces. The Constitutional Revolution raised the pillar of accountability in a country in which the pillar of the state had collapsed—the very Fukuyaman dilemma we saw in Chapter 2. *Accountability without a state is like law without police: it is respected, but only until the first act of disobedience.*

6.2 Two Sources of Legitimacy in One Text

Article 2 of the Supplementary Fundamental Law provided that a committee of leading *mujtahids* would oversee the Majlis's enactments to ensure they did not contradict the *shari'a*. In its time this article was a necessary compromise: without the support of part of the clergy, the Constitutional Revolution would not have won. But the compromise planted a seed that seventy years later became a mighty tree. In one text, two sources of the right to command sat side by side: the nation and the *shari'a*. As long as the two were aligned, the conflict remained hidden. When they diverged, it became clear that the Constitution had not said which prevails if the nation wants one thing and the *shari'a*, as interpreted by a group of jurists, another.

This is not merely a legal problem; it is a lesson in statecraft. *A constitution that recognizes two final sources of the right to command has not resolved the struggle for power; it has postponed it to the future*—and the future usually resolves it by force. The revolution of 1979 and the Constitution of 1979 ended this unfinished struggle in favor of one of the two sources—and Iran is still paying the cost of that ending.

6.3 The First Test: Mohammad Ali Shah and the Moment of Divergence

Mohammad Ali Shah ascended the throne in 1907 having sworn an oath to the Constitution, and in Tir 1287 (June 1908), with the backing of the Cossack Brigade and its Russian commanding officer, he had the Majlis shelled. This is the first open moment of divergence in modern Iran, and the dual-benefit test gives a clear answer about it.

Mohammad Ali Shah faced two options. He could accept the constitutional order, give up his personal prerogatives, and build a limited but durable monarchy—the path that European monarchies took in the same era and by which they endured. Or he could restore absolute power by relying on a foreign force. He chose the second. By the five criteria: on *understanding public consent* he scores close to zero, because he thought opposition was confined to the Majlis and that society would return to the old order. On *recognition of the national interest*, too, since by relying on the forces of Russia—a state that a year earlier had divided Iran into spheres of influence with Britain—he subordinated national sovereignty to the survival of the monarchy. His decision falls into the "self-serving" cell, and its outcome slid into the cell of "strategic error": a year later the constitutionalists took Tehran, and he was forced to take refuge in the Russian legation and was deposed.

The lesson of this moment: *a ruler who relies on a foreign force for his survival has pledged his domestic legitimacy as collateral for foreign support; and the collateral is held by the lender, not by the owner of the house.*

6.4 The Shuster Test: When the Majlis Put the National Interest Before Its Own Survival

In 1911 the Second Majlis employed Morgan Shuster, an American financial expert, to put the treasury in order. Shuster came with extensive powers and in a few months tried to build a tax system that would make the central government independent of foreign loans. This was exactly what the fourth criterion—the use of expert personnel—required, and exactly what Russia did not want. The Russian government, by ultimatum, demanded Shuster's dismissal.

The Majlis rejected the ultimatum. Russian forces advanced, and at the end of 1911 the Majlis was closed by the regent's government. From the standpoint of the institution's survival, this decision was a defeat. But in the dual-benefit test, it is one of the rare examples in the past hundred and twenty years: *an institution that paid the price of defending the national interest with its own existence.* The governments that came after it almost never experienced such loyalty to the national interest in the face of foreign pressure.

6.5 A Neutrality No One Respected

In the First World War, Iran declared neutrality. Russia, Britain, and the Ottoman Empire ignored this neutrality and turned parts of the country into their battlefield. The famine of the war's final years took the lives of a great number of Iranians. This experience held a lesson for the politicians of twenty years later that went unread: *neutrality is not a declaration; it is a capacity to compel others to respect it.* A country that lacks this capacity has a neutrality that is, at best, a polite request and, at worst, an unwanted invitation. Shahrivar 1320 (August 1941) repeated the same lesson at a different cost.

6.6 The 1919 Agreement: The National Interest in the Elite Marketplace

In 1919 the government of Vosuq al-Dowleh signed an agreement with Britain that in effect handed control of Iran's army and finances to British advisers. It later emerged that three leading ministers of the government had received payments from Britain in connection with this agreement. The agreement met with widespread public opposition, as well as the opposition of the United States and France, and was never ratified by the Majlis.

This affair has two lessons. First, elites who trade the national interest for personal interest sell not only the country but also public trust in the elite class itself—and for generations after 1919, Iran looked upon every agreement with a foreign power as a conspiracy. Second, this very distrust, which protected the country in 1919, repeatedly prevented sensible negotiation in later decades. *Elite corruption is paid for twice: once when it happens, and again when society, fearing its repetition, refuses even a sound deal.*

6.7 Why the Constitutional Order Was Not Consolidated

Four causes together left the Constitutional Revolution incomplete:

- **The absence of a state:** An accountable system without executive capacity could neither bring security, nor collect taxes, nor enforce the law.
- **Two sources of legitimacy:** The Constitution did not resolve the conflict between nation and *shari'a*; it merely postponed it.
- **Foreign powers:** The 1907 agreement, the 1911 ultimatum, and the occupation during the First World War each weighed on the scales at a fateful moment.
- **Elite division:** After victory, the constitutionalists, instead of building intermediary institutions—durable parties, a professional press, responsible local associations—fell into factional and sometimes bloody rivalries. Assassination, exile, and execution were instruments of political struggle among those same elites before they became instruments of dictatorship.

Of these four, the first is the most fundamental. Iranians who by 1921 were weary of chaos concluded that first a state was needed, and then freedom. This conclusion, in the form it took, shaped the next hundred years.

6.8 Legacy: A Pendulum That Swung for a Hundred Years

The Constitutional Revolution placed Iran between two poles between which the pendulum of Iranian politics has swung ever since: *law without a state* and *a state without law*. The Constitutional Revolution was the first pole. Reza Shah was the second. The interlude of 1941 to 1953 was a return to the first pole, and the coup of 1953 a return to the second. Even the revolution of 1979, which began with the slogan of freedom, built within a few years a state that subordinated the law to itself.

Political wisdom for tomorrow's Iran can be summarized in one sentence: *Iran needs neither of the two poles; it needs a point at which the pillar of rationality can stand—a capable state that regards the law as binding upon itself.* Korea, Taiwan, and Spain found this point. In the past hundred years Iran has passed through it, but has never stood at it.

CHAPTER 7

Chapter 7. From the Coup of 1921 to the Change of Dynasty in 1925: When the Manager Became the Owner

Reza Khan came by coup in 1921, but in 1925 he became king by vote of the Majlis, without the constitutional order having any real say in the matter. The interval between these two dates is the most important five political years in twentieth-century Iran; for in these five years a man who had come by force sought, and to a large extent managed, with British support, to acquire legitimacy. And then, at the moment of his zenith, he took a decision that converted that legitimacy from a "conditional contract" into "hereditary ownership." This chapter is about that decision.

7.1 The Demand to Which the Coup Responded

On 3 Esfand 1299 (21 February 1921), Cossack forces under the command of Reza Khan, in coordination with Seyyed Zia al-Din Tabatabai and with the encouragement—or at least the acquiescence—of the British military command in northern Iran, took Tehran. Seyyed Zia stepped aside about three months later. Reza Khan stayed, and his staying was no accident.

The coup was the kind of event that earns its legitimacy not from the way it came to power but from what it does afterward. The Iran of 1921 was a country that had collapsed from within: the Jangal movement in Gilan, Simko's rebellion in Azerbaijan, autonomous khans in the south, Sheikh Khaz'al in Khuzestan with close ties to Britain, insecure roads, and a central government whose king spent most of his time in Europe. The dominant demand of society, after fifteen years of turmoil, was one word: *security.*

Reza Khan read this demand correctly. In five years he built a unified army out of the Cossacks and the gendarmerie, suppressed local rebellions, and in 1924 brought Sheikh Khaz'al to submission. Each of these victories produced output legitimacy in the precise sense of the term. Many of those who loathed the coup—including a number of constitutionalists and nationalists—came in these years to see Reza Khan as someone doing what the Constitutional Revolution had been unable to do.

7.2 A Commander Who Employed Experts

One feature of these years has received less attention: Reza Khan, who himself had little formal education, had the capacity to recognize and employ capable people. Mohammad Ali Foroughi, Abdolhossein Teymourtash, and Ali Akbar Davar—three of the most outstanding political and administrative minds of their generation—joined him in these years and designed the architecture of the modern state. The American financial mission headed by Arthur Millspaugh, which came to Iran in 1922, put the finances in order.

But on this very criterion the first sign of the pattern we named in Chapter 2 appears. In 1927, after a dispute over control of the army budget, Millspaugh was forced to leave Iran. His fate repeated that of Shuster in another decade, with one decisive difference: this time it was not a foreign state but the Iranian government itself that removed an expert who insisted on limiting military power. And a few years later, those same three outstanding minds—Teymourtash, Davar, and Foroughi—met their fates: one died in prison, another committed suicide, and the third was forced into retirement. *A*

leader who employs experts to build but does not tolerate them saying "no" has hired only the instruments of building, not wisdom and rationality.

7.3 The Republic Test: The First Intelligent Retreat

In the winter of 1924, after Reza Khan had become prime minister and Ahmad Shah had gone to Europe, a campaign began to proclaim a republic—a campaign that openly saw Reza Khan as the future president. The opposition was fierce: a large part of the clergy, who equated a republic with the secular experience of neighboring Turkey; the Tehran bazaar; and deputies in the Majlis led by Seyyed Hassan Modarres.

In Farvardin 1303 (March 1924) Reza Khan went to Qom and met the senior clerics, after which he formally abandoned the republican campaign. This retreat, by the fifth criterion—response to discontent—was one of his wisest political decisions. He read the discontent, weighed the cost of continuing, and changed course before defeat turned into crisis. The leader who could retreat in 1924 could no longer do so in 1935 at the Goharshad Mosque or in 1941 before the Allies. The difference was not in his person; it was in his position. *A prime minister still needed the consent of others. An absolute king no longer did.*

In these same years there were signs from the other direction as well. Pressure on the critical press had begun, and the murder of Mirzadeh Eshghi, a poet and opposition journalist, in Tir 1303 (July 1924)—which many contemporaries attributed to agents of the police—was a warning that the cost of speaking truth to power was rising.

7.4 The Moment of Divergence: 9 Aban 1304 (31 October 1925)

On 9 Aban 1304, the National Consultative Assembly voted to end the Qajar dynasty, and a few weeks later a Constituent Assembly entrusted the monarchy to Reza Pahlavi and his family. In the session of the Majlis, several deputies objected—among them Mohammad Mosaddegh, Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh, Hossein Ala, and Yahya Dowlatabadi. Modarres left the session in protest.

Mosaddegh's argument in that session is, in this book's view, the most precise statesmanlike analysis of the problem of legitimacy offered in those years. The essence of his argument was this: *"Reza Khan as prime minister is both a servant of the country and accountable to the Majlis. If he becomes king, there are only two possibilities. Either, in accordance with the Constitution, he will be an unaccountable king, and the country will be deprived of his executive services; or he will be a king who also governs—and in that case, someone who governs and is not accountable is the very despotism the Constitutional Revolution came to end."*

This is precisely the moment of divergence for which the dual-benefit test was built. What served the country—a capable state that remained accountable to the representatives of the nation—diverged from what served Reza Khan's personal power—hereditary, unaccountable authority. And Reza Khan chose the latter.

7.5 The Strongest Defense

In accordance with the rule of the rival narrative, we must hear the strongest defense of this decision. Reza Khan's defender will say: the republic had failed a year earlier, so the only form of government society would accept was monarchy. Ahmad Shah was an absent and ineffective king who had left the state headless. A prime minister who could be removed at any moment by a vote of the Majlis

could not carry forward a long-term program of modernization. And the change of dynasty was carried out by vote of the Majlis and a Constituent Assembly—that is, in a legal form.

This defense is serious, and part of it is correct. But there is a reply to each of its points. The failure of the republic showed that society wanted a monarchy, not that the monarchy had to be absolute. Ahmad Shah's absence could have been resolved with a regency or with a limited monarchy from another dynasty. The need for program stability could have been met with the backing of the stable majority in the Majlis that Reza Khan enjoyed in those years. And the legality of the form, with a Majlis whose elections had been held under the influence of the army, is a claim that requires examination, not acceptance. *Legality is the first layer of legitimacy; but Reza Khan's personal despotism revealed itself in that very first layer.*

7.6 Scorecard: Reza Khan (1921–1925)

Table 7.1. Scorecard: Reza Khan, 1921–1925

Criterion	Score	Principal evidence	Confidence
Understanding public consent	3	Correct reading of the demand for security; retreat from the republic	High
Management of resources	2	Priority to the army's budget, without parliamentary oversight—though security was necessary	Medium
Recognition of the national interest	3	Ending local autonomies and foreign influence in Khuzestan	High
Use of experts	3	Foroughi, Teymourtash, Davar, the Millspaugh mission—with the first signs of intolerance	High
Response to discontent	2	Intelligent retreat in 1924, alongside growing pressure on the press	Medium
Dual-benefit test (decision of 1925)	Self-serving	Chose unaccountable hereditary authority over accountable executive authority	High

The summary of this card in one sentence: as manager of the country, Reza Khan earns good and sometimes brilliant marks on most criteria. The problem began at the moment he wanted to be the *owner* of the country. *A manager must earn consent every day; an owner imagines he has inherited it.*

7.7 What Is Handed On to Part Three

In 1925 Reza Shah ascended the throne with real capital of performance legitimacy. Sixteen years later, in Shahrivar 1320 (August 1941), when his army fell apart within a few days and the Allies occupied the country, no one came forward to defend his monarchy. Part Three of the book asks where this capital was spent.

Chapter 11 in particular dissects the end of this period with the same criteria: whether Reza Shah correctly read the global balance of power in 1939–1941; whether the option of a deal with the Allies—and obtaining concessions in return for cooperation—existed before the invasion and why it was not used; and whether, in the days after the invasion, decisions served the national interest or the continuation of the monarchy in the Pahlavi family. These questions have no simple answers, and Chapter 11 will weigh the evidence on both sides.

Special Essay. The Constitution and the Legitimacy of Governance: A Text That Never Ruled

A constitution, in its simplest definition, is a contract of legitimacy put into writing. It is the written answer of a nation to the question that Chapter 6 called the fundamental question of modern Iranian politics: where does the right to command come from, how far does it extend, and who restrains it? From 1906 to the present, Iran has had two constitutions—the Constitutional one and that of the Islamic Republic—and both, in different ways, have answered this question. But neither of these answers, at fateful moments, became the real authority of decision.

This essay does three things. First, it shows under what conditions a constitution creates legitimacy and under what conditions it burns it. Second, it dissects the Constitutional Law—perhaps the best example for such a study in the contemporary history of the Middle East: a text born with the signature of Mozaffar al-Din Shah that held official validity for seventy-two years and almost never ruled. Third, from this dissection it draws principles for the constitution of a future Iran.

1. Constitution or Constitutionalism

The first distinction, on which the rest of this essay rests: *having a constitution* is not the same as *having constitutionalism.* A constitution is a text; constitutionalism is a political culture—the shared belief of rulers and citizens that power must be limited, and that this limitation must be observed even when it is unwelcome. Almost every country in the world has a constitution. Few have constitutionalism.

The question, then, is not whether Iran had a good constitution. The Constitutional text was, by the standards of its time, an advanced text. The question is why this text did not become a culture. *A constitution that has only been written is like an oath that has only been spoken: its worth is measured at the moment when keeping it has a cost.*

2. Three Types of Constitution: Loewenstein's Typology

Karl Loewenstein, a German jurist, divided constitutions into three types based not on their text but on the relationship between the text and the reality of power. This typology is the most precise instrument for understanding the fate of the constitution in Iran.

- **Normative constitution:** The text actually governs the process of power. The powerful observe it, and when they do not, there are institutions to compel them. Like a garment that fits the body and is worn.
- **Nominal constitution:** The text is valid, but the reality of power has not yet conformed to it; social and political conditions do not yet permit its full implementation. Like a garment hanging in the closet, waiting for the day the body grows to fit it.
- **Semantic constitution:** The text is applied, but only to formalize a power determined outside it. The text serves power, not power the text. Like a garment that is worn but is not a garment; it is a disguise.

In its seventy-two years of official life, the Constitutional Law experienced all three types—but in the reverse of the order a nation hopes for:

Table E.1. The Constitutional Law through Loewenstein's typology

Period	Type	Judgment
1906–1921	Nominal	An advanced text; no state existed to implement it
1921–1941	Semantic	The text was preserved to formalize a power built outside it
1941–1953	Close to normative	The only period in which the Majlis truly made and unmade governments
1953–1979	Semantic	Revisions and practices turned the text into an instrument of concentrating power

This table in one sentence: *the Constitutional Law came close to what it was written for only once, and only for twelve years. For the rest of its life it either waited or served as a mask.*

3. Why a Constitution Does Not Enforce Itself

The deeper question is this: what compels a constitution to be implemented at all? The text itself has neither weapons nor money. The answer given by Barry Weingast, the political economist, is the key to this essay: *a constitution enforces itself when the ruler knows that violating it will provoke the coordinated resistance of elites and citizens.*

In other words, a constitution lives not by courts but by a shared expectation: the expectation that if the ruler crosses the line, others will stand against him together, not one by one. Where this expectation exists, the ruler does not even think of crossing the line. Where it does not exist, no text, however well written, will restrain him.

In Iran, this shared expectation never took durable shape. In 1908, when Mohammad Ali Shah shelled the Majlis, resistance formed—but in Tabriz, Gilan, and among the Bakhtiari, not as a coordinated national response, and it took a year. In 1925, 1941, and 1979—the three moments examined in section 6 of this essay—no coordinated resistance formed to defend the constitution. *A constitution for which no one is prepared to pay a price is in practice not a constitution; it is a proposal that the powerful can accept or reject.*

4. What Makes a Constitution Legitimate, and What Burns Its Legitimacy

The legitimacy of a constitution comes from four sources: its *origin* (who wrote it and how), its *content* (what power it gives to whom and how it restrains that power), its *mechanism* (who interprets and guards it, and how it is changed), and its *performance* (whether it is actually implemented). In each of these four sources there are factors that confer legitimacy and factors that burn it.

4.1 Legitimizing Factors

1. **Inclusive origin.** A constitution written with broad participation—an elected constituent assembly, negotiation among society's principal forces, and public approval in a free referendum—has legitimacy from the outset. Spain's Constitution of 1978, in the drafting of which left, right, and regional nationalists all had a share, and South Africa's Constitution of 1996, born of negotiation between the ruling whites and the anti-apartheid movement, are brilliant examples of this source. *A constitution in whose writing all had a share is one in whose keeping all will have a share.*

2. **A single source of sovereignty.** The text must state unambiguously where the final right to command comes from. Where two final sources sit side by side, the constitution has not resolved the conflict; it has postponed it.
3. **Separation and mutual restraint of powers.** No office or institution should have unaccountable power. Whoever commands must be accountable; and whoever is not accountable must not command. This was precisely Mosaddegh's argument in Aban 1304 (October 1925).
4. **Equal citizenship rights whose enforcement is guaranteed.** Not merely equality before the law, but rights that a court can defend against the government itself.
5. **Distribution of power and resources.** A constitution that concentrates all political power and all economic resources in the capital turns citizens on the periphery into spectators of government. The great mistake made after the conquest of Tehran by the revolutionary constitutionalists—among them Sattar Khan, Baqer Khan, and Sardar As'ad Bakhtiari—was the failure to add a supplement to the Constitutional Law that would remove the concentration of power from the center and distribute it through a democratic process across all parts of Iran; the result was discontent in the peripheral regions and growing deprivation in regions such as Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Sistan, Khorasan, and other parts of the country. The concentration of sources of wealth in the center can drive any government toward corruption. India's Constitution of 1950 for this reason provided for an independent "Finance Commission," which every five years determines the states' share of national revenues on the basis of a transparent formula. Germany's Basic Law of 1949 incorporated a federal system and a mechanism of "fiscal equalization" between rich and poor states. *A government that accumulates wealth in the center will sooner or later accumulate discontent on the periphery.*
6. **An independent arbiter.** An institution—a constitutional court or supreme court—that can annul laws and government decrees if they contradict the constitution, and is itself independent of political power. Germany's Constitutional Court is one of that country's most respected institutions, precisely because it has repeatedly ruled against the wishes of the government.
7. **Difficult and inclusive amendment.** A constitution must be changeable—otherwise it breaks as society changes—but not at the will of one person or one faction. A special majority, public approval, and the passage of time are the three usual barriers to hasty amendment.
8. **Implementation and effectiveness.** A text that is not implemented loses its credibility every day. Every principle that remains on paper teaches citizens not to take the other principles seriously either.

4.2 Delegitimizing Factors

9. **Dual sovereignty.** Two final sources of the right to command in one text—nation and monarchy in Constitutional practice, nation and *shari'a* in Article 2 of its Supplement, and republicanism and *velayat-e faqih* in the Constitution of 1979—plant at the heart of the constitution a conflict that is ultimately resolved by force.
10. **Amendment in the ruler's favor.** Every time the constitution is changed to add power to the holder of power, a clear message reaches society: this text is not a contract between nation and government; it is an instrument of government.

11. **The semantic constitution.** When the text is preserved but real power is exercised outside it, the constitution becomes not merely ineffective but a symbol of hypocrisy—and a symbol of hypocrisy is more harmful than the absence of a constitution.
12. **Emergency as the rule.** Special powers, martial law, and the suspension of law in the name of necessity, if they do not remain exceptions and become the rule, reduce the constitution to a marginal note.
13. **Exclusion of groups.** A constitution that keeps part of society—ethnic, religious, gendered, or political—out of equal rights or out of participation in its drafting and implementation turns that part into its permanent opponent.
14. **Concentration of resources and power in the center.** Even when the text speaks of equality, if it has no mechanism for distributing resources, equality is interpreted in practice in favor of the center.
15. **The foreigner as arbiter.** When fateful moments—succession, change of government, transfer of power—are decided not by the constitution's mechanism but by agreement with a foreign power, the constitution is demoted from authority to ceremony.
16. **The absence of defenders.** And finally, the most important factor: a constitution that no organized group in society is prepared to defend dies in the first crisis—unmourned.

The following sections show that the Constitutional Law, over its lifetime, experienced almost all the delegitimizing factors—and of the legitimizing factors fully possessed only one: its origin in a popular movement that had demanded it.

5. The Constitutional Law: Dissecting a Text That Never Ruled

5.1 Proprietary Monarchy or Custodial Monarchy: Power as Domination

The first root of the Constitutional failure lay not in the text but in the interpretation that the holders of power had of power. The text, at least in one article, had given a clear answer to the fundamental question: Article 35 of the Supplementary Law called the monarchy a "trust" (*vadi'eh*) placed by the nation in the person of the king. A trust is something held in custody—something its custodian does not own and must one day return to its owner. And Article 26, more explicitly, declared that the powers of the realm derive from the nation.

This distinction had also been formulated within Iranian political thought itself. Mirza Mohammad Hossein Na'ini, one of the constitutionalist jurists, distinguished in his treatise *Tanbih al-Umma va Tanzih al-Milla* between two kinds of monarchy: *proprietary monarchy* (*saltanat-e tamlikiyeh*), in which the ruler regards the country and the people as his property and disposes of them as he wishes, and *custodial monarchy* (*saltanat-e velayatiyeh*), in which the ruler is a trustee and a limited and accountable guardian. The Constitutional Revolution, in his view, was an attempt to move from the first to the second.

What happened was the reverse of this transition. Mohammad Ali Shah regarded the constitution as a concession his father had given under pressure, which he had the right to take back. Reza Shah kept the text but exercised power as though the text did not exist. And Mohammad Reza Shah, in the years of his authority, revised the constitution several times—each time to add to his own powers. In all three cases *power was understood not as the consensual distribution of responsibility among the people but as domination over others.* This was proprietary monarchy in constitutional dress.

This interpretation of power was neither accidental nor merely personal. It was rooted in a political culture that for centuries had seen the ruler as the absolute owner of the country—what Homa Katouzian has called "arbitrary rule": a government dependent not on law but on the will of the ruler, in which, for that very reason, every succession turns into a crisis. The Constitutional Revolution tried to change this culture with a text. But culture cannot be changed by a text; only by repeated experience. And the experience Iranians had of power in the following seventy years was almost always the experience of ownership, not of custodianship. *A constitution can say that power is a trust; but as long as the trustees regard themselves as owners, the text merely records a wish not yet fulfilled.*

5.2 The Negligence of the Conquerors of Tehran: Supplements That Were Never Written

In Tir 1288 (July 1909), constitutionalist fighters from the north and south took Tehran and deposed Mohammad Ali Shah. It was an unparalleled moment: for the first time, popular forces had triumphed over absolute power and could rewrite the rules of the game. The question is what they did with this opportunity.

The answer, in the author's view, is that they neglected a very great matter: *completing the constitution with mechanisms that would recognize equality of rights—especially in the distribution of economic resources among the regions of Iran—and prevent the concentration of all sources of power and wealth in the center.* The consequence of this neglect was the continued poverty of various regions of Iran and the repetition of the same pattern of concentration in the Pahlavi period and the Islamic Republic.

For this judgment to withstand a careful reader, it must be formulated with precision. The Constitutional text was not entirely oblivious to this matter. Article 8 of the Supplement recognized all inhabitants of the country as equal before state law. Articles 90 to 93 provided for provincial and district associations (*anjomans*)—elected bodies that supervised local public affairs—and required that provincial budgets be published. A separate law on these associations was also passed in 1907. That is, the skeleton of decentralization existed in the text.

What did not exist, and what the conquerors of 1909 did not build, were three things:

- **Fiscal decentralization.** The text provided for the associations but gave them no independent revenue, no guaranteed share of national taxes, and no formula for dividing resources between the center and the provinces. *An association without a budget is not an oversight body; it is a complaints bureau.*
- **An enforcement guarantee.** No institution was provided that could compel the central government to respect the rights of the provinces if it ignored them.
- **Political priority.** After victory, the conquerors spent their energy on deposing the shah, trying and executing opponents—including Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri—and then on factional rivalries among themselves. In 1910 matters came to armed confrontation between the constitutional government and some of the very fighters who had taken Tehran. The provincial associations, which in the early years had been powerful especially in Tabriz, gradually lost their effect.

The author's view, then, with this precision, stands firm: the conquerors of Tehran did not complete the text toward real decentralization, nor did they turn the skeleton that existed in the text into a living institution. *A victory spent on settling scores rather than building rules changes only the*

rulers, not the rules of government. And the unspoken rule that prevailed from then on was that *whoever holds the capital holds the country.*

5.3 A Pattern Repeated for a Hundred Years

This negligence had a hundred-year consequence. Reza Shah set aside the provincial associations and made centralization the principle of state-building. In 1962 Mohammad Reza Shah tried to build a new base by amending the law on provincial and district associations—and this very amendment, by granting women the vote and changing the requirement of the oath, became the first spark of clerical protest and of the events that led to 15 Khordad (June 1963). The irony of history was that the Pahlavis' only serious attempt to revive local institutions was used not to distribute power but as an instrument in a struggle over central power.

The Islamic Republic's Constitution of 1979 wrote, in this respect, a more advanced text than the Constitutional one. Article 48 stipulated that there must be no discrimination in the exploitation of natural resources and the distribution of economic activities among provinces and regions. Article 100 and the articles following it provided for local councils. Article 15 permitted the use of local languages in the press and the teaching of their literature. But the local councils were not formed until 1999—twenty years after adoption—and when they were formed they received little fiscal authority. And the chronic poverty of provinces such as Sistan and Baluchestan, Kurdistan, and parts of Khuzestan—some of which themselves possess enormous natural resources—shows that Article 48 met the same fate as Articles 90 to 93 of the Constitutional Law.

The lesson of this repetition goes beyond any text: *Iran's problem has not been a lack of principles in the constitution; it has been the lack of a mechanism that turns a principle into a budget, and a budget into a right.* The right to a share of resources, until it is tied to a guaranteed fiscal formula and independent arbitration, is a wish that any government can praise and ignore.

6. Three Tests of Failure: The Constitution at Moments of Destiny

The effectiveness of any constitution is measured in one kind of moment: the moment of transfer of power. In ordinary times, even authoritarian systems preserve the appearance of law. But when the question is who shall govern—when a king is deposed, a successor appointed, or a system collapses—it becomes clear where the real authority of decision lies. The Constitutional Law passed through such a test at three vital moments. In all three, *the constitution determined the form of the decision, but not its content.* The decision was made elsewhere, and the constitution merely recorded it.

6.1 The First Test: Aban 1304 (October 1925)—The Change of Dynasty

In form, the change of dynasty in 1925 was carried out in compliance with the Constitution. The National Consultative Assembly voted to end the Qajars, and a Constituent Assembly convened for the purpose revised Articles 36 to 38 of the Supplement and entrusted the monarchy to Reza Mirpanj and his descendants. None of these steps lay outside the legal framework.

But in content, the Constitutional Law was not the authority of decision. The decision had already been made by three factors: an army that was the country's only organized force; a Majlis whose elections in many constituencies had been held under the influence of that same army; and an international environment in which Britain—which five years earlier had encouraged or at least tolerated the coup of 1921—saw Reza Khan as the guarantor of the stability its interests in Iran required. The author's view is that Britain's national interests were decisive in the rise of Reza Shah.

Historians disagree on the extent to which this role was "decisive" and the extent to which it was "enabling." But on one point there is no doubt: at no stage was it the constitution and its institutions that decided the future of the monarchy; they merely formalized a decision made elsewhere.

Mosaddegh's argument in that very session—which we saw in Chapter 7—was precisely this: the change of dynasty violated the spirit of the constitution, which did not separate responsibility from power, while observing its letter. *A constitution whose spirit can be killed by its letter needs a guardian outside the text; and the Iran of 1925 had no such guardian.*

6.2 The Second Test: Shahrivar 1320 (September 1941)—Succession

In Shahrivar 1320, too, the constitution was observed in form. Article 37 of the Supplement, as revised in 1925, entrusted the monarchy to the king's eldest son, and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi took the oath in the Majlis on 26 Shahrivar (17 September 1941). But as Chapter 11 showed, the real decision as to whether the monarchy would remain in the Pahlavi family was made not in the Majlis but in a hidden negotiation between Mohammad Ali Foroughi and the representatives of the occupying powers—a negotiation in which, according to historical sources, Britain had even examined bringing back a prince of the Qajar dynasty.

The author's view is that in Shahrivar 1320 it was not the constitution but the mechanism of Foroughi's hidden agreement with the British that made Mohammad Reza Pahlavi his father's successor. This judgment, with one small correction, is accurate: the constitution determined the *form* of succession—the crown prince took the oath on the basis of Article 37—but its *occurrence* was determined by an agreement outside the constitution. Had that agreement reached a different result, the Majlis would probably have ratified that different result as well.

This test shows the seventh delegitimizing factor—the foreigner as arbiter—with the bitterest clarity. *A nation whose king's successor is decided in a foreign embassy does not regard that king as its own, even if the successor takes the oath in its own Majlis.* Mohammad Reza Shah carried this wound, alongside the wound of 28 Mordad (August 1953), until the end of his reign.

6.3 Between Two Tests: The Constitution as Instrument and as Battlefield

Between the second and third tests, the constitution took on two further roles, both of which eroded its legitimacy.

The first role was as *an instrument for concentrating power.* In 1949, after the assassination attempt on the shah, a Constituent Assembly was convened that revised Article 48 to give the shah the right to dissolve the Majlis—a right that the first constitutionalists had fought precisely to prevent. In 1957 further revisions were made, and in 1967 articles concerning the regency were also changed. Each of these revisions was legal in form. But their pattern carried one message: the constitution is a text that the king rewrites in his own favor whenever he deems it necessary.

The second role was as *a battlefield.* In Mordad 1332 (August 1953), Mosaddegh dissolved the Seventeenth Majlis by referendum, and the shah, in the absence of the Majlis, issued the decree dismissing him. Both sides invoked the constitution, and both, in some way, had departed from it. A constitution that both sides of a dispute regard as their weapon, and for whose interpretation there is no independent arbiter, is no longer the authority for resolving the dispute; it has itself become the subject of the dispute. *When a constitution has no arbiter, force appoints the arbiter*—and on 28 Mordad, force did.

6.4 A Nail in the Coffin: The Rastakhiz Party

On 11 Esfand 1353 (2 March 1975), Mohammad Reza Shah dissolved all parties and founded the single Rastakhiz Party. He announced that Iranians must either join this party or, if they did not agree with the system, could take their passports and leave the country.

This decision was, from the standpoint of the constitution, more than a political error. Article 21 of the Supplement had recognized the freedom of associations and gatherings. A one-party system was incompatible not only with the spirit of this article but with the logic of the entire Constitutional Law—which was built on competition, representation, and the separation of powers. Before Rastakhiz, the constitution had been semantic. After it, even the mask had been removed. *A government that makes its citizens choose between membership in its party and leaving their homeland has told them that their constitution is no longer their common home.* In the author's words, Rastakhiz was a great nail driven into the coffin of the Constitutional Law before the crisis.

6.5 The Third Test: Aban to Bahman 1357 (November 1978–February 1979)—Collapse

On 15 Aban 1357 (6 November 1978), Mohammad Reza Shah said in a televised message that he had heard the voice of the people's revolution. On the same day a military government took office. Two months later, on 26 Dey (16 January 1979), he left the country—after appointing Shapour Bakhtiar as prime minister and forming a Regency Council.

The author's view is that the shah, without submitting the question of his deposition or retention to the judgment of the Constitutional Law, turned his back on that very constitution by leaving the country. This judgment is, at its core, accurate—and it is worth stating in detail.

In those days the shah had several legal instruments at his disposal, each of which could have entrusted the fate of the monarchy to a legal mechanism: formal abdication in favor of the crown prince, with the regency provided for in the constitution; or submitting the question of the system's future to an elected body in a free process. He chose neither. He neither abdicated nor stayed. He left the country on a "trip" and left behind him an institution—the Regency Council—whose legal basis was itself in doubt. The chairman of this very council went to Paris a few days later and resigned, declaring it illegal.

And perhaps the bitterest sign of the death of the Constitutional Law was this: in those days even its historical heirs had washed their hands of it. The National Front, which regarded itself as the heir of Mosaddegh and of the Constitutional Revolution, declared in Aban 1357 (November 1978), in a statement in Paris, that the monarchical system was illegitimate. Only Shapour Bakhtiar—himself from the National Front, and expelled from it for that reason—tried to stand within the framework of the Constitutional Law. He lasted thirty-seven days. On 22 Bahman (11 February 1979), the army's Supreme Council declared neutrality, and the constitution that had been born seventy-two years earlier with the signature of Mozaffar al-Din Shah disappeared without a single institution or organized group rising to defend it.

This was the eighth delegitimizing factor: *the absence of defenders.* The Constitutional Law did not die by a bullet; it died of indifference. A shah who had made it his instrument for twenty-five years did not rely on it on the day of crisis, because he knew that no one else would rely on it. And a nation that for seventy years had seen that this text was never decisive at fateful moments saw no reason to defend it at this moment.

6.6 The Three Tests at a Glance

Table E.2. Three tests of the Constitutional Law

Test	What the constitution determined	What actually decided	Dominant delegitimizing factor
Aban 1304 (October 1925)	The form of the change of dynasty: vote of the Majlis and the Constituent Assembly	The army, engineered elections, the international environment and Britain's role	Semantic constitution
Shahrivar 1320 (September 1941)	The form of succession: Article 37 and the oath	Foroughi's agreement with the occupying powers	The foreigner as arbiter
Aban to Bahman 1357 (November 1978–February 1979)	Almost nothing	The street, rifts in the army, and departure from the country without abdication	The absence of defenders

A constitution that, at three moments of transfer of power, did not determine even the form of the decision at one of them and determined only its form at the other two has taught the people that *power in Iran comes from somewhere else.* And a nation that has learned this, at the next moment of transfer of power, turns not to the text but to that same somewhere else—to the street, to charisma, to the army, or to the foreigner. The revolution of 1979, from this perspective, was not merely the fall of a king; it was the logical end of seventy years of experience in which the constitution had never been the arbiter.

