



The Place of Incrementalism in Policymaking: Challenges in the Political Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aims to analyze the conditions that led to the lack of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran by utilizing the tenets of Incrementalism theory and its related perspective (path dependency).

Method: Historical institutionalism and a descriptive-analytical approach.

Results: The strategy of incrementalism is considered a tool in the policymaking arena of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which leads to policy accumulation and creates an impasse in the country's political development. This is deeply conservative and serves anti-political development forces.

Conclusions: The research results show that incrementalism is considered an obstacle in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which, as much as any conceptual framework related to the policymaking process, has created challenges in the field of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Introduction

Despite the formation of foundational bases for political development in Iran after the Islamic Revolution—such as the growth of civil institutions, periodic elections, the growth of new technologies, the development of digital media, the formation of various parties, and elite circulation—this concept still faces various levels and degrees of political instability. There is a distance to achieving the desired aspects of political development in various facets of governance, and it has not yet achieved a stable and established meaning in the discourse of politics in post-revolutionary Iran. The present study aims to provide an analytical and theoretical framework to understand the reasons for the weakness of political development in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. One of the serious problems in Iranian society in recent years is that the elite spectrum has not been able to achieve a common causality (a coherent causal apparatus) for the lack of political development in Iran in the field of policymaking.

The policymaking process is convoluted and complex, which is why researchers have tried to simplify its various stages into an easily understandable "Policy Cycle." Strategies like incrementalism, which will be analyzed in this article, can be helpful in understanding the policymaking process in the context of political development. Since the empirical reality of incrementalism is primarily the result of policy accumulation, it continuously entails the operationalization of political actions. In such conditions, it increases the demand for fundamental political discussions. Consequently, accumulated incrementalism becomes one of the sources that puts pressure on the three cornerstones of legitimate government: effective policy implementation, the complexity of policy discussion, and evidence-based policymaking (Adam, 2022: 525).

It is generally argued that the tool for analyzing gradual institutional changes is path dependency, "Which includes elements of continuity and (structured) change." This insight may be considered a deviation from a long-standing tradition in the study of institutional change (Heijden and Kuhlmann, 2016: 4).

These issues raise theoretical challenges and necessitate examining the obstacles that have contributed to the lack of modernization and political development in the Islamic Republic. It is believed that modernization and political development encompass goals whose realization can reduce the gap between political institutions and other institutions in the economy and society, thereby paving the way for progress, advancement, and public welfare. Considering

these discussions, the aim of this article is to evaluate the theory of incrementalism as an obstacle to political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is as influential as any conceptual framework related to the policymaking process in political science and has stimulated thought and research for more than two decades. Over time, with changes in the needs of society, and considering the intractable problems currently plaguing Iranian political society, as well as the need to pay attention to flexibility in developmental decision-making, incremental theory and the belief in applying gradual changes are deeply conservative and serve anti-development and anti-modernization forces. This critical perspective is not merely about criticizing, but rather about taking a deeper look at events. The application of this analysis is not to predict the future, but rather to open up current and past discussions to create spaces for transformation to create alternative futures, allowing us to provide a range of transformative actions in this research. From this perspective, this paper intends to answer the main question: ‘ Under what policy did the inhibiting factors of political development in Iran emerge after the Islamic Revolution?’ The hypothesis presented in this research states that over time, with changes in the needs of society, and considering the intractable problems currently plaguing Iranian political society, as well as the need to pay attention to flexibility in developmental decision-making, incremental theory and the belief in applying gradual changes are deeply conservative and serve anti-political development forces.

Despite this, no study or research has yet been conducted to examine the obstacles to political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran from a structuralist perspective and through the lens of incrementalism theory. However, there are resources and research that, with different approaches, have addressed the lack of political development in Iran. For example, Ranjbar et al., (2021 AD/1400 SH) argue in their article "Path Dependency as an Obstacle to Correct Policymaking; with Emphasis on Iran," that path-dependent processes are considered a significant and influential obstacle in policymaking. They demonstrate how and in what context this factor originates and how and through what mechanism it interferes with decision-making and non-decision-making. Additionally, Shafieifar (2015 AD/1394 SH), in his article "The Trend of Political Development in the Islamic Republic," argued that after the formation of the Islamic Republic system and the establishment of elected institutions, governments have had different orientations in their programs and policies in line with political development. However, given the relative distance of these programs from the ideals of the Islamic Revolution, there is still considerable potential for the realization of political

development in the Islamic Republic. Vafaei (2014 AD/1393 SH) also argued in his article "Political Development and Modern Politics: Damages and Challenges of Political Development in Contemporary Iran" that political development has always faced various damages and challenges. The origin of one of its fundamental challenges in our society is a misunderstanding of the relationship between political development and modern politics.

Despite the considerable research on political development and its obstacles in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the present study differs from the aforementioned works in that it incorporates incrementalism theory, taking time and history as influential components in shaping the policymaking process. It demonstrates that one of the reasons for the lack of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran is the adherence of agents and policymakers to a path established in the past. These positions reflect gradual conservative changes based on maintaining the status quo due to risk aversion and the unpredictability of policy consequences, a subject not considered in previous research.

