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The Impact of the Tradition–Modernity Dichotomy on Political Development in Iran After the Islamic Revolution

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Extended Abstract

The relationship between tradition and modernity has long constituted one of the central debates in political and social thought, particularly within developing societies. In many such contexts, modernity has been introduced as an external and, at times, disruptive phenomenon, generating tensions within pre-existing cultural and institutional frameworks. In Iran, this tension has acquired distinctive characteristics following the Islamic Revolution, which established a political order grounded in religious values while simultaneously confronting the structural imperatives of a modern state and an increasingly globalized world.

Despite the transformative aspirations of the Revolution, the dichotomy between tradition and modernity has persisted across multiple spheres of Iranian

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society, including politics, culture, and governance. The expansion of globalization in the past half-century has intensified this interaction, creating new arenas of contestation and dialogue between competing discourses. The present study seeks to examine how this dynamic interplay has influenced political development in post-revolutionary Iran. The central research question guiding this study is: How has the confrontation between tradition and modernity affected political development in Iran after the Islamic Revolution? The study advances the hypothesis that, notwithstanding the enduring tension between traditional and modern paradigms, the emergence of a new discourse—rooted in national, indigenous, and religious values while remaining compatible with certain universal modern principles—has been both necessary and influential in fostering political development in Iran. Rather than viewing tradition and modernity as mutually exclusive, this research explores the possibility of their synthesis as a driver of institutional evolution and political participation. This study is situated within broader debates on political development, discourse theory, and modernization in non-Western societies. Traditional modernization theories often conceptualize development as a linear transition from traditional to modern forms. However, such binary frameworks have been increasingly criticized for neglecting local agency, cultural specificity, and the potential for hybrid models of governance.

In the Iranian context, post-revolutionary political discourse has attempted to redefine modern political concepts—such as participation, legitimacy, civil society, and sovereignty—through a religious and indigenous lens. The interaction between revolutionary ideals and global political norms has produced a distinctive discursive field in which confrontation and adaptation coexist.

The research employs a qualitative analytical approach based on primary documentary sources, including official documents, scholarly works, and credible online materials. Through interpretive analysis, the study examines the evolution of political discourses after the Revolution and assesses their role in shaping institutional arrangements, public participation, and state–society relations. The qualitative method allows for an in-depth exploration of meanings, narratives, and ideological transformations rather than relying solely on quan-

titative indicators of political development.

The findings indicate that the post-revolutionary political order in Iran has succeeded in articulating a distinctive ideological and political identity that resonates beyond its national boundaries, particularly among certain revolutionary and liberation-oriented movements. This development cannot be understood solely through the lens of conflict between tradition and modernity. Instead, it reflects a dynamic process of contestation, negotiation, and selective integration.

The study reveals that the tension between traditional religious values and modern political institutions has not merely generated stagnation or regression. On the contrary, the interaction of competing discourses has contributed to the gradual transformation of political structures and practices. Electoral processes, constitutional mechanisms, public debate, and policy discourse have evolved within a framework that seeks to reconcile religious legitimacy with elements of modern governance. Globalization has further complicated this relationship by introducing new normative standards and communication networks. In response, Iranian political discourse has undergone adaptations aimed at preserving cultural authenticity while engaging with global modernity. This adaptive process has played a meaningful role in shaping the trajectory of political development, even as debates over identity, authority, and reform continue. The confrontation between tradition and modernity in post-revolutionary Iran should not be interpreted solely as a source of contradiction or paralysis. Rather, it has functioned as a catalyst for discursive innovation and institutional evolution. The emergence of a hybrid discourse—grounded in indigenous, national, and religious values while selectively incorporating modern political concepts—has been instrumental in advancing political development.

Ultimately, the study concludes that political development in Iran after the Islamic Revolution has been shaped not by the dominance of one paradigm over the other, but by the ongoing interaction between them. The future trajectory of Iran's political development will likely depend on the continued capacity of its political discourse to mediate, reinterpret, and harmonize these two foundational forces.

Key words: Tradition; Modernity; Political Development; Islamic Revolution; Discourse.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.