7. Legacy: The Constitution of the Islamic Republic and the Repetition of Duality

The Constitution of 1979 began with an origin the Constitutional Law never had: a referendum on the type of system in Farvardin 1358 (March 1979), an elected assembly to draft the text, and another referendum to approve it in Azar of that year (December 1979). In terms of origin, this constitution enjoyed broad legitimacy at the outset. But it carried three delegitimizing factors from the beginning—and in the revision of 1989 it intensified all three. Parts Six and Seven of the book examine this text in detail; here we show only the pattern.

- **Dual sovereignty.** Article 6 states that the affairs of the country are administered on the basis of public votes; Articles 5, 57, and 110 entrust final authority to the *vali-ye faqih* (the guardian jurist). The same unfinished dispute of Article 2 of the Constitutional Supplement—nation or *shari'a*—was this time resolved in favor of the *shari'a*, as interpreted by one institution. The revision of 1989, by adding the word "absolute" (*motlaqeh*) to Article 57, made this resolution final.
- **Amendment in the ruler's favor.** Under Article 177, the initiation of revision lies with the Leader, and certain principles—including the guardianship of the community (*velayat-e amr*)—are declared unamendable. The comparison with Germany's Basic Law is instructive: that text, too, has an "eternity clause," but Germany's eternity clause protects human dignity, democracy, and federalism—that is, the citizen against the government. Iran's eternity clause protects the position of the ruler—that is, the government against the citizen. *An eternity clause, when it defends the rights of the nation, is the backbone of legitimacy; when it defends the position of the ruler, it is the prison wall of legitimacy.*

- **The gap between text and implementation.** Articles 48, 15, and 100—non-discriminatory distribution of resources among provinces, linguistic rights, and local councils—as we saw in section 5.3, repeated the fate of the Constitutional provincial associations.

And one further factor, which the Constitutional Law did not have: an institution that was supposed to be an independent arbiter—the Guardian Council—through its interpretation of Article 99, regarding its supervision of elections as "approbatory" (*estesvabi*), became not an arbiter but the gatekeeper of political competition. *A constitutional court that is not independent of the holder of power is not an arbiter; it is his legal arm.*

8. Comparative Lessons

Table E.3. Comparative lessons in constitutional legitimacy

Country and text	What made it legitimate	Lesson for Iran
United States, 1787	A supreme court able to strike down laws; federalism; difficult amendment	The durability of a constitution lies in the difficulty of changing it and in independent arbitration
Germany, 1949	An eternity clause for dignity and democracy; a powerful constitutional court; fiscal equalization among the states	An eternity clause must protect the citizen; resources must be distributed by formula
India, 1950	An inclusive constituent assembly; an independent finance commission; linguistic rights and federalism	A highly diverse country can remain united through the lawful distribution of resources
Spain, 1978	Agreement of all forces; autonomous communities with fiscal powers	Regional diversity can be accommodated in the constitution, not on the battlefield
South Africa, 1996	Agreement on basic principles before drafting; a constitutional court that measured the text against them	Rules before winners—even in the writing of the constitution itself
Turkey, 1961 and 1982 (warning)	—	A constitution written after a coup and under military supervision is born with a legitimacy deficit

9. Principles of a Legitimizing Constitution for a Future Iran

From these hundred and twenty years of experience, ten principles emerge. Each is a response to one of the failures we have seen in this essay.

17. **An inclusive, two-stage origin.** First, agreement of society's principal forces on basic principles; then drafting of the text in an elected constituent assembly; and finally a free referendum. *Response to:* the negligence of the conquerors of 1909 and the rule of "rules before winners."
18. **A single source of sovereignty: the nation.** No second source—monarchical, religious, or ideological—has a final right to command alongside the public vote. *Response to:* Article 2 of the Constitutional Supplement and Articles 5 and 57 of the 1979 Constitution.
19. **No power without responsibility.** Every official with executive power is accountable to an elected institution; and every official who is not accountable has no executive power. *Response to:* Mosaddegh's argument in 1925.

20. **An independent constitutional court.** With judges chosen by a special majority and by various institutions, serving long, non-renewable terms, and able to annul laws and decrees. *Response to:* 28 Mordad (1953), and to the Guardian Council.
21. **An eternity clause for rights, not for the ruler.** Human dignity, fundamental rights, and the democratic character of the system are unamendable; no office or institution is.
22. **Political and fiscal decentralization.** Elected provincial councils with independent revenue; an independent fiscal commission that determines the provinces' share of national revenues—including natural-resource revenue—on the basis of a transparent formula; and a guaranteed share for the regions in which resources are located. *Response to:* Articles 90–93 of the Constitutional Law and Article 48 of the 1979 Constitution—principles that never became budgets.
23. **Equal citizenship and linguistic and cultural rights.** Full equality without ethnic, religious, gender, or political distinction, with the right to education in the mother tongue alongside the national language.
24. **Neutrality of the armed forces.** The army and security institutions are, by constitutional mandate, barred from politics and economic activity and subordinate to elected civilian authority. *Response to:* 1925, 1953, and the decades after 1989.
25. **A clear rule for the transfer of power.** The text must have an explicit, time-bound mechanism, under the supervision of an elected institution and the constitutional court, for every possible situation—succession, resignation, removal, incapacity, and power vacuum. *A direct response to the three tests of 1925, 1941, and 1979.*
26. **Difficult amendment, limited emergency.** Amendment only by a special majority in two consecutive parliaments and approval by referendum; and a state of emergency only for a limited period, with parliamentary extension and judicial oversight. *Response to:* the revisions of 1949, 1957, 1967, and 1989.

But none of these ten principles suffices without an eleventh—one that is written in no text: *a society prepared to defend its constitution.* A constitution does not survive by its text; it survives by the shared expectation of citizens—the expectation that if anyone crosses the line, all will stand against him together. Building this expectation is the work of parties, a free press, civil society, and civic education. *Jurists write the constitution; but citizens make it a constitution.*

10. Summary of the Essay

The Constitutional Law, with all its shortcomings, was a text that could have brought Iran to custodial monarchy—a trustee and accountable government. Three things prevented it: an interpretation of power that saw it as domination rather than responsibility; a victory that was spent on settling scores rather than completing the rules; and seventy years of experience in which, every time the question "who shall govern?" arose, its answer was given somewhere outside the constitution.

Iran today, with another constitution, stands at the same point. And the lesson that the Constitutional Revolution learned at the cost of seventy years is more vital for tomorrow's Iran than any other: *the legitimacy of a government comes from the constitution, provided that the constitution—and not the powerful—has the last word at the moment of transfer of power.* Any constitution that does not pass this test, however beautifully written, is merely a prelude to the next revolution.

PART THREE: The First Pahlavi—Legitimacy Through Order and Authoritarian Modernization (1925–1941)

Reza Shah ascended the throne with an unwritten contract: *"I bring order; you obey."* A society that had experienced fifteen years of turmoil accepted this contract, at least at first. The question of this part is why a contract accepted in 1925 had not a single defender in 1941.

The short answer is this: in sixteen years Reza Shah fulfilled his obligation—he brought order—but he changed the terms of the contract unilaterally. He did not consider obedience sufficient and demanded submission; he did not consider order sufficient and demanded everything, from people's dress to their lands; and he removed from his path anyone who could tell him that the contract was breaking down. *A contract that only one party has the right to interpret is not a contract; it is a command.* And a command, unlike a contract, obliges no one to defend its issuer.

CHAPTER 8

Chapter 8. The Architecture of Power and the Management of Legitimacy: A Room in Which No One Said "No"

Every government has two architectures: the visible architecture, seen in the constitution and the organizational chart, and the real architecture, which shows where decisions are made and who can stop them. In the era of Reza Shah, the gap between these two architectures was greater than in any other period of the past century—and, at the same time, more visible. The Constitutional Law was in place; the Majlis held sessions; the government had ministers. But every informed Iranian knew that all of this was a stage, and that there was only one actor.

8.1 The Claimed Source of Legitimacy: Order, Nation, and Modernity

Reza Shah built his right to command on three foundations. The first was *order*—the capital he had accumulated in the years 1921 to 1925. The second was *the nation*, in a new sense: a nationalism that reached back to ancient Iran and defined Iranian identity on the basis of the Persian language, pre-Islamic history, and territorial integrity. The millennial celebration of Ferdowsi in 1934 and the official request to foreign governments to use the name "Iran" instead of "Persia" in 1935 were symbols of this foundation. The third was *modernity*: the promise to bring Iran into the caravan of advanced nations.

What was absent from these three foundations was the vote. Reza Shah never claimed that his right to command came from the people's choice. And this absence was not accidental; it was a conscious choice. He had concluded from the experience of the Constitutional Revolution that the people's vote brings chaos, and he regarded order as a superior substitute for it. *He was right to see that the Constitutional order without a state had failed; but he drew the wrong conclusion: that a state without the Constitutional order would succeed.*

8.2 The Center of Decision: One Man

The real architecture of power in this period was simple: all important decisions, and many minor ones, passed through a single center. The Sixth through Thirteenth Majlises were formed by elections whose lists of acceptable candidates were prepared before the vote with the input of the court and the security and military apparatus. The deputies who had opposed him in the Fifth Majlis—Mosaddegh, Modarres, and others—either left the scene or were exiled and imprisoned. Modarres remained in exile for years and died in that exile in 1937.

The cabinet, too, became an apparatus for executing commands. Ministers, even the most capable among them, often learned of decisions after they had been made. This architecture had two features whose understanding is essential for the rest of the book. First, *the center of decision was visible.* No one doubted where power lay. This feature, as we shall see in Chapter 11, harmed the government when the crisis arrived: the discontent of all of society had a single address. Second, *the center of decision was alone.* There was no institution, no group, and almost no individual who could challenge a decision before its execution.

8.3 Instruments for Managing Legitimacy

Of the four instruments for managing legitimacy—persuasion, performance, co-optation, and coercion—Reza Shah used three and almost abandoned one.

- **Performance** was the principal instrument: security of the roads, a national army, the railway, the university, a modern judiciary. Chapter 10 assesses the record of this instrument.
- **Coercion** was the supporting instrument and gradually became the first. The police, especially in the final years of the decade, became an apparatus for surveillance and control of society. A law of 1931 criminalized every "collectivist ideology," and Qasr prison hosted intellectuals, journalists, tribal leaders, and even former ministers.
- **Co-optation** was used at first and then set aside. At the outset Reza Shah drew political elites, khans, and clerics to himself with office and privilege; but when he no longer needed them, he took those same privileges back.
- **Persuasion** was the instrument used least of all. The government had propaganda, but it had no dialogue. Even a brief attempt to build a government party in the first years of the reign—begun on Teymourtash's initiative—was soon abandoned. Reza Shah did not even want his own party, because a party, even a dependent one, is a center for speaking.

This last point may be the deepest point of this chapter. *A government that does not trust even its own party is not afraid of dialogue; it is afraid of any gathering in which someone other than the ruler speaks.* And such a government, however effective, cannot build diffuse support, because diffuse support is built in gatherings, not in queues.

8.4 The Step-by-Step Removal of Dissenting Voices from the Room

The most important change in the architecture of power in this period took place not in institutions but in the composition of the decision-making room. In the early years of the reign, Reza Shah had around him men who each had independent standing and who could, at least occasionally, offer a dissenting opinion. In the second decade of the reign, these men were eliminated one by one:

- **Teymourtash**, minister of court and the most powerful man after the shah, was dismissed and arrested in 1932 and died in prison in 1933.
- **Sardar As'ad Bakhtiari**, minister of war, was arrested in 1933 and died in prison.
- **Nosrat al-Dowleh Firouz**, minister of finance, was murdered in exile in 1937 after dismissal and imprisonment.
- **Ali Akbar Davar**, architect of the modern judiciary and minister of finance, committed suicide in 1937.
- **Mohammad Ali Foroughi**, after the Goharshad Mosque incident of 1935, which led to the execution of his in-law Mohammad Vali Asadi, deputy custodian of the Shrine of Imam Reza, stepped down as prime minister and remained in forced retirement until 1941.

This list should not be read merely as a list of victims. It should be read as *the history of a government going blind.* Each of these men, whatever his own faults, was a channel through which information different from what the shah wanted to hear reached him. With the removal of each, a channel was closed. By the late 1930s, the decision-making room was full of executors who had learned that *hearing the truth was unpleasant for the shah and saying it was fatal for the speaker.*

8.5 Was There Another Way? Atatürk

The strongest defense of Reza Shah's architecture of power is this: Iran was a fragile state that was falling apart, and only complete concentration of power could save it. Iran's western neighbor, Atatürk's Turkey, was governed by the same logic, and no one says that Atatürk ruined his country.

This comparison is serious and deserves to be followed carefully—because its conclusion, contrary to expectation, is not a defense of Reza Shah. Atatürk, too, was authoritarian, repressed his opponents, and pursued authoritarian modernization. But he did three things that Reza Shah did not. *He built a party*—the Republican People's Party—which was an institution for gathering and training elites and a channel for feedback. *He built institutional succession*, so that after his death in 1938 the state continued without interruption and İsmet İnönü, who had for years been his prime minister, succeeded him. And that same system, less than a decade later, in 1946, moved to a multiparty system and in 1950 handed over power through the ballot box.

Reza Shah built none of these three. The system he built could not stand without him—and August 1941 proved it. *Atatürk built a state that outlived him; Reza Shah built a state that did not last even to the end of his own life.* The difference was not in the quantity of authority; it was in whether authority built an institution to reach beyond the individual.

8.6 Scorecard: The Architecture of Power (1925–1941)

Table 8.1. Scorecard: the architecture of power, 1925–1941

Criterion	Score	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	1	Mistook obedience for consent; built no channel for measuring consent	High
Recognition of the national interest	2	Correctly recognized sovereignty and territorial integrity, but equated the national interest with the permanence of personal power	Medium
Use of experts	1	Co-opted and then eliminated the most capable officials; emptied the decision room of independent voices	High
Response to discontent	1	From the retreat of 1924 to systematic repression	High
Dual-benefit test: complete concentration of power	Self-serving	Personal power was strengthened; the country gained no institution for continuity beyond the individual	High

The criterion of "management of resources" does not appear in this section, because its place is in Chapter 10.

8.7 Summary

Reza Shah's architecture of power was optimized for one goal: the swift execution of one man's will. And for this goal it was effective. But this very optimization sacrificed three things: the government's capacity to listen, its capacity to correct error, and its capacity to endure after its founder. All three sent their bill at once in August 1941.

A single-center government is like a bridge built on a single pillar: the stronger the pillar, the less the engineer thinks about what will happen if the pillar trembles.

CHAPTER 9

Chapter 9. Demands and Responses: A Modernization That Created Its Own Enemies

Reza Shah provided many of the things that Iranian society needed. But he provided almost none of them in the form society wanted. This chapter measures each social stratum with a simple question: what did they want, what did they get, and at what price? The answers reveal a pattern that goes beyond Reza Shah: *the right goal pursued by the wrong method not only fails to reach the goal; it burns the legitimacy of the goal itself.*

9.1 The Tribes: National Unity at the Price of Livelihood

The tribes—who at the start of this period made up a considerable part of the country's population—wanted two things: the continuation of their nomadic way of life, and the degree of self-government they had had for centuries. The government, rightly, saw them as a threat to the country's unity: armed khans, some with ties to foreign powers, had repeatedly challenged the central government.

The government's response came in two stages. First, disarmament and the breaking of the khans' power—a goal consistent with the national interest. Then, in the early 1930s, the policy of forced sedentarization, which in the literature of the period came to be called *takhteh-qapu*. Nomads were settled in places unsuitable for their livestock; the animals perished; and a society that had previously been self-sufficient fell into poverty.

In the dual-benefit test, the first stage was convergent: it strengthened both the state and the country. The second stage went beyond convergence and slid into strategic error: it made neither the country richer nor the government more popular. Its clear evidence is that many tribes returned to migration immediately after August 1941. *A policy that is reversed immediately upon the ruler's departure was never accepted; it was only endured.*

9.2 The Clergy: From Ally in 1924 to Victim in 1935

In 1924 the clergy was one of the principal factors in the defeat of the republican campaign, and Reza Khan went to Qom to win their support. A decade later, the relationship had been completely reversed. In several steps, the government dismantled the foundations of the clergy's institutional power: the new Civil Code—itself compiled with the participation of jurists and on the basis of *fiqh*—handed the judicial system to state courts; the Uniform Dress Law of 1928 made wearing clerical dress conditional on a permit; and later laws restricted judgeships to holders of law degrees.

Many of these reforms were necessary from the standpoint of the modern state. A unified judicial system and a codified civil law are pillars of the rule of law. The problem lay not in the reforms themselves but in the fact that the government built no channel for negotiating them. The clergy, whom a large part of society still trusted, found no way to express opposition except resistance.

The moment of divergence came in Tir 1314 (July 1935). In protest at the decree on the new hat and the rumor of the unveiling of women, a crowd gathered in the Goharshad Mosque in Mashhad. Military forces opened fire on them; many were killed, and the exact figure remains disputed to this

day. Mohammad Vali Asadi, deputy custodian of the Shrine of Imam Reza, who according to some sources had tried to mediate between the government and the protesters, was executed.

This moment must be compared with the moment of 1924. In both, Reza Shah faced widespread religious opposition. In 1924 he retreated and changed course. In 1935 he opened fire. The difference was not in the intensity of the opposition; it was in his position. *A leader who no longer needs others' consent no longer sees the cost of their discontent—until the day that cost is paid all at once.* The interval between 1935 and 1979 is forty-four years; but the clergy that overthrew the Pahlavi state in 1979 had a memory that began at Goharshad.

9.3 The Bazaar: Financing Modernization on the Back of the Consumer

The bazaar, which in the Constitutional Revolution had been the movement's financial pillar, wanted two things: freedom of trade and bearable taxes. The government moved in the opposite direction on both. The Foreign Trade Monopoly Law of 1931 made trade subject to state licensing; state monopolies on basic goods expanded; and, most importantly, the cost of the period's largest project—the Trans-Iranian Railway—was financed through taxes on sugar and tea.

This last decision is a textbook example for the criterion of resource management, and Chapter 10 examines it in detail. Here it suffices to say: a tax on sugar and tea is a tax on general consumption, and its burden, relative to income, weighs more heavily on the poorest families. *A modernization built on the backs of the poor and designed without their voice, even if it benefits them, is not recorded in their name.*

9.4 The Intellectuals: Modernity Without Freedom

The new middle class and the intellectuals—teachers, civil servants, European-educated graduates, journalists—were Reza Shah's most natural allies. They, too, wanted schools, a university, a modern judiciary, and an end to foreign influence. Many of them supported him with enthusiasm in the early years.

But this class also wanted something else, for which it had fought in the Constitutional Revolution: freedom. And the government denied it precisely that. The independent press was silenced. Mohammad Farrokhi Yazdi, poet and newspaper editor, died in prison in 1939. Taqi Arani, physicist and leftist theorist, was arrested in 1937 together with a group later known as "the Fifty-Three" and died in prison in 1940. Intellectuals who cooperated were absorbed into institutions such as the Academy of Language (*Farhangestan*); those who did not took refuge in silence.

The result was a rift that four decades later led to catastrophe. *The Pahlavi government turned its most natural ally—the class that wanted modernity—into an opponent, because it could not accept that this class did not want modernity without freedom.* This error was repeated on a far larger scale under Mohammad Reza Shah.

9.5 Women: The Right Goal, the Wrong Method, and an Inverted Legacy

No policy of the Reza Shah era aroused at once as much praise and as much hatred as the unveiling of women. And none is clearer for the lesson of this chapter.

A movement of Iranian women had struggled since the Constitutional era for education, social presence, and equal rights. The government responded to this demand in some areas: girls' schools

expanded, and the University of Tehran began admitting women from the mid-1930s. This part of the policy was convergent.

But on 17 Dey 1314 (7 January 1936), the government took a step that went beyond demand to compulsion: the unveiling, enforced in the streets by the police. For some women this was freedom. For another large group, who regarded the veil as part of their religious identity, it meant confinement to the home—women who, to avoid confrontation with the police, did not leave their homes for years. A policy meant to bring women into the public sphere pushed some of them out of it.

The legacy of this policy is, from the politician's standpoint, more instructive than the policy itself. Compulsory unveiling linked women's rights in the minds of a large part of society with the coercion of the government. And forty-five years later, another government, with an inverted logic but the same method—compulsory dress—fell into the same error. *Compulsory veiling and compulsory unveiling are two sides of one coin: both made the citizen's body a stage for displaying the government's ideology, and both created opponents who outlasted their governments.* In matters of conscience, wise governance guarantees the right of choice instead of imposition—because the only right that is not reversed by a change of government is a right that no government imposed.

9.6 Peasants and Ethnic Communities: Those Who Were Not Heard

Two other groups were not heard at all in this period. *The peasants*, who were the majority of the country's population, saw no land reform. On the contrary, the large landowners consolidated their position in Majlises most of whose deputies came from that very class, and Reza Shah himself, through purchases and acquisitions many of which were forced, became the country's largest landowner, especially in Mazandaran. *Non-Persian ethnic communities* likewise faced a policy of linguistic and cultural homogenization. The discontent of both groups remained silent in this period—and only a few years after 1941, in the crises of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan and in peasant movements, did it find its voice.

9.7 Chart of Demands and Responses

Table 9.1. Demands and responses under Reza Shah

Stratum	Principal demand	Government response	Consequence for legitimacy
Tribes	Self-government; nomadic livelihood	Disarmament, then forced sedentarization	Poverty, and return to migration after 1941
Clergy	Institutional influence, endowments, judgeship	Dismantling without negotiation; repression at Goharshad	Lasting hostility that played a role in 1979
Bazaar	Freedom of trade; bearable taxes	Trade monopoly; taxes on general consumption	Hidden resentment, and later alliance with the clergy
Intellectuals	Modernity together with freedom	Modernity without freedom; censorship and prison	A natural ally turned into an opponent
Women	Education and social presence	Education (convergent); compulsory unveiling (coercive)	A real achievement accompanied by a deep identity rift
Peasants	Land, and relief from oppression	Nothing; strengthening of landlords and the shah's acquisitions	Silent discontent

Stratum	Principal demand	Government response	Consequence for legitimacy
Ethnic communities	Linguistic and cultural rights	Homogenization	The crises of 1945–1946

9.8 Scorecard: Reza Shah Facing Society's Demands

Table 9.2. Scorecard: Reza Shah facing society's demands

Criterion	Score	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	1	Correctly recognized some needs, but did not measure consent and considered it unimportant	High
Response to discontent	0 to 1	From the retreat of 1924 to the shooting of 1935	High
Dual-benefit test at Goharshad	Self-serving → strategic error	The shah's authority was preserved in the short term; in the long term both the country and the dynasty paid the price	Medium

9.9 Summary

Reza Shah in many cases responded to society's *needs*, but almost never to its *will*. These are not the same. Need can be diagnosed from outside; will can only be heard. A government that imagines it knows better than the people what they need may sometimes be right. But even when it is right, a need met without asking provokes resentment instead of gratitude. *People do not regard a reform carried out in their name but without them as their own—and what they do not regard as their own, they do not defend on the day of danger.*

CHAPTER 10

Chapter 10. The Record of Effectiveness and Resource Management: A State That Built but Did Not Render Account

It would not be fair to judge Reza Shah's record without acknowledging his achievements. In sixteen years, a country that had no effective central government acquired a national army, a modern bureaucracy, a unified judiciary, a deeds registry, a national bank, a university, and a railway that linked the north and south of the country. None of the governments before him in a century had such a record.

The question of this chapter is not whether Reza Shah worked—he did. The question is in what direction, with what priority, and on whose account he spent the country's resources; and whether this manner of spending, to the same extent that it made the state capable, also made it legitimate.

10.1 The Abolition of Capitulations and the National Bank: Complete Convergence

Two decisions in this period undoubtedly fall into the convergent cell. First, the abolition of capitulations in 1928—a privilege that exempted the nationals of certain foreign powers from the jurisdiction of Iranian courts. This decision restored Iran's judicial sovereignty and added as much to national dignity as it did to the government's authority. Second, the founding of the National Bank (*Bank-e Melli*) in 1928 and the gradual transfer of the right to issue banknotes from the Imperial Bank, a British bank, to the Iranian state.

In both cases, Reza Shah correctly recognized the national interest, correctly judged the timing, and made use of experts—especially Davar in the first case. These decisions show that the capacity for national rationality existed in this government. *The problem was never that Reza Shah could not recognize the national interest; the problem was that wherever the national interest was aligned with his personal authority he pursued it brilliantly, and wherever it was not, less so.*

10.2 The Trans-Iranian Railway: A National Project on the Budget of the Poor

The Trans-Iranian Railway, begun in 1927 and completed in 1938, is the perfect symbol of this period. On the one hand, it was an astonishing achievement: without foreign loans, with domestic revenue, and over difficult mountainous terrain. Its financial independence was, from the standpoint of the national interest, an intelligent decision; Iranians had not forgotten the bitter experience of the foreign loans of the Qajar era.

On the other hand, the manner of its financing raises a fundamental question. The main part of the cost was met through taxes on sugar and tea—goods present in the basket of every Iranian household, rich and poor. A tax on such goods is regressive: its burden, relative to income, is heavier on the poorest. At the same time, the large landowners—from among whom most Majlis deputies came—remained to a large extent exempt from direct taxation of their wealth.

This is not merely a matter of tax justice; it is a matter of legitimacy. There is an ancient bond between taxation and representation. A citizen who pays taxes has the right to ask where his taxes are spent and to have a share in deciding about them. Reza Shah took taxes from peasants and

workers but gave them no share in decisions. *A government that taxes the poor and gives the rich seats in parliament has lost both the poor and the rich—the former because it has offended them, the latter because it has accustomed them to not needing the people.*

There was also a bitter historical irony. This very railway, built with the money of the Iranian people and with the aim of independence, became in August 1941 one of the reasons for Iran's strategic importance to the Allies: the shortest and safest route for delivering supplies to the Soviet Union. An achievement meant to strengthen sovereignty, in the absence of a foreign policy that could turn its value into a bargaining chip, became a target for occupation. Chapter 11 returns to this point.

10.3 The Oil Agreement of 1933: The Moment of Divergence at the Heart of the National Interest

If we were to choose one decision that puts the criterion of "recognizing the national interest" to the test in this period, that decision is the oil agreement of 1933.

The D'Arcy concession, granted to the British in 1901, was to expire in 1961. For years Iranians had complained of their meager share of oil revenue. In Azar 1311 (November 1932) Reza Shah suddenly cancelled the concession—a bold decision that prompted Britain to complain to the League of Nations. Up to this point, the decision was in the direction of the national interest: cancellation of the concession was a trump card for renegotiation.

But the new agreement signed in Ordibehesht 1312 (April 1933), although it improved the financial terms somewhat and reduced the area of the concession, extended its term to 1993—that is, thirty-two years beyond the original concession. Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh, the finance minister who signed the agreement, said fifteen years later in the Majlis that he had had no authority in the matter and had merely been the instrument for executing a decision taken by someone else.

By the dual-benefit test, this decision reads as follows: in the short term, it served the government—a more stable and predictable revenue, and the end of a diplomatic crisis with a power that Reza Shah did not want to confront. In the long term, it was to the country's detriment: the oil question was not resolved, merely postponed, and this very postponement led two decades later to the crisis of oil nationalization, the coup of 1953, and a wound that accompanied the legitimacy of the second Pahlavi to the end. *The decision of 1933 was self-serving in the short term and in the long term turned into a strategic error—both for the country and for the Pahlavi dynasty itself.*

The strongest defense of this decision is that the Iran of 1933 had little leverage against Britain, and the new agreement, with all its shortcomings, was better than the previous one. This defense contains part of the truth. But its answer lies in the affair itself: a government that in November 1932 had the boldness to cancel the concession had leverage. What it lacked was organized domestic support—an independent Majlis, free public opinion, and a press that could back the Iranian negotiator. *A power that has silenced society is alone at the negotiating table with the foreigner; and a lone negotiator usually gives way sooner.* Twenty years later, Mosaddegh, with the backing of the Majlis and the street, brought that same Britain to the table—although he, too, was ultimately defeated, for reasons we shall see in Chapters 12 and 13.

10.4 Budget Priorities: The Army, the Capital, and the Shah's Estates

The pattern of resource allocation in this period had three features. First, *the army* took the largest share of the budget. In the early years this priority was consistent with the national interest: security

was the precondition of everything else. But the army's share remained high even after internal security had been established, and the army on which so much had been spent fell apart within a few days in August 1941. This raises the question of whether that army had been built to defend the country or to control it.

Second, *the concentration of investment in the capital and a few large cities*, and the neglect of the countryside—where the majority of Iranians lived. Rural health, agriculture, and rural education received a small share compared with symbolic urban projects.

Third, and most sensitive of all, *the blurred boundary between national and personal property.* Through purchases and acquisitions—a considerable part of which were carried out under pressure and compulsion—Reza Shah became the country's largest landowner, especially in Mazandaran, and some state industrial investments were concentrated near these estates. After August 1941, widespread complaints about these acquisitions and efforts to restore them showed that society had never accepted these properties as legitimate.

This third feature was, from the standpoint of legitimacy, more harmful than the other two. A citizen may accept the concentration of the budget on the army if he sees a real threat. He may tolerate concentration on the capital if he hopes his village's turn will come. But when he sees that the one who demands sacrifice of him has himself become the richest man in the country, he no longer believes any narrative about the national interest. *The ruler's corruption steals not only money; it also steals the credibility of every appeal the ruler makes in the name of the nation.*

10.5 Scorecard: Effectiveness and Resource Management

Table 10.1. Scorecard: effectiveness and resource management, 1925–1941

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Management of resources (whole period)	2	Real infrastructural achievements; regressive financing; urban concentration; blurred boundary between national and personal property	Medium
Recognition of the national interest (whole period)	2	Brilliant in judicial and monetary sovereignty; weak on oil	Medium
Use of experts	2 to 3	Davar, Teymourtash, and the first generation of officials—before their elimination	High
Founding of the National Bank and abolition of capitulations	Convergent	—	High
Trans-Iranian Railway	Convergent, with divergent cost	A national goal; financing on the backs of the poor	High
Oil agreement of 1933	Self-serving → strategic error	Short-term calm at the price of a long-term crisis	Medium
Personal acquisitions	Self-serving	—	High

10.6 Summary

Reza Shah's record on effectiveness is better than his record on legitimacy—and this is the most dangerous part of it. Effectiveness gave him the illusion that he had legitimacy, and gave outside

observers the illusion that his system was stable. But effectiveness that does not render account builds only specific support, not diffuse support. Society used the railway, benefited from the university, and profited from the security of the roads—and in August 1941, without the slightest hesitation, abandoned the shah who had built them.

A government can buy today's consent with effectiveness; but only with accountability can it build tomorrow's loyalty. Reza Shah bought the first and did not build the second.

CHAPTER 11

Chapter 11. Silent Delegitimation and August 1941: A Country Absent from Its Own Fate

In August 1941 two collapses took place, and only one of them was seen. The visible collapse was that of the army: a force that for sixteen years had taken the largest share of the budget fell apart within a few days. The invisible, but more fundamental, collapse was that of the relationship between government and society—a relationship that had been hollowed out from within years before August and was only waiting for the moment when fear was lifted for its emptiness to be revealed.

11.1 A Delegitimation No One Measured

By the four-stage scale of Chapter 3, where did Iranian society stand in the late 1930s? Direct evidence is scant, because no channel existed for the free expression of opinion—and this, according to Kuran's rule, is itself a datum. But the indirect evidence is clear. After Goharshad, the clergy was at the stage of normative rupture. Intellectuals who did not want modernity without freedom lived in complete institutional distrust. Tribes and peasants had never been heard in any channel. And even within the government, elites who had witnessed the fate of Teymourtash and Davar did not mistake loyalty for fear.

The strongest evidence, however, came after the event. In the weeks and months after August 1941, Iran experienced an explosion of speech: dozens of new newspapers, new parties, the release of political prisoners, the return of exiles, and a flood of complaints about the shah's acquisitions. Such an explosion does not arise from nothing. *Speech that pours out in a week has been accumulating in silence for years.* August 1941 did not begin the delegitimation; it revealed it.

11.2 A World Transformed, and a Government That Did Not Hear

In Shahrivar 1318 (September 1939), with the outbreak of the Second World War, Iran declared its neutrality. This decision was in itself sensible. But neutrality, as we saw in Chapter 6, is not a declaration; it is a capacity that must be backed by an active foreign policy. And here Iran faced a difficult reality: in the years before the war Germany had become Iran's largest trading partner, German experts were extensively present in Iran's industries and infrastructure projects, and in parts of the government elite there was open admiration for German efficiency.

On 1 Tir 1320 (22 June 1941) Germany attacked the Soviet Union, and in a single day Iran's position in the world was transformed. Britain and the Soviet Union suddenly became allies, and Iran—with a railway stretching from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea—became the shortest and safest route for delivering supplies to the eastern front. Until that day, Iran's neutrality had been tolerable to both powers. From that day on, it was tolerable to neither.

This moment was a pure test of the third criterion—recognition of the national interest and reading the global balance of power. The question for every Iranian statesman in June 1941 should have been: *now that Iran has acquired strategic value for two great neighboring powers, how do we turn this value into a trump card for the national interest, before it is taken from us by force?*

11.3 The Moment of Divergence: The Notes of July and August 1941

In notes of 28 Tir and 25 Mordad 1320 (19 July and 16 August 1941), Britain and the Soviet Union demanded that the Iranian government expel German nationals. Reza Shah had three options:

1. **Full and rapid acceptance** of the demands, which might have postponed the attack but would have subordinated Iran to the Allies' will without any gain.
2. **A preemptive deal:** taking the initiative and offering cooperation on the supply route in return for specific guarantees—respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, a clear timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces, and economic assistance.
3. **Procrastination:** carrying out part of the demands, reducing the number of Germans without complete expulsion, and hoping that time—and perhaps a German victory—would solve the problem.

Reza Shah chose the third option.

The argument of this book—and the author's view—is that this choice was one of the clearest strategic errors of the past hundred years. The reason can be made clear with the five criteria.

On *recognition of the national interest*, Reza Shah either did not grasp the new balance, or grasped it and bet that Germany would win. In the summer of 1941, Germany's rapid advances in the Soviet Union had led many in the world to such a conclusion. But even if this bet seemed reasonable, a wise statesman does not bet on a single outcome when the cost of losing is the occupation of his country. He must find a path that keeps the country safe in both scenarios.

On *the use of experts and channels of information*, the government was in the worst possible condition. The decision-making room, as Chapter 8 showed, had been emptied of independent voices years earlier. Ministers and commanders had learned that bringing bad news to the shah carried a cost. The question whether anyone around him dared to say that Iran's army had no capacity to resist, or that the Allies' resolve was serious, probably has the answer this chapter's strongest evidence suggests: *a shah who for years had closed his ears to "no" no longer had anyone to say it at the moment when the country's fate depended on hearing one "no."*

In the *dual-benefit test*, procrastination served the country in no scenario. If its motive was to preserve the image of the shah's independence and authority—that a shah who for sixteen years had made sovereignty his slogan did not want to bow to a foreign demand—then the motive was self-serving. And since its outcome was both the occupation of the country and the shah's own removal, it ultimately reached the cell of *strategic error*: a decision that sacrificed both the country and the government.