Method

1. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Theories in political-historical research have at least five diverse roles. Theories can serve as a guide for selecting research data, as the goal of research, as a research tool, as a subject of research debate, and finally, as the explanatory configuration of research (Hatami, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 126-141). In studying political processes, researchers can turn to various theories in the field of institutional change. When examining these theories, a broad distinction can be made between those studying major changes implemented at critical junctures, times, or as a result of external shocks, and theories studying gradual change (Heijden and Kuhlmann, 2016: 1). This article aims to analyze, from a structuralist perspective, the conditions that have contributed to the lack of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran, utilizing the teachings of incrementalism theory and the related perspective of path dependency. Each of these approaches will be outlined below for a deeper understanding.

1.1. Incrementalism Theory

The credit for developing the incremental model of public decision-making is usually attributed to Charles Lindblom (Howlett and Migone, 2011: 54). Despite Lindblom's clear commitment to incrementalism as a preferred decision-making strategy (Atkinson, 2011: 10);

he illustrates the problems of decision-making by considering analytical limitations and conflicting preferences (Adam, 2022: 525).

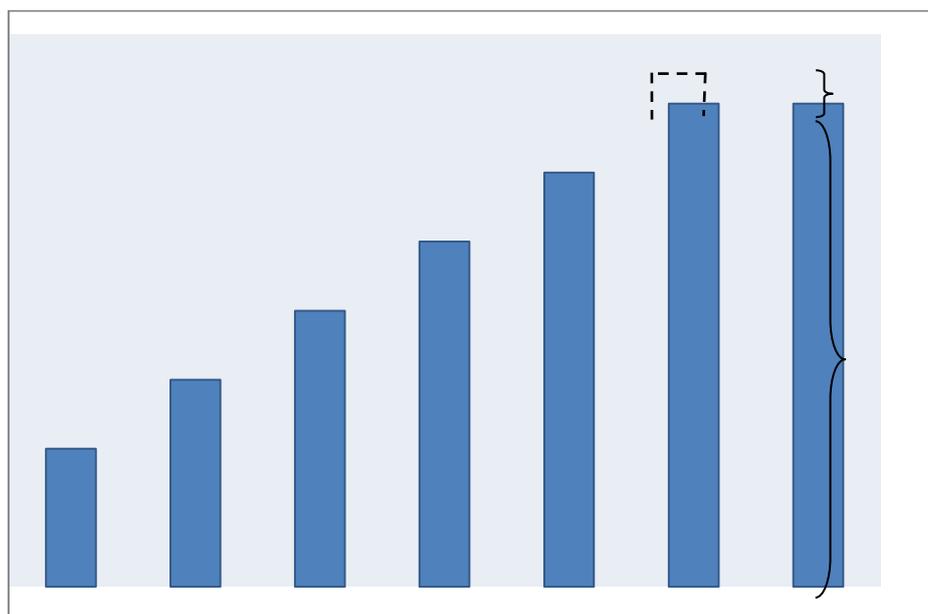
This decision-making method is in stark contrast to the rational decision-making model and relies on "Successive limited comparisons" to simplify decision-making (Lindblom, 1959: 81). It goes so far as to consider rational decision-making impossible due to a combination of disagreement over goals and insufficient knowledge base for most issues (Hayes, 2006). The limitations of rational policymaking necessitate research to develop the necessary recommendations for rational policymaking. In this regard, incrementalism can be seen as an awareness of the inherent political challenges in policymaking (Deegan, 2017: 3), and continuously creates solutions outside the current situation, step-by-step and in small degrees, which are "Far Superior" to the efforts of the rational approach and are considered more comprehensive for policymaking (Lindblom, 1959: 86). Indeed, this concept is one of the results of a system of checks and balances in which politicians may disagree about what we, as a nation, want to achieve or what policies best achieve common goals (Hayes, 2002). Hence, it demonstrates a pluralistic process of policymaking that involves mutual adjustment between multiple actors who typically start from very different concepts regarding goals (Hayes, 2012: 287).

Although policies show changes over time without responding to major exogenous "Shocks," (Thelen, 1999) policymakers prefer to stick with existing policies rather than embrace new programs with uncertain consequences (Talebi et al., 2017 AD/1396 SH: 117).

According to Lindblom, decision-makers do not annually review the entire range of existing and proposed policies, but rather identify social goals and investigate the benefits and costs of alternative policies in achieving these goals. They also rank the order of priorities for each alternative policy in terms of maximum net benefit and then choose based on all relevant information.

Conversely, time, information, and cost constraints prevent policymakers from identifying a full range of alternative policies and their consequences. Political constraints hinder the establishment of a transparent commonality of objectives and an accurate calculation of costs and benefits. Therefore, the incrementalism model describes a more conservative decision-making process because existing programs, policies, and expenditures are limited and considered as a base (Dye, 2013: 21). Thus, small and marginal changes occur based on existing institutional arrangements (Dimitrakopoulos, 2001: 1).

In this way, incrementalism suggests that policy choice at any given time is a marginal adjustment of a previous policy choice (Jones and Baumgartner, 2004: 325). Insofar as, one of the main assumptions of incrementalism is that a project is carried out through many small incremental changes rather than a few large leaps (extensive planning), and these changes are reversible. The manager sees their decisions merely as "A Step" in which "They can often correct a past error relatively quickly." (Pal, 2011: 31) In this manner, incrementalism, slowly applied, reflects larger changes in public policy over time (DeCooman, 2023). Hence, incrementalism, in contrast to dramatic changes, is conventionally praised in law as the prudent path of change, a path that gives credence to history and precedent (Levmore, 2009: 3). Overall, the theory of incremental decision-making states that decision-makers use previous activities, programs, and policies as the basis for their decisions and focus their efforts on incrementally increasing, decreasing, or modifying past activities, programs, and policies (Dye, 2013: 21).



(source: Dye, 2013: 21)

Gradualism Policy

Past policy commitment

Figure 1. The Incrementalism Model

In fact, the incrementalism model assumes that policymakers rarely review past policy commitments, but rather focus their attention on changes in policies and expenditures. Furthermore, incrementalism is politically expedient. Agreement in policymaking is easier when the issues in dispute are only increases or decreases in budgets or reforms.

Program conflicts intensify when decision-making focuses on significant policy changes yielding substantial gains or losses. This is because political alignments will be extremely high during the annual approval of new programs or policies (Dye, 2013: 22).

1.2. Path Dependency

The concept of path dependency has its origins and is now well-established in the multidisciplinary fields of history, economics, policy studies, and political science. The path dependency perspective remains popular using political science studies in historical-institutionalist research (Opara et al, 2022: 365). Similarly, it is common for social scientists to describe political processes as "Path-dependent." (Pierson, 2004: 251) It is generally argued that path-dependent policy paradigms influence institutional development. This is an issue that can include institutional transitions from democracy to authoritarianism, from federalism to centralization, and vice versa. In this regard, policy ideas are more important than material interests for the evolution of historical paths. Second, the sequence of path construction is equally important because the significance of policy ideas for constructing two sequences – a layering-conversion-drift path – points to institutional drift (Mukherji and Zarhani, 2021: 78). From this perspective, it is believed that the concept of path dependency is almost exclusively employed in institutional theories in political science, which relates to the institutionalist emphasis on the strategic orientation of actors to the contexts in which they find themselves in the unintended consequences of purposeful action and the importance of the historical legacy inherited from the past to the present. This is a historical-institutionalist tendency that explains historical structures rather than norms and the culture of rational behavior, which is the most relevant (Heron and Richardson, 2008: 4). William Sewell believes regarding path dependency: "What happened in the previous time period affects the probable outcomes of a

sequence of events that occurs in the subsequent time period." (Pierson, 2004: 252) This often implies the claim that "History matters." (Pierson, 1997: 3 and Greener, 2004: 3)

In political theory, path dependence indicates how historical factors, imprinted at a particular moment, can determine subsequent changes and outcomes. Thus, upon embarking on a path, any institution finds itself increasingly committed to the chosen route, and although this does not mean the path is irreversible, it does mean that the initial choice is reinforced (Fernandes, 2010: 143). Indeed, past choices may have been purely random or considered insignificant events at the time, but these early choices may later have important consequences. This also means that the sequence of events matters and influences outcomes. Furthermore, early events are amplified and locked in due to increasing returns (Rixen and Viola, 2015: 306). Hence, it can be argued that the core concept behind the path dependence perspective is that institutions, organizational structures, and technological systems are related to prior historical events. This indicates that the future path of any organizational and institutional structural system is dependent on the historical path of the system. Therefore, the motivation/desire of institutions, technologies, or systems to develop in certain ways is fundamentally a result of inherent structural characteristics, actor beliefs, and intrinsic values. In short, the path dependence perspective on a geographical environment is the idea that, within an organization or institution, previous historical events contextualize and determine future events (Opara et al, 2022: 365). Another key aspect is the concept of change that follows the prior path of pre-existing or deeply rooted institutions, technologies, and systems. Since path dependence assumes relative stability in political and institutional systems, it provides a useful starting point for examining transformative changes, given existing institutions and policies (Opara et al, 2022: 366).

2. The Impact of Incrementalism in Evidence-Based Policymaking

"Politics is the art of the possible," is one of the most famous phrases attributed to Otto von Bismarck, Chancellor of the German Empire from 1871 to 1890. Reaching agreement on radical departures is more difficult than agreeing on marginal deviations from the status quo. After all, the status quo is the result of lengthy decision-making processes involving intense conflict, bargaining, and reflecting long-standing power structures in which actors from all sides of the political spectrum are, to some extent, invested. This is why incrementalism is so common in democratic decision-making and politically appealing (Adam, 2022: 530).

According to Lindblom, there are two reasons why decision-making typically does not stray far from the status quo. First, since bargaining involves distributing limited resources among various participants, it is easier to continue the existing distribution pattern than to attempt to negotiate redistribution. Major changes are more difficult to agree on because the benefits and costs of existing arrangements are known to policy actors, in contrast to the uncertainties surrounding new arrangements. The result is usually either a continuation of the status quo or agreement on small, incremental changes. Second, the standard operating procedures of bureaucracies also tend to promote the continuity of existing practices. The methods, by which bureaucrats identify options, and the selection procedures and criteria, are often predetermined, preventing innovation and perpetuating existing arrangements (Hewlett and Migone, 2011: 56).

Political decision-making models begin with an important observation about the information processing requirements in public policymaking. Political actors are constrained by a scarcity of time, resources, and political attention. Because political decision-makers must deal with a large number of different issues on a daily basis – negotiating budget allocations, designing regulatory policies, sitting in hearings, and engaging in casework – they cannot devote the time and resources required to engage in a comprehensive search for a solution to every policy problem (Araral Jr et al, 2013: 139).