11.4 Was There Another Way? The Witness of Turkey and the Witness of the Son

The strongest defense of Reza Shah is that occupation was unavoidable in any case: the Allies' need for a supply route to the Soviet Union was so vital that no response from Tehran could have stopped it. Many historians hold this view, and it must be taken seriously.

But even if the *fact* of an Allied military presence was unavoidable, its *terms* were not. And the difference between the two is the difference between occupation and cooperation: between an army that falls apart in a few days and a state that sits at the table and sets conditions. Two witnesses show that the second path existed.

The first witness is Turkey. İsmet İnönü faced the same dilemma: a country between hostile powers, with economic ties to Germany and pressure from the Allies. Turkey concluded a treaty with Britain and France in 1939, signed a friendship pact with Germany in 1941, received aid from both sides, maintained its neutrality until the end of the war through active diplomacy, and in 1945, just in time, declared war on Germany in order to secure a place in the post-war order. Turkey had a different geographical position and army; but its lesson for Iran is that *successful neutrality is the art of perpetual negotiation, not stubborn loyalty to a single position.*

The second witness is the conduct of the Iranian government itself after Reza Shah. Foroughi's government, under Mohammad Reza Shah, signed the Tripartite Treaty with Britain and the Soviet Union on 9 Bahman 1320 (29 January 1942): Iran accepted cooperation on the supply route and in return obtained the formal commitment of the two powers to respect Iran's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to withdraw their forces no later than six months after the end of the war. In Shahrivar 1322 (September 1943) Iran declared war on Germany; in Azar of that year (December 1943) the Tehran Conference ended with a declaration on Iran's independence; and Iran became one of the founding members of the United Nations. These very written commitments became Iran's trump card in the Azerbaijan crisis of 1946 for securing the withdrawal of Soviet forces. *What the son obtained by bargaining after the occupation, the father could have obtained before the occupation, without occupation.*

11.5 After the Attack: Monarchy or Country?

On 3 Shahrivar 1320 (25 August 1941), British and Soviet forces entered Iran from the south and north. The navy was taken by surprise at Khorramshahr and Bandar Shahpur, and its commander, Admiral Bayandor, was killed on the first day. Ground resistance on most fronts collapsed within a few days. Reza Shah dismissed the government of Ali Mansur and summoned Mohammad Ali Foroughi (Zoka al-Molk), a man he had kept in forced retirement for six years, to the premiership. This was itself the most eloquent confession of the error described in Chapter 8: when the crisis came, the shah was forced to turn to the same independent voice he had silenced for years.

In the following days, as Allied forces advanced on Tehran and unprecedented radio attacks targeted the shah personally, Reza Shah abdicated in favor of his son on 25 Shahrivar (16 September 1941) and left Iran. Historical accounts show that Britain in those days even examined restoring the Qajar dynasty, and that Foroughi played a decisive role in persuading the Allies to accept the crown prince.

The author's view is that in these days the priority of the principal decision-makers was to preserve the monarchy in the Pahlavi family, not to defend the national interest. This view must be weighed carefully, for there is evidence supporting it and complexities against it.

In its support: a government that for sixteen years had equated the national interest with the permanence of personal power naturally asked first, at the moment of crisis, what would become of the monarchy. And throughout these days, no independent national institution—no real Majlis, no party, no organized public opinion—played any role in determining the country's fate. Iran's fate was decided among the shah, his prime minister, and the ambassadors of the two occupying powers. Had Reza Shah, instead of insisting on his son's succession, accepted the institutionalization of government in the form of a republic, the subsequent course of Iran would have lent later governments greater credibility and legitimacy in terms of constitutionalism.

Against it: abdication in favor of the crown prince may, in those circumstances, also have served the country—because a power vacuum in an occupied country, with ethnic groups and provinces each of which might have gone its own way, carried the risk of disintegration. And the treaty that Foroughi's government signed a few months later, as we have seen, did not sell out the national interest; on the contrary, it preserved it as far as possible under the most unfavorable conditions.

The final judgment of this book is as follows: *the tragedy of August 1941 was not that the national interest was sold to preserve the monarchy; it was that the country had no voice to defend the national interest separately from the monarchy.* When all institutions have been reduced to one man, on the day that man falls the country is forced to hear its fate from the mouths of foreign ambassadors. This was not the betrayal of a moment but the bill for sixteen years of governance.

11.6 Meaningful Silence: Why No One Defended Him

The most important evidence of delegitimation in this period was silence. No uprising was mounted to bring Reza Shah back. No Majlis defended him. No guild, no stratum, no city took to the streets to say, we want this shah. According to many contemporary accounts, open rejoicing was even seen in parts of society.

This silence was the fourth stage of delegitimation—behavioral refusal—in its quietest possible form: *refusal to defend.* This is the simplest and at the same time the most decisive vote a nation can give its ruler. A nation that for sixteen years had had no possibility of voting cast its vote in August 1941—with hands that were not raised.

The fate of Amanullah Khan, the king of the neighboring country to the east, had already shown this lesson. Amanullah pursued a rapid and authoritarian modernization in Afghanistan—including the removal of the veil—and in 1929 lost his crown and throne in the face of a widespread rebellion. Reza Shah witnessed this fall, and perhaps for this reason he advanced some reforms more slowly in the first decade of his reign. But he did not learn the main lesson: that modernization without consent, however slow, does not create supporters.

11.7 Period Scorecard: The First Pahlavi in Ten Items

Table 11.1. The first Pahlavi in the ten-part template

Item	Judgment
1. Claimed source of legitimacy	Order, nationalism, modernity—without the vote
2. Architecture of power	Single-center, visible, without independent institutions or institutional succession
3. Instruments for managing legitimacy	Performance and coercion; temporary co-optation; persuasion almost absent
4. Demands of society	Security, modernity, freedom, land, respect for identity
5. Attention to the people's vote and will	Close to zero after 1925
6. Record of effectiveness	High in state-building and infrastructure; low in the countryside and in distributive justice
7. Institution-building and executive capacity	Built executive institutions; hollowed out accountable institutions
8. The gap between demand and response	Active in all strata except part of the new middle class

Item	Judgment
9. Delegitimation and the government's response	Silent and hidden; response: repression; revealed in August 1941
10. Measurement against the reference model	Weak on principles 1, 2, 3, 6, 8; medium on 4 and 5; the army an instrument of the shah, not neutral

Reza Shah's leadership rationality at a glance:

Table 11.2. Reza Shah's leadership rationality, before and after 1925

Criterion	1921–1925	1925–1941
Understanding public consent	3	1
Management of resources	2	2
Recognition of the national interest	3	2 (and 0 to 1 in 1941)
Use of experts	3	1
Response to discontent	2	0 to 1

Instrumental rationality and national rationality. In the years 1921 to 1925, Reza Shah scores high on both types of rationality, because his interests and those of the country almost coincided. After 1925, his instrumental rationality—the capacity to preserve and concentrate power—remained high, but his national rationality gradually declined, because wherever the two diverged he chose the former. In August 1941 even his instrumental rationality collapsed: a government optimized to preserve power could not preserve even power.

11.8 Summary of Part Three

Reza Shah saved Iran from disintegration and built a state that remained after him. This achievement is real, and no fair judgment can ignore it. But he failed in the one thing that mattered most for the durability of that state: linking it to the consent of the people.

The statesman's lesson of these sixteen years can be summarized in three sentences. *First, order without consent is not order; it is a ceasefire. Second, a ruler who expels independent voices from the decision-making room will be left alone on the day of crisis—and solitude in crisis is defeat. Third, the national interest cannot be entrusted to one man, however patriotic that man may be; because on the day that one man's interests diverge from the country's—and such a day always comes—there is no one to defend the country.*

His son, Mohammad Reza Shah, ascended the throne with full awareness of his father's fate. Parts Four and Five ask whether he learned from that fate—and if he did, why he ultimately arrived at the same point.

PART FOUR: The Interlude—A Natural Experiment (1941–1953)

CHAPTER 12

Chapter 12. When the Vote Mattered: Twelve Years of Freedom Without a State

The central hypothesis of this book makes a bold claim: legitimacy in Iran was lost when the government's ear closed. Every serious hypothesis must be capable of failing. If we find a period in the past hundred years in which the government's ear was open and legitimacy nevertheless collapsed, the hypothesis is at least incomplete. Fortunately—or perhaps unfortunately—Iranian history has placed such a period at our disposal: the twelve years between Reza Shah's abdication and the coup of 28 Mordad (19 August 1953).

12.1 The Opening of the Channels

In these twelve years, almost all the channels that Reza Shah had closed were suddenly opened. Dozens of newspapers were published, from left to right, from nationalist to religious. Parties emerged: the Tudeh Party in Mehr 1320 (October 1941), then nationalist, religious, and liberal parties, and finally the National Front. Trade unions were organized. The Majlis, for the first time since the Constitutional Revolution, became a place where governments were truly made and unmade. And a young king who lacked his father's authority was obliged to share power with prime ministers, deputies, and public opinion.

This period was not perfect. Elections were held under the influence of large landowners and, during the years of occupation, of foreign powers. The press was free, but part of it was irresponsible and dependent on one embassy or another. Nevertheless, by this book's measure, it was the only period in the past hundred years in which the distribution of authority—the book's principal variable—truly changed. International comparative data also confirm this: indicators of civil society and freedom of expression for Iran in this period reach their highest level in the entire twentieth century.

12.2 What Freedom Built: Input Legitimacy

The first finding of this test confirms the hypothesis. When the channels opened, society returned to the political system. People read newspapers, joined parties, took to the streets—and, most importantly, felt that they had an effect on the country's fate. This feeling, which in Chapter 1 we called "input legitimacy," existed to this degree in no other period of the past hundred years.

The clearest example was 30 Tir 1331 (21 July 1952). When the shah agreed to Mosaddegh's resignation and appointed Qavam prime minister, Tehran and other cities took to the streets. After several days of clashes and the killing of a number of protesters, the shah was forced to bring Mosaddegh back. This is the only time in the past hundred years that popular protest, within the framework of the existing system and without overthrowing it, reversed the king's decision. *A government whose decisions the people can change is a government the people regard as their own—even when they oppose it.*

12.3 What Freedom Did Not Build: The State

But the second finding of the test is more complex. In these same twelve years, Iran changed governments almost every year. The army, which had collapsed in August 1941, became a political

force independent of the government and loyal to the court. Central authority weakened again in some provinces. And in 1945, with Soviet support, autonomous governments were established in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan.

This was the Fukuyaman dilemma of Chapter 2, this time from the other side: *accountability without a state.* A system in which everyone speaks but no one can carry out a decision is ultimately as fragile as a system in which one person decides and no one speaks.

12.4 Qavam and the Azerbaijan Crisis: The Majlis as Trump Card

Amid this disarray, one moment showed what capacity an accountable system has in foreign policy when it has wise leadership. In 1945–1946, Soviet forces, contrary to the commitment of the Tripartite Treaty, did not withdraw from Iran and supported the autonomous government of Azerbaijan. Ahmad Qavam, the prime minister, went to Moscow and signed an agreement: the Soviet Union would withdraw its forces, and Iran would agree to the formation of a joint oil company in the north—*subject to ratification by the Majlis.*

Soviet forces withdrew. The central government returned to Azerbaijan in Azar 1325 (December 1946). And in Mehr 1326 (October 1947), the Fifteenth Majlis rejected the northern oil agreement. Qavam used the Majlis as a trump card: he made a promise to a foreign power whose fulfillment depended on an institution independent of himself.

This moment must be set beside August 1941 and the agreement of 1933. In both cases Reza Shah was alone at the negotiating table. Qavam was not. *A negotiator backed by an independent institution can say, "I agree, but the nation must ratify"—and in diplomacy this sentence is more powerful than any army.* The independence of the Majlis, which authoritarian governments saw as an obstacle, became a weapon in the hands of a wise statesman.

12.5 Mosaddegh and Oil Nationalization: The Peak of Legitimacy, and Its Limits

In Esfand 1329 (March 1951) the Majlis passed the law nationalizing the oil industry, and in Ordibehesht 1330 (April 1951) Mohammad Mosaddegh, who for twenty-five years had been the voice of resistance to despotism and foreign influence, became prime minister. No government in the past hundred years has enjoyed as broad and free popular support as his.

By the five criteria, Mosaddegh scores close to full on *understanding public consent*: he correctly read the national demand to end foreign domination over oil and turned it into a concrete policy. On *recognition of the national interest*, too, his goal was right: Iran's oil should be at Iran's disposal.

But this book's rule of the rival narrative applies to Mosaddegh as much as to Reza Shah. Two serious questions arise about the rationality of his policymaking, from which today's politician must learn, even if they do not change the final outcome.

The first question is flexibility in negotiation. In 1951 and 1952 several mediating proposals were put forward—including by the World Bank and by the governments of the United States and Britain. Mosaddegh rejected them, arguing that each in some way undermined the principle of nationalization. His defenders say that these proposals were in fact a disguised return of British control and that accepting them would have been a betrayal of the movement. His critics say that he lost the best possible deal, and that the result of refusal was not national oil but a coup and a Consortium agreement worse than all those proposals. This question has no definitive answer; but

its lesson is clear: *in negotiating with a superior power, victory in principle without victory in terms may lead to defeat in both.*

The second question concerns institutions. Mosaddegh, who had fought all his life for the Constitutional order, obtained special powers from the Majlis in the final years of his government, and in Mordad 1332 (August 1953), through a referendum in which the "yes" and "no" ballot boxes were separate, dissolved the Seventeenth Majlis. His aim was to prevent a conspiracy he correctly foresaw. But his instrument was the very instrument he had fought against all his life: setting aside an independent institution in the name of necessity. *When even a nation's most democratic leader sees institutions as obstacles at the moment of danger, it becomes clear that Iran's problem lies not only in its rulers but in a political culture that regards the law as an instrument of the goal rather than its boundary.*

12.6 28 Mordad: The Coup and Its Domestic Accomplices

The coup of 28 Mordad 1332 (19 August 1953) was carried out with the planning and support of the American and British intelligence services—a fact that documents released by those very governments now confirm. But the coup would not have been possible without domestic accomplices: the court, a large part of the army's commanders, some clerics who had earlier been allied with Mosaddegh and had broken with him, and parts of the landowners and bazaar merchants. And on the other side, the national coalition, which in 1951 had been broad and united, had fallen apart by 1953.

The lesson of this defeat is the same as the lesson of Egypt in Chapter 4: *a transition without agreement on rules, and without the restraint of the armed forces, is reversible.* The freedom of 1941 to 1953 rested on no durable agreement among political forces. The army remained outside the control of the elected government. And the coalition that had won split from within before it had built the institutions of its victory.

12.7 The Result of the Test: What Becomes of the Hypothesis?

The natural experiment has two results, and both must be stated honestly.

The first result confirms the central hypothesis: when the channels opened, input legitimacy returned, and society regarded the political system as its own. 30 Tir 1331 (July 1952) is the greatest evidence of this. Legitimacy in this period was lost not through the closing of the government's ear but through a coup from outside and from within.

The second result completes the hypothesis: an open ear is a necessary condition of legitimacy, but not a sufficient one. A government that hears but cannot act, and a system in which there is freedom but no shared rules for competition, are as fragile as a government that acts and does not hear. The precise formulation of the hypothesis is therefore this: *durable legitimacy in Iran is possible only where a capable state, an open ear, and shared rules exist simultaneously.* In the past hundred years Iran has sometimes had one of these three and sometimes two. It has never had all three together.

12.8 Scorecard of the Interlude

Table 12.1. Scorecard of the interlude, 1941–1953

Principle of the reference model	Score	Judgment
1. Source of authority: the vote	2 to 3	Imperfect elections under influence; the Majlis truly made governments
2. Restraint of power	2	The king was restrained; but the constitution was sometimes set aside in the name of necessity
3. Listening channels	3 to 4	The peak of the century
4. Meritocratic bureaucracy	2	Heirs of the Reza Shah era, but governmental instability eroded effectiveness
6. Restraint of rent	3	Oil nationalization, the victory of the principle of national control of rent
7. Neutrality of the armed forces	0 to 1	The Achilles' heel of the period—an army loyal to the court, not to the elected government
8. Error correction	2	Peaceful changes of government; ended by a coup

This is the only period in the book that scores high on the third principle—listening. And it is also the only period brought down by a score of zero on the seventh principle—neutrality of the armed forces. *A country whose army is not loyal to the nation holds its freedom as a trust in the hands of someone who can take it back at any moment.*

PART FIVE: The Second Pahlavi—Legitimacy Through Development (1953–1979)

Mohammad Reza Shah came to power three times. The first time in August 1941, by decision of the occupiers. The second time in August 1953, by coup. And the third time in January 1963, through the referendum on the White Revolution—the only time he tried to take his right to command directly from the people. The tragedy of his reign is that on none of these three occasions did he build his authority on a foundation that could defend him on the day of crisis.

He learned two lessons from his father and failed to learn one. He learned that the shah must control the army, and he learned that the shah must have a powerful foreign patron. But he did not learn the lesson that August 1941 had taught with merciless clarity—that *a shah whom the people do not defend cannot be saved by any army or any foreign patron.* The son saw the father's failure as a lack of power; and because he misdiagnosed the cause, he also chose the wrong cure.

CHAPTER 13

Chapter 13. Rebuilding Authority After 28 Mordad: A Wound That Never Healed

13.1 The Original Sin

Every political system has a founding story, and that story colors the legitimacy of everything that follows. The founding story of Mohammad Reza Shah's second reign was a coup that overthrew a popular government with the support of two foreign powers. This fact, regardless of any judgment about Mosaddegh or the shah, had one inescapable consequence: from 28 Mordad onward, a large part of Iran's political society saw the shah not as the king of the nation but as the representative of a foreign will.

The shah knew this wound and tried until the end of his life to offer another narrative of 28 Mordad: the narrative of a national uprising against the communist danger. But a wound of legitimacy cannot be closed with a narrative; it can only be healed through conduct—by showing that the government, despite its beginnings, is of the people and for the people. And the government's conduct in the decade that followed showed precisely the opposite.

An original sin cannot be erased; it can only be compensated for by later virtues. A government that denies instead of compensating passes the sin on as an inheritance.

13.2 The Consortium Agreement: The First Moment of Divergence

The new government's first test of the national interest was oil. In Mehr 1333 (October 1954) an agreement was signed with a consortium of Western oil companies. The principle of nationalization was preserved on paper: ownership of the oil remained with the National Iranian Oil Company. But production and sales operations were entrusted to the consortium, in which the former Anglo-Iranian Oil Company had a large share and American companies, for the first time, obtained an equal share. Iran's revenue was set on the basis of a fifty-fifty profit split.

By the dual-benefit test, this agreement occupies a middle cell. It served the government: oil revenue returned quickly and began to rise, and the bond with the United States was strengthened. It also served the country to some extent: national income rose, and the financial terms were far better than those of the D'Arcy concession. But measured against the goal of the national movement—Iran's real control over its oil—it was an obvious retreat. *An agreement that preserves sovereignty on paper and surrenders control in practice brings revenue to the government and a sense of betrayal to the nation.*

The strongest defense of this agreement is that after two years of oil embargo Iran had a paralyzed economy and no choice but to return to the world market, and that the consortium was the best agreement possible under those conditions. This defense is serious. But the same question from Chapter 10 arises again: a negotiator who after the coup had removed the Majlis and the free press from behind him—with what backing could he have asked for better terms?

13.3 The New Architecture of Power: SAVAK and Two Parties

In the years 1953 to 1961, the new architecture of power took shape. It had three pillars.

The first pillar was the security apparatus. The National Intelligence and Security Organization—SAVAK—was founded in 1957. The Tudeh Party's military network was discovered and dismantled in 1954; a number of its officers were executed. Hossein Fatemi, Mosaddegh's foreign minister, was executed, and Mosaddegh himself, after trial and imprisonment, remained under surveillance at Ahmadabad until the end of his life. The message of these measures was clear: the interlude was over.

The second pillar was rubber-stamp parties. In 1957, on the shah's initiative, two parties were formed—one for the government and one for "opposition." The shah chose the leaders of both. The popular joke that called the two parties two sides of the same coin was the most accurate judgment about them. This experience is, from this book's perspective, instructive: the shah had realized that a political system without parties is incomplete, but he could not accept that a party, if it is real, must be able to oppose the shah. *A party built by the ruler is the ruler's voice echoing in two rooms.*

The third pillar was the foreign patron. The bond with the United States—military, economic, and political—became the government's main support. This bond had real benefits: economic aid, military equipment, and support against the Soviet Union. But it also had a cost that no aid could compensate: every time American policy was visible in Tehran, the wound of 28 Mordad reopened.

13.4 Ebtehaj and Amini: The Pattern of the Competent Official, Again

In this decade, the pattern we saw in Chapters 2 and 8 was repeated with disturbing precision. Abolhassan Ebtehaj, one of the most outstanding economic managers in Iran's history, became head of the Plan Organization in 1954 and tried to invest oil revenue in development on the basis of technical planning, free from political influence. In 1959, after a dispute over whether oil revenue should go to the Plan Organization or to other budgets—especially the military budget—he was removed, and some years later he spent a period in prison.

Ali Amini was another example. In 1961, amid economic crisis and pressure from the new Kennedy administration in the United States, the shah was forced to accept as prime minister Amini, who had an independent base. Amini, with Hassan Arsanjani as minister of agriculture, began the land reform. But in Tir 1341 (July 1962) the shah dismissed Amini, and a few months later pursued the land reform under his own name, in the form of the White Revolution.

This moment is the second moment of divergence of this period, and the dual-benefit test is clear about it. Land reform served the country—and Amini had begun it. What the shah gained by removing Amini was not the reform but *a monopoly on the credit for reform.* The shah did not want any major reform carried out except in his own name, because every reformer with independent standing was a potential rival. The decision was therefore self-serving: the reform continued, but the reformer was eliminated—and with him the last chance for a government with an independent base to govern beside the monarchy, rather than in its shadow.

13.5 Scorecard: Mohammad Reza Shah (1953–1962)

Table 13.1. Scorecard: Mohammad Reza Shah, 1953–1962

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	1	Covered the wound of 28 Mordad with a narrative, not with conduct	High

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Management of resources	2	Oil revenue returned; tension between development planning and the military budget, resolved against the Plan Organization	Medium
Recognition of the national interest	2	Security against the Soviet Union correctly seen; oil limited to paper sovereignty	Medium
Use of experts	2	Ebtehaj and Amini employed and then removed	High
Response to discontent	1	Organized and institutionalized repression with the founding of SAVAK	High
Consortium, 1954	Convergent, with an identity cost	Revenue for the government and the country; foreign control	Medium
Dismissal of Amini, 1962	Self-serving	Monopoly of credit for reform at the price of eliminating the reformer	High

13.6 Summary

In this decade, Mohammad Reza Shah moved from the weakness of the interlude to an authority he had never had before. But he built this authority with three instruments—security, a foreign patron, and the elimination of domestic rivals—none of which built legitimacy. He had learned how to seize power. He had not yet learned how to convert it into consent. His best opportunity to do so came a few months later: the White Revolution.

CHAPTER 14

Chapter 14. The White Revolution and the Management of Legitimacy from Above: The Direct Bond Between Shah and People

The White Revolution was Mohammad Reza Shah's most intelligent attempt to build legitimacy, and precisely for that reason his most instructive failure. The shah had realized that he could not rely solely on the army and America. He needed a social base. His answer was to build that base through fundamental reforms—reforms that would draw the rural masses, women, and the new middle class toward the throne and leave his traditional rivals without a base. He called it "the Revolution of the Shah and the People."

The problem lay in one word of that name: *"and."* The shah wanted to build a *direct* bond with the people—without intermediaries, without a real party, without an independent Majlis, without any institution through which the people could tell the shah what they wanted. The direct bond was, in practice, one-way: the shah granted, the people received.

14.1 The Referendum of 1963 and What Was Granted

On 6 Bahman 1341 (26 January 1963), the six principles of the White Revolution were put to a referendum and approved by a majority that the government announced as nearly unanimous. The initial principles included land reform, nationalization of forests, sale of shares in state factories, profit-sharing for workers, amendment of the electoral law to give women the vote, and the formation of the Literacy Corps. In the following years further principles were added.

Many of these reforms fall, by this book's yardstick, in the convergent cell. *Land reform* broke the landlord–peasant system that for centuries had kept the majority of Iranians in dependence, and millions of rural families for the first time became owners of the land they worked. *Women's suffrage* was a right for which the women's movement had struggled for decades. *The Literacy Corps* brought literacy to villages that had never before seen a teacher. In the following decade the Iranian economy grew at rates seen in few countries.

14.2 What Was Not Granted

But each of these grants also withheld something alongside it.

Women obtained the vote—in elections in which no one's vote, neither woman's nor man's, changed the center of power. *A right to vote without a choice is like a key that fits no door: it is a symbol of freedom, but not freedom itself.*

Peasants obtained land—but many of them obtained plots too small to support a family, without sufficient credit, water, and technical support. In the following decades a great wave of rural migration filled the margins of the big cities. These migrants, uprooted from their villages and finding no place in the city, were the very population whose numbers were striking in the protest queues of 1978 fifteen years later.

Workers obtained a share of profits—without the right to form an independent union. And citizens as a whole benefited from the fruits of growth—without being able to say anything about how that growth took place.

The pattern is clear. *The White Revolution gave the people things that could be granted, and withheld the one thing that could only be recognized: the right to decide.* A grant brings gratitude, and gratitude is fleeting. Recognition brings participation, and participation endures.

14.3 15 Khordad 1342 (5 June 1963): The First Moment of Divergence

The White Revolution faced opposition from part of the clergy from the very beginning—an opposition that combined protest against land reform and women's suffrage with protest against the government's despotic methods and its bond with America. In this opposition, a cleric from Qom who until then had been little known on the national stage came to prominence: Seyyed Ruhollah Khomeini.

In Khordad 1342 (June 1963), after his fiery speech on the day of Ashura and his arrest, protests broke out in Tehran, Qom, and other cities. The government responded with military force, and a number of protesters were killed; the exact figure, as with Goharshad, remains disputed to this day.

This moment must be compared precisely with Goharshad in 1935. Father and son, twenty-eight years apart, gave one answer to religious protest against modernization: the bullet. And in both cases repression "worked" in the short term—the street fell quiet. But in both cases repression built something that lived far longer than that day's protesters: a memory of victimhood, and a face that thereafter became the symbol of resistance. *A government that fires on its critic gives him something no speech could: the legitimacy of the victim.*

This time, the shah—in violation of the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which in the author's reading regard the use of national defense forces (the army) to repress citizens as a breach of international norms—did so several times between 1963 and 1979, and by giving the army a free hand to repress protesters and fire on citizens in the streets, laid the principal groundwork for the overthrow of his own government. The Jimmy Carter administration, with its "human rights" doctrine, was not prepared to defend Mohammad Reza Shah's crimes before international bodies, and the shah lost his greatest ally, the United States of America.

14.4 The Immunity Bill of 1964: Reversing the Father's Legacy

If we were to choose one decision in this period that displays the dual-benefit test with the greatest clarity, it is the bill the Majlis passed in Mehr 1343 (October 1964): a bill granting judicial immunity to American military advisers and their families in Iran.

Thirty-six years earlier, in 1928, Reza Shah had abolished capitulations—one of his most brilliant achievements in the domain of the national interest. Now his son, to preserve the bond with the foreign patron and obtain military loans, was restoring a form of that same privilege. From the standpoint of the government's survival, the decision made sense: America was the third pillar of the shah's authority, and its wishes could not be ignored.

Ruhollah Khomeini, in Aban 1343 (November 1964), attacked the bill in a speech in which he called it a humiliation of the Iranian nation, and a few days later he was exiled to Turkey—and then to Iraq, where he remained for fourteen years. This moment is, from this book's perspective, one of the

principal junctures of the past hundred years: *a government that gave way to a foreigner on a matter of sovereignty allowed its religious opponent to seize the banner of nationalism—which had traditionally been the Pahlavi banner.* Nationalism and religion, which Reza Shah had set against each other, were joined together in opposition to his son. Fourteen years later, this union overthrew the monarchy.

The strongest defense of this decision is that such agreements were common between the United States and many of its allies, and that Iran needed American help to modernize its army. This defense is legally correct. But a politician must weigh not only what is legal but how his people understand it. In a country where the memory of capitulations and of 28 Mordad is alive, such a bill, however common elsewhere, has a different meaning in Iran. *A ruler who does not weigh the symbolic meaning of his decisions fails politically even when he decides correctly on technical grounds.*

14.5 The Decade of Growth: Technocracy Without Politics

In the years 1963 to 1973 the Iranian economy experienced a period of rapid and relatively stable growth—with low inflation, extensive industrial investment, and the expansion of the urban middle class. Amir Abbas Hoveyda, who became prime minister after the assassination of Hassan Ali Mansur in Bahman 1343 (January 1965), remained in this post until 1977—thirteen years. A generation of Western-educated technocrats managed the economy with a skill that was rare in the region.

This decade is, on the criterion of using experts, the best period of the second Pahlavi. But the technocrats had no authority in one domain: politics. They could say where a factory should be built, but they could not say in which decision the shah was mistaken. *Technocracy without politics is the companionship of brilliant minds in a room whose door opens only from the outside.* They were managers but not advisers; executors but not partners.

This decade was at the same time a period in which, in the terms of Lipset's theory, performance legitimacy reached its peak. Growth, welfare, and stability created specific satisfaction for a large part of society—especially the urban middle class. The danger, as we saw in Chapter 3, was precisely this: a government whose legitimacy is built on performance creates, at the peak of performance, expectations it cannot meet. And a government that does not build institutions of participation at this peak has nothing to lean on at the first decline in performance.

14.6 Scorecard: The White Revolution and the Decade of Growth (1962–1973)

Table 14.1. Scorecard: the White Revolution and the decade of growth, 1962–1973

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	2	Recognized the need for a social base; mistook a direct, unmediated bond for an institution of participation	High
Management of resources	3	A decade of stable growth with low inflation; shortfalls in support for peasants after land reform	Medium
Recognition of the national interest	2	Development rightly seen; the immunity bill was a retreat on sovereignty	High

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Use of experts	3	The best period of technocracy; but without a political voice	High
Response to discontent	1	15 Khordad: repression instead of dialogue	High
Land reform, women's suffrage, Literacy Corps	Convergent	To the benefit of the country and, in the short term, of the government	High
Immunity bill, 1964	Self-serving	Preserving the bond with the foreign patron at the price of sovereignty and the national symbol	High
Repression of 15 Khordad	Self-serving → strategic error	Short-term calm; built a symbol of resistance that overthrew the monarchy	Medium

14.7 Summary

The White Revolution showed that Mohammad Reza Shah, unlike his father, understood the importance of a social base. He knew that a monarchy without the people does not endure. His mistake was to think that the people could be won without being heard—that consent could be bought with grants, without recognizing the right of participation.

For this reason, the White Revolution both succeeded and failed. It succeeded because it transformed Iranian society. It failed because the transformed society—more literate, more urban, with women present in the public sphere and an expanded middle class—was precisely the society that no longer considered grants sufficient and wanted a share.

The shah built a society that was ready for participation, and then built a government that was not ready for participation. The gap between these two became, in the following decade, the abyss into which the monarchy fell.

CHAPTER 15

Chapter 15. The Government and the New Classes: A Development That Created the Middle Class but Rejected Its Participation

Mohammad Reza Shah made an unwritten bargain with Iran's middle class: *"welfare in exchange for silence."* The government provided schools, universities, state jobs, houses, cars, and trips to Europe; and in return it asked the middle class to leave politics to the shah. From the government's standpoint this bargain seemed logical. From the standpoint of history it was one of the greatest miscalculations of the past hundred years—because it was built on a mistaken understanding of what the middle class is and what it wants.

15.1 Developmental State, or Rentier State with Developmental Ambitions?

Before assessing this bargain, a concept must be made precise. The common literature on the second Pahlavi often calls it a "developmental state." But this term has a specific meaning in political science. Chalmers Johnson used it for Japan, and Peter Evans for Korea and Taiwan: a state whose meritocratic bureaucracy, with autonomy from particular groups and close ties to the private sector, steers the economy toward competitive, export-led industrialization—and whose financial source, at least in large part, is domestic taxation and saving.

Iran in the 1960s and 1970s had some of these features—especially the capable technocracy we saw in Chapter 14. But it departed from the model in two essential features. First, its financial source was not taxation but oil; and a state independent of taxation, as we saw in Chapter 4, also feels independent of accountability. Second, its bureaucracy was not autonomous; major economic decisions, as we shall see in Chapter 16, were made not in the Plan Organization but at the court. The more precise description is therefore this: *a rentier state with developmental ambitions.* This difference is not a play on words. Korea's developmental state built a middle class that paid taxes and therefore eventually demanded—and obtained—a share. Iran's rentier state built a middle class that fed on rent and therefore demanded a share—and did not obtain it.

15.2 The Class the Government Built

The statistics, in every form, tell one story. In the two decades after the White Revolution, the number of university students in Iran multiplied, tens of thousands of young Iranians went to Europe and America to study, and a new class of civil servants, engineers, doctors, teachers, and managers emerged in the large cities. This class was the direct product of government policy: the government had built its schools, founded its universities, paid its scholarships, and given it jobs.

The shah expected this class to be grateful. It was not. And political sociology, from Lipset to Huntington, had already explained why: *the educated middle class, precisely because it is educated and prosperous, is no longer content with welfare; it wants a share in the decisions that affect its life.* Education makes people not only more efficient but more questioning. And a questioning person resents a government that does not answer his questions—even if that government has given him a house.

Samuel Huntington called this situation the "participation gap": when social modernization—education, urbanization, media—moves faster than institutions of political participation, the demand for participation outstrips the capacity of institutions, and the gap is filled either by institution-building or by instability. Iran in the 1970s was a textbook example of this gap. *The government modernized society at the speed of an airplane and political institutions at the speed of a carriage.*

15.3 The Intellectuals: From "Westoxication" to the Return to the Self

In the decade in which the government was moving Iran rapidly toward the West, the mainstream of Iranian intellectual life moved in the opposite direction. In the early 1960s Jalal Al-e Ahmad wrote *Gharbzadegi* ("Westoxication") and coined a concept that became the keyword of a generation. Ali Shariati, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, drew thousands of educated young people to the Hosseiniyeh Ershad with a revolutionary interpretation of Shi'ism—until the Hosseiniyeh was closed in 1972. And in those same years, leftist and Islamist guerrilla groups, most of whose members were students and graduates, turned to armed struggle.

This development was, from this book's perspective, the government's great defeat in the "war of meaning." The government, which had built its legitimacy on modernity, could not offer a narrative of modernity that was meaningful to educated young people—because the official narrative had identified modernity with the person of the shah, with the bond with America, and with imposition from above. As a result, young people who were modern rejected the government's modernity and turned to narratives that promised authenticity, justice, and resistance to the foreigner. *A government that wants a monopoly on defining progress will sooner or later see its young people oppose progress itself in order to oppose it.*

15.4 The Bazaar and the Clergy: Natural Allies Who Became Enemies

Two traditional strata—the bazaar and the clergy—became in this period opponents who eventually formed the financial and organizational backbone of the revolution.

The bazaar in the 1970s came under pressure from several directions: competition from department stores and new banks, state control over parts of trade, and finally, in 1975, the campaign "against profiteering," in which thousands of shopkeepers and merchants were arrested, fined, or exiled. The government blamed the bazaar for the inflation it had itself created with its economic policies—which Chapter 16 examines. This is, by the fifth criterion, a perfect example of a response that does not resolve discontent but displaces it. *A government that manufactures culprits for its own error does not solve the problem; it turns the culprit it has manufactured into an enemy.*

The clergy, after 15 Khordad and Khomeini's exile, was outwardly quiet. But in these years the government took several steps that turned this quiet into silent anger. The most important was the change of the country's official calendar in Esfand 1354 (March 1976) from the Hijra of the Prophet of Islam to the founding of the Achaemenid empire. This decision had no practical benefit for the country. Symbolically, it told a large part of religious society that the government was not only ignoring their religious identity but replacing it. The 2,500-year celebrations of 1971, with a splendor and expense conspicuous in a country with widespread rural poverty, had already sent the same message.

In the dual-benefit test, the calendar change falls into the cell of strategic error: it made neither the country nor the government stronger. Its only function was to enhance the image of the shah personally—an image that two years later, in the first retreat of the Sharif-Emami government with the restoration of the Hijri calendar, itself became a symbol of weakness. *A symbol the ruler builds to glorify himself and is then forced to dismantle costs twice: once in the building, and once in the dismantling.*

15.5 Rural Migrants: A Population That Went Unseen

And finally, the stratum that was seen least of all and in 1978 was seen most of all: rural migrants. Land reform, as we saw in Chapter 14, gave many peasants land insufficient for their livelihood. The oil boom of the 1970s, by drawing capital to the cities and the construction industry, pulled this population toward the large cities. On the margins of Tehran and other cities, a population emerged that was neither rural nor urban: construction workers, street vendors, or unemployed; far from the support networks of the village and outside urban networks.

The only institution present for this population was the mosque and the religious association (*hey'at*). The government neither heard them nor organized them. The revolution both heard them and organized them. *A government that leaves part of society without institutions hands it over to an institution prepared to organize it—and that institution is rarely the government's friend.*

15.6 Scorecard: The Government and the Social Classes (1966–1977)

Table 15.1. Scorecard: the government and the social classes, 1966–1977

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	1	The bargain of "welfare for silence" was built on a mistaken understanding of the middle class's demands	High
Use of experts	2	Capable technocracy, without a political voice	High
Response to discontent	1	Repression of guerrilla groups and closure of the Hosseiniyeh instead of opening a political channel	High
Anti-profiteering campaign, 1975	Strategic error	Scapegoating the bazaar for state inflation; alienation	High
Calendar change, 1976	Strategic error	A great symbolic cost without any national benefit	High

15.7 Summary

By the end of the 1970s, the government of the second Pahlavi had reached a situation in which none of the principal strata of society—the new middle class, the intellectuals, the bazaar, the clergy, and the rural migrants—regarded it as its own. Most of them were still at the second or third stage of delegitimation—distrustful of institutions, or detached from the official narrative—and not at the stage of behavioral refusal. Repression had kept them silent. But as Kuran had shown, silence is not consent. It was enough for the government to ease the pressure for a moment, or for an economic crisis to occur, for hidden preferences to be revealed all at once. Both happened together in 1976 and 1977.

Development creates a class that has the right to ask whom development serves. A government that builds this class and forbids this question has raised its own enemy at its own expense.

CHAPTER 16

Chapter 16. The Oil Boom, Inflation, and the J-Curve: When Wealth Blinded the Government

Most governments fall from poverty. The second Pahlavi fell from wealth. This sentence is not an exaggeration; it is a precise summary of the years 1973 to 1979. In these five years Iran had more money than at any time in its history—and the Iranian government, more than at any other time, had lost the capacity to hear and to measure. The combination of the two produced a catastrophe that neither alone would have produced.

16.1 Unprecedented Money

In the autumn of 1973, after the October War, the world price of oil nearly quadrupled within a few months. The shah not only benefited from this increase but was one of its leading advocates in OPEC. Iran's oil revenue multiplied in a single year. For a country that a few years earlier had needed foreign loans and aid, this was a transformation seldom seen in contemporary history.

This moment was a pure test of the second criterion—*management of resources in the right direction.* The question for any wise leader was: what should be done with money obtained overnight and without any domestic effort, so that it brings health rather than sickness? Norway's experience, which we saw in Chapter 4, had given an answer: keep the money away from the economy, spend it gradually and in proportion to absorptive capacity, and build an institution that places a distance between revenue and whim. The shah's answer was the reverse of this.

16.2 Ramsar, Mordad 1353 (August 1974): The Moment of Divergence

The country's Fifth Development Plan, carefully drafted by the experts of the Plan Organization, had been approved before the oil boom. In the summer of 1974, at a meeting in Ramsar, at the shah's request, this plan was revised and its investment volume was almost doubled.

Many accounts by experts of the period—including managers of the Plan Organization itself—show that serious warnings were raised at that meeting: the Iranian economy did not have the capacity to absorb such a volume of money; ports, roads, and the electricity grid were inadequate for such a volume of imports and construction; there was not enough skilled labor; and the inevitable result would be inflation. These warnings were not heard. Or more precisely: they were heard and set aside.

This moment is, in the entire book, one of the clearest examples of the fourth criterion. The problem was not a lack of experts; the Iran of that time had one of the most capable generations of economists and planners in the region. The problem was that these experts could warn but could not change the decision. *A government that has experts but does not listen to them is worse than a government that has no experts; because the second at least knows that it does not know.*

The shah's motive was most likely not personal selfishness but national ambition: the dream of bringing Iran to the "Great Civilization," to the position of the world's fifth industrial power, within a generation. This dream should not be belittled. But in the dual-benefit test, the Ramsar decision falls into the cell of strategic error—not because its goal was wrong, but because its haste harmed

both the country and the government. *A great dream, without listening to those who know the boundary of the possible, differs little from illusion.*

16.3 Consequences: Inflation, Bottlenecks, and Discontent in the Midst of Boom

The experts' prediction came true with disturbing precision. In the years 1974 to 1977:

- **Inflation** reached levels Iran had not experienced in the previous decade. Housing rents in Tehran in particular became exorbitant, and the salaried middle class—the very class the government sought with its bargain of "welfare for silence"—saw its welfare melting away.
- **Infrastructure bottlenecks** made the face of the boom ugly. Ships waited months in the southern ports to unload, imported goods rotted on the docks, and in the summer of 1977 widespread power cuts gripped Tehran—in a country that was one of the world's largest energy exporters.
- **Labor shortages** led to a large influx of foreign workers and experts, whose presence, with higher wages and a different lifestyle, reinforced a sense of alienation in parts of society.
- **Military purchases** reached unprecedented dimensions. After Nixon's visit to Tehran in 1972, the shah had been permitted to buy almost any non-nuclear American weapon, and after the oil boom he made generous use of this permission. A large share of oil revenue that could have gone to education, health, and rural agriculture went to an arsenal that was of no use in the year of crisis.
- **Corruption in major contracts**, especially those reaching people close to the court, became a topic of people's daily conversation.

This last item was, by the yardstick of legitimacy, the most harmful of all. Chapter 10 showed that the ruler's corruption steals the credibility of every appeal the ruler makes in the name of the nation. In the 1970s this lesson was repeated on a far larger scale. *People standing in line for bread and housing can forgive inflation; but they cannot forgive that those who demand sacrifice of them grow rich from that same inflation.*

16.4 The J-Curve: From the Peak of Expectation to the Fall

In 1977 the government of Jamshid Amouzegar, which succeeded Hoveyda, adopted a contractionary policy to curb inflation. Government spending was cut, and the construction industry—the largest absorber of rural migrants—fell into recession. Thousands of construction workers who had come from the villages to the city for work became unemployed.

This is precisely the moment Chapter 3 explained with James Davies's theory. After years of rapid growth that had sent expectations skyward, reality suddenly fell. The government had itself built these expectations—with the promise of the "Great Civilization," with propaganda of endless growth, and with the image it had painted of an Iran on the threshold of joining the advanced world. Now the gap between what people expected and what they saw had become intolerable.

And at precisely this moment, the government had no second pillar to lean on. It had built its legitimacy, as Chapter 1 showed through Lipset's theory, solely on performance. When performance trembled, everything trembled. *A government that for twenty years has said, "Accept me because of growth," has nothing to say in the first year of recession.*

16.5 The Strongest Defense

The defender of this period will say: in the 1970s Iran experienced the fastest growth in its history; infrastructure was built that is still used decades later; inflation was a global phenomenon in those years and all oil-exporting countries faced it; and military purchases, in a turbulent region with neighbors such as Ba'thist Iraq and the Soviet Union, were a strategic necessity.

Each of these claims contains part of the truth. The growth was real; the infrastructure was real; the inflation was global; and the regional threats were also real. But this book's answer to this defense lies in a comparison: other countries had the same windfall revenue in those same years. Some, like Norway, managed it with accountable institutions. Iran managed it through the decision of one man, against the warnings of its experts, and without any institution that could stop him. *The problem was not oil; the problem was that the key to the oil treasury was in the pocket of someone to whom no one could say "no."*

16.6 Scorecard: The Oil Boom (1973–1977)

Table 16.1. Scorecard: the oil boom, 1973–1977

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Management of resources	1	The greatest financial opportunity in Iran's history spent in haste, without absorptive capacity	High
Recognition of the national interest	2	Real national ambition; priority to the military over human and rural development	Medium
Use of experts	1	Experts' warnings heard and set aside	High
Understanding public consent	1	Built expectations that could not be met; corruption ignored	High
Revision of the Fifth Plan at Ramsar, 1974	Strategic error	A national goal pursued with a haste that harmed both country and government	High
Massive military purchases	Self-serving	Strengthening the bond with the foreign patron and displaying power, at the price of development	Medium

16.7 Summary

The oil boom of the 1970s was the greatest opportunity the Pahlavi government had to convert performance legitimacy into durable legitimacy. With that money, the government could have both continued development and, under the shelter of a prosperity that reached everyone, gradually opened institutions of participation—what Korea and Taiwan, with far fewer resources, did in later decades. The government did neither: it continued development at a pace that consumed itself, and it did not open institutions of participation but closed them in 1975 with the Rastakhiz Party.

Sudden wealth makes a government that listens rich; and a government that does not listen, arrogant. The second Pahlavi became both rich and arrogant in 1974. Three years later, the bill for both arrived at once.

CHAPTER 17

Chapter 17. From Leniency to Collapse (1977–1979): A Government That Had Neither the Capacity to Repress nor the Capacity to Compromise

The fall of the second Pahlavi was, for most observers of the time, sudden. In Dey 1356 (December 1977), the President of the United States, at a banquet in Tehran, called Iran an "island of stability" in a turbulent region. Thirteen months later the shah had left the country, and a monarchy of two and a half millennia was collapsing. This chapter shows why what seemed sudden was not sudden—and why the government's conduct in these thirteen months, instead of slowing the collapse, accelerated it.

17.1 The Open Space: A Leniency That Came Late and Without a Plan

In 1977, with the Carter administration in power in the United States and its emphasis on human rights, and perhaps also with the shah's awareness of the illness he was keeping hidden, the government tried to open the political space a little. Open letters were written to the shah by political figures and jurists calling for a return to the Constitutional Law. Poetry nights in Tehran gathered thousands of people. And some political prisoners were released.

This leniency was, in principle, exactly what this book's reference model recommends: opening the channels of listening. But it had two fundamental shortcomings. First, *it was late*. The channels were opened when society was no longer at the stage of issue-specific discontent; large parts of it had reached the stage of normative rupture. The letter-writers called for a return to the constitution; but the society behind them no longer believed much in that constitution either—as the special essay showed. Second, *it was without a plan.* The opening came not as a strategy for building institutions of participation but as a temporary concession to foreign pressure. And society understood this.

Tocqueville, writing about the French Revolution, made a point that is the most precise description of Iran in 1977: *the most dangerous moment for a bad government is usually the moment it begins to reform itself, because reform shows people that what they were enduring was changeable—and what is changeable is no longer endurable.*

17.2 The Chain of Revelation

On 17 Dey 1356 (7 January 1978), the newspaper *Ettela'at* published an article under a pseudonym that sharply attacked Khomeini, who was in exile in Najaf. According to many sources, the article had reached the newspaper from within the government apparatus. Two days later, in Qom, a protest by seminary students was met with bullets. The fortieth-day commemoration of those killed in Qom led to a protest in Tabriz that was also violently suppressed; and the fortieth day of Tabriz to protests in other cities. The tradition of the fortieth-day mourning, which the government had no mechanism to contain, became an engine that every forty days reproduced the protest in a new city and with a larger crowd.

This is precisely the mechanism that Timur Kuran, in Chapter 3, called the "chain of revelation." Each death lowered the cost of the next protest for others, because it turned protest into a moral duty.

And each protest showed those sitting at home that they were not alone. *A government that fires on mourning makes the next mourning larger.*

On 28 Mordad 1357 (19 August 1978), the fire at the Cinema Rex in Abadan killed hundreds of people. Responsibility for this catastrophe was later attributed to elements not aligned with the government; but in those days a large part of society blamed the government. This itself, regardless of the truth of the affair, was evidence of the stage of delegitimation: *when people attribute every catastrophe to the government, the government is no longer believed even in its innocence.*

17.3 Oscillation: Leniency and the Fist in a Single Week

From then on, the government's conduct took on a pattern that, from this book's perspective, was the principal cause of the collapse's acceleration: *oscillation between compromise and repression.*

On 5 Shahrivar 1357 (27 August 1978), the shah appointed Ja'far Sharif-Emami prime minister with the slogan of "national reconciliation." The imperial calendar was abolished and the Hijri calendar restored, casinos were closed, and press freedoms were expanded. Twelve days later, on 17 Shahrivar (8 September), after martial law was declared, military forces opened fire on protesters in Jaleh Square. On 15 Aban (6 November), the shah said in a televised message that he had heard the voice of the people's revolution—and on the same day a military government under General Azhari took office. And in the same month Amir Abbas Hoveyda, who had been the shah's own prime minister for thirteen years, was arrested along with a number of former officials.

Each of these steps, on its own, had a logic. But together they were the worst possible combination. Compromise without repression told society that the government was weak. Repression without compromise created new martyrs. And the combination of the two in a single week sent society both messages at once: the government is both weak and violent. *Oscillation between compromise and repression pays the costs of both and reaps the benefits of neither.*

The arrest of Hoveyda is the most instructive of all. By imprisoning the prime minister he himself had kept in office for thirteen years, the shah wanted to transfer responsibility for the errors to him. But people had a simple question: if Hoveyda is to blame, who kept him in office for thirteen years? *A ruler who sacrifices his officials to save himself has proved to the people that in that system only one person truly decided—and now that one person has pointed out the culprit.* This is the same pattern of scapegoating we saw in the anti-profiteering campaign of Chapter 15—this time at the highest level.

17.4 The Paris Error: The Moment of Divergence in Foreign Policy

In Mehr 1357 (October 1978), at the request of the Iranian government, the Iraqi government restricted Khomeini's activities in Najaf, and he was forced to leave Iraq and went to Neauphle-le-Château on the outskirts of Paris. The government's aim was to distance him from Iran and from the network of Shi'i clerics.

The result was exactly the opposite of the aim. In Najaf, Khomeini was an exiled cleric whose messages reached Iran only with difficulty. In Paris, he was placed at the center of the world's media. Every day he spoke with international journalists; his messages reached mosques throughout Iran within hours by telephone and cassette tape; and figures from every opposition current—including leaders of the National Front—traveled to Paris to meet him.

This decision falls, in the dual-benefit test, into the cell of strategic error, and on the third criterion—recognizing interests and reading the environment—it scores close to zero. But its deeper point is this: the government, even at this stage, still believed that the problem was one individual, not a society. *A government that reduces a crisis of legitimacy to a single enemy makes that enemy larger with every blow it strikes against him—because society hears its own voice in that enemy.*

17.5 The Shah Alone: Illness, Ambassadors, and an Army Without a Head

Three further factors paralyzed the government's capacity in these months.

First, *the shah's illness.* Mohammad Reza Shah had been suffering from cancer for several years and had concealed it even from many of those close to him. To what extent the illness and its treatment affected his decision-making capacity in these months is debated. But that the fate of a country had become dependent on the physical health of one man is itself the most eloquent critique of the architecture of power he had built.

Second, *reliance on foreign ambassadors.* The published accounts of the American and British ambassadors in Tehran, and the memoirs of those close to the shah, show that in the months of crisis the shah repeatedly consulted these two ambassadors about what to do. This pattern was a bitter return of the delegitimizing factor of "the foreigner as arbiter"—the same pattern from which his father had suffered in August 1941. *A shah who asks a foreign ambassador in a crisis what to do has announced to his nation that what they said about the beginning of his reign is also true of its end.*

Third, *an army built for one person.* The second Pahlavi's army, with all its equipment and budget, was organized so that its commanders reported directly to the shah and had no independent coordination with one another—so that no commander could stage a coup. This architecture had made the shah safe from a coup. But an army coordinated only through one person is, when that person leaves, no longer an army; it is a collection of commanders, each of whom does not know what the other will do. After 26 Dey (16 January 1979), precisely this happened, and on 22 Bahman (11 February) the army's Supreme Council declared neutrality. *An army built to protect the ruler against the army cannot protect the ruler against the nation.*

17.6 Scorecard: The Crisis of 1977–1979

Table 17.1. Scorecard: the crisis of 1977–1979

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	0 to 1	Until the final months regarded the crisis as a foreign conspiracy or the work of one individual	High
Recognition of the national interest	1	The Paris decision; reliance on consulting foreign ambassadors	High
Use of experts	1	Independent advisers summoned late and without authority; loyal officials thrown in prison	Medium
Response to discontent	0	Oscillation between compromise and repression—the worst possible combination	High
The article of 17 Dey 1356 (January 1978)	Strategic error	A wound the government inflicted on itself	Medium
17 Shahrivar 1357 (September 1978)	Strategic error	Repression that both created martyrs and discredited the reconciliation government	High

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Arrest of Hoveyda	Self-serving → strategic error	Sacrificing an official to save the ruler; reverse effect	High
Expulsion of Khomeini from Iraq	Strategic error	Moved the opposition leader to the center of world media	High

17.7 Period Scorecard: The Second Pahlavi in Ten Items

Table 17.2. The second Pahlavi in the ten-part template

Item	Judgment
1. Claimed source of legitimacy	Development, imperial nationalism, and "the Revolution of the Shah and the People"—without a free vote
2. Architecture of power	Single-center and visible; army and SAVAK directly dependent on the shah
3. Instruments for managing legitimacy	Performance and distribution of rent; coercion; symbolic and ineffective persuasion
4. Demands of society	Participation, freedom, justice, respect for religious identity, independence from the foreigner
5. Attention to the people's vote and will	Close to zero after 1953; Rastakhiz forbade even silence
6. Record of effectiveness	High until 1973; chaotic thereafter
7. Institution-building and executive capacity	Capable technocracy; rubber-stamp political institutions
8. The gap between demand and response	Active in all principal strata
9. Delegitimation and the government's response	Hidden until 1977; chain of revelation; oscillating response
10. Measurement against the reference model	Weak on principles 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8; medium to good on 4 and 5 until 1973

Table 17.3. Mohammad Reza Shah's leadership rationality in three periods

Criterion	1953–1962	1962–1973	1973–1979
Understanding public consent	1	2	0 to 1
Management of resources	2	3	1
Recognition of the national interest	2	2	1
Use of experts	2	3	1
Response to discontent	1	1	0

The pattern is clear. Mohammad Reza Shah reached his best scores in the decade of the White Revolution—a period in which he still needed consent and experts. After the oil boom, which seemed to make him independent of both, all his scores fell. *Wealth not only made the government independent of taxpayers; it made the shah independent of his advisers.*

17.8 Summary of Part Five: Father and Son

Mohammad Reza Shah ascended the throne with one lesson from his father's fall and fell with the same lesson. The lesson he drew was that the shah must be more powerful: a larger army, a firmer foreign patron, and a more effective security apparatus than his father had. He built all of these. And in 1979 all of them proved as ineffective as his father's army in 1941.

The lesson he did not learn was the real lesson of August 1941: *a shah whom the people do not defend is saved by no instrument.* Like his father, he built the country; like his father, he transformed society; and like his father, at the moment of crisis, he was left alone. The difference was that the father was removed from power by foreigners and the son by the nation. And this difference, which outwardly did not favor the son, was in fact more telling: delegitimation in 1941 was silent; in 1979, it was a shout.

The government that came after him read this lesson in its own way: if the shah fell because he had no popular base, then the new system must build a popular and ideological base that would never collapse. Parts Six and Seven ask what became of this solution in practice.

PART SIX: The Islamic Republic, the First Decade—Revolutionary and Charismatic Legitimacy (1979–1989)

No government in Iran's last hundred years began with as much legitimacy capital as the Islamic Republic. In Bahman 1357 (February 1979), millions of Iranians were in the streets; in Farvardin 1358 (March 1979), according to the official report, a very large majority of voters voted for an "Islamic Republic"; and the leader of the revolution was, in Weber's terms, an almost perfect example of charismatic authority: a man whose commands many accepted without any law obliging them to, because they believed in him.

This capital drew on all three dimensions of legitimacy set out in Chapter 1. It had *input legitimacy*: a popular revolution and a referendum with broad participation. It had *normative legitimacy*: a narrative—Islam, independence, justice—that a large part of society regarded as justifiable. And, at least at the outset, it had *the promise of output legitimacy*: an end to corruption, an end to dependence, and oil wealth reaching the tables of the dispossessed.

The question of this part is how this greatest legitimacy capital of the century was spent in a single decade. The short answer is this: *the leaders of the revolution drew a lesson from the shah's fall that was half right.* They rightly saw that the shah fell because he had no popular base. But they concluded that the solution was a popular base loyal to one interpretation, one leader, and one ideology—not a base able to criticize, remove, or replace its leaders. They built support, not institutions of accountability. And support that cannot say "no," as Chapter 1 showed, is only another name for obedience—an obedience that this time came not from fear but from faith, but whose fate, as Part Seven shows, was not very different.

The three chapters of this part measure this decade with the same ten-part template and the same five criteria of leadership rationality that were applied to the two Pahlavis. Uniformity of yardstick is a condition of fairness: if we criticized Reza Shah for eliminating competent officials, we must apply the same critique to Bazargan and Banisadr; and if we criticized Mohammad Reza Shah for the repression of 15 Khordad, we must apply the same yardstick to the decade that followed.

CHAPTER 18

Chapter 18. Two Sources of Legitimacy in One Constitution: When the Winners Wrote the Rules

The lesson of Spain, which we saw in Chapter 4, could be summarized in a single sentence: *rules before winners.* After Franco, Spain's political forces first agreed on the rules of the game and then competed for power. Iran in 1979 took the reverse path: the winner of the revolution was determined, and then that same winner wrote the rules. This chapter shows how—and why this sequence planted at the heart of the new system a duality that had been inherited from the Constitutional era and has still not been resolved.

18.1 The Referendum of Farvardin: A Vote for a Name

On 10 and 11 Farvardin 1358 (30–31 March 1979), Iranians took part in a referendum with a single question: Islamic Republic, yes or no. The official result was a majority close to unanimity. The input legitimacy of this moment should not be underestimated: millions of people voted, freely and with enthusiasm, for a new system.

But this referendum had a fundamental shortcoming that was little noticed in those fervent days: *people voted for a name, not for a text.* No one yet knew exactly what the "Islamic Republic" would be—who would decide within it, which institution would supervise which, and what the rights of citizens would be. Nor was there any other option on the ballot; currents that wanted a "democratic republic," or a "republic" without an adjective, had no way to put their option to the people's vote. *A referendum in which people say yes to a name before knowing its content has entrusted the power to determine that content to whoever chose the name.*

18.2 From Constituent Assembly to Assembly of Experts: The Moment of Divergence

In the first months of the revolution, the official promise was that the constitution would be drafted by an elected constituent assembly with broad representation. A draft was indeed prepared in Mehdi Bazargan's Provisional Government—a text that structurally resembled the Constitutional Law and the models of parliamentary republics, and in which no special position was envisaged for *velayat-e faqih* (the guardianship of the jurist). According to a number of sources, the leader of the revolution, too, initially had no objection to this draft.

Then the course changed. Instead of a constituent assembly with hundreds of representatives, a smaller body with some seventy-odd members—the "Assembly for the Final Review of the Constitution," which became known as the Assembly of Experts—was elected in Mordad 1358 (August 1979). In elections that many non-religious forces had boycotted or in which they had failed, the majority of this assembly went to clerics and those close to the Islamic Republican Party. And this assembly did not review the draft; it rewrote it. The principle of *velayat-e faqih*—absent from the draft—became the central pillar of the text.

This moment is the clear moment of divergence of this period. The dual-benefit test answers it as follows. What served the country was a constitution in which all the forces of the revolution—religious and nationalist, leftist and ethnic—could find their place and would therefore defend it.

What served the victorious current was a constitution that entrusted final authority to a particular interpretation of Islam and to a particular institution. The victorious current chose the second. The decision was therefore self-serving—not in the sense of personal gain, but in the sense of placing the dominance of one ideological current, with its reading of political Islam, above a national covenant.

Some figures of the revolution saw this danger at the time. Members of the Provisional Government proposed that the Assembly of Experts be dissolved. Ayatollah Seyyed Kazem Shariatmadari, a prominent *marja'*, opposed the principle of *velayat-e faqih* in the form in which it had been written, and the party close to him rose in protest in Tabriz. These voices were pushed aside. *When the allies of a revolution are excluded from writing the constitution, they are no longer allies; they are rivals waiting for the first opportunity.*

18.3 Azar 1358 (December 1979): A Constitution in the Shadow of the Embassy

The referendum on the new constitution was held on 11 and 12 Azar 1358 (2–3 December 1979)—less than a month after the occupation of the American embassy on 13 Aban (4 November), and a few days after the resignation of the Provisional Government. The country's atmosphere was one of anti-American mobilization; and in such an atmosphere, opposing a text backed by the leader of the revolution was not easy. The text was approved by a large majority, although the number of participants, according to the official report, was noticeably lower than in the Farvardin referendum.

Many observers—including some who were involved at the time—later said that the hostage crisis helped the approval of the text, at least in its timing. This judgment cannot be proven with certainty. But it raises a question that is vital for this book: *a constitution approved in an atmosphere of mobilization against a foreign enemy enjoys a legitimacy that depends on the enemy; and a legitimacy that depends on the enemy needs the enemy.*

18.4 A Text with Two Pillars

The Constitution of 1979 was a text with two pillars that were never reconciled.

The first pillar was *republicanism.* Article 6 provided that the affairs of the country must be administered on the basis of public opinion: the election of the president, the deputies of the Majlis, and the members of the councils. Article 56 held that absolute sovereignty over the world and humanity belongs to God, but that God has made human beings sovereign over their own social destiny. This pillar was the legacy of the Constitutional Revolution and of a popular revolution.

The second pillar was *velayat-e faqih.* Article 5 placed the guardianship of the community, during the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, in the hands of a just and informed jurist. Article 110 entrusted to the Leader supreme command of the armed forces, the appointment of the jurists of the Guardian Council and of the head of the judiciary, and other powers. And the Guardian Council, half of whose members are appointed by the Leader, became the authority for reviewing the conformity of all Majlis legislation with the sharia and the constitution.

This is the same duality that the special essay saw in Article 2 of the Supplement to the Constitutional Law: two ultimate sources of the right to command in one text. In the Constitutional era, the conflict between nation and sharia remained hidden in a supervisory committee that was never seriously convened. In the Constitution of 1979, this conflict was institutionalized at the heart of the system, and from the outset it was resolved in favor of the second pillar. *A constitution that*

recognizes two sovereigns has, in practice, one sovereign: the one who has the last word at the moment of conflict.

18.5 The Strongest Defense

The defender of this path will say: the revolution was an Islamic revolution; the great majority of society was Muslim and had accepted its leader; and a constitution that accommodated *velayat-e faqih* institutionalized exactly what people had demanded in the streets. The Assembly of Experts, too, was chosen by popular vote, and its text was approved by popular vote.

This defense is serious and contains an important part of the truth: a large part of Iranian society in 1979 trusted the leader of the revolution and supported a role for religion in government. But it has three answers. First, the dominant slogan of the revolution was "Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic," not "*velayat-e faqih*"; and the concept of *velayat-e faqih*, in the form it took in the text, had no prominent place in public discourse before the revolution. Second, people chose between "this text" and "no text," not between this text and another; and a choice without a real alternative measures consent but does not measure preference. Third, and most important of all: even if the majority of 1979 wanted this text, a constitution written for today's majority that closes the path of change for tomorrow's majority—as the 1989 revision did with Article 177—is the contract of one generation, not the covenant of a nation. *A good constitution makes the rule of today's majority possible; a durable constitution keeps the rule of tomorrow's majority possible as well.*

18.6 Scorecard: Founding the System (1979)

Table 18.1. Scorecard: founding the system, 1979

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent (leader of the revolution)	4 in 1978; 2 in 1979	Read the anti-monarchical demand correctly; then converted general consent into one particular interpretation	High
Use of experts	2	Provisional Government formed of experts; the experts' draft set aside	High
Recognition of the national interest	2	Independence correctly seen; an inclusive national covenant sacrificed to the dominance of one current	Medium
Referendum of Farvardin 1358	Convergent, with a shortcoming	Input legitimacy; a vote for a name, not for a real text	High
Setting aside the constituent assembly and the Provisional Government's draft	Self-serving	Dominance of one current over a covenant that could have been national	High

18.7 Summary

In its first year, the Islamic Republic did something the first and second Pahlavis never did: it founded its system through the direct vote of the people. This was a capital that no government of the past hundred years had possessed. But that same year it took two decisions that made this capital conditional from the outset: the constitution was written by the winners, not by all the revolutionaries; and in it two sources of the right to command sat side by side, one of which had

precedence over the other from the very beginning—and that was an opportunistic clergy that confiscated power in its own name.

The lesson of this chapter for the Iran of tomorrow is clear, and the special essay wrote it into the first principle of a future constitution: *the day after every revolution is its most important day—the day on which it becomes clear whether the victors are writing rules for everyone or rules for themselves.*

CHAPTER 19

Chapter 19. The Elimination of the Revolutionary Coalition and the Parallel Institutions: A Revolution That Chose Among Its Children

The revolution of 1979 was brought to victory by a broad coalition: clerics and bazaar merchants, liberal nationalists and the Freedom Movement, Marxist leftists and Muslim Mojahedin, students, oil workers, and ethnic groups. Within three years, almost the whole of this coalition, save one current, had been driven from power. This chapter shows how this elimination took place, with what instruments, and at what cost to the legitimacy of the new system.

One point must be made at the outset, because the fairness of this book depends on it: *this elimination was not one-sided.* Some of the eliminated forces—particularly the People's Mojahedin Organization from Khordad 1360 (June 1981)—themselves turned to armed struggle and assassination, and killed hundreds of officials and citizens. In Iran's last hundred years, a political culture that regards the rival as an enemy and the enemy as deserving of elimination has been the monopoly of no single current. But the responsibility of a government is not equal to the responsibility of its opponents: *the government, unlike its opponents, holds the law; and whoever holds the law sets the standard of justice for everyone—including for its enemies.*

19.1 Parallel Institutions: A Second State Beside the First

In the first months after the revolution, alongside the official government—Bazargan's Provisional Government—a second state emerged: the Revolutionary Council, the revolutionary committees in every neighborhood, the Revolutionary Courts, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (Ordibehesht 1358, May 1979), the Foundation of the Dispossessed (Bonyad-e Mostaz'afan), which took over the confiscated assets of the Pahlavi family and its associates, the Construction Jihad, and the Basij. Bazargan described this situation with a famous phrase: a government that has responsibility but no authority, beside institutions that have authority but no responsibility.

From the perspective of this book's model, this phenomenon—which we call *parallel institution-building*—may be the most enduring legacy of the revolution's first decade. Reza Shah hollowed out accountable institutions. Mohammad Reza Shah made them rubber stamps. The Islamic Republic did something else: it preserved the accountable institutions—the government, the Majlis, the councils—and beside each one built a parallel institution that was not accountable but held real power. In fact, it must be said that *an appointed state* (a combination of institutions such as the Assembly of Experts, the Guardian Council and the Expediency Discernment Council, the various foundations, headquarters and command staffs) was created beside the bureaucratic state to supervise it. In the first decade this architecture became an instrument for eliminating rivals. In the following decades, as Part Seven shows, it led to an architecture of "concealing the center of authority."

Some of these institutions had real and even beneficial functions. The Construction Jihad, as Chapter 20 shows, brought electricity and roads to villages that had never received anything from the Pahlavi state. But this book's yardstick is not function; it is accountability. *An institution that*

does good work but answers to no one serves today; tomorrow, when it does bad work, no one can stop it.

19.2 The Revolutionary Courts: Revolutionary Justice and Judicial Legitimacy

From the first days after 22 Bahman, the Revolutionary Courts tried and executed hundreds of military, security, and political officials of the former regime—often in brief trials, without counsel, and without the possibility of appeal. Amir Abbas Hoveyda, whom the shah himself had arrested, was tried and executed in such a court in Farvardin 1358 (April 1979).

Many Iranians in those days saw these courts as justice: an answer to years of SAVAK repression and torture. This feeling must be understood. But from the perspective of legitimacy, these courts laid a foundation that was later used against the revolutionaries themselves: the principle that law and due process can be set aside in the face of "revolutionary necessity." *A court that sets aside the law today to punish the enemy will set it aside tomorrow to punish yesterday's friend*—and so it happened.

19.3 13 Aban 1358 (4 November 1979): The Moment of Divergence in Foreign and Domestic Policy

On 13 Aban 1358 (4 November 1979), a group of students occupied the American embassy and took its staff hostage. The leader of the revolution supported this action and called it "the second revolution." The next day, Bazargan's Provisional Government resigned.

This decision, perhaps more than any other in this decade, shows the distinction between *instrumental rationality* and *national rationality.*

From the perspective of instrumental rationality—consolidating the power of the dominant current—the hostage-taking was a highly effective decision. It pushed aside the liberal Provisional Government, created an atmosphere of anti-American mobilization in which the new constitution was approved (Chapter 18), and discredited every opposition with the label of complicity with the "Great Satan." Liberal currents, which had ties to the West, became vulnerable in this atmosphere.

From the perspective of national rationality, the costs were heavy: Iran's assets abroad were frozen; economic sanctions began; Iran was isolated in the international community—precisely on the eve of the Iraqi attack, which came a few months later, in Shahrivar 1359 (September 1980), and left Iran alone and without allies in the face of a massive aggression. The hostages were freed after 444 days, under the Algiers Accords—on terms that many analysts do not regard as favorable to Iran.

In the dual-benefit test, therefore, the hostage-taking falls in the self-serving cell: it strengthened the dominant current and cost the country. And its legacy lasted far longer than the event itself: a pattern in which hostility toward a foreign power becomes an instrument for managing domestic legitimacy. *A government that builds its domestic legitimacy on a foreign enemy cannot reconcile with that enemy, even when the national interest demands reconciliation—because reconciliation destroys its legitimacy.* This pattern, as Part Seven shows, shaped four decades of Iranian foreign policy.

19.4 Banisadr: The First President and the First Test of Republicanism

In Bahman 1358 (January 1980), Abolhassan Banisadr was elected Iran's first president by a large majority—nearly eleven million votes. He was the direct choice of the people, with far more votes than any rival. If the republican pillar of the constitution had any meaning, this vote should have made him the holder of real authority.

It did not. In the eighteen months that followed, a war of attrition broke out between the elected president and the Islamic Republican Party, which controlled the Majlis, the cabinet, and the judiciary. A prime minister whom Banisadr did not want was imposed on him. His powers in the war, which had begun in Shahrivar 1359 (September 1980), were curtailed. And finally, in Khordad 1360 (June 1981), the Majlis voted on his political incompetence, and the leader of the revolution dismissed him.