While alternative policies exist, the cost of collecting all the necessary information is exceedingly high. Consequently, policymakers lack sufficient foresight to understand all the implications of each option. They are also unable to calculate the cost-benefit ratio for alternative policies, thus putting various political, social, economic, and cultural values at risk (Dye, 2013: 21). According to Pierson, political actors within political institutions tend to act in accordance with previously established paths, due to the high costs that deviation from the path entails. It is logical to assume that this inertia inhibits entry and departure from previously established policies. The more actors follow a path, the more likely they are to take further steps in the same direction. The costs of exiting the path and breaking the pattern of development increase over time. Pierson describes this process of behavior among political institutions as self-reinforcing mechanisms and increasing returns (Pierson, 2000: 252). Furthermore, given the nature of politics as a collective action, political actors within political contexts tend to adapt their behavior to existing conditions. Therefore, the claim of adopting

policy initiatives that deviate from existing standards is debatable, and thus explains why policy development stagnates (Pierson, 2000: 257).

Under such circumstances, governments may decide to focus on improving previous policies as a more efficient method of policymaking. Alongside this, we can consider policymaking that occurs in stages or over time to be more reasonable, as it reduces the likelihood of creating large, lasting changes that have not been properly considered and evaluated over a period of time (Deegan, 2017: 3). Given this, uncertainty about the consequences of various policy alternatives compels policymakers to adhere to previous policies as much as possible to reduce the likelihood of unforeseen negative consequences. The segmented nature of policymaking in large bureaucracies makes it difficult to make decisions that take into account the views of all the various experts involved (Dye, 2013: 19).

On the other hand, a lack of governmental accountability ensures that the same group of political leaders are frequently re-elected for extended periods, and thus are disinclined to enact fundamental changes. In their governance approach, based on the principle of path dependency, there exists, effectively, a mutually reinforcing and symbiotic relationship. When a stable team of political leaders is repeatedly re-elected, they interpret their re-election as a mandate from voters who either interpret or dislike change. Therefore, they only implement minimal or limited changes in accordance with a path-dependent perspective (Opara et al, 2022: 365).

However, when public understanding of current political issues transforms, broad changes occur in one or more policy areas. Government policies and strategies sometimes change dramatically, but more often operate in a manner similar to the past. In this context, the political sphere is understood identically to the concept of a policy subsystem, that is, a segment of public policy (Czapiewski, 2015: 38). The subsystem approach suggests that interest groups, operating in a more limited environment than traditional group theorists, take action at the mid-level of government in decision-making systems organized around discrete programs and issues (Worsham, 1998: 486). These actions can sometimes be identified as an impediment to political development, due to a belief in the status quo and the unpredictability and high risk inherent in political decision-making.

Overall, most political scientists now take some form of disjointed incrementalism and partisan mutual adjustment for granted (Wood and Collingridge, 1993: 3). However, aspects of the political system may prevent policies from being regularly re-examined, that is,

preventing the rapid succession of small steps that Lindblom predicts. Under such circumstances, incrementalism can rightly be accused of a conservative bias (Hayes, 2012: 296). In any case, the current state of policy reflects a long history of conflict and bargaining. While this history is usually known to policy actors, the impact of entirely new arrangements is uncertain (Lindblom, 1959: 84).

Path dependency also refers, more narrowly, to the idea of institutional "Lock-in," whereby change becomes impossible or unlikely (Rixen and Viola, 2015: 302). According to Lindblom, the idea of continuous and incremental change is summarized through small wins. In short, the marginal costs of failure and the benefits of small steps reduce resistance and political competition for success (Banha et al, 2022: 544). Successes that can be achieved in light of political modernization and development. Political experts, NGOs, and citizens regularly criticize the inadequate nature and status quo of political action (Kersh and Morone, 2011: 169 and Roberts, 2019). This frustration is particularly evident in the context of political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran, where incrementalism is prominent, a matter that seems to be a major obstacle to the political development of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

3. Obstacles to Political Development in the Islamic Republic of Iran

With the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the path of political development in Iran underwent a fundamental difference from the period before it. This stemmed from the fact that the revolution, by its very nature, uprooted and transformed all those unfulfilled concepts, aspirations, and desires. The presence of the entire nation on the political scene of the revolution, while presenting a high degree of political maturity, familiarized and engaged them in the cycle of political issues and other related subjects, and, compared to the past, enhanced their intellectual strength and political insight. In fact, the Islamic Revolution of Iran led to a revision of people's views and orientations towards the political system and politics, and as a result, brought about a transformation in the political culture of the masses and their perception and orientation towards the functions of the political system (Sadeghi and Ghanbari, 1396: 143-144). In analyzing the relationship between the political culture of the masses and political development, it can be said that in the first decade of the revolution, especially in the early days of the victory of the revolution, the first presidential elections and subsequently, the parliamentary term of the Islamic Consultative Assembly took place. This

election period was held in completely revolutionary and competitive conditions with the widespread participation of various groups. The ideology of the Islamic Revolution, by weakening class, ethnic, and environmental identities and strengthening the superior Islamic identity, greatly influenced the expansion of the mass society of the people.