A judgment of Banisadr as a politician is not the subject of this chapter; he too had his errors. The subject of this chapter is what his removal revealed about the architecture of power: *in the first serious conflict between the direct vote of the people and the institutions under the influence of the dominant current, the people's vote lost.* The republican pillar that Chapter 18 saw in the text of the constitution proved, at its first practical test, to be a pillar that stays upright only as long as it does not have to bear the weight of the other pillar. This is the same pattern of the competent official that we named in Chapter 2—this time in the highest elected office of the country.

19.5 Khordad 1360 (June 1981) and After: From Rivalry to Civil War

Banisadr's removal was accompanied by a bloody turn. On 30 Khordad 1360 (20 June 1981), the People's Mojahedin Organization, which had allied itself with Banisadr, turned to armed struggle. In the weeks that followed, the bombing of the Islamic Republican Party headquarters on 7 Tir (28 June) killed Ayatollah Beheshti and dozens of the system's officials; and on 8 Shahrivar (30 August) another bombing killed the new president, Mohammad-Ali Raja'i, and his prime minister, Mohammad-Javad Bahonar. The government responded with a wave of arrests and executions that encompassed thousands of people—including many who had played no role in the armed operations.

In those same months, the National Front, after calling a demonstration in protest against the *qesas* (retribution) bill, was declared apostate by the leader of the revolution. In 1982 and 1983 the Tudeh Party—which had supported the system for years—was dismantled and its leaders arrested. The Freedom Movement was pushed to the margins. The universities, in the course of the "Cultural Revolution," remained closed from 1980 to 1983, and many of their professors and students were expelled. And in Kurdistan, armed conflict between government forces and the Kurdish parties had begun in the very first year.

By 1983, of the broad coalition of 1979 only one current remained in power. *A revolution that began with "all together" arrived, in less than five years, at "only us."*

19.6 The Cost of Elimination: What Left with the Rivals

From the perspective of the fourth criterion—the use of experts—the cost of this elimination was very heavy. The "purges" in government offices, the army, the universities, and industry drove out tens of thousands of specialists, and a great wave of emigration of skilled people began that has never stopped since. Many of those who left or were driven out were not opponents of the revolution

but merely out of step with its dominant interpretation. The criterion of selection changed from "expertise" to "commitment"—and this change was made official with a slogan that was common in those days.

From the perspective of the fifth criterion—the response to discontent—this decade, for all its differences, repeated the pattern we saw at Goharshad in 1935 and on 15 Khordad 1342 (1963): the answer to opposition was not dialogue but elimination. With one difference: this time, elimination was justified in the language of religion, and this justification carried a cost the Pahlavis did not bear. *When the elimination of a political rival is justified in the language of religion, not only the rival but religion itself pays a price in the eyes of part of society.* Part Seven shows that this cost became, in later decades, one of the deepest legitimacy rifts of the system.

19.7 Scorecard: Consolidation of the System (1979–1983)

Table 19.1. Scorecard: consolidation of the system, 1979–1983

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	2	Effective mass mobilization; but broad consent reduced to support for one current	Medium
Use of experts	1	"Commitment" instead of "expertise"; widespread purges and the start of elite emigration	High
Response to discontent	0 to 1	Elimination of all rivals; mass executions	High
Support for the hostage-taking	Self-serving	Consolidation of the dominant current at the price of isolation on the eve of war	High
Removal of Banisadr	Self-serving	Defeat of the people's direct vote by the institutions of the dominant current	High
Parallel institution-building	Self-serving	Power without accountability; the foundation of the architecture of later decades	High

19.8 Summary

Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah eliminated competent officials one by one. The revolution eliminated its entire coalition within a few years. Both patterns had one logic: in a system whose legitimacy comes from a single center, every independent voice is a threat. The difference was in scale—and in language.

The lesson of this chapter, which Chapter 4 drew from the experience of Taiwan, is seen here with bitterer clarity: *a government that regards the defeat of its rivals as necessary for its own survival will eventually find those same rivals again in the form of a discontented society—a society that no longer says "no" to a rival but to the whole system.*

CHAPTER 20

Chapter 20. War, Mobilization, and Distributive Justice: A Legitimacy Built from Sacrifice

On 31 Shahrivar 1359 (22 September 1980), the Iraqi army attacked Iran by land and air. Eight years later, a war that had killed or wounded hundreds of thousands of Iranians ended with the acceptance of a resolution that left the borders almost exactly where they had been at the start. In these eight years, the Islamic Republic had three instruments for building and sustaining legitimacy that no other government of the past hundred years possessed to the same degree: *defense of the homeland, faith-based mobilization, and distributive justice.* This chapter assesses what these three instruments built, and why what they built proved, with the end of the war and the death of the leader of the revolution, more fragile than it had appeared.

20.1 Defense of the Homeland: A Legitimacy the Enemy Gave the System

In the short term, the Iraqi attack was the greatest political boon for a system that was locked in a fierce internal struggle. The phenomenon political scientists call the "rally-round-the-flag effect"—the unity of a nation in the face of an external threat—occurred in Iran with an intensity seldom seen. Millions of Iranians, including many who did not sympathize with the system, went to the front or supported it to defend the country. Even officers of the former army, many of whom had been purged or imprisoned in the first months of the revolution, returned to the front.

This legitimacy was real and deep. Iran's resistance against an army fighting with the support of most Arab states and many world powers, and the liberation of Khorramshahr on 3 Khordad 1361 (24 May 1982), created moments of national pride that are still alive in the collective memory of Iranians. Any judgment about this decade must recognize this fact: *in a war that Iran did not begin, defending the country was the most legitimate thing any government could do, and this government did it.*

But this legitimacy was of a particular kind: a legitimacy that came from outside, not from within. Loyalty was shown to the government because there was a foreign enemy, not because the government had built institutions of accountability. And as Chapter 19 warned regarding the hostage-taking, *a legitimacy that depends on the enemy fades when the enemy departs.*

20.2 Khordad 1361 (June 1982): The Great Moment of Divergence of the Decade

After the liberation of Khorramshahr, Iraqi forces had been pushed back from almost all of Iranian territory. Iran was in a position it would never regain in the course of the war: military superiority, international legitimacy as the victim of aggression, and real leverage for negotiation. There are reports from those months of mediation proposals and even of payment of reparations by the Arab states of the Persian Gulf; the extent, seriousness, and precise terms of these proposals are debated by historians, but the existence of an opportunity to end the war from a position of strength is not seriously in doubt.

The leadership of the system decided to continue the war and to enter Iraqi territory. The slogans of this period—among them that "the road to Jerusalem passes through Karbala" and that the war

would continue "until the removal of sedition"—showed that the aim of the war had changed from the defense of Iran to the overthrow of the Iraqi regime and the export of the revolution.

This decision is, in the whole of this book, one of the costliest decisions of the past hundred years. Six more years of war, hundreds of thousands more killed and wounded, the destruction of cities, and an economic cost whose effects Iran still feels. And in the end, Iran accepted a resolution that was no better than anything possible in 1982.

The strongest defense of this decision is as follows: Saddam Hussein was still in power and his ceasefire could not be trusted; the UN Security Council had not even demanded Iraq's withdrawal at the start of the war, and Iran had no reason to trust international institutions; parts of Iranian territory were still occupied; and without the identification of the aggressor and the payment of reparations, any ceasefire would have meant rewarding aggression. This defense is serious, and parts of it—especially the distrust of international institutions—are justified.

But this book's answer lies in Resolution 598 itself, which was issued in Tir 1366 (July 1987) and which Iran accepted a year later. This resolution referred, among other things, to determining responsibility for the start of the war—the very thing Iran wanted. The question is whether similar or better terms could not have been obtained in 1982, when Iran was at the peak of its military superiority. Most evidence indicates that the advantage on the battlefronts lay with Iran. *Ending a war from a position of strength is the most difficult and wisest decision a leader can make, because it must be made at precisely the moment when victory seems possible.*

How, in the dual-benefit test, should the continuation of the war after Khordad 1361 be judged? The simple judgment is to call it "self-serving": the war preserved the atmosphere of mobilization, kept domestic opposition silent, and made the revolutionary institutions—especially the Revolutionary Guard—more powerful. All this is true. But fairness requires us to say that the principal motive was most likely ideological faith, not power-seeking calculation. Some leaders of the Islamic Republic saw in the continuation of the war a way of fanning that same faith, an ideological slogan and demand that would lend the system further legitimacy; publicly proclaiming their revolutionary ideal under the motto "the tree of the revolution is watered with the blood of the young," they saw the discourse of continuing the war as bound up with the continuation and survival of the Islamic Republic, and it was for this reason that the decision to continue the war was taken. Nevertheless, the outcome is independent of the motive. In the long run, the decision harmed both the country and the system itself—which after the war faced an exhausted society and a ruined economy. This book's judgment is therefore: *an ideological strategic error*—a decision that weakened both country and government, not from a calculation of power but from a belief that would not accept the limits of the possible.

20.3 Distributive Justice: What Actually Reached the Dispossessed

If war was the first instrument of legitimacy in this decade, distributive justice was the second—and in this instrument the system's record is better than its opponents often concede.

The Construction Jihad brought electricity, piped water, and roads to thousands of villages that had been deprived of them under the Pahlavis. The network of rural "health houses," which expanded from the mid-1980s, became one of the most successful primary health-care programs in the developing world, and indicators such as infant mortality and life expectancy in rural areas improved dramatically in the following decades. The Literacy Movement, which began in the first

year of the revolution, brought literacy to millions of adults, especially rural women. And in the war years, the rationing system for basic goods, for all its shortcomings, prevented widespread hunger.

These achievements produced real *specific support* among a large part of rural society and the urban poor—support that in later decades, too, remained a pillar of the system's social base in parts of society. This is the very stratum that Chapter 15 said the second Pahlavi "neither heard nor organized." The Islamic Republic both heard it and organized it.

But three questions complicate the judgment. First, *the source of funding*: this distribution, as under the Pahlavis, relied on oil revenue, and a state that finances itself from oil, as Chapter 4 showed, does not need its taxpayers and feels no need to answer to them. Second, *the channel of distribution*: an important part of the distribution took place not through the accountable government but through foundations and parallel institutions that answered to no elected body—and these same foundations became, in later decades, unaccountable economic empires. Third, *the link between distribution and loyalty*: wherever distribution is made conditional on loyalty, it turns from a right into rent. *Justice that passes through an unaccountable channel reaches the poor today; tomorrow, the loyal.*

20.4 1988: The Year Two Files Were Closed

The year 1988 contained two decisions that, side by side, show the dual face of this decade with bitter clarity.

The first decision was the acceptance of Resolution 598 on 27 Tir 1367 (18 July 1988). Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, ended the war in a message that likened the acceptance to drinking "a chalice of poison." Chapter 2 called this decision an example of error correction—but a correction that was late, costly, and dependent on the will of one person, and that occurred only when the cost of continuing had become so evident that no filter could conceal it. This decision must be recognized: a leader who could have passed the cost on to another generation by continuing accepted responsibility for the end. In the dual-benefit test, this decision was *convergent*—though six years late.

The second decision came a few weeks later. In the summer of 1988, after a military incursion by the People's Mojahedin Organization from Iraqi territory, thousands of political prisoners—many of whom had already been sentenced and were serving their terms—were executed in prisons across the country after brief interrogations before panels that later became known as the "death committees." The exact number of victims is still unknown; estimates range from several thousand upward.

Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri, deputy leader and designated successor, protested these executions in letters to the leader of the revolution. A few months later, in Farvardin 1368 (March 1989), he was removed as deputy leader.

This moment, from this book's perspective, has a meaning beyond the catastrophe itself. Montazeri was, in those days, the last independent voice at the highest level of the system—someone who, from within and from the position of successor, could tell the leader that he was wrong. His removal was the same pattern we saw in all four periods: the elimination of an official who spoke truth to power. But this time, the elimination occurred in a position that none of the earlier eliminations had occupied: succession. *A system that removes its critical successor has announced to its future that it will accept only a successor who is not a critic.* When the last "no" at the highest level is silenced,

the system can no longer be reformed from within; it can only be broken from without—or decay from within.

20.5 Scorecard: War and Distribution (1980–1989)

Table 20.1. Scorecard: war and distribution, 1980–1989

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	3	National mobilization in defense; real distribution to the poor	High
Management of resources	2	A relatively effective war economy; distribution through unaccountable channels	Medium
Recognition of the national interest	1	Correct defense; continuing the war after 1982 a grave error	High
Use of experts	1	"Commitment over expertise"; rivalry between the professional army and the Revolutionary Guard to the detriment of military expertise	Medium
Response to discontent	0	The executions of 1988; removal of the internal critic	High
Defense, 1980–1982	Convergent	The most legitimate act of any government	High
Continuing the war after Khordad 1361 (1982)	Ideological strategic error	Six years of cost without further gain	High
Acceptance of Resolution 598	Convergent (belated)	Error correction through the will of one person	High
The executions of 1988 and the removal of Montazeri	Self-serving	Elimination of the last independent voice at the highest level	High

20.6 Period Scorecard: The First Decade of the Islamic Republic in Ten Items

Table 20.2. The first decade of the Islamic Republic in the ten-part template

Item	Judgment
1. Claimed source of legitimacy	Dual: the people's vote and *velayat-e faqih*; in practice, the leader's charisma
2. Architecture of power	A visible government beside parallel institutions; the ultimate center visible in the person of the Leader
3. Instruments for managing legitimacy	Faith-based mobilization, national defense, distribution; and elimination
4. Demands of society	Independence, justice, freedom, security in war
5. Attention to the people's vote and will	High in 1979; declining after the removal of Banisadr
6. Record of effectiveness	Weak in the macroeconomy; strong in rural and health services
7. Institution-building and executive capacity	Extensive parallel institution-building; erosion of the expert bureaucracy
8. The gap between demand and response	Hidden under the war; visible for the educated middle class
9. Delegitimation and the government's response	Organized opposition eliminated; stage one to two for most of society
10. Measurement against the reference model	Weak on principles 2, 3, 4, 7, 8; medium on 1 and 5

Instrumental rationality and national rationality. Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the revolution, was in instrumental rationality—the capacity to seize and consolidate power—one of the most effective political leaders of the twentieth century. In less than three years he turned a system that began as a broad and tense coalition into a unified system under the leadership of one current. But in national rationality his record is dual: high marks in the defense of the country and in delivering services to the deprived; low marks in continuing the war, in eliminating the coalition, and in closing the channels of error correction.

20.7 Summary of Part Six: A Charisma Without a Successor

Part Six began with the greatest legitimacy capital of the century. At the end of the decade, an important part of this capital still remained—in the loyalty of the families of martyrs, in the support of villagers who had received electricity and health care, and in the faith of those who regarded the leader of the revolution as their *marja'*. But this capital depended almost entirely on the person of the Leader.

And this is the classic problem of charisma that Max Weber formulated a century ago: *charisma is not inherited.* Authority that comes from faith in one person must, with that person's death, either be converted into a durable institution—what Weber called "the routinization of charisma"—or vanish. A system that in ten years had closed all independent channels, eliminated all rivals, and even set aside its critical successor was not ready for this conversion.

On 14 Khordad 1368 (3 June 1989), the leader of the revolution died. The system that had been built on his charisma had to answer where its right to command would come from henceforth. Part Seven shows that its answer was constitutional revision, institutional selection, and, finally, security. *A charismatic leader can set a nation in motion; but if he does not build an institution that continues the motion without him, he leaves the nation, at the moment of his departure, alone before an unanswered question.*

PART SEVEN: The Islamic Republic After 1989—Institutional and Security Legitimacy

On 14 Khordad 1368 (3 June 1989), a system that had been built on the charisma of one man was forced to answer a question its founder had never had to answer: *where, henceforth, does the right to command come from?* The thirty-seven years that followed are the story of three successive answers to this question. The first answer was *institution*: the revision of the constitution and the selection of the Leader by the Assembly of Experts. The second answer was *the ballot box*: elections in which the people chose among permitted options. And the third answer, which gradually prevailed over the other two, was *security*: a system that based its survival not on consent but on the capacity to contain discontent.

This part assesses the longest period in the book—a period longer than the two Pahlavi periods combined. And at the moment these lines are being written, it has not yet ended. In the winter of 1404 (early 2026), after the bloodiest repression of protests in Iran's contemporary history and in the midst of a war that the United States and Israel launched against Iran, Seyyed Ali Khamenei, the Leader who had ruled this system for thirty-six years, was killed, and the Assembly of Experts chose his son as successor. A book that writes about legitimacy cannot pretend that these events did not happen; nor can it pretend to know how they will end. Chapter 25 assesses this unfinished situation as far as the evidence allows.

The five chapters of this part employ the same ten-part template and the same five criteria of leadership rationality. Chapter 21 examines the transition from charisma to institution; Chapter 22 the value of the vote; Chapter 23 the record of effectiveness and resource management; Chapter 24 the waves of protest as stages of delegitimation; and Chapter 25 the confrontation between society and government, up to the end of the period that was sealed in 1404 (2025–26).

CHAPTER 21

Chapter 21. The Revision of 1989: The Transition from Charisma to Institution, and from Institution to Concealment

Max Weber had warned a century earlier that charisma is not inherited. Authority that arises from faith in one person, upon that person's departure, either becomes a durable institution—what Weber called "the routinization of charisma"—or disappears. The Islamic Republic in 1989 tried to take the first path. This chapter asks what kind of institution it built.

21.1 Four Changes in One Summer

In less than two months, four fundamental changes took place.

First, the selection of a successor. The day after the founder's death, the Assembly of Experts chose Seyyed Ali Khamenei—who was then president and was not at the time among the *marja'*s (sources of emulation)—as Leader. The Constitution of 1979 regarded being a *marja'* as one of the qualifications for leadership. The selection was therefore made, at least initially, on the basis of a text that had not yet been revised.

Second, the removal of the requirement of being a marja'. The constitutional revision, approved by referendum that same summer, removed the requirement of *marja'iyat.* From the standpoint of the theory of legitimacy, this change was decisive: the basis of the Leader's right to command shifted from religious preeminence—which, at least in the eyes of believers, came from within the seminary and the community of the faithful—to institutional selection. From then on, the Leader was Leader not because he was the foremost jurist but because an institution had chosen him.

Third, the addition of the word "absolute." Article 57, which had previously spoken of "the guardianship of the affairs [of the community]," now recognized "the *absolute* guardianship of the affairs." The powers of the Leader in Article 110 were expanded. And the Expediency Discernment Council of the System, which had earlier been formed by order of the founder, acquired a constitutional status.

Fourth, the abolition of the office of prime minister. Executive power was concentrated in the presidency, and the conflict between president and prime minister—which had repeatedly paralyzed the system in the first decade—came to an end.

21.2 The New Architecture: Two States, One Visible and One Invisible

Out of these changes emerged an architecture whose seed this book saw in Chapter 19 in "parallel institution-building," and which here reached maturity. In this architecture, two states worked side by side.

The first state was the *visible (bureaucratic) state*: the president, the cabinet, the Majlis, and the councils. This state was chosen by the people's vote, was answerable to public opinion, and bore responsibility for everyday matters—the economy, services, inflation.

The second state was the *invisible (appointed) state*: the Office of the Leader and its network of representatives in all institutions; the armed forces, especially the Revolutionary Guard; the judiciary and state broadcasting, whose heads were appointed by the Leader; the Guardian Council; and the great economic foundations—from the Foundation of the Dispossessed to the Execution of Imam Khomeini's Order headquarters and Astan Quds Razavi—which answered to no elected institution. This state took the strategic decisions: foreign policy, the nuclear file, security, and the boundaries of political competition.

The result of this architecture was a phenomenon that the earlier version of this book called *the concealment of the center of authority.* Under the Pahlavis, every citizen knew where power lay; and this very visibility, as Chapters 8 and 17 showed, sent discontent to a single address on the day of crisis. The architecture of 1989 solved this problem: it assigned responsibility to the visible state and kept power in the invisible state. When the economy was bad, the president was to blame. When foreign policy had costs, the government had to answer. And the invisible state, which had taken the strategic decisions, remained safe from criticism.

In instrumental rationality, this architecture was the most intelligent architecture of power in Iran's last hundred years, because it kept discontent away from the center of power. But in national rationality it was the most harmful, because it deliberately severed the link between decision and accountability—the core of all wise governance.

21.3 The Moment of Divergence: The Revision of 1989 in the Dual-Benefit Test

How should the revision of 1989 be judged? The answer depends on which part of it we assess.

The abolition of the office of prime minister and the end of the duality of the executive fall in the *convergent* cell: they raised the effectiveness of government and untied one of the knots of the first decade.

But the removal of the *marja'iyat* requirement, together with the addition of the qualifier "absolute," and the entrusting of the initiation of any future revision to the Leader himself in Article 177, carried another message. This combination, on the one hand, weakened the religious basis of the Leader's legitimacy—since the Leader was no longer the foremost *marja'*—and, on the other, broadened his powers. *Less legitimacy and more authority is a combination that every theory of legitimacy regards as a sign of future crisis*—because any power that grows while its base weakens must inevitably fill that gap with something else. In the following decades, that something else was security.

This part of the revision therefore falls in the *self-serving* cell: in the short term it carried the system through the crisis of succession, but at the price of severing the link between authority and accountability.

21.4 Reconstruction: Technocracy Returns, Politics Does Not

The government of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989–1997) came with the slogan of "reconstruction" (*sazandegi*), and from the perspective of the fourth criterion—the use of experts—it was a clear return to the pattern of the 1960s. A generation of educated managers returned; post-war reconstruction rebuilt cities and infrastructure at remarkable speed; higher education expanded; and the economy, after years of rationing, was opened toward the market.

But the pattern of the 1960s returned with all its shortcomings: *technocracy without politics.* The experts could decide on dams and refineries, but not on press freedom, political competition, or foreign policy. In these same years the Revolutionary Guard, which after the war had idle manpower and extensive engineering capacity, entered the economy through the creation of the Khatam al-Anbiya Construction Headquarters—a step that seemed logical at first and that in later decades, as Chapter 23 shows, became one of the largest unaccountable economic empires in the region.

And in these same years, economic adjustment, carried out in haste and without adequate safety nets, raised inflation and in the early 1990s led to unrest on the margins of several cities—including Mashhad, Eslamshahr, and Qazvin. The first signs appeared of a rift that two decades later, in 2017, became fully visible: the rift between the system and the very lower class that had been its base in the first decade.

21.5 The Strongest Defense

The defender of this architecture will say: a system that in one decade had passed through revolution, civil war, and an eight-year war, and had lost its founder, needed stability, and the revision of 1989 provided that stability. The succession, unlike 1941 and 1979, took place without collapse and without foreign intervention. And the separation of the "elected government" from the "system" exists in many countries: in constitutional monarchies, the king is not responsible and the government is answerable.

The first part of this defense is correct and must be accepted: the succession of 1989, compared with 1941 and 1979, took place stably and from within. But the second part is a false comparison. In constitutional monarchies the king is not responsible *because he has no power*; this is precisely Mosaddegh's argument of 1925, which we saw in Chapter 7 and in the special essay. The architecture of 1989 was the reverse of this: the office that had the most power had the least accountability. *A constitutional king, because he has no power, has no responsibility; but an office that has the most power and no responsibility is the exact definition of what the Constitutional Revolution came to end.*

21.6 Scorecard: Transition and Reconstruction (1989–1997)

Table 21.1. Scorecard: transition and reconstruction, 1989–1997

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Understanding public consent	2	Post-war fatigue and the need for reconstruction read correctly; political demand not	Medium
Management of resources	2	Rapid reconstruction; hasty adjustment and the Revolutionary Guard's entry into the economy	Medium
Recognition of the national interest	2	Return to economic rationality; opening in foreign policy without follow-through	Medium
Use of experts	3	Return of technocracy; without a political voice	High
Response to discontent	1	Repression of unrest on the urban margins; continued pressure on critics	Medium
Abolition of the office of prime minister	Convergent	End of the duality of the executive	High

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Removal of *marja'iyat* and addition of "absolute"	Self-serving	More authority on a weaker base	High
Architecture of visible and invisible states	Self-serving	Deliberate severing of decision from accountability	High

21.7 Summary

The succession of 1989 was the only succession in Iran's last hundred years that took place without collapse, without occupation, and without revolution. This is an achievement that must be recognized. But the price of this stability was an architecture in which power and responsibility were deliberately separated. A government that does this is safe from discontent in the short term, because people do not know with whom to be discontented. But in the long term, people learn. And when they have learned, they are no longer discontented with the visible state; they are discontented with the whole system. The following chapters trace this learning.

Concealing power delays discontent but does not eliminate it; it only ensures that when discontent finally finds the right address, it is no longer satisfied with reforming the government.

CHAPTER 22

Chapter 22. The Value of the Vote: Choosing Among Permitted Options

The Islamic Republic, unlike both Pahlavis, held elections whose outcome was not known in advance. This difference is real, and this chapter takes it seriously. In 1997, a candidate whose rival was supported by most of the system's institutions won by a large majority under the banner of "reformism." But after little more than a year, in the protests known as the "Tehran University dormitory" events, which led to the widespread repression of students and citizens—and again in 2009, with the same practice of repressing the supporters of the reformists in a disputed election—the radical, hard-line revolutionary faction once again took the reins of power and drove the country down its preferred path: the securitization of society. In 2013, too, an outcome occurred that many did not expect. The question of this chapter is not whether the people's vote had any effect in the Islamic Republic, but *how far* it had an effect, and who determined its limit.

22.1 Approbatory Supervision: A Gate Before the Ballot Box

In the early 1990s, the Guardian Council, in an interpretation of Article 99 of the constitution, declared its supervision of elections to be "approbatory" (*estesvabi*): that is, not merely supervision of the correctness of the voting, but approval or rejection of candidates' qualifications before the vote. This interpretation may be, from this book's perspective, the most important institutional decision of the post-1989 period.

Approbatory supervision divided elections into two stages. In the first stage, an appointed body—half of whose members were chosen by the Leader and the other half proposed by the head of the judiciary, himself appointed by the Leader—determined who could be a candidate. In the second stage, the people chose among these candidates. The people's vote was therefore real; but *the field in which the vote had effect was determined in advance and outside the vote.*

The special essay saw this phenomenon: an institution that was meant to be the arbiter of the constitution became the gatekeeper of political competition. In Chapter 3 we also said that elections are a safety valve that keeps discontent with the government separate from discontent with the system. Approbatory supervision preserved this valve but narrowed its diameter: people could change the government, but only among options the system had accepted.

22.2 2 Khordad 1376 (23 May 1997): The Second Natural Experiment

On 2 Khordad 1376 (23 May 1997), Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, with more than twenty million votes and very broad participation, became president. Three years later, the reformists won a majority in the Sixth Majlis. For the first time since the first decade of the revolution, the visible state—the president and the Majlis—was in the hands of a current that sought political opening, press freedom, and the rule of law.

This period is this book's *second natural experiment*—after the interlude of 1941 to 1953. The question of the experiment is: when the people's vote hands the visible state to a reformist current, can that current change the architecture of power?

History's answer is clear: it could not. In eight years, reformist newspapers were shut down in droves. In Tir 1378 (July 1999), a student protest against the closure of a newspaper was answered with a raid on the university dormitory. In Mordad 1379 (August 2000), when the Sixth Majlis tried to amend the press law, the Leader halted its consideration by a *hokm-e hokumati* (governmental decree). Bills that the government sent to the Majlis to increase the powers of the president and to limit approbatory supervision were rejected by the Guardian Council, and the government withdrew them. And in the winter of 1382 (early 2004), the Guardian Council disqualified thousands of candidates for the Seventh Majlis—including many deputies of the Sixth Majlis.

The result of this experiment is more instructive than the result of the first. In the interlude, the government's ear was open but the state was weak. In the reform era, the visible state was strong—it had the people's vote, it had the Majlis—but the invisible state, which had no vote at all, was able to nullify all its important decisions. This was the empirical proof of the architecture Chapter 21 described. And the lesson society drew from it was bitter and lasting: *the vote can change the government, but it cannot reform the system.*

22.3 Moments of Divergence: Mordad 1379 (2000) and Bahman 1382 (2004)

Two decisions in this period show the dual-benefit test with clarity.

The governmental decree on the press law (Mordad 1379, August 2000). A Majlis elected by the direct vote of the people wanted to change a law that had made the closure of dozens of publications possible. The Leader, using a power beyond the explicit text of the constitution, halted this consideration. From the perspective of instrumental rationality, this decision of Khamenei (the Leader) was effective: the reformist press, which was the principal voice of the critics, was contained. From the perspective of national rationality, it sent society a clear message: an elected institution, even when legislating, is subject to the will of an institution that is not elected. The decision was therefore *self-serving.*

The mass disqualifications for the Seventh Majlis (Bahman 1382, February 2004). This decision was even more important in its consequences. The Guardian Council, by disqualifying hundreds of sitting deputies—people whose qualifications that same council had approved four years earlier—told society that the criterion of qualification was not law but alignment. This decision, too, was *self-serving*, and its lasting consequence is seen in Chapter 24: part of the society that had come to the ballot box with enthusiasm in 1997 looked at it with doubt from then on.

22.4 2009: When the Valve Burst

The presidential election of Khordad 1388 (June 2009), with very high turnout, ended in the announcement of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory. The rival candidates—Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi—did not accept the result and regarded it as the product of fraud. Millions of people came into the streets with the question "Where is my vote?"

As to how far the official result diverged from the actual votes, a definitive judgment is not possible on the available evidence; statistical analyses and various reports have reached different conclusions. But from this book's perspective, the principal question lies elsewhere. *The legitimacy of an election depends as much on voters' belief in its correctness as on the correctness of the count;* and a system in which the body supervising elections is itself appointed by the center of power, and

in which there is no independent arbiter to hear complaints, has no instrument for restoring trust at the moment of doubt.

The system's response was rapid confirmation of the result, repression of the protests, mass trials, and finally the house arrest, without trial, of the two candidates and the wife of one of them—a house arrest that lasted for years. In the dual-benefit test, this response is *self-serving → strategic error*: in the short term it carried the system through an acute crisis, but it moved millions of people—who had voted, within the framework of the system, for a candidate from within the system itself—from the first stage of delegitimation directly to the second and third. *A government that treats those who voted within its own framework as enemies teaches them that the framework is not their place.*

22.5 From 2013 to 2024: The Vote as a Shield

In the decade that followed, voting took on a new function for a large part of society: *not an instrument of change, but a shield against something worse.* In 2013 and 2017, Hassan Rouhani won with promises of negotiation, economic opening, and the easing of social pressures—and many of his voters chose him without enthusiasm, against rivals who were closer to the invisible state.

Then the shield, too, wore out. In 2021, the Guardian Council disqualified most of the serious rivals of the preferred candidate, and official turnout fell to the lowest level in the history of presidential elections in the Islamic Republic. In the Majlis elections of 2024, official turnout was lower still. And in 2024, after the president was killed in a helicopter crash, the first round of the early election was held with turnout below half of eligible voters; in the second round, Masoud Pezeshkian, the only reformist candidate whose qualifications had been approved, won.

Chapter 3 read this trajectory in the language of Hirschman: *the transition from voice to exit.* In a country that cannot be left, exit takes the form of withdrawal from the ballot box. The turnout rate was, in this period, the most precise indicator of delegitimation—one that the Islamic Republic, unlike the Pahlavis, measured and published itself.

22.6 The Strongest Defense

The defender of the system will say: the Islamic Republic has held more elections than any other system in Iran's history; election results have repeatedly gone against the wishes of powerful institutions; and supervision of candidates' qualifications exists in many countries—in some countries anti-constitutional parties are banned.

This defense is correct in its first and second points, and this book has recognized them repeatedly. But the third point is a false comparison. In democracies that ban anti-constitutional parties—such as Germany—this decision is made by an *independent constitutional court*, through a transparent procedure open to challenge, not by a body whose members are appointees of the holder of power and which does not announce its reasons. *Supervision of qualifications, when its arbiter is independent, protects democracy; when its arbiter is itself an interested party, it manages democracy.*

22.7 Scorecard: The Value of the Vote (1991–2024)

Table 22.1. Scorecard: the value of the vote, 1991–2024

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Attention to the people's vote and will	2 to 1	The vote determined the visible state, not the center of power; declining	High
Response to discontent	1 to 0	From limited tolerance in 1997 to repression and house arrest in 2009	High
The interpretation of approbatory supervision	Self-serving	An appointed gate before the ballot box	High
Governmental decree on the press law (2000)	Self-serving	Subordinating an elected institution to the will of an appointed one	High
Disqualifications for the Seventh Majlis (2004)	Self-serving	Alignment instead of law as the criterion	High
Response to the protests of 2009	Self-serving → strategic error	Driving voters from within the system to outside it	High

22.8 Summary

In the test of the vote, the Islamic Republic scores higher than both Pahlavis: people voted in it, and their vote sometimes changed the outcome. But in this same test the system learned something the Pahlavis never learned, because they had never held real elections: that one can accept the vote and at the same time contain its effect. In the short term, this lesson made the system more stable than the Pahlavis. In the long term, it led society to the conclusion to which the Pahlavis had brought it by force: that through the ballot box it does not get where it wants to go.

A vote, when it can move power, builds legitimacy; when it can move only the executor, it teaches people that power is somewhere else—and sooner or later, they go looking for that somewhere else.

CHAPTER 23

Chapter 23. The Record of Effectiveness: Achievements That Were Seen, and Costs That Were Paid

A fair judgment of the Islamic Republic's effectiveness is harder than any other judgment in this book—because both its achievements are real and its failures are enormous. Its opponents often deny the first, and its defenders the second. This chapter assesses both, and then asks why real achievements could not halt the erosion of legitimacy.

23.1 What Was Built

In four decades, Iran's human development indicators improved dramatically. Literacy among the young became almost universal. Life expectancy and infant mortality, especially in rural areas, approached the levels of upper-middle-income countries—an achievement whose pillar was the rural health network of the 1980s, which Chapter 20 recognized. Electricity, piped gas, and paved roads reached most of the country's villages. And higher education expanded to the point that the number of students multiplied several times over, and from the late 1990s women made up the majority of those admitted to universities.

This last achievement has, from this book's perspective, a dual meaning. The system that imposed compulsory veiling on women was the same system that sent millions of women to university. And as Chapter 15 said of the middle class of the second Pahlavi, *education makes people not only more efficient but more questioning.* A generation of educated women whom the government had itself raised became, in 2022, the principal voice of protest against that same government.

23.2 What Was Lost

Alongside these achievements, the macroeconomic record of the Islamic Republic over four decades has been weak on most indicators. *Inflation* has been in double digits in most years, and in recent years has repeatedly exceeded forty percent. *The value of the national currency* against the dollar has fallen several-thousand-fold over these four decades, and the currency crisis of Dey 1404 (December 2025)—which sparked the largest wave of protest in the system's history—was the latest and most severe stage of this fall. *Economic growth* in recent decades has been low and volatile compared with peer countries.

And two other crises, which earlier attracted less attention, became vital issues in recent years. *The environmental crisis*: the drying of Lake Urmia, land subsidence in the central plains, and a water shortage that in recent years has threatened even the capital. And *the energy imbalance*: a country with some of the world's largest reserves of gas and oil experiences power cuts in summer and gas shortages in winter. These two crises are perhaps, more than inflation, signs of failure on the second criterion—*management of resources in the right direction*—because they are the product of decades of policy that spent finite resources on short-term goals.

23.3 Sanctions: Cause or Effect?

The system's defenders attribute a large part of these failures to foreign sanctions. This claim contains part of the truth and should not be underestimated: sanctions, especially from the early

2010s, restricted Iran's oil exports, closed off access to the global financial system, and raised the cost of all trade.

But this book asks another question, the same question it has asked of every period: *what decision were the sanctions the product of, and was another decision possible?* The sanctions were, in large part, the consequence of policies that the appointed state had chosen—especially in the nuclear file and in regional policy. From this book's perspective, therefore, sanctions are not the first cause of economic failure; they are the middle link between the strategic decisions of the appointed state and the costs that society paid. And this is precisely the severing of decision from accountability that Chapter 21 described: the decision was taken by an institution that was not accountable; its cost was paid by a people who had no share in that decision; and its responsibility was borne by the visible state.