In other words, the participation of the masses during this period was not based on specific professional or group interests. The nature of social policies in the early years of the revolution, until 1989, led to the establishment of a populist government, the most important feature of which was mass participation and political mobilization, especially under the influence of the imposed war (Sadeghi and Ghanbari, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 144-145).

Also, during this period, we witness the growth of a manifestation of political culture that emphasized characteristics such as elitism, paternalism, obedience, and discipline, and did not herald the opening of opportunities for spontaneous civil and democratic activities. This is despite the fact that examples of active participation manifest themselves as participation in parties, aggregation of interests, articulation of interests, the right to vote, the creation of political parties, or voluntary associations, and active participation to change the various policies of the political system in an institutionalized manner (*ibid.*: 145).

However, the traditional view of government and governance, which can be called a paternalistic and authoritarian approach, has hindered political development in various ways. Although economic and social development has provided favorable conditions for establishing the principles of democratic movement, and although democratic institutions have been established in Iranian society, the influence of traditional culture has prevented these modern institutions from realizing their full potential. Institutions such as elections, separation of powers, legislative assembly, and political parties have not had the functions they have in Western and democratic societies in Iran. In fact, these institutions have been used in ways that are compatible with authoritarian approaches, not with the principles of democracy. In fact, these institutions have been transformed and co-opted under the influence of the long-standing political culture of society, which has had a profound impact on people's attitudes and beliefs (Abdolkhani et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 193).

A deep connection with traditional values can inevitably affect political development. Even revolutions cannot quickly affect them. On the other hand, the behavior of political leaders and the beliefs and tendencies of the masses regarding rational political behavior are largely influenced by traditional behavioral patterns. Understanding the relationship of power and its

connection with the behavior of political leaders and the approaches of the people is one of the important issues of political development.

When the concept of democracy and modern governance methods entered Iran, it did not integrate with the traditional system of thought and beliefs. Furthermore, it was received with specific understandings by both rulers and the people. Politicians interpreted this concept in a particular way, according to their own understanding and interests, and utilizing popular notions, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions, democracy was understood with the substance of autocracy. In Iran, institutions were established during a political movement to ensure public participation. However, deeply rooted structures in the traditional political culture created conditions that significantly altered the nature of these institutions. Political institutions derived from the modern state, such as elected government, legislative assembly, and political parties, faced serious transformation in their challenge with traditions and the perception of religious government (Abdolkhani et al., 2021 AD/1400 SH: 194).

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of the Islamic Revolution is important from several perspectives in the discussion of political development: "Firstly, the Islamic Revolution had popular, almost pan-class, and populist aspects; secondly, freedom and liberation from the tyranny of the Pahlavi absolute state was the common goal of all political and social forces participating in this revolution; thirdly, with the victory of the revolution, a constitution was drafted based on two pillars: "Islam and republicanism." Islam represents the content of the government and the basis of legislation, and republicanism represents the sovereignty of the nation and mechanisms of popular sovereignty or democracy. Therefore, the constitution was drafted in a way that integrates Islam and popular sovereignty or republicanism. In the constitution, the objective requirements of political development, including fundamental freedoms, political and social rights, civil organizations, parties, social groups, and the scope and extent of their political and social participation, are included and formulated in a special chapter entitled "Rights of the Nation." Article 26 of the Constitution stipulates: "Parties, associations, political and professional organizations, and Islamic societies or recognized religious minorities are free, provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, Islamic criteria, and the foundations of the Islamic Republic. No one can be prevented from participating in them or forced to participate in one of them." (Afzali, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 345)

From this perspective, the main argument of this paper is that the obstacles to political development in Iran, in light of the pathology of parties, are subject to incrementalism strategy and a path-dependent process that constantly emerges in the past and becomes determined as an arena for policymaking in the future. Below are the factors that have strengthened incrementalism and path dependency in Iranian policymaking and have led to the failure of political development.

3.1. Bureaucracy and Factional Conflicts in Light of Path Dependency

One of the most important and prominent features of most modern societies today is the emergence of a powerful state bureaucracy. The goals of bureaucracy are significantly influenced by politics, and as long as these goals are clear and specific, there should be no inherent problem in bringing bureaucrats and politicians together. However, there are accidental sources. A fundamental difference between a bureaucrat and a politician is their accountability (Besley et al, 2019: 23). This raises the issue of the power of bureaucracy, which bureaucrats can abuse for selfish purposes or in dealing with private citizens. Given this latter point, attention is usually drawn to the weak position of citizens in relation to the powerful state bureaucracy (Uguru and Ibeogu, 2014: 139). On the other hand, the existence of political groups and parties in the modern era is undeniable. Political parties are one of the four fundamental pillars of democracy and contribute to its advancement. They are such a fundamental force in the development of a country that they also influence development patterns. Elections without the presence of political parties can hardly be called democratic (Koolae and Mazarei, 2018: 57). A vast literature in empirical political science covers party systems, the performance and inefficiency of political parties, campaigns and elections, party identity, and many other topics. The intellectual history of parties is largely a story of anti-partyism. For every attempt to articulate a unified and stable order, parties and partisanship introduce political pluralism and, with it, division, discord, and fragmentation.

That is why political thought, in its aim to describe a just and stable political order, has been inherently anti-partisan (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2020: 96 and 99). On the other hand, researchers have examined bureaucracy as a social phenomenon and as a bridge between the leaders of a society and the people (Ghaffari and Torjoman, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 171). Historically, Iran, like other countries, faces a challenge between politics and administration. The interest of politics in controlling administration and the interest of administration in

dominating matters related to implementation are unavoidable in Iran, as in many countries. In this way, the political orientation of public administration is a very important issue. This issue becomes even more important given Iran's strategic position. The rotation of power and the coming to power of a new government undoubtedly lead to fundamental changes in the administrative structure, and the change of individuals from director-general to ordinary experts in government departments is proof of this claim. The incoming president changes the ministers, the ministers appoint new deputies, and the new deputies appoint new director-general. In many cases, the director-general change the heads, and the new heads bring new experts into the administrative system. The changes that occur in government departments following a change of government are visible to everyone. In this way, the politicization of public administration is not a far-fetched phenomenon and has consequences (Sadeghi et al., 2016 AD/1396 SH: 112). In this regard, political parties in Iran suffer from significant organizational chaos, a lack of strong leadership, and a lack of internal democracy (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 42); so much so that the literature on politics in Iran contains extensive references to political parties as well as frequent observations regarding the prohibition or absence of political parties. In this context, Sayfzadeh believes that factional infighting, with its dominance over the Iranian political landscape, has led to factional leaders making ambitious promises that are not fulfilled due to the populist nature of Iranian politics. This inevitably leads to public discontent and creates a rift among political factions (Bradley, 2007: 19 and 21).

Under such circumstances, it is argued that the institutionalization of a factional system in Iran has been path-dependent and, consequently, difficult to neutralize due to the existence of a self-reinforcing feedback loop (Mohammadi, 2014: 3). This issue can be attributed to the inflexibility and lack of rational mechanisms within the bureaucracy. In fact, the lack of bureaucratic capacity leads to coping mechanisms, such as the creation of red tape, administrative burden, the search for organizational workarounds, and non-compliance through delays in decision-making and failure to meet deadlines. Furthermore, the difficulty in identifying accountable actors increases the incentive for politicians to avoid blame and the incentive for bureaucrats to evade responsibility or abuse power (Park, 2021: 2).

Given this, it is believed that bureaucracy in Iran has played no role in the political development process, serving only as an agent of the political and governmental structure, with no other strong or influential role. The bureaucracy's function has primarily been to

facilitate and expand the dominance of the political structure in Iran. Due to structural weaknesses and a lack of institutional capacity, the bureaucracy, through its increasing size, cost, and corruption, has exacerbated the situation, adding to the inefficiency of the state institution instead of increasing efficiency (Mayeli et al., 2011 AD/1391 SH). In some instances, bureaucracy in Iran has led to widespread cronyism and governmental corruption, whereby individuals, through early access to information, awareness of upcoming events, and control of power and wealth resources, create a chain of influence that generates golden opportunities in political, economic, and social spheres for specific individuals within the administrative and governmental system. Indeed, in political, economic, and informational rent-seeking, the will of influential individuals dictates granting privileges to a specific individual or group, often with bureaucrats using their influence within the system to award these privileges to those who benefit them and whose favors they can later repay (Shahrokhi, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 9-10).

In light of incrementalism theory and path dependency, bureaucracy, when inflexible to environmental changes, becomes entangled in red tape and lacks creativity, which diminishes the efficiency of human resources and slows down system agility. The incremental model, emphasizing the impractical nature of public policy analysis based on complete rationalism, portrays a conservative decision-making process. Incrementalism is conservative in that it grounds itself in existing programs, policies, and expenditures, focusing primarily on modifying previous policies (Vahid, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 112-113). For example, the bureaucracy of the Ministry of Interior (one of the most important ministries of the Islamic Republic of Iran) has structural weaknesses, lacking proper organizational mechanisms for incorporating new specialists into the ministry's structure. Moreover, the existence of parallel structures within the ministry complicates decision-making and the execution of affairs. These structures lead to conflicts of interest in major decisions of the Ministry of Interior, and as a result, influenced by bureaucratic weaknesses in lack of clarity and transparency in policies, result in the exertion of bureaucratic influence, the imposition of opinions and beliefs, and the continued dominance of a particular faction. In setting public policy, excessive concentration and overlap of duties between the formal structure and parallel structures within the Ministry of Interior minimizes the participation of organizational units and public associations, reducing the richness and effectiveness of the decisions made.

3.2. Critical and Sensitive Junctures

As Pierson explains, critical junctures are "Brief periods during which opportunities for major institutional reform appear, followed by long periods of institutional stability." They are those historical windows during which opportunities for new institutional arrangements become available, albeit for a limited time. Path-dependent processes begin with the adoption of a particular institutional arrangement from among two or more options available at these moments. Once a particular option is chosen, returning to the initial point when multiple options were still available gradually becomes more difficult (Mohammadi, 2014: 5).

These opportunities or critical junctures mostly occur in the early stages of institutions' life. After investing time, money, and other resources along that path for an extended period, the path chosen at the critical juncture becomes difficult to reverse. Consequently, the organization becomes less dependent on human agency, giving rise to more of an autopilot situation (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 30).