23.4 The JCPOA: An Error Correction That Went Halfway

In Tir 1394 (July 2015), Iran and six world powers reached an agreement—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA (*Barjam*)—under which Iran accepted limits on its nuclear program and in return international sanctions were lifted. From this book's perspective, the JCPOA was a rare example of *error correction* in the post-1989 period: a decision that accepted that the previous policy had a cost that was no longer bearable. And it was a correction that, unlike Resolution 598, began through the people's vote: a president who had won on a promise of negotiation brought it to fruition.

The JCPOA broke down twice. Once in 2018, when the United States withdrew from it and restored sanctions—a decision outside Iran's control. And again from within: the appointed state, which had never fully stood behind the agreement, did not use its economic opening for political or regional opening, and the domestic critics of the JCPOA turned every delay in its economic benefits into a reason for distrust of any negotiation. Finally, as Chapter 25 shows, the course of the nuclear file led to the return of UN sanctions in 2025 and to two wars in 2025 and 2026.

An error correction that only half the system wants goes only halfway; and a correction that goes halfway bears the costs of both paths and reaps the benefits of neither.

23.5 The Economy of the Invisible State

One feature of the post-1989 economy is the growth of a network of economic institutions that answer to no elected body: the great foundations, companies affiliated with the armed forces, and institutions under the supervision of the Office of the Leader. Independent estimates of the share of these institutions in Iran's economy vary widely, and there are no transparent official data on them—which is itself the most telling evidence. But there is no doubt that a large part of the country's economy, including in energy, construction, telecommunications, and finance, is in the hands of institutions whose budgets are not approved by the Majlis and whose accounts are not fully seen by the Supreme Audit Court.

The political expression of this situation is simple, and Chapter 20 had foreseen it: the Islamic Republic has built within itself a very powerful duality of power—"political authoritarians," who hold the reins of power in their hands, and "economic monopolists," a class of economic elites who have been drawn into this system to generate extensive financial resources for the holders of power.

"Justice that passes through an unaccountable channel reaches the poor today; tomorrow, the loyal." In the decades after 1989, institutions that had been founded in the first decade for the "dispossessed" became empires whose interests were bound up with the interests of the system. And a system that places part of the country's economy in the hands of institutions loyal to it can no longer be an impartial arbiter, in economic policy, between the interests of the country and the interests of those institutions.

23.6 Aban 1398 (November 2019): The Moment of Divergence in Resource Management

In the early hours of 24 Aban 1398 (15 November 2019), the price of gasoline was suddenly, and without prior notice, multiplied several times. The decision had been taken by the heads of the three branches, and the Leader supported it. Its economic logic was, in itself, defensible: the hidden energy subsidy was swallowing a huge share of national wealth every year, and most of its benefit went to the wealthy. Economists had recommended reforming it for years.

But the manner of its implementation was a textbook example of everything this book has said about unwise governance: without public dialogue, without preparing society, without a support network that would reach the poor before the price increase, and in a country where the real income of most families had been falling for years. The protests, which broke out that same day in hundreds of cities, were answered with a nationwide internet shutdown and a repression that in a few days, according to human rights organizations' estimates, killed hundreds of people; some reports have put forward much higher figures.

In the dual-benefit test, this decision must be split in two. *The goal*—reforming energy prices—was in the convergent cell. *The method and the response*—sudden implementation and bloody repression—fall in the cell of strategic error: they made neither the country nor the government stronger. And the lesson is the same lesson that the unveiling of 1936 and the calendar change of 1976 had taught: *a correct reform, if implemented without listening and by force, not only fails but makes every subsequent correct reform impossible—because from then on society sees every reform as the prelude to a new imposition.*

23.7 Resources and Priorities: "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon"

From the protests of 2009 onward, one slogan was repeated in the streets of Iran: "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon—my life for Iran." This slogan, regardless of any judgment about Iran's regional policy, is precise evidence that a large part of society regarded the priorities of resource allocation as inconsistent with the national interest. The costs of regional policy, because of the lack of transparency, were never precisely established. But the political meaning of the slogan was clear: society objected not only to the size of the expenditure but to the fact that it had not been consulted about it.

This is the same issue Chapter 16 saw in the military purchases of the 1970s. In both cases, a large share of national resources was spent on goals the government regarded as vital, without the people having given any opinion on them. And in both cases, when economic crisis arrived, these very allocations became symbols of the government's indifference to the people. *People can make sacrifices for their country's security; but when they are not asked what their country's security is, they regard the sacrifice as an imposition, not a choice.*

23.8 Scorecard: Effectiveness and Resources (1989–2025)

Table 23.1. Scorecard: effectiveness and resources, 1989–2025

Criterion or decision	Score or cell	Judgment	Confidence
Management of resources	1	Achievement in human development; failure in the macroeconomy, water, and energy	High
Recognition of the national interest	1	The interests of the system and its loyal institutions placed above the national interest	Medium
Use of experts	1 to 2	Abundant experts; mass emigration; strategic decisions beyond their reach	High
Expansion of education and health	Convergent	A real and lasting achievement	High
JCPOA (2015)	Convergent, unfinished	An error correction that only half the system wanted	Medium
Economy of unaccountable institutions	Self-serving	Binding economic interests to political loyalty	Medium
Gasoline price increase (Aban 1398 / November 2019)	Goal convergent; method and response a strategic error	A correct reform carried out in a way that made every later reform impossible	High

23.9 Summary

The Islamic Republic built more in human development than both Pahlavis, and less in macroeconomic management than either. This paradox is the key to understanding the fate of its legitimacy. The Islamic Republic created a society whose citizens were more literate, more urban, and more aware than at any other time—and then asked this society to accept inflation, unemployment among the educated, water shortages, blackouts, and international isolation, without having any share in the decisions that had led to this situation. At the same time, this same system deprived the people of their most fundamental human rights, one of which is *elections*—a right it gradually took from the people through the securitization of society and the authoritarian exercise of ideological power, in the sense that determining the outcome of elections and conferring legitimacy on them lay solely in the hands of the system's leading organs (the Office of Khamenei), the Guardian Council, the radical forces within the government, and the military and security apparatus (the Revolutionary Guard), and the people, apart from the formal role of appearing at the ballot box, in practice had no influence on the outcome of elections.

This is, with greater intensity, the same paradox we saw at the end of the White Revolution in Chapter 14: *the government built a society ready for participation, and then remained a government not ready for participation.* The second Pahlavi made this paradox its political instrument for fifteen years. The Islamic Republic managed it to its own advantage for four decades.

CHAPTER 24

Chapter 24. Waves of Protest and the Stages of Delegitimation: From "Reform" to "Moving Beyond"

Chapter 3 described delegitimation as a four-stage process: issue-specific discontent, institutional distrust, normative rupture, and behavioral refusal. In no period of the past hundred years is this process seen with such clarity as in the waves of protest under the Islamic Republic from 1999 to 2025. Each wave both brought new actors onto the field and moved them one stage further. And each wave was answered with a repression bloodier than the previous one.

This chapter reads these waves not as separate events but as stages of a single process.

24.1 Tir 1378 (July 1999): Stage One—"Reform"

On 18 Tir 1378 (9 July 1999), students of the University of Tehran gathered to protest the closure of a reformist newspaper. That night, police forces and plainclothes agents raided the university dormitory. The protests continued for several days and were then suppressed.

The demand of this wave was essentially *within the system*: press freedom, the rule of law, and support for an elected government for which the protesters themselves had voted. The principal actors were students and the urban middle class. This, on the scale of Chapter 3, was *stage one: issue-specific discontent*, addressed to the government and demanding reform.

24.2 Khordad 1388 (June 2009): Stage Two—"Where Is My Vote?"

Chapter 22 read this wave from the perspective of elections. Here we read it from the perspective of delegitimation. The main slogan—"Where is my vote?"—is the most telling slogan possible for stage two: the protesters still believed in the vote, were still within the framework of the system, and supported candidates from within the system itself. But they no longer trusted the institutions that counted and safeguarded the vote. This was *institutional distrust.*

The system's response—repression, mass trials, and house arrest—pushed this stage to the next. Millions of people drew one lesson from this wave: if even those who vote within the framework of the system and support the system's own candidates are called enemies, then the framework has no place for them.

24.3 Dey 1396 (December 2017): Stage Three—"It's Over"

The wave of Dey 1396 (December 2017–January 2018) began in Mashhad and within a few days reached dozens of small and large cities. Two features set it apart from earlier waves.

First, *the actors*: this time it was not the middle class of the capital but the young people of the lower classes in small and medium-sized cities—the very stratum that Chapter 20 identified as the system's social base in the first decade. A system that had built its distributive legitimacy on the support of the dispossessed now saw the dispossessed in the street against it.

Second, *the slogans*: a slogan heard in this wave—declaring to reformists and principlists alike that "the game is over"—announced a normative rupture. This was no longer a protest against one

faction; it was a rejection of the whole logic that held reform from within to be possible. This was *stage three.*

24.4 Aban 1398 (November 2019): Repression as Language

Chapter 23 read the decision to raise the price of gasoline from the perspective of resource management. From the perspective of delegitimation, Aban 1398 was the moment at which the intensity of repression in a wave of protest exceeded anything seen in the preceding decades: in a few days, and in the darkness of a nationwide internet shutdown, hundreds of people were killed.

From the perspective of Kuran's theory, this is instructive. Massive repression silenced protest in the short term. But as Chapter 3 had warned, *repression hides stages one and two from the government's view and carries society directly to stages three and four.* The families of those killed in Aban became, from then on, a population that no reform would bring back to the system.

24.5 2022: Stage Four—"Woman, Life, Freedom"

On 25 Shahrivar 1401 (16 September 2022), a young woman named Mahsa (Zhina) Amini died a few days after being detained by the morality police. A protest that began in Saqqez, her hometown, became within a few weeks the broadest and longest protest movement in the history of the Islamic Republic up to that time.

This wave had four unprecedented features. *First, its focus was identity and human rights, not economics or elections*: the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" was not a demand addressed to the government but the declaration of another way of living. *Second, its actors were a new generation*: teenagers and young people born in the 2000s who had no memory of the revolution, the war, or even the reform era. *Third, its geography was peripheral*: Kurdistan, where the movement began, and Sistan and Baluchestan, which on 8 Mehr 1401 (30 September 2022) in Zahedan witnessed one of the bloodiest days of repression, were at its center—the very regions about which the special essay spoke of chronic poverty and the gap between Article 48 of the constitution and their reality. *The fourth feature* was that this movement, as the fifth wave of nationwide protest in Iran, was the only protest that, because of its human-rights-violation content, was able to provoke a broad global reaction from the international community, leading to the formation of a fact-finding mission and to a special session held by the United Nations.

The system's response was a repression that, according to human rights organizations' estimates, left hundreds dead, followed by the execution of a number of protesters. But the lasting consequence of this wave was seen not in the street but in everyday life: after 2022, large numbers of women appeared in the streets of the big cities without compulsory veiling—and the government, with all its instruments, could not reverse this. This is the exact definition of *stage four: behavioral refusal*, in the form of widespread, everyday civil disobedience. *When millions of people ignore a law every day and the government cannot enforce it, that law is no longer a law; it is a relic of a government that once could demand obedience.*

24.6 Dey 1404 (December 2025–January 2026): The Bazaar, and the Bloodiest Repression of the Century

On 7 Dey 1404 (28 December 2025), after a new and severe fall in the value of the national currency, protests began in the Grand Bazaar of Tehran. This starting point had, from this book's perspective,

a historical meaning. The bazaar, which Chapters 9 and 15 showed was the financial pillar of the revolution in 1979, and for four decades one of the system's traditional allies, now sparked the protest against it. Within a few days the protest spread across the country, and its slogans moved from economic protest to the demand for an end to the system.

On 18 Dey (8 January 2026), the government cut off the internet nationwide. In the two days that followed, a repression occurred whose death toll exceeded that of every protest wave of recent decades. The government's official figure was more than three thousand dead. Human rights organizations, in the following weeks, went beyond registering and verifying several thousand dead, and other reports put forward much higher figures that had not been independently verified at the time of writing. Tens of thousands of people were arrested. Even the official figure makes this repression—by a wide margin—the bloodiest repression of protests in Iran's contemporary history.

As a rule, this book is cautious about every contested figure, and the details of this event must be clarified by future research. But no exact figure is needed for a judgment about legitimacy. *A government that, to silence the protest of its citizens, is compelled to kill thousands of people in two days no longer has any legitimacy to lose; what it loses is the last illusion that it still had some.*

24.7 The Map of a Process

Table 24.1. Waves of protest as stages of delegitimation, 1999–2025

Wave	Principal actors	Central slogan or demand	Stage of delegitimation	Government response
Tir 1378 (1999)	Students, urban middle class	Press freedom, support for the elected government	One: issue-specific discontent	Raid on the university dormitory
Khordad 1388 (2009)	Urban middle class, especially in the capital	"Where is my vote?"	Two: institutional distrust	Repression, mass trials, house arrest
Dey 1396 (2017)	Young people of the lower classes, small cities	Moving beyond both factions	Three: normative rupture	Repression and mass arrests
Aban 1398 (2019)	Lower classes, urban margins	Economic protest turning into a political demand	Three to four	Internet shutdown; hundreds killed
1401 (2022)	Women, the young generation, ethnic peripheries	"Woman, Life, Freedom"	Four: behavioral refusal	Hundreds killed; executions of protesters
Dey 1404 (2025)	The bazaar, then all strata	An end to the system	Four, in its broadest form	Internet shutdown; the bloodiest repression of the century

This table reveals three patterns.

The first pattern: the widening circle of actors. Each wave brought a new stratum into protest without the earlier strata returning. The students of 1999, the middle class of 2009, the lower classes of 2017, the women and young people of 2022, and finally the bazaar of 2025. By the end of this trajectory, almost all the strata that Chapter 15 enumerated for the second Pahlavi—and also the strata that Chapter 20 called the base of the Islamic Republic—were seen in the ranks of the protesters.

The second pattern: stage-by-stage advance. Each wave was one stage beyond the previous one. And the decisive point is this: *no wave returned to an earlier stage.* A society that had reached normative rupture in 2017 did not say "Where is my vote?" again in 2022.

The third pattern: escalating repression. The number of those killed rose from dozens in 2009 to hundreds in 2019 and 2022, and to thousands in 2025. This escalation is fully consistent with the theory of Chapter 3: a government that carries society one stage further with each wave of repression faces, in the next wave, a society that can be silenced only by harsher repression. *Repression is like a drug to which the body grows accustomed: each time, a larger dose is needed for the same effect—until the day when no dose has any effect.*

24.8 The Strongest Defense, and Its Answer

The system's official narrative of each of these waves was almost identical: the protests were designed and directed by foreign enemies—America, Israel, or armed opposition groups; the real protesters were few and had been deceived; and the security forces defended the country against armed "rioters."

This narrative should not be dismissed entirely: in some waves, violence was also committed by some of the protesters, and foreign powers, especially in recent years, have openly supported the fall of the system. But by this book's yardstick, this narrative has a fundamental problem, the same problem as the second Pahlavi's narrative in 1978: *if discontent was manufactured by foreigners, then the government bears no responsibility for it; and a government that sees no responsibility of its own in discontent sees no reason to reform.* The shah, too, until the final months, regarded the revolution as the work of foreigners and of "red and black reaction." Chapter 17 showed where that narrative led.

24.9 Summary

The waves of protest under the Islamic Republic, from 1999 to 2025, are the most complete example of the process of delegitimation in Iran's last hundred years—more complete than under the first Pahlavi, whose delegitimation was silent, and more complete than under the second Pahlavi, whose delegitimation became visible in a single explosion. In the Islamic Republic, this process unfolded over twenty-six years, stage by stage, before everyone's eyes. And at each stage, the government had the choice the Pahlavis also had: to open channels, or to repress. At each stage, it chose the second.

A government that in twenty-six years has six opportunities to listen and six times chooses repression can no longer say it was taken by surprise; it can only say it had decided not to hear.

CHAPTER 25

Chapter 25. Society Against Government, and the End of an Era (2022–2026)

The previous chapter read the waves of protest—the moments when society confronted the government in the street. This chapter examines what happened between those moments: the quiet, everyday transformation of the relationship between society and government, which proved more lasting than any wave of protest. It then turns to the events of 1404 and 1405 (2025–2026), which brought a thirty-seven-year era to an end without it yet being clear what the next era will be.

25.1 Women: A Law That Is No Longer Enforced

Chapter 9 said that compulsory veiling and compulsory unveiling are two sides of the same coin. Four decades after the revolution, this judgment was tested with complete clarity. After 2022, large numbers of women appeared in the streets of the big cities without compulsory veiling. The government tried various instruments—from identification cameras to the sealing of businesses—and in 2024 a harsh law on the matter was passed. But the implementation of this very law was halted a few months later by the government's own institutions.

This moment has, from the perspective of the theory of legitimacy, an importance beyond its own subject. *A government that passes a law and cannot enforce it has shown society where the limit of its authority lies; and a society that has seen this limit does not forget it.* Reza Shah enforced unveiling by force, and the government after him was forced to retreat. The Islamic Republic enforced compulsory veiling by force and, in the end, faced with the disobedience of millions, was itself left powerless. *In matters of conscience, any government that chooses imposition is eventually left with two options: retreat, or a repression whose cost is greater than the issue itself.*

25.2 The New Generation: A Society That Does Not Recognize the Official Narrative

The generation that came into the streets in 2022 was born in the 2000s. For this generation, the revolution, the war, and even the reform era were not memory but history. The language in which the system explained its legitimacy—sacrifice, martyrdom, global arrogance, resistance—did not have for this generation the meaning it had had for its fathers and mothers.

Attitudinal data, with all their methodological limitations in a society where an honest answer has a cost, report a broad transformation of values: a decline in adherence to official religious rituals, a growing inclination toward the separation of religion from government, and a transformation in attitudes toward the role of women. This book relies on no single survey, because each is a subject of methodological dispute. But the direction of the change is the same in official and unofficial surveys alike.

This is, on the scale of Chapter 3, *normative rupture in its most complete form*: not opposition to the official narrative, but its loss of meaning. And for a government that has built its legitimacy on ideology, this is more dangerous than any opposition. *One can fight an opponent; but with someone who no longer understands your language, one cannot even speak.*

25.3 The Periphery: Article 48 and Reality

The special essay showed that Article 48 of the constitution, which spoke of the non-discriminatory distribution of resources among the provinces, never became a budget. In 2022 this gap was seen in the street: Kurdistan, where the movement began, and Sistan and Baluchestan, which on 8 Mehr 1401 (30 September 2022) witnessed one of the bloodiest days of repression, were at the center of the protest.

This is the repetition of a hundred-year pattern that the special essay traced back to the neglect of the victors of 1909. *A center that consumes the resources of the periphery and gives the periphery neither share nor voice turns the periphery into the first field of resistance against itself.* And any government in the Iran of the future—whatever form it takes—will face the same reaction if it does not break this pattern.

25.4 Emigration: A Vote Cast with the Feet

Chapter 3, in Hirschman's language, called emigration a form of vote. In the years after 2019, this vote reached dimensions that even official institutions could not ignore: doctors, nurses, engineers, university professors, and students left the country, or sought to leave it, in unprecedented numbers.

This emigration may be, from the perspective of the fourth criterion—the use of experts—the heaviest cost of this period, because it is a cost that no political change can quickly make good. A government whose universities train hundreds of thousands of specialists every year and that cannot retain them is in effect developing other countries with its own nation's budget. *The exit of the elite is the quietest form of delegitimation—and the most lasting.*

25.5 2025–2026: The End of an Era

The year 1404 (2025–26) was the year in which all the trends this part has traced reached their peak at once.

In Khordad 1404 (June 2025), Israel attacked Iran, and in the final days of this twelve-day war the United States bombed Iran's nuclear facilities. A few months later, in the autumn of that year, the UN sanctions that had been lifted under the JCPOA were restored. In Dey 1404 (December 2025–January 2026), a new collapse in the value of the national currency led to the wave of protest that Chapter 24 called the bloodiest repression of the century. And on 9 Esfand 1404 (28 February 2026), the United States and Israel launched a new and extensive war against Iran, which on its very first day killed the Leader of the Islamic Republic.

On 18 Esfand 1404 (9 March 2026), the Assembly of Experts, in the midst of the war, chose Seyyed Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the slain Leader, as Leader, and the Revolutionary Guard immediately pledged allegiance to him.

Inside the country, the months of war displayed the same pattern that Chapters 17 and 24 described. A new law extended the scope of the death penalty for charges such as espionage and collaboration with hostile states; human rights organizations reported the arrest of thousands of people since the start of the war and the execution of a number of political prisoners—including detainees from the protests of Dey 1404. And at the same time, in Khordad 1405 (June 2026), the media reported the new Leader's approval of the commutation of the sentences of more than one hundred people condemned to death. This combination—the expansion of repression and signs of selective leniency

in a single period—is the same "oscillation between compromise and repression" that Chapter 17 saw in the final months of the second Pahlavi. It is still too early to say where this oscillation will lead this time.

But regarding one event of this period, this book has an instrument it built in advance: *succession.*

25.6 The Fourth Test of Succession

The special essay tested the Constitutional Law at three moments of transfer of power—1925, 1941, and 1979—and concluded that in all three the constitution determined only the form of the decision, not its content. The succession of 2026 is the fourth test, and this time the test of the constitution of the Islamic Republic.

In form, the succession took place in accordance with the constitution: the Assembly of Experts, the institution that Article 107 provides for the selection of the Leader, convened and chose the Leader.

In content, three questions arise that this book cannot answer with certainty, but cannot fail to ask. First, the members of the Assembly of Experts had themselves been chosen in elections whose candidates' qualifications had been determined in advance by the Guardian Council, and in which participation, according to the official report, was low; the input legitimacy of this institution was therefore limited before this selection. Second, the selection was made in the midst of war and with the immediate allegiance of the armed forces; and the question of where the real decision was taken—in the Assembly of Experts or before it—is the same question the special essay asked about 1941. Third, and most important of all: the revolution of 1979 began with the rejection of hereditary monarchy; and the succession of a son in place of his father, in a system that calls itself a republic, stands in tension with the most fundamental claim to legitimacy of that system.

And there is a historical parallel that the reader of this book cannot overlook: in Shahrivar 1320 (September 1941), in the midst of a foreign military attack, a son succeeded his father, and the constitution merely recorded it. In Esfand 1404 (March 2026), in the midst of a foreign military attack, a son succeeded his father, and the constitution merely recorded it. The distance between these two moments is eighty-four years. *A nation that in eighty-four years has twice witnessed a son succeeding his father in the shadow of war has the right to ask what it has learned in the interval about the rule for transferring power.*

A judgment on the leadership rationality of the new Leader, by this book's five criteria, is still premature, and there is not enough evidence for it. Later editions of this book will assess it when the evidence has accumulated.

25.7 Period Scorecard: The Islamic Republic After 1989 in Ten Items

Table 25.1. The Islamic Republic after 1989 in the ten-part template

Item	Judgment
1. Claimed source of legitimacy	Institutional selection of the Leader; the people's vote in a limited field; and, gradually, security
2. Architecture of power	An accountable visible state and a decision-making invisible state; concealment of the center of authority
3. Instruments for managing legitimacy	Limited elections, distribution, the narrative of the foreign enemy, and escalating repression

Item	Judgment
4. Demands of society	Freedom, welfare, the right to choose one's way of life, dignity, and ultimately a change of system
5. Attention to the people's vote and will	Medium in 1997; in continuous decline after 2004
6. Record of effectiveness	High in human development; low in the macroeconomy, water, and energy
7. Institution-building and executive capacity	Extensive institutions; an economy of unaccountable institutions; emigration of specialists
8. The gap between demand and response	Active in all strata by 2025, including the system's traditional base
9. Delegitimation and the government's response	Stage-by-stage advance from 1999 to 2025; response: escalating repression
10. Measurement against the reference model	Weak on principles 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8; medium on 4 and 5

Table 25.2. Leadership rationality in three periods, 1989–2025

Criterion	1989–1997	1997–2009	2009–2025
Understanding public consent	2	1	0 to 1
Management of resources	2	2	1
Recognition of the national interest	2	1 to 2	1
Use of experts	3	2	1
Response to discontent	1	1	0

Instrumental rationality and national rationality. The appointed state of the post-1989 period built, in instrumental rationality, one of the most effective architectures for the survival of power in Iran's last hundred years: it lasted more than three decades, survived several waves of protest, and kept power in a center that was less accountable than any other. But in national rationality, the pattern is the same one we saw in all four periods, this time in its longest form: *wherever the interests of the system's survival and the interests of the country diverged, the former was chosen.* And at the end of the period, even instrumental rationality reached its limits: an architecture built to contain discontent required, in order to silence it in 2025, a violence that hollowed out every claim to legitimacy from within.

25.8 Summary of Part Seven: From Institution to Security

Part Seven began with a question: after charisma, where does the right to command come from? The system tried three answers. *Institution*—which replaced accountability with concealment. *The ballot box*—which was taken from the people and altered to the benefit of the ruling power, and which, although it moved the government, did not move power. And *security*—which gradually prevailed over both.

The third answer was the answer at which all four governments of the past hundred years eventually arrived. Reza Shah with the army and the police. Mohammad Reza Shah with SAVAK. The first decade of the revolution with the Revolutionary Courts and the Revolutionary Guard. And the post-1989 period with a security apparatus more extensive than all its predecessors. *Every government in Iran that could not build legitimacy eventually tried to replace it with security; and none of them*

understood that security does not replace legitimacy—it only spends the time that remains for building it.

Part Eight places these four governments side by side and asks: why did one nation, with four different governments, arrive four times at the same point?

PART EIGHT: Comparative Analysis—One Nation, Four Governments, One Pattern

Parts Three to Seven assessed four governments one by one—each with the same template, so that comparison would be possible. This part turns the book from the vertical to the horizontal. We no longer ask what each government did; we ask why four governments, with four ideologies, four styles of governance, and four different ruling groups, arrived at the same point.

The answer this part tests is the final formulation of the book's hypothesis—a formulation that Chapter 12 refined through the natural experiment of the interlude: *durable legitimacy in Iran is possible only where three conditions hold at the same time—a capable state, an open ear, and shared rules.* No government of the past hundred years had all three together. Reza Shah had a capable state and a closed ear. The interlude had an open ear and an incapable state. The second Pahlavi had a capable state and a closed ear. The revolution, at the moment of victory, had an open ear but no shared rules. And the Islamic Republic after 1989 had a capable state and a half-open ear—one that reached only the visible state, not the center of power.

The seven chapters of this part test this hypothesis from seven angles: the source of legitimacy (Chapter 26), the instruments for managing it (Chapter 27), attention to the vote (Chapter 28), the anatomy of discontent (Chapter 29), the mechanism of collapse (Chapter 30), the distance from the reference model (Chapter 31), and, finally, rival explanations and the condition of falsification (Chapter 32).

CHAPTER 26

Chapter 26. Four Sources of Legitimacy, One Pattern: Why Order, Development, Faith, and Security Did Not Take the Place of the Vote

26.1 Four Answers to One Question

Every government must answer a question that the Constitutional Revolution posed to Iranian power for the first time: *why should you be obeyed?* The four governments of the past hundred years gave four different answers.

Table 26.1. Four governments, four answers

Government	Answer: "Obey me, because…"	Type of legitimacy in the typology of Chapter 1	The crisis that broke the answer
First Pahlavi	"…I brought order"	Performance (security)	Collapse of the army, Shahrivar 1320 (1941)
Second Pahlavi	"…I brought development"	Performance (welfare)	Recession after the boom, 1976–1977
First decade of the Islamic Republic	"…faith and the Leader require it"	Ideological–charismatic	Death of the founder, 1989
Islamic Republic after 1989	"…the system must be preserved"	Institutional, then security	Repression of Dey 1404 and the war of Esfand 1404 (2025–2026)

This table reveals one thing in common: *none of the four answers was "because you chose me."* All four governments founded their right to command somewhere outside the free vote of the people. And this, in this book's view, was not an accident but a choice.

26.2 Why the Vote Was Set Aside

Each of the four governments had a reason for setting the vote aside that, in its time, seemed reasonable to many.

Reza Shah had concluded from the experience of the Constitutional era that the people's vote brought chaos. Fifteen years of unstable Majlis and governments, provincial revolts, and foreign interference had turned this belief into a certainty for a generation of the Iranian elite.

Mohammad Reza Shah had concluded from the experience of the interlude and of 28 Mordad that the people's vote, in a Cold War world, would throw the country into the arms of communism or anarchy.

Ruhollah Khomeini and the leaders of the revolution believed that they knew the truth, and that a vote that opposed the truth was not a vote but error.

And the system after 1989, under the leadership of Ali Khamenei, had learned from the experience of 1997 and 2009 that a free vote could threaten the center of power.

The common thread in all four arguments is *the ruling elite's distrust of the people.* All four governments, each in its own way, believed that they knew better than the people what the people needed. And this is exactly what Chapter 9 said in its summary: *need can be diagnosed from outside; will can only be heard.* Governments that recognized need but did not hear will sometimes accomplished great things—but they never built a legitimacy that could survive the day of crisis.

26.3 An External Source Threatens the Evaluator

The book's second hypothesis, in the Introduction, was that an external source of legitimacy eliminates the independent evaluator. Now we can see its mechanism more precisely.

A government that has built its legitimacy on order sees every institution that calls its order oppressive as an enemy of order. A government that has built its legitimacy on development sees every newspaper that writes about inflation and corruption as an enemy of development. A government that has built its legitimacy on faith sees every critic as an enemy of religion. And a government that has built its legitimacy on security sees every protester as a security threat.

In all four cases the logic is the same: *when the source of legitimacy is anything other than the consent of the people, criticism of the government is regarded as an attack on the source of its legitimacy.* And a government that sees criticism as an attack silences the institutions of criticism—the press, parties, independent courts, a competitive parliament—one by one. In a democracy, criticism of the government strengthens the system, because it shows that the system can see its own errors. In a system whose legitimacy lies outside the vote, criticism of the government weakens the system, because it shows that its principal claim—order, development, truth, security—may be false.

26.4 Four Sources, Four Failures, One Cause

Each of the four sources of legitimacy failed in its own particular crisis. But the deeper cause of all four failures was one.

Reza Shah's order failed in Shahrivar 1320 (1941)—not because the army was weak, but because no one was willing to defend an order in whose making they had had no share. *Mohammad Reza Shah's development* failed in 1977—not because growth stopped, but because the society that development had built wanted its share in decision-making and did not get it. *The ideological faith* that Khomeini claimed failed in 1989—not because the people lost their faith, but because a faith bound to a person departed with that person. And *the security and military order* that Khamenei had borrowed from the commanders of the Revolutionary Guard to legitimize his rule reached its limits in 2025—not because the security apparatus was incapable, but because, in order to silence society, it needed a violence that emptied every claim to legitimacy.

The common cause is the one Chapter 1 showed through Easton's theory: *all four sources built specific support, not diffuse support.* Specific support—satisfaction with security, with welfare, with a beloved leader, with stability—was abundant in good times. But diffuse support—loyalty to the system itself, independent of its performance today—comes from only one source: the citizen's feeling that this system is his own, because he has a share in making and changing it. And none of the four governments built this feeling.

26.5 A Cheap Source, an Expensive Cost

One statesmanlike consideration brings this chapter to a close. Why, despite these repeated failures, did governments continue to prefer external sources of legitimacy to the vote?

The answer is simple: *external sources are cheaper in the short term.* A government that builds its legitimacy on the vote must accept the risk of defeat every few years, tolerate criticism, negotiate with rivals, and share power. A government that builds its legitimacy on order, development, faith, or security is exempt from all these costs—until the day of crisis.

But a cost not paid in the short term is paid with interest in the long term. *A legitimacy built on the vote has a small cost every few years—the cost of losing an election. A legitimacy built on anything else has one great cost, paid once and all at once—the cost of collapse.* The four governments of Iran's last hundred years all chose the second. And the Iranian nation paid the bill four times.

CHAPTER 27

Chapter 27. The Instruments of Legitimacy Management Compared: What Everyone Had, and What No One Had

Every government uses a set of instruments to obtain and maintain consent. Chapter 5 named four principal instruments: *persuasion, performance, co-optation, and coercion.* The study of the four periods revealed four further instruments that played a special role in Iran: *distribution of rent, nationalism, religion, and the foreign enemy.* This chapter places these eight instruments side by side.

27.1 A Map of the Instruments

Table 27.1. Instruments of legitimacy management in four periods

Instrument	First Pahlavi	Second Pahlavi	First decade of the revolution	After 1989
Performance	Main: state-building and security	Main: growth and modernization	Secondary: rural services	Medium: human development
Distribution of rent	Weak: oil still small	Strong after 1953	Strong: rationing and foundations	Strong: subsidies and loyal institutions
Nationalism	Strong: ancient Iran	Strong: imperial	Weak: *umma* over nation	Medium: resistance and independence
Religion	Against it: dismantling the religious institution	Ambivalent: tolerance and pressure	Main: monopoly of interpretation	Main, but eroding
Foreign enemy	Weak	Medium: communism	Strong: America and Iraq	Strong: America and Israel
Co-optation of elites	Temporary, then elimination	Technocrats without politics	Only the like-minded	Loyal networks
Dialogue and persuasion	Almost absent	Symbolic	Mobilization, not dialogue	Limited elections
Coercion	Rising	Institutionalized: SAVAK	Widespread	Escalating

27.2 Five Observations

First observation: nationalism, when tied to the ruler, turns back on him. All four governments used nationalism—but each tied it to itself. Reza Shah identified the nation with ancient Iran and with his own person. Mohammad Reza Shah identified the nation with a two-and-a-half-thousand-year monarchy. The Islamic Republic, after a period in which it placed the *umma* above the nation, identified nationalism with "resistance" against the West. In all three cases, when society turned against the ruler, the nationalism that had been tied to the ruler turned against him: the revolutionaries of 1979 called the shah a dependent of foreigners, and the protesters of recent decades, with the slogan "Neither Gaza nor Lebanon," accused the Islamic Republic of spending

Iran's resources on others. *Nationalism is a capital that belongs only to the nation; a ruler who registers it in his own name will one day see the nation take it back and use it against him.*

Second observation: religion slips from the ruler's hands both when it is repressed and when it is monopolized. Reza Shah dismantled the religious institution, and a clergy that carried the memory of Goharshad became, thirty years later, the pillar of the revolution. The Islamic Republic monopolized religion, and four decades later attitudinal data report a broad erosion of adherence to official religion. These two failures appear opposite, but they have one root: *both governments saw religion as an instrument of power—one as an instrument to be broken, the other as an instrument to be monopolized.* Wise governance, as the principles of the special essay stated, regards religion as neither enemy nor instrument; it returns it to society.

Third observation: rent made the government independent of the people, but did not make the people independent of the government. From 1953 onward, each of the three governments that had oil revenue at its disposal bought part of its legitimacy by distributing it. This distribution produced specific satisfaction. But the problem lay in the direction of dependence: the government did not need the people's taxes, so it did not need their consent either; but the people needed the government's distribution, so they regarded every reduction in it as a betrayal. *Rent turns the relationship between government and citizen from a contract into charity; and the recipient of charity never loves the giver—he only needs him, until the day he no longer does.*

Fourth observation: a foreign enemy gives the government a legitimacy that makes it the prisoner of the enemy. Chapter 19 said this about the hostage-taking, and Chapter 23 about the JCPOA. A government that takes part of its legitimacy from hostility to a foreign power cannot reconcile with that power, even when the national interest demands reconciliation. The second Pahlavi, by relying on America, was the prisoner of its support; the Islamic Republic, by relying on enmity with America, became the prisoner of its hostility. *A government that ties its legitimacy to its relationship with a foreign power—whether friendship or enmity—has handed control of its foreign policy to that power.*

Fifth observation: coercion increased under all four governments. None of the four governments used less coercion over the course of its life. Each, as its other instruments eroded, relied more heavily on coercion. This is the same mechanism Chapter 24 described with the metaphor of a drug: each time the other instruments grow weaker, more coercion is needed for the same effect.

27.3 The Instrument No One Had

But the most instructive column of the table is the one that is not there. Among all the instruments the four governments used, one instrument was almost never used in a durable way: *institutionalized participation*—that is, giving citizens a share in decisions through institutions that can evaluate, criticize, and, if necessary, replace the government.

This instrument, in the reference model of Chapter 4, is the only instrument that builds diffuse support. Korea, Taiwan, Spain, and even Botswana, for all their differences, all chose this instrument at a decisive moment. And Iran, in a hundred years, came close to it only in two brief moments—the interlude of 1941 to 1953 and the first years of the reform era—and both times the center of power took it back with the instrument of radicalism.

Iran's governments tried every instrument but one; and that one—the only instrument that builds durable legitimacy—they set aside, because it was the only instrument that also limited the government itself.

CHAPTER 28

Chapter 28. A Hundred-Year Index: How Far Iran's Governments Listened to the People's Vote and Will

If we wanted to summarize the book's main question in a single number, that number would have to answer this question: *in each period, how much effect did the people's vote and will have on the government's decisions?* This chapter builds such an index—in full awareness that any number assigned to so complex a phenomenon is a simplification. The value of the index lies not in the precision of each number but in the pattern the numbers reveal side by side.

28.1 How the Index Was Built

The index runs from 0 to 4 and is built on four questions:

1. Did the people's vote determine the center of power, or only the executors?
2. Was electoral competition real, or was its field restricted in advance?
3. Did peaceful protest lead to a change of policy?
4. Did the channels of listening—the press, parties, unions—operate freely?

The scores are the author's judgment, based on the evidence of the preceding chapters, and have been compared with the data of the Varieties of Democracy project (V-Dem). Wherever this book's judgment differs from those data, the reason is given in section 28.4.

28.2 The Index in Fifteen Periods

Table 28.1. A hundred-year index of attention to the people's vote and will

Period	Score (0–4)	Brief explanation
1906–1921 (Constitutional era)	2	A real Majlis; an incapable state; foreign interference
1921–1925 (Sardar Sepah)	2	The Majlis still had effect; the army gaining the upper hand
1925–1941 (Reza Shah)	0 to 1	A ceremonial Majlis; channels closed
1941–1953 (the interlude)	3	The hundred-year peak; the Majlis brought down governments
1953–1962	1	Engineered elections; rubber-stamp parties
1962–1973	1	A direct, unmediated bond between shah and people
1973–1979	0	The Rastakhiz Party; even silence forbidden
1979–1981	3	Referendum, competitive elections, free press—until the removal of Banisadr
1981–1989	1 to 2	Elections among the like-minded; elimination of rivals
1989–1997	1 to 2	Approbatory supervision; limited factional competition
1997–2005	2 to 3	The vote changed the government, not the center of power
2005–2013	1	2009 and its consequences
2013–2021	2	The vote as a shield

Period	Score (0–4)	Brief explanation
2021–2025	1	Widespread disqualification; turnout at its lowest
2025 onward	0 to 1	The repression of Dey 1404; succession in the midst of war

28.3 The Pattern: Freedom as a Product of Weakness

This table reveals a pattern that may be the most important finding of the entire book.

In a hundred years, the index reached a score of 3, or close to it, three times: in the interlude of 1941 to 1953, in the first years of the revolution, and in the reform years. And each time, this peak occurred at a moment when the center of power was *weak*—not at a moment when it was strong and decided to listen.

In 1941, the center of power had collapsed with the occupation and the removal of Reza Shah; the young shah could not stop freedom. In 1979, the former center of power had collapsed with the revolution and the new center had not yet consolidated. In 1997, the center of power—because of Khamenei's policing of society and the existing political repression—was internally divided and had been unable to prevent the victory of a candidate it did not want.

And each time, when the center of power regained its strength, it took freedom back: in 1953 by coup; in 1981 by eliminating rivals; and in 2004 by disqualifications.

This pattern, in one sentence: *in Iran's last hundred years, freedom has always been the product of the ruler's weakness, and never the product of the ruler's decision.* No government in Iran, at the height of its power, decided to open the channels of listening. Wherever channels were opened, it was because the government could not keep them closed.

And this is precisely what separates Iran from the reference model. In Taiwan, the Kuomintang decided at the height of its power to accept competition. In Korea, the military government accepted direct elections even though it could still have repressed. In Spain, Franco's rubber-stamp Cortes voted for its own dissolution. *Freedom that is the product of the ruler's weakness is taken back when the ruler's power returns; only freedom that is the product of a strong ruler's decision endures—because the strong ruler, by accepting it, has turned it into a rule.*

28.4 Comparison with International Data

The V-Dem data for Iran are, in most periods, consistent with this book's judgment: the peak of the interlude, the decline under the second Pahlavi, and the brief peaks of the first years of the revolution and of the reform era. But there is one important difference, which Chapter 5 had foreseen.

In some V-Dem indicators, especially those that measure constraints on the executive, the period of the Islamic Republic receives a higher score than this book gives it—sometimes even higher than the interlude. The reason is the architecture Chapter 21 described: comparative indicators measure the power of the visible state. In a system whose center of decision lies outside the visible executive, the president really is constrained—but not because power is constrained; rather, because power is somewhere else. *An indicator that reads the concealment of power as its limitation will show the system as more democratic the more complete the concealment is.* For this reason, this book does not use this part of the data to judge the distribution of power.

28.5 Summary

If we were to summarize this chapter's hundred-year index in a single image, the image would not be a straight line but a line with three peaks and four valleys. The peaks are short—each a few years. The valleys are long—each decades. And no peak became a plateau.

The statesmanlike question for the Iran of tomorrow, then, is not how to reach the next peak; Iran has three times reached a peak at which the management of power by the people approached democratic standards. The question is *how to turn the peak into a plateau*—how to turn the freedom that arises at a moment of weakness in the center of power into a rule that no power can take back, before the center of power regains its strength. Chapter 31 and Part Nine return to this question.

CHAPTER 29

Chapter 29. The Anatomy of Discontent: Seven Rifts, and Governments Whose Rifts Built Their Successors

In none of the four periods did discontent have a single cause. In each period, several rifts were active at the same time, and the order in which they became active determined the shape of the crisis. This chapter separates seven rifts and shows which ones each government faced—and, more important, which ones it built itself.

29.1 Seven Rifts

5. *The political rift*: between the demand for participation and the monopoly of power.
6. *The economic rift*: between the expectation of welfare and justice, and the reality of inflation, poverty, and inequality.
7. *The identity–religious rift*: between the beliefs and way of life of citizens and what the government imposes—whether in the name of modernity or in the name of religion.
8. *The ethnic–regional rift*: between center and periphery, in the distribution of resources, power, and respect for language and culture.
9. *The gender rift*: between women's demand for equal rights and the right to choose, and the law and practice of the government.
10. *The generational rift*: between the generation that built the government and the generation that inherited it.
11. *The moral rift*: between the government's claim to integrity and the reality of corruption at its top.

29.2 A Map of the Activation of the Rifts

Table 29.1. The seven rifts in four periods

Rift	First Pahlavi	Second Pahlavi	First decade of the revolution	After 1989
Political	Active	Intense and active	Active for eliminated rivals	Active and intensifying
Economic	Medium	Intense after 1975	Hidden under the war	Intense and chronic
Identity–religious	Intense: against religion	Intense: against religion and for authenticity	Active for the non-religious	Intense: against official religion
Ethnic–regional	Intense: homogenization	Medium	Intense: Kurdistan	Intense in the periphery
Gender	Ambivalent: unveiling and education	Ambivalent: the vote and tradition	Intense: compulsory veiling	Very intense after 2022
Generational	Weak	Active: educated youth	Weak: the revolutionary generation in power	Very intense

Rift	First Pahlavi	Second Pahlavi	First decade of the revolution	After 1989
Moral	Active: the shah's land acquisitions	Intense: court corruption	Weak at the outset	Intense

29.3 First Finding: Each Government Closed the Previous Rift and Opened the Next

This table, read horizontally, reveals a remarkable pattern: *each government closed the rift the previous government had opened—and at the same time opened the rift the next government would face.*

Reza Shah closed *the rift of insecurity and state collapse*—the legacy of the Constitutional era and the Qajars. But through homogenization and the dismantling of the religious institution, he opened the identity–religious and ethnic rifts.

Mohammad Reza Shah, through the White Revolution and economic growth, closed part of *the rift of rural poverty.* But through development without participation he brought the political rift to its peak, and through imposed modernity he deepened the identity rift—this time on the part of those who sought authenticity.

The revolution closed the identity–religious rift in favor of the religious part of society, and answered the rift of dependence on foreigners with the slogan of independence. But through compulsory veiling and the monopoly of religion it opened the gender rift, and through the elimination of all rivals it reopened the political rift, this time for non-religious forces.

And the Islamic Republic after 1989, through the expansion of education and health, closed part of *the rift of deprivation*—and through that same expansion produced an educated, urban generation that brought the generational and gender rifts to the most intense form in contemporary history.

Every government in Iran was an answer to the discontent with the previous government; and every government, by the way it answered that discontent, built the discontent with the next. This may be the most precise description of the "cycle" of which the original text of this book spoke. The cycle is not the repetition of a government; it is the repetition of an error: answering a rift through imposition instead of dialogue. And imposition, each time, builds a new rift—because imposition always makes part of society a loser, and losers who have no voice sooner or later become the voice of the next government.

29.4 Second Finding: The Moral Rift, the Final Accelerator

In all four periods, one rift played a special role: not the cause of the onset of discontent, but its *final accelerator.* This is the moral rift—the gap between the government's claims and the conduct of the rulers.

A society under political and economic pressure tolerates it for a time, if it believes that the rulers are in the same boat with it. But when it sees that those who demand sacrifice of it grow rich from that same crisis, tolerance turns to anger. Reza Shah's land acquisitions, the corruption of Mohammad Reza Shah's court in the 1970s, and the structural corruption in the Islamic Republic's unaccountable institutions were, in all three periods, the point at which discontent with "wrong policy" turned into hatred of "wrong rulers."

People tolerate an ineffective government; they tolerate a strict government; but they do not forgive a government that demands sacrifice of them and makes none itself.

29.5 Third Finding: The Periphery, Always the First Victim and the Last to Be Heard

In all four periods the ethnic–regional rift existed, and in all four periods it received the least attention. The special essay saw its root in the neglect of fiscal decentralization by the victors of 1909, and Chapter 25 found it at the center of the movement of 2022. This rift, unlike the others, was not closed by a change of government, because none of the governments even recognized it as a problem. All four governments looked at the periphery through the lens of security, not the lens of rights.

29.6 Summary

If we were to summarize this chapter in one statesmanlike lesson, that lesson would be: *Iran's governments responded to rifts, but they never built a mechanism through which the rifts could express themselves and be resolved through negotiation.* Responding to one rift closes it and opens another. Building a mechanism—parties, parliament, local councils, independent courts—allows all the rifts to be continuously expressed and managed, without any of them reaching the point of explosion.

Democracy, from this perspective, is not a system without rifts. It is a system that expresses its rifts quietly every day in parliament, in the press, and in the street, so that it is not forced to express them one day in a revolution.

CHAPTER 30

Chapter 30. Why Collapse Always Seems Sudden: Repression and the Destruction of the Instruments of Measurement

In Iran's last hundred years, every great crisis of legitimacy was a surprise—at least to those in power. Until Shahrivar 1320, Reza Shah did not imagine that on the day of his fall he would have no defenders. In Dey 1356 (December 1977), under the praise of the American president for an "island of stability," Mohammad Reza Shah did not imagine that thirteen months later he would leave the country. And the Islamic Republic called every wave of protest the work of foreigners and of a small number of "rioters"—until the day when, to silence it, thousands were killed in two days.

This chapter asks: *why did governments that possessed the most extensive intelligence apparatuses always remain unaware of the condition of the society they ruled?*

30.1 The Dictator's Dilemma

The economist Ronald Wintrobe called this problem "the dictator's dilemma." Every ruler who represses opposition faces a dilemma: the harsher the repression, the less people express what they really think; and the less they express it, the less the ruler knows what they really think. *Repression, designed for the ruler's security, therefore makes him less secure—because it blinds him.*

Chapter 3 explained the same mechanism through Timur Kuran's theory of preference falsification. This chapter shows that this mechanism operated with disturbing precision in all four periods.

30.2 The Instruments of Measurement, and the Governments That Broke Them

Every society has instruments that measure its condition—just as the body has a thermometer and a blood-pressure gauge. In politics there are five such instruments:

12. *Free elections*, which show whom the people want.
13. *A free press*, which shows what the people are worried about.
14. *Parties and unions*, which organize scattered demands and turn them into an audible voice.
15. *Independent surveys*, which measure attitudes directly.
16. *Independent officials*, who can tell the ruler what he does not want to hear.

All four governments broke or hollowed out these instruments one by one—not out of malice, but out of short-term security calculation. Reza Shah silenced the press and eliminated independent officials. Mohammad Reza Shah engineered elections, made parties rubber stamps, and in 1975 even forbade silence. The Islamic Republic restricted elections through approbatory supervision, closed newspapers in droves, and made independent surveys dangerous. And all three governments discovered, at the moment of crisis, that they had broken their own thermometer.

This was the central finding of the earlier version of this book, and here it is confirmed with the evidence of all four periods: *repression, before it silences the opponent, silences the government's instrument of measurement; and a government that cannot measure the condition of society cannot*

make a correct decision even with the best of intentions—because it does not know in what situation it is deciding.

30.3 Why the Security Apparatus Does Not Replace the Instruments of Measurement

Each of these governments relied, instead of free instruments of measurement, on a security apparatus: Reza Shah's police, SAVAK, and the security institutions of the Islamic Republic. Why could these apparatuses, for all their extent, not tell the government the condition of society?

The answer lies in the very structure of the security apparatus. A security official, like any citizen, works in a system in which bringing bad news has a cost. A report that says "the people hate the Leader" is dangerous both for its author—because he may be accused of pessimism or even of sympathy with the opposition—and for the hierarchy that must pass it upward. So reports become a little softer at each layer. And at the highest layer, a picture arrives that is very far from reality.

The security apparatus, from this perspective, is a thermometer that is itself afraid of fever. It can track organized opponents, but it cannot measure the diffuse anger of millions—because that anger, until the moment of explosion, is recorded in no file.

30.4 Signs That Were Visible

But this book does not claim that the collapses were truly unpredictable. In every period there were signs that were visible to any careful observer—even without free instruments of measurement.

Political humor: Chapter 3 said that at the stage of normative rupture, humor takes the place of protest. Under all three governments, before the great crisis, political jokes about the rulers and the official symbols became widespread. *Emigration*, especially the emigration of skilled people, which was visible in the 1970s and on a far larger scale in recent decades. *Capital flight*, which occurred before 1979 and in recent years in striking amounts. *The value of the national currency*, which is the most precise indicator of distrust in the future. And *the turnout rate*, which the Islamic Republic, unlike the Pahlavis, measured and published itself—and which, as Chapter 22 showed, reached the lowest level in the system's history in its final decade.

These signs were visible. What was missing was someone who could tell the ruler about them, and a ruler who would listen. Collapse, then, was sudden not for society but only for the ruler. *Society always knows at which stage of delegitimation it stands; only the ruler who has closed his ears does not know.*

30.5 The Lesson for the Iran of Tomorrow

This chapter may hold the most practical lesson of the whole book for the politicians of tomorrow. The instruments of measurement—a free press, free elections, independent surveys, reliable official statistics, and independent officials—are usually regarded as "democratic luxuries," things that can be attended to after security and growth have been secured. The experience of Iran's last hundred years shows the opposite.

The instruments of measurement are a security asset, not a security threat. A government that freely knows what its people want and what they suffer from can reform before the crisis. A government that has broken these instruments learns only after the crisis—and by then it is too late to reform.

A ruler who closes a critical newspaper imagines that he has silenced the enemy's voice; in reality, he has thrown out of his room the last person who was willing to tell him, free of charge, where he is in danger.

CHAPTER 31

Chapter 31. Iran Against the Reference Model: Where and Why Iran's Path Diverged from Korea and Spain

Chapter 4 chose six countries, each of which untied at least one of Iran's knots. This chapter returns to those countries and asks: did Iran, too, have moments when it could have taken their path? And if it did, what was missing?

This book's answer is that in the past hundred years Iran had at least seven moments in which a path similar to that of one of the model countries was open. In none of the seven was this path taken. And what was missing in all seven moments was, remarkably, almost the same thing.

31.1 Seven Moments

Table 31.1. Seven moments when another path was open

Moment	The path that was open	Model country	What was missing
Aban 1304 (1925)	Reza Khan as a capable, accountable prime minister, not an absolute king	The constitutional monarchies of Europe; Turkey after 1946	A ruler willing to accept less than he could have
1941–1953	Consolidating the parliamentary system with a capable state	Spain, 1977	A neutral army; agreement among the political forces on rules
1961–1962	A government with an independent base (Amini) leading land reform	Korea in the 1950s	A monarch willing to tolerate an independent reformer
1973–1975	Institutional management of oil revenue and gradual political opening under the shelter of welfare	Norway; Taiwan in the 1980s	An institution that places a distance between revenue and whim
1979	A constitution agreed upon by all the forces of the revolution	Spain, 1978; South Africa, 1996	A victor who writes rules for everyone, not for itself
1997–2005	Opening from within, with the center of power accepting competition	Taiwan, 1987–1996	A center of power that sees its own survival in competition
2015–2017	Gradual political opening on the basis of the JCPOA's economic opening	Indonesia, 1998–2004	Turning an external correction into an internal correction by the will of the center of power

31.2 The Common Element Missing in All Seven Moments

The last column of this table repeats one thing in different words: *a ruler—or a center of power—willing to accept having less than it could have.*

Chapter 4 said at its close: "Legitimacy begins where power voluntarily gives up part of itself." Now we can see that this sentence is not merely a lesson from Korea and Spain; it is the key to understanding Iran's history. In all seven moments, whoever held power could, by giving up part of it, have opened a path leading to durable legitimacy. And in all seven moments, this concession did not happen.

Why? Chapter 4 proposed an answer from the experience of Taiwan: the Kuomintang gave up power because it realized that electoral defeat was not its end. *Iran's rulers, in all seven moments, believed that losing their monopoly was equivalent to annihilation.* And this belief was not without grounds: in a political culture that eliminates the loser—from the execution of Teymourtash and the house arrest of Mosaddegh to the executions after the revolution and the house arrest of the leaders of the Green Movement—every ruler had reason to fear that if he lost power he would lose his life as well.

The common element, then, has two faces. One face was rulers who were unwilling to give up power; the other was a political culture that gave them no reason to give it up—because there was no guarantee for the security of losers.

31.3 What the Model Countries Had and Iran Did Not

Comparison with the model countries reveals four elements that they had and that Iran, at its decisive moments, did not.

First, guarantees for losers. In Spain, the military and Franco's elite knew that after the transition they would not be put on trial. In Korea, the former military leaders—although some of them were later tried—had guarantees at the moment of transition. In Indonesia, the army left politics step by step while preserving part of its position. In Iran, no transition offered guarantees for the losers—and for that reason every ruler fought to the last moment.

Second, neutral or controllable armed forces. In Spain, the young king stopped the army from carrying out a coup in 1981. In Iran, the army in 1925 was the instrument for coming to power, in 1953 the instrument of a coup, and after 1989 the armed forces became one of the main pillars of the center of power.

Third, an external anchor. Spain had the prospect of joining Europe, which gave all political forces a shared incentive to preserve democracy. Korea and Taiwan, within the framework of their alliance with America, benefited from external pressure for opening. Iran, at its decisive moments, had no anchor—or its anchor, like America for the second Pahlavi, worked in favor of preserving the status quo.

Fourth, a tax-paying middle class. In Korea and Taiwan, development was based on industry and exports, and the middle class that emerged was a taxpayer that wanted a share. In Iran, development was based on oil, and the middle class—under both the second Pahlavi and the Islamic Republic—was to a large extent a recipient of rent rather than a taxpayer. *A middle class that takes from the government can become discontented; but only a middle class that gives to the government can compel it to be accountable.*

31.4 The Warnings of Turkey and Egypt

Chapter 4 also presented two cautionary cases: Turkey and Egypt. Both are instructive for Iran, because at certain moments Iran has resembled each of them.

Iran in the interlude of 1941 to 1953 resembled the Turkey of the 1950s: a real opening without a neutral army and independent institutions to support it, reversed by military intervention. And Iran in 1979 resembled Egypt in 2011: the overthrow of a long-standing ruler by a broad popular

movement, without agreement on rules among the forces that had won together—and in both, one of those forces wrote the rules in its own favor.

These two warnings share one lesson for the Iran of tomorrow: *the moment after the fall of a system is the most dangerous moment for freedom, because at that moment everyone wants freedom, but no one yet has the rules to protect it.*

31.5 Summary

In the past hundred years, Iran has not suffered from a lack of opportunity. Seven times, a path like that of the countries that are today models of legitimate governance lay open before it. What was missing was not opportunity; it was a mechanism to turn opportunity into rule: guarantees for losers, a neutral army, an external anchor, and a tax-paying class that wanted a share. And above all, a ruler willing to accept having less.

Countries do not succeed because they have more opportunities; they succeed because, at one of those opportunities, someone who could have kept everything decided to let part of it go. Iran is still waiting for that decision.

CHAPTER 32

Chapter 32. Rival Explanations and the Condition of Falsification: Is This Book Right?

Every book that makes a large claim must be able to stand against rival claims. And every serious hypothesis must say under what conditions it would be false. This chapter does both. First, it assesses five rival explanations for the failure of legitimate governance in Iran. Then it tests the book's own hypothesis against the condition of falsification set out in the Introduction.

32.1 The First Explanation: Oil

The claim: Iran did not achieve legitimate governance because it was a rentier state. Oil made the government independent of the people's taxes, and a government that does not need the people's taxes does not need their consent either.

Assessment: This explanation contains an important part of the truth, and this book has used it in Chapters 4, 16, 23, and 27. But three pieces of evidence show that oil is not the first cause. First, Reza Shah—whose oil revenue was negligible compared with that of his successors, and who financed a large part of his spending from taxes on sugar and tea—arrived at the same pattern of governance. Second, the interlude of 1941 to 1953 also had oil revenue, yet in it the Majlis really governed. Third, Norway and Botswana showed that natural resources, alongside accountable institutions, do no harm to legitimate governance.

Judgment: Oil was a facilitator, not a cause. It exempted a government that was already inclined toward monopoly from the costs of monopoly—and this, as the earlier version of this book said, is an important difference. *Oil did not build despotic government; it made it cheaper.*

32.2 The Second Explanation: Political Culture

The claim: Iran is a "short-term society"—in Homa Katouzian's phrase—a society in which power has never been bound by law, every government is arbitrary, and every arbitrary rule leads to chaos and every chaos to new arbitrary rule. The root of failure therefore lies in culture itself, not in the decisions of this or that ruler.

Assessment: This explanation is the strongest rival to this book's hypothesis, and this book has learned much from it—including in the special essay, which regarded proprietary kingship as the root of the interpretation of power as domination. But if this explanation is turned into determinism, it has two problems. First, it does not explain the experiences that do not fit it: the Constitutional Revolution, the interlude, the referendum of 1979, and the broad participation of 1997 show that Iranian society chose participation wherever it had the opportunity. Second, political culture, too, as the special essay said, "changes with repeated experience"—and Korea and Taiwan, which before their transitions had a deep-rooted authoritarian political culture, transformed it within a generation.

Judgment: Political culture is the context, not destiny. It explains why Iran's rulers moved easily toward monopoly and why political losers were always afraid. But it does not explain why, at the decisive moments—seven of which Chapter 31 enumerated—rulers chose one option over another. *Culture sets the field of play; but the players make the moves.*

32.3 The Third Explanation: Geopolitics and Foreign Interference

The claim: Because of its position between great powers and its oil resources, Iran has always been an arena of foreign rivalry. Every time Iranians came close to legitimate governance, foreign powers stood in the way: 1907, 1911, 1921, 1941, 1953, and the wars of 2025.

Assessment: This explanation states an undeniable reality, and this book has recognized it repeatedly. The coup of 28 Mordad, which closed the last opportunity of the interlude, would not have occurred without American and British planning. But the evidence of this book shows a constant pattern: *foreign interference always entered through a rift that had already opened within.* The coup of 1921 emerged from the collapse of the Constitutional state. The occupation of 1941 was made easier by Reza Shah's strategic error. The coup of 1953 would not have been possible without domestic accomplices and a rift in the national coalition. And both wars of 2025 occurred after decades of policy that the center of power in Iran had chosen.

Judgment: Geopolitics was an accelerant—sometimes a decisive one—but not the first cause. And one statesmanlike point: *an explanation that attributes every failure to foreigners is precisely the explanation that all four governments used to escape responsibility.* A book that wants to help the Iran of tomorrow cannot repeat it.

32.4 The Fourth Explanation: Ideology

The claim: The Islamic Republic's failure in legitimate governance is rooted in its religious ideology—in the belief that it knows the truth and that the people's vote has no validity against the truth.

Assessment: This explanation is powerful for the Islamic Republic, and Chapters 18 and 26 have used it. But it explains nothing for the two Pahlavis: they had no religious ideology, and they still arrived at the same pattern.

Judgment: Ideology determined the *form* of despotism, not its existence. The Pahlavis, with the ideology of modernity and nationalism, arrived at the same point as the Islamic Republic did with religious ideology. *Every ideology that claims to know better than the people what the people need—whether in the name of modernity or in the name of religion—arrives at the same architecture of power.*

32.5 The Fifth Explanation: "The People Were Not Ready"

The claim: Iranians, because of illiteracy, poverty, or lack of democratic experience, were not ready for legitimate governance; and each time they achieved it, they dragged it into chaos.

Assessment: This explanation was the most common justification of all four governments for setting the vote aside—and that in itself should make the reader suspicious of it. The evidence of this book refutes it. A society that in 1906, with very limited literacy, demanded a constitution; a society that on 30 Tir 1331 (21 July 1952) came into the streets to restore its prime minister; a society that in 1997, with broad participation, chose a candidate the institutions of power did not want; and a society that today is more literate and more aware than at any other time—such a society was not "unready." *It was the governments that were not ready; the people demonstrated their readiness again and again.*

32.6 The Condition of Falsification: Did the Hypothesis Survive?

The Introduction to this book set a condition of falsification: "If a period is found in which the channels of listening were open and legitimacy nevertheless collapsed, the central hypothesis must be revised." Two periods put this condition to the test.

The interlude of 1941 to 1953. In this period the channels of listening were open, and the political system collapsed with a coup. So the condition of falsification was, on the face of it, met. And this book, in Chapter 12, revised the hypothesis, as it should: an "open ear" is a *necessary* condition of legitimacy but not a *sufficient* one; a capable state and shared rules are also needed. This revision did not refute the hypothesis but refined it. But the reader should know that this book changed its original hypothesis in the face of the evidence.

The reform era, 1997 to 2005. In this period the channels of listening were open to some extent, and legitimacy, instead of consolidating, eroded further in the years that followed. But Chapter 22 showed that the channels were open only to the visible state, not to the center of power. So this period does not meet the condition of falsification; on the contrary, it confirms the more precise formulation of the hypothesis: *an ear that is open only to the executor and not to the decision-maker is not an open ear.*

The book's hypothesis, in its revised formulation, has therefore survived: *durable legitimacy in Iran is possible only where three conditions hold at the same time—a capable state, an open ear at the center of decision, and shared rules that keep losers safe as well.* No period of the past hundred years had all three; and no period achieved durable legitimacy.

32.7 Summary of Part Eight: One Nation, Four Governments, One Error

Part Eight began with a question: why did four different governments arrive at the same point? Seven chapters, from seven angles, arrived at a single answer.

The four governments chose four different sources of legitimacy—but all four outside the people's vote (Chapter 26). They tried every instrument for managing legitimacy—except institutionalized participation (Chapter 27). Each time the channels of listening were opened, it was because of the ruler's weakness, not his decision (Chapter 28). Each closed the rift of the previous government and opened the rift of the next (Chapter 29). Each broke its own instruments of measurement and remained blind at the moment of crisis (Chapter 30). Each had at least one opportunity to take the path of the model countries, and lost it (Chapter 31). And none of the rival explanations—oil, culture, foreigners, ideology, or the "immaturity" of the people—explains this pattern on its own (Chapter 32).

What brought the four governments to the same point, then, was neither their ideology, nor their rulers, nor their enemies. *It was a common error: the belief that one can govern without listening.* This error wore four different garments. But beneath all four garments was one body.

Part Nine, the last, moves from the past to the future and asks: if the Iran of tomorrow does not want to repeat this error, where should it begin?

PART NINE: Outlook—From the Lessons of the Past to a Design for the Future

The eight parts of this book have assessed the past. This final part looks to the future. But not by prophecy—a book written in the midst of war and at the end of an era has no right to say what tomorrow will bring. Rather, with a different question: *if the Iran of tomorrow—in whatever form it takes—does not want to repeat the error that the four governments of the past hundred years repeated, where should it begin?*

Chapter 33 proposes principles that emerge from the findings of the preceding eight parts. Chapter 34 assesses the scenarios before Iran, without predicting any one of them, together with the conditions of each. And the Conclusion gathers the book's argument into a few pages.

CHAPTER 33

Chapter 33. Principles for Designing Legitimate and Wise Governance for the Iran of the Future

33.1 One Rule Before All the Principles

Before any principle, one rule must be stated, because all the other principles rest on it: *these principles are not about the form of government; they are about the relationship between power and accountability.*

The debate over whether the Iran of tomorrow should be a constitutional monarchy or a republic is a legitimate and important debate, and this book leaves the judgment on it to the free vote of the Iranian people in a fair referendum. But the experience of the past hundred years shows that the form of government, on its own, determines nothing. Iran had a constitutional monarchy, and in it the king ruled. Iran had a republic, and in it the people's vote did not determine the center of power. *The issue was never the name of the government; it was whether whoever holds power is accountable to those over whom he rules.* Mosaddegh's principle of Aban 1304 (1925)—*no power without responsibility*—applies equally to every form of government.

33.2 Three Pillars, Three Sets of Principles

The book's final hypothesis, which survived in Chapter 32, was that durable legitimacy is possible only where three conditions hold at the same time—*a capable state, an open ear at the center of decision, and shared rules that keep losers safe as well.* The principles of this chapter, in three sets, answer these three conditions. And each principle answers a specific error of the past hundred years.

The First Pillar: A Capable State

1. *A merit-based bureaucracy, by law.* The selection, promotion, and dismissal of state officials must take place under a law independent of political preference, and an independent body must oversee it. *Answer to:* the pattern of the competent official in every period—from Teymourtash and Davar to Ebtehaj and Amini, and the purges of the revolution's first decade.
2. *Professional, neutral armed forces outside the economy.* The army and the security institutions should, by constitutional provision, be barred from political and economic activity, and their command should be subordinate to elected civilian authority. The withdrawal of the armed forces from the economy, as the experience of Indonesia showed, must be carried out step by step, according to a plan, and with guarantees for the livelihood of their personnel—not by a single decree. *Answer to:* 1925, 1953, and the decades after 1989.
3. *A tax state, not a rentier state.* Oil and gas revenue must go into a national fund under parliamentary supervision, with a fiscal rule that limits annual withdrawals; and the government's current budget should gradually come to rest on taxation. *A citizen who pays taxes has the right to ask; and a government that lives on taxes is compelled to answer. Answer to:* 1974 and the pattern of rent in Chapters 16, 23, and 27.
4. *An independent Plan Organization and central bank.* Major economic decisions must be kept out of the reach of political whim—not out of the reach of parliament, but out of the reach of any single individual. *Answer to:* Ramsar 1974 and Aban 1398 (2019).

The Second Pillar: An Open Ear at the Center of Decision

5. *One source of sovereignty: the people's vote.* No second source—royal, religious, or ideological—holds the final right to command alongside the free vote. *Answer to:* Article 2 of the Supplement to the Constitutional Law and Articles 5 and 57 of the Constitution of 1979.
6. *No power without responsibility.* Every office that holds executive power is accountable to an elected body; and every office that is not accountable holds no executive power. *Answer to:* the architecture of the visible and invisible states in Chapter 21.
7. *The instruments of measurement as a security asset.* Freedom of the press, freedom of parties and unions, an independent statistical institution, and the right to independent polling of public opinion must be guaranteed in the constitution—not as a privilege the government grants, but as an instrument the government needs in order to see its own errors. *Answer to:* Chapter 30 and all four "sudden" collapses.
8. *Supervision of elections by an independent body.* No appointed body should determine, before the ballot box, who may stand as a candidate. The qualifications of candidates are set by law, and objections to them are heard by an independent court. *Answer to:* approbatory supervision and 2009.
9. *Local and provincial councils with real budgets.* An open ear is not enough in the capital alone. Citizens must be able to shape, by their vote, the decisions that affect their lives in their own city and province—and these councils must have independent revenue and a guaranteed share of national revenue. *Answer to:* the provincial councils of the Constitutional era and Article 100 of the Constitution of 1979—both without budgets.

The Third Pillar: Shared Rules

10. *A constitution with an inclusive, two-stage origin.* First, agreement among the principal forces of society on basic principles; then, the drafting of the text in an elected constituent assembly; and finally, a free referendum. *Answer to:* 1909 and 1979—two victories in which the rules were written for the victors.
11. *An independent constitutional court.* Arbitration between institutions, and between citizen and government, by a court whose judges are chosen by special majority, by different institutions, and for a long, non-renewable term. *Answer to:* 28 Mordad, when a constitution without an arbiter became a battlefield.
12. *A clear rule for the transfer of power.* For every case—succession, resignation, removal, incapacity, a power vacuum—an explicit, time-bound mechanism under the supervision of the constitutional court. *Answer to:* the four tests of succession—1925, 1941, 1979, and 2026—in none of which the constitution determined the content of the decision.
13. *Freedom of conscience.* No government has the right to impose dress, belief, or way of life on its citizens—neither in the name of modernity nor in the name of religion. *Answer to:* the unveiling of 1936 and compulsory veiling after 1979—two sides of the same coin.
14. *Fiscal decentralization by formula.* An independent fiscal commission should set each province's share of national revenue—including natural-resource revenue—on the basis of a transparent formula, and the regions in which the resources are located should have a guaranteed share; together with equal linguistic and cultural rights. *Answer to:* the neglect of the victors of 1909 and Article 48 of the Constitution of 1979—principles that never became budgets.

15. *Security for losers.* No one should lose his life, liberty, or property because of political defeat. This principle is the most important and the most difficult on this list, and section 33.3 examines it separately.

33.3 The Fifteenth Principle: Security for Losers, and Justice Without Revenge

Chapter 31 showed that in all seven moments when Iran could have taken the path of the model countries, one element was missing: a ruler willing to have less than he could have. And it showed that this inability was rooted in a justified fear: in Iran's political culture, the loser of power also lost his life.

The principle of security for losers is therefore not merely a moral principle; *it is the practical condition of any peaceful transition.* No holder of power, in Iran or anywhere else, gives up power voluntarily if he believes that the day after he does so he will be hanged.

But this principle stands in tension with another demand that is equally legitimate: the demand for justice. A nation that has given hundreds of thousands of dead, imprisoned, and exiled—from Goharshad to 15 Khordad, from the executions of the 1980s and the summer of 1988 to Aban 1398 and Dey 1404—has the right to know who was responsible, and the right to see those responsible held to account. A nation that ignores this right passes on to the next generation a wound that will one day reopen.