In light of this, one of the challenging debates among public administration theorists are the relationship between the two concepts of politics and administration. The concept of government today encompasses both bureaucracy and politics; the fundamental characteristic of bureaucracy is that it serves as an important instrument for political unity and is seen as having the permanent function of creating conditions and spaces supportive of politics. Particularly in developing countries, there is an imbalance between policymaking institutions and the bureaucratic structure that implements policy. Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a risk that these gigantic and rigid bureaucratic mechanisms disregard the right to dissent. This can occur both in the relationships between superiors and subordinates within the bureaucracy itself and in the relationships between those in power and the general public (Lapalombara, 1963: 107-108). This is while understanding the nature of politics and bureaucracy and their relationship is difficult, and each can influence the other. In this context, some theorists believe that politicization can create challenges and tensions in administrative and bureaucratic relationships, ultimately leading to a departure from the structural and fundamental characteristics of Weber's ideal bureaucracy, such as hierarchy, meritocracy, and specialization; it also creates conditions in which bureaucrats seek political solutions to organizational and administrative problems (Honarmandi Choukami and Kenarroodi, 2024 AD/1403 AH: 65-67). In this regard, following the victory of the Islamic

Revolution, the laws of the administrative system were formulated with the aim of creating a state-run economy.

Many of our structures, laws, and regulations were established and shaped when we were in specific circumstances, such as during wartime or particular economic conditions. Under those conditions, governments generally believed they needed to establish organizations and enact laws to control the situation and improve affairs. It is expected that when those special circumstances are resolved, their mechanisms should also be eliminated. However, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, we have rarely encountered the removal of previous regulations. So much so that despite changing circumstances, the laws and structures remain in place. Even with changing conditions, newer laws are enacted and added to the previous laws and regulations. Thus, over time, we have faced a vast collection of governmental structures, laws, and regulations that are not functional but pose a significant obstacle to development and progress. This accumulation of regulations creates problems for developmental activities and slows down their process (Mashayekhi, 2018 AD/1398 SH).

Policymaking during sensitive and critical junctures, and its continuation due to self-reinforcement over time, creates problems that need to be addressed and require an incremental approach. According to this approach, for example, the implementation of the Targeted Subsidies Law caused problems and challenges that some economists consider a form of shock therapy (Momeni, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 93). Continuing the implementation of a policy may lead to new problems, which makes changes in that policy necessary (Malek Mohammadi, 2014 AD/1394 SH: 94). Currently, only the cash payment to households remains from the implementation of the Targeted Subsidies Law, and the government has not yet succeeded in changing the payment method or ending it, and in the current sensitive and critical juncture, it is still caught in the trap of path dependency. Furthermore, in the early years of the revolution, especially in the initial years, due to the conditions of the imposed war, there was no opportunity for the formation and growth of political parties. Therefore, the press, media, and individuals assumed the roles and functions of political parties. During this period, known as the era of the ideological government, the Islamic Republic Party played the role of the dominant single party in order to monopolize power (Sadeghi and Ghanbari, 2016 AD/1396 SH: 145). This role, after the imposed war and in the present era, has been dominated by two parties: "Principlists and reformists."

Meanwhile, among experts, there is a consensus that political parties play a key role in consolidating democracy. As Pasquino (1990) argued, "All transition processes have not been dominated by the party, but all transition processes have been dominated by parties. In fact, the processes of democratic consolidation have indeed been dominated by the party." (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 30)

In other words, the institutionalization of the party system is considered a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the healthy functioning of democracy. Accordingly, the institutionalization of an individual party is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the institutionalization of the party system. This is important because "paths" or policy choices, although easily changed at the start of an institution, become very difficult to deviate from once a path is set and significant progress is made along the way. The path or policy that actors of an institution choose from among various options at the rare "critical junctures" in the institution's history is likely to affect them for a long time, and the longer this process lasts, the more complex the reverse operation becomes (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 30).

3.3. Self-reinforcing Mechanism within the Framework of Incrementalism Strategy

Self-reinforcing dynamics are the main driver behind any given instance of path dependency. Initial decisions, choices, and developments within institutions become deeply embedded in the structure of these institutions, and changing these embedded policies after years of investment in them will entail significant costs on the part of those who have benefited from the old arrangements for a long time, especially when these benefits feed back into the organization as a good, which in turn reinforces the desired path. Positive feedback dynamics capture two key elements of analysts' more intuitive sense of path dependence. First, they clearly show how the costs of switching from one alternative to another increase significantly over time in specific social contexts. Second, and relatedly, they draw attention to issues of timing and sequencing, distinguishing formative moments or times from periods that reinforce divergent paths (Mohammadighalehtaki, 2011: 31).

This issue can be understood within the framework of bureaucratic problems and the pursuit of path dependency by agents. For many politicians, survival in power is often the primary goal, and there are two broad complementary strategies for achieving this: coercion and the creation of a social contract. The first diverts the state's priority toward strengthening state

power through the creation of a police force or army. Politicians then coexist with effective bureaucratic control in some dimensions of the government. For other countries, the goal may be to establish a social contract in which staying in power is based on providing public goods for citizens in the form of infrastructure, health, and education in exchange for citizen support. This incentive leads to the creation of a state whose bureaucracy can deliver these goods. With either of these strategies, other dimensions of state bureaucracy, such as strong and independent legal systems that limit the power of incumbents and bureaucrats, and strengthening the independence of the legislature as a tool to control the executive branch, may not be built (Besley et al., 2019: 25). In fact, bureaucrats, in addition to public policymaking, are also influential in the specific decisions and actions of political officials; decisions that cannot be considered public policymaking. However, they are taken in order to exert political authority in various fields, both domestic and international. In both areas, the issue is the bureaucracy escaping from being a tool under the control of political institutions and becoming a power that pursues self-sufficient and independent goals (Gorji Azandariani and Ghahremanzadeh Nimgazi, 2015 AD/1395 SH: 14).