Global experience suggests a path between these two—a path that is neither perfect nor easy, but is better than either alternative:

- *Truth before punishment.* An independent commission to record and reveal the crimes of the past, as was done in South Africa, Argentina, and Chile. Revealed truth is itself a form of justice—and a foundation for any subsequent justice.
- *Individual, not collective, responsibility.* Only those who were directly responsible for serious crimes—murder, torture, enforced disappearance—should be tried, in courts with all the guarantees of fair trial. Membership in an institution or affiliation with a system is not, on its own, a crime.
- *No to revolutionary courts.* Chapter 19 showed how the courts that in 1979 set the law aside to punish the "enemy" used that same broken law a few years later against yesterday's friends. *Justice that begins by breaking the law lends legitimacy to the next injustice.*
- *Preserving the institutions of the state.* The experience of Iraq after 2003 showed that dismantling the army and the bureaucracy wholesale in the name of purging brings not justice but collapse and civil war. Vetting must be individual, based on evidence, and step by step.

A transition that begins with revenge arrives at a government that must fear the next revenge; and a government that fears revenge will close its ears again. Only a justice that holds itself bound by law from the first day can break this cycle.

33.4 Institutionalizing Leadership Rationality

In every chapter, this book measured leaders by five criteria of rationality. The final lesson of this assessment is that *leadership rationality cannot be entrusted to the personal virtue of the leader; it must be institutionalized:* each of the five criteria has an institution that makes it independent of the person.

Table 33.1. Institutionalizing the five criteria of leadership rationality

Criterion	The danger when it is entrusted to a person	The institution that guarantees it
Understanding public consent	The ruler hears what his entourage tells him	Free elections, free press, independent surveys
Management of resources	Personal whim or ambition sets the budget	A national fund with a fiscal rule, a budget approved by parliament, an independent audit court
Recognition of the national interest	The government's interests are taken for the country's interests	An accountable national security council; public parliamentary debate on security and foreign policy
Use of experts	Loyalty takes the place of expertise	A merit-based civil service law; independent technical institutions
Response to discontent	Repression takes the place of dialogue	The right of peaceful protest, an independent judiciary, independent oversight of the police

A wise government is not a government that has a wise leader; it is a government that, even with an unwise leader, cannot lead the country into the abyss. The past hundred years in Iran have been the history of leaders some of whom were intelligent and some patriotic. What was missing were institutions that would turn their intelligence into collective wisdom and contain their errors before they turned into catastrophe.

CHAPTER 34

Chapter 34. Scenarios and Conditions of Transition: Four Roads Ahead

This chapter does not predict. Iran, at the moment these lines are being written—Mehr 1405 (October 2026)—is in the seventh month of a war whose end is not in sight: a naval blockade continues, the Strait of Hormuz is a field of contention, and proposals and replies pass between Tehran and Washington through mediators. The new leadership has been in office for seven months, and society, nine months ago, went through the bloodiest repression of the past hundred years. At such a moment, any prediction is more an expression of the author's hope or fear than analysis.

What this chapter does is assess four roads that lie before Iran—with the conditions that make each road more or less likely, the signs that can be followed to identify each road, and the question that matters most for this book: *on each of these roads, will the hundred-year pattern be broken, or repeated?*

34.1 The First Road: Security Survival

Description: The system, under the new leadership and relying ever more heavily on the armed forces, passes through the war and the crisis and retains control. The political space becomes more closed, and the principal source of legitimacy becomes, entirely, security—and the narrative of defense against a foreign enemy.

Conditions: The cohesion of the armed forces and the security apparatus; an end to the war, or its containment, without institutional collapse; and the inability of society to organize sustained protest after the repression of Dey 1404.

Signs: The concentration of decisions in a small network of security officials; a further reduction in the role of elected institutions; harsher treatment of every critical voice, even from within the system.

Assessment against the book's model: This road is the complete repetition of the pattern—in its most severe form. Chapter 24 showed that repression, with each wave, required a larger dose for the same effect. Security survival, if it occurs, will therefore be not an end to the crisis of legitimacy but its postponement at a growing cost. *A government whose legitimacy has become negative can survive; but only as long as it can pay the cost of its survival.*

34.2 The Second Road: Transformation from Within

Description: Part of the system—perhaps under the pressure of war, the economy, and society—concludes that it should seek its survival not in monopoly but in competition, and begins a step-by-step opening, perhaps together with an external agreement that eases economic pressure.

Conditions: This is the road of Taiwan in Chapter 4, and Chapter 31 showed that its principal condition was never met in the seven earlier moments: *a center of power that sees its own survival in competition.* This condition depends on guaranteeing the security of losers (the fifteenth principle of Chapter 33), and on the division, or at least the containment, of the armed forces.

Signs: The release of political prisoners; an end to house arrests; a real—not symbolic—opening of the press; a reduction in disqualifications; and, most important of all, a change in the center of decision, not merely in the bureaucratic government.

Assessment against the book's model: This road, if it occurs, would be the first time in the past hundred years that freedom was the product of the ruler's decision, not of his weakness—and Chapter 28 showed that only such freedom endures. But the record of a hundred years, and especially the fate of the reform era, makes this road difficult and—on current evidence—unlikely. This book does not regard it as impossible; the history of Korea, Taiwan, and Spain shows that rulers sometimes, at a moment when no one expects it, choose another road. Given the intertwining of security and military power with political radicalism, however, the likelihood of this situation under present conditions is very low.

34.3 The Third Road: Collapse and Transition

Description: The system, under the simultaneous pressure of war, the economy, and society, collapses—perhaps suddenly, since, as Chapter 30 said, collapses always seem sudden—and new forces from inside and outside the country find the opportunity to build another order.

The great danger: This road appears the most hopeful. But Chapter 31 gave two warnings that matter more on this road than anywhere else. Iran in 1979 and Egypt in 2011 both took this road; and in both, the forces that had won together competed for power before agreeing on rules—and one of them wrote the rules in its own favor. *The moment after the fall is the most dangerous moment for freedom, because at that moment everyone wants freedom and no one yet has the rules to protect it.*

Conditions for this road not to lead to another 1979:

- *Agreement on rules before the fall.* The opposition forces—with all their ideological, ethnic, and political differences—must, before the moment of transition, have agreed on the basic principles of the next order and on the decision-making mechanism of the transitional period. This is the lesson of South Africa: principles before text, and text before competition.
- *Avoiding a monopoly of victory.* No force—however popular—should take sole control of writing the rules during the transition.
- *An army that joins the nation, not a faction.* The armed forces must know before the transition that they will have a professional, guaranteed place in the next order—but a place outside politics and the economy.
- *A bond with the periphery.* Representatives of the regions and ethnic groups must be present in the agreements from the start, with guarantees concerning decentralization and equal rights. Otherwise, a power vacuum at the center will lead to rupture at the periphery.

34.4 The Fourth Road: Collapse Without Transition

Description: The system collapses, but no organized force can build a new order. The central state weakens, the armed forces fragment, the periphery separates from the center, and foreign powers each intervene on behalf of their allies.

This road is the worst road—and it should not be regarded as far-fetched. Libya after 2011, and Syria and Iraq after 2003, showed that the fall of a dictatorship does not in itself bring democracy;

sometimes it brings something worse than dictatorship. And Iran, with its ethnic diversity, its long borders, and neighbors each with their own interests, is not immune from this danger.

What makes this road more likely: The absence of agreement among the opposition forces; the wholesale dismantling of state institutions in the name of purging; foreign intervention without domestic backing; and disregard for the demands of the periphery. *What makes it less likely:* The same conditions set out for the third road—especially the preservation of state institutions and an early bond with the periphery.

The lesson of this road is more fundamental than any other lesson in this book, and Chapter 2 stated it through Fukuyama's dilemma: "In the past hundred years Iran has had either a state without accountability or accountability without a state." *Any transition that destroys the state in order to achieve accountability arrives at the other pole of the same dilemma—and Iran's history has shown that the way back from that pole usually leads to a state that is once again unaccountable.*

34.5 The Four Roads at a Glance

Table 34.1. Four roads ahead

Road	Principal condition	Principal danger	Will the pattern be broken?
Security survival	Cohesion of the armed forces	The rising cost of repression	No; it is repeated in its most severe form
Transformation from within	A center of power that sees its survival in competition	A symbolic opening taken back once power returns	Yes, if freedom becomes a rule
Collapse and transition	Agreement on rules before the fall	A repetition of 1979: a victor who writes rules for itself	Yes, if the rules are written before the victors
Collapse without transition	—	Collapse of the state and territorial fragmentation	No; it arrives at the other pole of the dilemma

34.6 The First Hundred Days: A Test Every New Order Must Pass

On each of the two roads that can break the pattern—transformation from within or transition after collapse—the first hundred days are decisive. The experience of 1909, 1941, and 1979 showed that in these hundred days either the rules are built or the opportunity to build them is lost. The following list is not a complete program but a test that every new order, whatever form it takes, must pass:

16. *Legal continuity:* a declaration that existing laws, except those clearly in conflict with fundamental rights, remain valid until new laws are passed—so that the country is not left in a legal vacuum.
17. *Release of political prisoners and an end to house arrests*, immediately.
18. *Freedom of the press and of the internet*, as the first instrument of measurement of the new order.
19. *An independent electoral body*, with a composition that all the principal forces trust.
20. *A clear and binding timetable* for the election of a constituent assembly and a constitutional referendum.
21. *A truth commission and a declaration of the principles of transitional justice*—with emphasis on individual responsibility and fair trial, not collective revenge.

22. *A decree on the neutrality of the armed forces*, and the start of a program for their withdrawal from the economy.
23. *Immediate economic stability:* continued payment of salaries, provision of basic goods, and a transparent program to contain inflation—because no freedom survives in hunger.
24. *A transitional council with representatives of the provinces and ethnic groups*, so that the periphery finds its voice at the center from the first day.
25. *A public declaration of the principle of security for losers:* that no one will lose his life or liberty because of affiliation or political defeat.

The test of every new order is not whom it sets aside in its first hundred days; it is what rules it builds that will keep it safe as well, on the day it becomes the loser.

Conclusion: From Authority to Trust

This book began with a question: why were Iran's four political orders, despite their sometimes remarkable achievements, unable to turn the consent of citizens into durable legitimacy; and by what mechanism did society take legitimacy back from them?

Now this question can be answered.

What This Book Has Shown

First, legitimacy in Iran was not lost through a lack of achievement. Reza Shah built a state; Mohammad Reza Shah transformed the country; the revolution brought millions into the field and delivered services to the villages; and the Islamic Republic after 1989 created a society more literate than at any other time. None of these achievements was small. But none of them was turned into something that could defend the government on the day of crisis.

Second, all four governments defined their right to command outside the people's vote—in order, in development, in faith, and in security. And any source defined outside the vote turns the institutions of independent evaluation into a threat. So all four governments silenced the press, parties, independent courts, and a competitive parliament—their own instruments of measurement—and at the moment of crisis remained blind.

Third, delegitimation was a process in stages: from issue-specific discontent, to institutional distrust, to normative rupture, and finally to behavioral refusal. Repression did not stop this process; it concealed and accelerated it. And because it was concealed, collapse each time seemed sudden to the ruler—although society always knew where it stood.

Fourth, in a hundred years freedom was opened three times, and all three times it was the product of the ruler's weakness, not his decision. And all three times, with the return of the ruler's power, it was taken back.

Fifth, Iran had at least seven opportunities to take the path of the countries that are today models of legitimate governance. What was missing all seven times was one thing: a ruler willing to accept having less than he could have. And this inability was rooted in a political culture that eliminated the loser of power.

And sixth, the book's first hypothesis—that legitimacy was lost through the closing of the government's ear—was refined in the face of the evidence of the interlude: *durable legitimacy is possible only where three conditions hold at the same time—a capable state, an open ear at the center of decision, and shared rules that keep losers safe as well.* In the past hundred years Iran sometimes had one of these three and sometimes two. It never had all three together.

One Error, Four Garments

If we were to summarize this whole book in one sentence, that sentence would be: *the four governments of Iran's last hundred years, with four ideologies and four styles of governance, repeated one error—the belief that one can govern without listening.*

Reza Shah committed this error in the garment of order. Mohammad Reza Shah in the garment of development. The leaders of the revolution in the garment of faith. And the system after 1989 in the

garment of security. Each garment, in its time, was seductive to many, because each was an answer to a real suffering: the suffering of insecurity, the suffering of poverty, the suffering of humiliation, and the suffering of foreign threat. But beneath all four garments was one body: *a power that considered itself in no need of listening.*

What Remains of This Book for Tomorrow

The Iran of today, at the end of an era, faces the same question that the Constitutional Revolution first put to Iranian power: *where does the right to command come from?* This book has given its answer. But the answer must be given not by authors but by those who will build the Iran of tomorrow.

For them, this book has three sentences.

To those who hold power today: You can still do something none of your predecessors did—open the channels by your own decision, before weakness forces you to. Iran's history shows that this opening will happen sooner or later. The only question is whether it happens by your decision—in which case it may endure—or through your weakness, in which case you will be outside it.

To those who will take power tomorrow: The first temptation of every victor is to write the rules for himself. The victors of 1909 did not resist this temptation, nor did the victors of 1979. If you do not resist it either, another book, a hundred years from now, will write exactly these chapters about you. Write rules that will keep you safe as well if tomorrow you become the losers. This is the only guarantee that tomorrow you will not lose.

And to the citizens of Iran: This book has shown that you have repeatedly demonstrated your readiness for legitimate governance—in the Constitutional Revolution, in the interlude, in 1979, in 1997, and in every wave that has risen since. What was missing was not your readiness; it was the rules that would turn your readiness into institutions, and these were never made. Building those rules is the work of a generation. And that generation may be this one.

Closing Word

Legitimacy comes neither from power, nor from ideology, nor from effectiveness, nor from security. All of these can buy obedience; none of them can build trust. Trust comes from only one place: from the repeated experience of a citizen who has seen that when he speaks, he is heard; when he votes, it has effect; and when the government errs, there is a way to correct it that does not pass through revolution.

In the past hundred years, Iran has built power four times. Now it is time, for the first time, to build trust.

The history of Iran has not been a history of a lack of power; it has been a history of powers that considered themselves in no need of listening. If the Iran of tomorrow does not want to repeat this history, it must begin right here: with a power that knows it needs to listen.

Ebrahim Roshandel
Mehr 1405 (October 2026)

Appendix A: Outline and Conceptual Framework of the Book

About This Design

This book is not a historical narrative; it is an anatomy of the management of governance. Its unit of analysis is not the "event" but *the relationship between demand and response*: what the people wanted in each period, what the government did to gain legitimacy at home, and why society took legitimacy back from it.

The original file had a good framework for narrating four periods. This design makes three shifts in it:

1. *From chronology to the management of governance.* Each period is assessed with the same ten-part template, not with a continuous narrative. This template makes comparison possible.
2. *From the government's view to the citizen's view.* "Delegitimation" is an act that society performs. The book traces its stages, signs, and turning points in each period.
3. *From description to assessment.* A reference model of wise and legitimate governance, drawn from successful democratic and developmental experiences, is the yardstick for judging each period.

Link with the earlier full version: The principal findings of that text have been absorbed into this design—the destruction of the instruments of measurement through repression, the concealment of the center of authority, rent as facilitator rather than cause, and the natural experiment of 1941–1953. The difference lies in the center of gravity: that text assessed the rationality of decision-making; this text assesses the relationship between government and society.

An open question: should this design be a new edition of the same book or a separate volume? My proposal is a new edition under the same title, because the core of the argument is the same and the earlier decision-centered chapters fit into the period parts of this design.

Questions and Hypotheses

Main question: Why were Iran's four political orders of the past hundred years, despite their sometimes remarkable achievements in state-building and development, unable to turn the consent of citizens into durable legitimacy; and by what mechanisms did society take legitimacy back from them?

Subsidiary questions:

4. From what source did each government claim its legitimacy, and with what management instruments did it try to build it at home?
5. What were the dominant demands of each social stratum in each period, and through what channels did the government hear them?
6. To what extent did the government pay attention to the people's vote and will, and how can this attention be measured?
7. How did the gap between demand and response turn into discontent, and discontent into delegitimation?

8. What did successful models of democratic and developmental governance have that was absent in Iran?
9. What minimum conditions does the Iran of the future need in order to break this pattern?

Hypotheses:

10. *The central hypothesis.* Legitimacy in Iran was not lost through a lack of achievement; it was lost through the closing of the channels of listening and correction. Governments substituted performance for consent; and performance without participation builds expectations without building loyalty.
11. *An external source of legitimacy.* All four governments defined their source of legitimacy outside the people's vote: order, development, sharia, security. This very definition turned the institutions of independent evaluation—a free press, a competitive Majlis, an independent judiciary—into threats.
12. *Delegitimation proceeds in stages.* Society moves from issue-specific discontent, to institutional distrust, to normative rupture, and finally to behavioral refusal. Repression does not stop this movement; it conceals and accelerates it.
13. *The difference from successful cases lies in sequence, not in quantity.* Korea, Taiwan, and Spain turned the achievement of development into institutionalized participation; Iran several times turned the same achievement into greater concentration.
14. *Rent and repression postpone the crisis; they do not solve it.* Both turn the crisis of legitimacy into a security cost; that is, they move the problem from a domain in which it can be solved to a domain in which it can only be contained.

Each hypothesis is assessed in Chapter 32 against its own condition of falsification: if a period is found in which the channels of listening were open and legitimacy nevertheless collapsed, the central hypothesis must be revised.

Conceptual Framework

The book assesses legitimacy in three dimensions: *input* (vote and participation), *process* (law and fair procedure), and *output* (effectiveness). Its basic assumption is that none of these three can take the place of the other two.

1. Legitimacy

- *Weber:* three types—traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. The limitation of this typology for Iran is that it does not cover "performance legitimacy"—the basis of the claims of both Pahlavis.
- *Beetham:* power is legitimate when it conforms to established rules, when those rules are justifiable in terms of beliefs shared by rulers and ruled, and when the consent of the ruled is openly expressed. This three-layered model is the book's principal instrument of assessment.
- *Lipset:* legitimacy and effectiveness are two separate axes. An effective but illegitimate system becomes vulnerable at the first crisis of performance; this was precisely the fate of the second Pahlavi in 1977.
- *Easton:* specific support (satisfaction with a policy) versus diffuse support (loyalty to the system itself). Effectiveness builds only specific support; diffuse support is born of participation and fair procedure.

- *Scharpf and Schmidt:* input, process (throughput), and output legitimacy—the basis of the book's three dimensions.

Working definition: legitimacy means citizens' belief in the government's right to command, *provided that it is expressed in observable behavior*. The absence of protest is not evidence of legitimacy.

2. Wise Governance

Wise governance means a government that has both the capacity to act and a mechanism for understanding where it has gone wrong. It has six components:

- *Executive capacity:* a merit-based bureaucracy that is connected to society but not captured by particular groups (Evans's concept of "embedded autonomy").
- *Rule of law:* the law also governs the ruler himself.
- *Threefold accountability:* vertical (elections), horizontal (the Majlis and an independent judiciary), and social (the media and civil society).
- *Listening:* channels that carry demands to the center of decision without distortion.
- *Error correction:* the possibility of changing policy and policymakers without crisis.
- *Inclusiveness:* inclusive institutions as opposed to extractive institutions (Acemoglu and Robinson).

Fukuyama counts three pillars: the state, the rule of law, and accountability. In the past hundred years Iran built the first pillar many times and each time dismantled or hollowed out the other two.

3. Delegitimation: A Four-Stage Process

15. *Issue-specific discontent:* protest against a specific policy, with a demand for reform. Society still addresses the government.
16. *Institutional distrust:* the belief that the official channels—the Majlis, elections, the courts—do not work.
17. *Normative rupture:* the official narrative no longer justifies; the language of the government becomes meaningless or ridiculous.
18. *Behavioral refusal:* exit (emigration, withdrawal), civil disobedience, or protest aimed at changing the system.

Theoretical underpinning: Hirschman (exit, voice, and loyalty—when voice becomes costly, exit rises); Gurr (relative deprivation); Davies (the J-curve—rising expectations followed by a sudden fall, the pattern of 1973–1977); Kuran (preference falsification—why collapse seems sudden); and Habermas (legitimation crisis). *The book's central point:* repression hides stages one and two from the government's view and carries society directly to stages three and four.

4. The Grid of Indicators

Table A.1. The grid of indicators

Dimension	Key question	Observable indicators	Principal sources
Input	Does the people's vote determine the center of power?	Competitiveness of elections, disqualifications, turnout, rotation of power	Majlis proceedings, election statistics, V-Dem

Dimension	Key question	Observable indicators	Principal sources
Process	Is power subject to law?	Judicial independence, special courts, suspension or rewriting of the constitution	Texts of constitutions and revisions, V-Dem
Output	Did the government deliver what it promised?	Growth, inflation, employment, unemployment of graduates, literacy, life expectancy	Central Bank, Statistical Centre of Iran, World Bank
Responsiveness to demands	Were demands heard and answered?	Press freedom, parties, unions, type of response to protest	V-Dem, press archives
Error correction	How was a wrong policy corrected?	Policy change after failure, peaceful replacement of officials	Autopsies of decisions
Delegitimation	At which stage is society?	Waves of protest, strikes, elite emigration, falling participation, attitudinal data	NAVCO, National Survey of Iranians' Values and Attitudes, World Values Survey, GAMAAN

The Reference Model of Legitimate and Developmental Governance

Six global experiences are the book's yardstick of judgment, because each of them solved precisely one of Iran's problems: turning development into participation, rule-based transition, containing rent, or taking the army out of politics.

Table A.2. The reference model

Country	Period	What it did	Lesson for Iran	Limits of comparison
South Korea	1961–1987	Authoritarian development under Park Chung-hee; then, after the broad protests of 1987, the June 29 Declaration accepting direct elections	Development endured when its achievement was turned into institutionalized participation	No oil rent; the North Korean threat and the American anchor
Taiwan	1987–1996	Lifting of martial law in 1987; the first direct presidential election in 1996; the ruling party managed its own transition	Gradual opening from within is possible if rulers see their survival in competition	A smaller and more homogeneous society
Spain	1975–1982	Negotiated transition after Franco; the Moncloa Pacts of 1977; the Constitution of 1978; containment of the 1981 coup	Agreement on the rules of the game before competition for power	The prospect of European membership as an external anchor
Botswana	From 1966	Diamond revenue channeled through the budget and accountable institutions; regular elections	A natural resource is not a curse if its channel of distribution is supervised	Small population; traditional consultative institutions (*kgotla*)
Norway	Oil from 1971; the fund from 1990	An oil fund under parliamentary supervision, a fiscal rule limiting withdrawals, preservation of the tax base	An oil state can also remain accountable to its taxpayers	Democracy was consolidated before oil—the reverse of Iran's sequence
Indonesia	1998–2004	Transition after Suharto; gradual withdrawal of the army from parliament, decentralization, direct elections in 2004	A large Muslim-majority country can take the army out of politics	The army's economic role, corruption, and setbacks persisted

To avoid selecting only successful cases, Chapter 31 also presents two cautionary cases: Turkey (the opening of 1950, followed by military interventions and a return to concentration) and Egypt (the cycle from 1952 to 2013).

The Eight Principles of the Reference Model

19. *Source of authority:* a free and periodic vote, with a rule of succession fixed before the candidates are known.
20. *Restraint of power:* a constitution that the ruler cannot unilaterally rewrite or suspend; an independent judiciary.
21. *Channels of listening:* a free press, parties, and unions, which serve as the government's instruments of measurement.
22. *Merit-based executive capacity:* recruitment and promotion on the basis of competence, not loyalty.
23. *Inclusive development:* economic achievement is turned into the expansion of participation, not into greater concentration.
24. *Containment of rent:* the channel for distributing natural-resource revenue is transparent and supervised by an elected body.
25. *Neutrality of the armed forces:* the army and security institutions stand outside politics and the economy.
26. *Error correction:* the possibility of changing policy and officials without crisis, and the peaceful transfer of power.

This model is not a template to be copied; it is a yardstick of assessment. Every period chapter ends with a scorecard based on these eight principles.

A Uniform Analytical Template for Each Period

All four periods—and the interlude of 1941–1953—are analyzed with the same ten items, so that comparison is possible and no period is judged by a different yardstick.

Table A.3. The ten-part template

Item	Question	Required evidence
1. Claimed source of legitimacy	On what basis did the government found its right to command?	Constitution, speeches, official narrative, official education
2. Architecture of power	Where was the final center of decision, and who could see it?	Institutional structure, constitutional revisions, parallel institutions
3. Instruments for managing legitimacy	What instruments did the government use to win consent: persuasion, performance, co-optation, or coercion?	Distributive policies, nationalism, official religion, repression
4. Demands of society	What did each stratum—peasants, the bazaar, the clergy, the middle class, women, ethnic groups, the young—want?	Slogans, petitions, the press, surveys
5. Attention to the people's vote and will	Did the vote change the center of power? Did protest lead to reform of policy?	Elections, disqualifications, response to protests

Item	Question	Required evidence
6. Record of effectiveness	What did the government deliver, and to whom?	Economic, educational, health, and infrastructure data
7. The gap between demand and response	Which rifts—political, economic, identity, ethnic, gender, generational, moral—became active?	Comparison of item 4 with item 6
8. Stages of delegitimation	At which stage was society, and what were the turning points?	Waves of protest, emigration, electoral participation
9. The government's response	Did the government reform, buy off, or repress discontent?	Autopsies of key decisions
10. Measurement against the reference model	What score does the period receive against the eight principles?	Scorecard with confidence level

Scoring scale: each principle is scored from 0 (entirely absent) to 4 (fully present), together with a confidence level (high, medium, low) and reference to the evidence. No score without evidence appears in the text.

The internal structure of each period chapter: introduction and the chapter's question → items 1 to 9 → one or two decision autopsies → the rival narrative → scorecard (item 10) → summary.

Proposed Detailed Table of Contents

Nine parts, thirty-four chapters, seven appendices; about 330 pages in octavo format. The period parts (Three to Seven) are written with the ten-part template, and Part Eight reads them horizontally.

Front matter: Author's preface · Abstract · List of tables and figures

Introduction: The problem, its importance, questions, hypotheses, and map of the book

Part One — Theoretical Framework and the Reference Model

27. Legitimacy: from Weber to Beetham; the three dimensions of input, process, and output
28. Wise governance: capacity, accountability, and error correction
29. How people take legitimacy back: the theory of delegitimation (Hirschman, Gurr, Davies, Kuran)
30. The reference model: lessons of Korea, Taiwan, Spain, Botswana, Norway, and Indonesia
31. Method: historical comparison, process tracing, the grid of indicators, and sources

Part Two — Context: The Constitutional Legacy (1906–1925)

32. The Constitution as the first contract of legitimacy, and why it was not consolidated
33. From the coup of 1921 to the change of dynasty in 1925: order instead of law

Part Three — The First Pahlavi: Legitimacy Through Order and Authoritarian Modernization (1925–1941)

34. Architecture of power and management of legitimacy: the army, the bureaucracy, and a ceremonial Majlis
35. Demands and responses: the tribes, the clergy, the bazaar, the intellectuals, and women (the unveiling of 1936)

36. The record of effectiveness and its costs: the railway, education, the judiciary, and the acquisition of estates
37. Silent delegitimation: why no one defended the monarchy in September 1941 (compared with Atatürk's Turkey and Amanullah Khan's Afghanistan)

Part Four — The Interlude: The Natural Experiment of 1941–1953

38. When the vote mattered: the Majlis, the press, parties, and the nationalization of oil—and why this opening was not consolidated

Part Five — The Second Pahlavi: Legitimacy Through Development (1953–1979)

39. Rebuilding authority after 28 Mordad: the legitimacy wound of the coup
40. The White Revolution and the management of legitimacy from above: land reform, women's suffrage, the corps
41. The government and the new classes: a development that built the middle class but rejected its participation
42. The oil boom, inflation, and the J-curve (1973–1977)
43. From the Rastakhiz Party to 1979: the blocking of channels and the "sudden" collapse

Part Six — The Islamic Republic, the First Decade: Revolutionary and Charismatic Legitimacy (1979–1989)

44. Two sources of legitimacy in one constitution: republicanism and *velayat-e faqih*
45. The elimination of the revolutionary coalition and the building of parallel institutions
46. War, mobilization, and distributive justice as instruments of legitimacy

Part Seven — The Islamic Republic from 1989: Institutional and Security Legitimacy

47. The revision of 1989 and the transition from charisma to institution
48. The value of the vote: approbatory supervision and elections from reconstruction to 2024
49. The record of effectiveness: education, health, and infrastructure versus inflation, corruption, and sanctions
50. Waves of protest and stages of delegitimation: 1999, 2009, 2017, 2019, 2022—from the demand for reform to moving beyond
51. Society against government: women, the new generation, ethnic groups, emigration, and civil disobedience

Part Eight — Comparative Analysis

52. Four sources of legitimacy, one pattern: why order, development, sharia, and security did not take the place of the vote
53. The instruments of legitimacy management compared: distribution, nationalism, religion, co-optation, and repression
54. A hundred-year index of attention to the people's vote and will
55. The anatomy of discontent: seven rifts and the order of their activation
56. Why collapse always seems sudden: repression and the destruction of the instruments of measurement

57. Iran against the reference model: where and why Iran's path diverged from Korea and Spain
58. Rival explanations and the condition of falsification: rent, political culture, geopolitics, the short-term society, ideology

Part Nine — Outlook

59. Principles for designing legitimate and wise governance for the Iran of the future
60. Scenarios and conditions of transition

Conclusion: From authority to trust

Appendices: A. Chronology, 1906–2025 · B. Comparative matrix of the four periods · C. Scorecards of the reference model · D. Quantitative data (V-Dem from 1900; World Bank governance indicators from 1996) · E. Theoretical glossary · F. Sources · G. Index

Page Budget

Table A.4. Page budget

Part	Chapters	Pages
Front matter and Introduction	—	18
One: theory and the reference model	1–5	40
Two: context	6–7	16
Three: the first Pahlavi	8–11	36
Four: the interlude	12	14
Five: the second Pahlavi	13–17	48
Six: the Islamic Republic, first decade	18–20	30
Seven: the Islamic Republic from 1989	21–25	50
Eight: comparative analysis	26–32	50
Nine and Conclusion	33–34	18
Appendices	—	10
Total	34	330

Content Map: The Fate of the Material in the Original File

Almost all the material of the original file finds a place in the book, but most of it is moved from narrative form into the ten-part template and strengthened.

Table A.5. Content map

Material in the original file	Its place in the book	Type of treatment
Detailed outline of the Reza Shah chapter	Part Three, Chapters 8–11	Retained and expanded; the items "demands" and "delegitimation" added
Detailed outline of the Mohammad Reza Shah chapter	Parts Four and Five, Chapters 12–17	Divided: the period 1941–1953 becomes a separate chapter; the J-curve added

Material in the original file	Its place in the book	Type of treatment
Detailed outline of the Khomeini chapter	Part Six, Chapters 18–20	Retained; "a state without institutions" corrected to "parallel institution-building"
Detailed outline of the Khamenei chapter	Part Seven, Chapters 21–25	Retained and expanded; elections and waves of protest become separate chapters
Weberian tables at the end of each chapter	Item 1 of the template and the scorecard	Replaced by three-dimensional assessment and the eight principles of the reference model
"The cycle of repeated legitimacy"	Chapters 26 and 30	Retained as a tendency, not a law; the exceptions of 1941–1953 and 1997–2005 made explicit
The five evaluation indicators	Part One, Chapter 5	Merged into the grid of indicators
Scenarios and elements of rebuilding legitimacy	Part Nine, Chapters 33–34	Retained; each principle linked to a specific finding of the earlier chapters
Final general introduction and conclusion	Introduction and Conclusion	Rewritten after the chapters are complete, not before
Author's preface	Front matter	Retained in a personal tone; date and place of signature updated
Academic abstract	Front matter and back cover	Retained, with the claim of novelty corrected
Comparison with Turkey and Faruq's Egypt	Chapters 11 and 31	Turkey retained; Faruq's Egypt replaced by Amanullah Khan's Afghanistan
Technical design, cover, publisher's proposal	Outside the text of the book	Kept for the publication stage; two-column layout removed and a single-column layout proposed

Necessary Corrections to the Original Text and Notes on Method

The original text contains several claims that an academic reader will not accept; correcting them before writing the chapters is cheaper.

Corrections of Content

61. *Use of Weber's typology.* The tables of the original text call the legitimacy of Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah "charismatic." Charisma, in the Weberian sense, means an exceptional personal quality recognized by followers. The claim of both Pahlavis was rather "performance legitimacy" (order and development); this very shortcoming is the reason for adding the three-dimensional framework.
62. *"A religious state without civil institutions."* The Islamic Republic built many institutions—in parallel alongside existing institutions. More precisely: "parallel institution-building and the hollowing out of elected institutions."
63. *"The selection of Khamenei without sufficient juristic qualifications."* This claim is contested and should be presented as such. The documented fact: the revision of 1989 removed the requirement of *marja'iyat* and shifted the basis of the Leader's legitimacy from religious preeminence to institutional selection.
64. *"Developmental state" for the second Pahlavi.* In the literature (Johnson, Evans) this term has a specific meaning. Iran in that period was closer to "a rentier state with developmental ambitions"; this distinction is discussed in Chapter 15.

65. *The fall of Reza Shah.* The occupation of 1941 was carried out by Britain and the Soviet Union. But the occupation was not the cause of delegitimation; it revealed it. The argument of Chapter 11 rests on this distinction.
66. *The claim of novelty.* "The first comprehensive comparative study" is not defensible; Katouzian, Abrahamian, Arjomand, and Ansari have made comparisons before. A more precise claim: *the first uniform assessment of four periods against an external reference model and a hundred-year index.*
67. *The closed cycle of legitimacy.* The period 1941–1953 shows that the cycle is not an iron law. The book must say when the cycle was broken and why it closed again.

Notes on Method

- *Measuring the people's will in periods without surveys.* Before 2000 there is no reliable national survey. Substitutes: petitions, strikes, the press, protest slogans, emigration, and electoral behavior in competitive periods.
- *Archival asymmetry.* Pahlavi documents are more accessible; there is a danger that those periods will appear more error-prone merely because they are better documented.
- *Judging by today's standards.* Each period should be assessed first by the standards of its contemporaries, then against the reference model.
- *Global indicators.* The World Bank governance indicators begin in 1996; for the hundred-year index only V-Dem is usable. In a layered system, these indicators record the concealment of the center of authority as "constraints on the executive" and must be read with caution.
- *Tone.* Epigrammatic sentences such as "Khomeini brought faith but eliminated rationality" have force in the preface, but in the chapters they must give way to documented argument. A categorical judgment without evidence diminishes the credibility of the whole book for the academic reader.

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First Pahlavi	Second Pahlavi	Islamic Republic	Islamic Republic
1925–1941	1941–1979	1979–1989	1989–…

A hundred years · four governments · one error

From Authority to Trust

The four governments of Iran's last hundred years, with four ideologies and four styles of governance, repeated one error: the belief that one can govern **without listening**. One wore it in the garment of order, another in the garment of development, a third in the garment of faith, and the fourth in the garment of security; each built power, and none built trust. This book shows that durable legitimacy arises only where three conditions hold at the same time—**a capable state, an open ear at the center of decision, and shared rules that keep the losers safe as well**—and that Iran has never had all three together.

> **Iran has built power four times.**
> **Now it is time, for the first time, to build trust.**

Obstacles to Legitimate Governance in Contemporary Iran

Ebrahim Roshandel

ENGLISH EDITION

100 years