Within the framework of political parties, it is easier to change the policies and choices that party leaders make in the early stages of a party than when the party has consolidated. These early actions can set a precedent that will be difficult to break after a while, not because of the bias or conservatism of the party leaders, but because those policies trigger a chain reaction that feeds the path. For example, the reason for the difficulty in breaking the cycle of the rentier state in many oil-producing countries is the fact that investing in other industrial sectors other than the oil sector is less profitable.

Consequently, all available capital in the market is channeled towards the oil industry, and other sectors of the economy suffer from underinvestment. More importantly, over time, most people adapt their lifestyle, business practices, and politics to the consequences of an oil-based economy, such as the Dutch disease and rentier state. When the livelihood of the majority of people in a country depends on that type of economy and state, changing course from the situation they have become accustomed to is difficult. In this context, Bashiriyehe believed that the strengthening of the structure of political power in Iran has led to the inefficiency of political development, because in such a structure, various spheres of society are usually deprived of the necessary autonomy for free internal growth (Bashiriyehe, 2008 AD/1388 SH: 124).

In this regard, in the electoral system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, there exists an image of a representative who is, in some respects, obligated to a constituency but independent in others, which is rooted in the era of 19th-century parliamentarianism. Parliamentarianism was characterized by a personal trust relationship between citizens and their elected representatives, distinguished by "Local connections, social prominence, or the respect they inspired." (Muirhead and Rosenblum, 2020: 96) Furthermore, the party system is complicated by the fact that individuals can belong to multiple parties, and that parties do not practically introduce candidates in Iranian elections. Instead, parties publish a list of candidates they support, and parties within a particular faction rarely support the same candidates. Additionally, funding is highlighted as a vital factor for improving any political party. In countries like the United States, political parties are financially supported through "contributions and subsidies provided by a few supportive businessmen, industrial corporations, banks, etc." (Duverger, 1964: 1) The absence of a party system also imposes a significant financial burden on potential candidates (Bradley, 2007: 22), which can be particularly difficult for women who need to negotiate campaign financing with their husbands. Indeed, political parties in Iran lack such substantial support.

Given the absence of major private companies active in developed countries, most companies and banks in this country are state-controlled and disinclined to support political parties. Furthermore, in Iran, people are not inclined to join parties that require membership fees; consequently, there is no public funding for political parties.

Another problem for parties in Iran is the electoral system. Political parties are effectively "Election machines that guarantee the nomination of a candidate" (Duverger, 1964: 21-22) and "The party system and the electoral system are two realities that are inextricably linked, and it is sometimes difficult to separate them analytically." (Duverger, 1964: 205) This indicates that political parties cannot be separated from the electoral system. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, however, elected representatives are not necessarily members of a party and only decide to become active within a party after the election. Considering the above, it appears that the weakness in strengthening and the lack of desirable political development in Iran are due to the strategy of incrementalism and path-dependent policies that occurred in the past.

Conclusion

Political development in post-revolutionary Iran demonstrates the logic of incrementalism's reactive sequence reasoning based on path dependency. Within this trajectory, three main sequences can be identified: modernization, environmental, and cultural. The modernization sequence contains events that directly undermined the interests, values, and culture of the Pahlavi regime and laid the groundwork for people's participation in the first decade of the revolution, aiming to realize their rights. However, this sequence was perpetuated by a contingent event of increased demands and desires from the people, which, in turn, grew from a combination of environmental and cultural sequences. The environmental sequence was triggered by the intrinsic characteristics of the Iranian people, such as public participation in elections and freedom. These conditions, involving the strong reliance of various segments of the population, implied an innovation that unfolded in the elections from the seventh to the thirteenth administrations. This strengthened the political system based on the Islamic Republic and enhanced the dynamics of political development.

In formulating this research, cultural sequence is identified by a set of values such as participation, self-determination, freedom, etc., in which new ways of thinking were outlined in the life of the Islamic Republic of Iran. With all that said, politics and bureaucracy are inextricably intertwined in policy failures, regardless of their scope and degree. Politicians and bureaucrats have a symbiotic relationship in political and administrative systems; while politics and bureaucratic capacity differently affect policy-making processes. Therefore, whether a policy failure is politically or administratively driven largely depends on the temporal and spatial scope, along with policy cycles. In this regard, a political party is a means of linking the political process with society and helps improve the political system. The development of political parties in Iran dates back about a century, but parties have not been able to play a significant role in the Iranian political system, and obstacles such as political culture, rentier state, concentration of power, civil society, and the separation between elite groups and the masses have existed. From this perspective, it is argued that socio-political events since the Islamic Revolution have experienced a path-dependent, backward-looking cycle based on incrementalism, resulting in consequences such as the lack of a developed political culture, lack of publishing and press freedom, a rent-seeking economy and people's dependence on the government, concentration of power, lack of civil society, and separation between elite groups and the masses. This has become an arena for the inefficiency

of political parties and, consequently, an obstacle to political development in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

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