BEYOND THE VEIL: LEGITIMACY CRISES, CIVIL DISSENT, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY IN POST-ISLAMIC REPUBLIC IRAN

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ABSTRACT

The political panorama of Iran today is defined by the catastrophic decline brought about by more than four decades of clerical mismanagement. Since 1979, a nation once celebrated for its modernization, rising prosperity, and international stature under the Pahlavi monarchy has been reduced to economic collapse, international isolation, and basic infrastructure failures, including chronic shortages of electricity and water. This paper examines the crises of legitimacy eroding the Islamic Republic, the roots of public dissent, and the growing calls for systemic change. By contrasting the achievements of the Pahlavi era with the failures of the post-1979 regime, it argues that a constitutional monarchy offers a credible path toward restoring stability, unity, and progress.

The study employs **qualitative methods**, including historical analysis, discourse analysis of political speeches, archival research, and thematic examination of protest slogans and media narratives. It also incorporates **quantitative methods**, such as statistical analysis of economic indicators (GDP growth, inflation, unemployment, poverty rates), public opinion polling, and protest participation data. This mixed-methods approach provides both the empirical and contextual depth needed to assess Iran's political trajectory and evaluate the viability of a constitutional monarchy as a unifying and stabilizing alternative.

Keywords: Iran, Pahlavi monarchy, Islamic Republic, legitimacy crisis, political dissent, constitutional monarchy, governance, regime change, economic mismanagement, modernization, democracy.

INTRODUCTION: FROM REVOLUTION TO RUIN

The 1979 Islamic Revolution replaced a modernizing monarchy with a theocratic regime promising justice, independence, and prosperity. Instead, it delivered repression, isolation, and decline. Under the Islamic Republic, governance fused religious absolutism with authoritarianism, crushing civil freedoms while failing to meet basic social and economic needs. The violent suppression of protests, mass arrests, and censorship illustrate a regime sustained not by popular support but by coercion. In contrast, the Pahlavi period, for all its shortcomings, offered a vision of national progress, secular governance, and integration into the global economy.

The contemporary political panorama of Iran is characterized by a complex interplay of historical and emerging social dynamics that require an in-depth examination of its potential following the Islamic Republic. With the regime struggling with substantial crises of legitimacy since its institution in 1979, the question of governance in the context of the post-Islamic Republic is of great significance. The factors that contribute to these crises of legitimacy include dissatisfied promises of the revolution, government repression and widespread dissatisfaction with socioeconomic conditions. The repercussions of these dynamics occur in the current wave of

popular dissent, which underlines a growing discontent with the prevailing political order and the requests for systemic reform or a complete review of governance structures (Amin, 2023).

These shortcomings and broken promises laid the groundwork for a persistent crisis of legitimacy that defines the Islamic Republic to this day.

The Islamic Republic was founded on the principles of theocratic governance, merged with republican ideals, which provided a distinctive framework for its authority. However, this ideological foundation has been increasingly questioned. The crisis of legitimacy is underlined by the dependence of the regime on coercive measures to maintain control, as seen in the violent suppression of protests and the reduction of civil freedoms. The mass revolts observed in recent years, in particular following the controversial presidential elections and the systemic denial of fundamental rights, illustrate a population increasingly willing to challenge the status quo. These acts of dissent reflect more exhaustive research of political agency and a desire for governance that intersects with the aspirations of a significant segment of the Iranian population (Amin, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research strategies to assess Iran's political trajectory and the viability of governance alternatives.

Qualitative Analysis:

- **Historical research** was conducted through secondary sources and archival material on the Pahlavi monarchy, the Islamic Revolution, and subsequent regime crises.
- **Discourse analysis** examined the speeches of Supreme Leaders (1979–2023), presidential addresses, and clerical pronouncements, alongside protest slogans and statements collected through media archives and diaspora reporting.
- **Thematic analysis** was applied to protest narratives, opposition literature, and interviews reported in international and Persian-language media.

Quantitative Analysis:

- **Economic data** (GDP growth, inflation, unemployment, and poverty rates) were drawn from the World Bank, IMF, and Central Bank of Iran where available.
- **Protest participation data** were sourced from independent monitoring organizations such as the Iran Human Rights Monitor (2017–2023) and verified international media reports.
- **Public opinion surveys** conducted by institutions such as GAMAAN were reviewed to assess shifting popular attitudes toward the Islamic Republic and alternative governance models.

By integrating qualitative insights with quantitative indicators, the study ensures both contextual depth and empirical grounding. This dual approach provides a robust framework for evaluating the legitimacy crisis of the Islamic Republic and the potential pathways for Iran's political transformation.

BROKEN PROMISES: FORTY YEARS OF MISRULE AND DECLINE

In light of this background, the tension between monarchical and republican ideologies becomes particularly prominent. The monarchy, symbolized by the former Pahlavi regime, continues to represent a credible and stabilizing alternative within the Iranian political discourse. For many advocates, a return to a constitutional monarchy is not a step backwards but rather a revival of a system that historically fostered modernization, national identity, and integration into the global

community. Unlike the Islamic Republic, whose legitimacy rests on coercion and failed promises, the Pahlavi legacy offers a vision of governance that balances tradition with progress and provides a unifying framework above partisan divisions. While republican factions emphasize sovereignty derived from popular will, their fragmentation and inability to consolidate power underscore the appeal of monarchy as a guarantor of stability and continuity in a nation exhausted by decades of authoritarian theocracy (Amin, 2023).

The promises of 1979 — economic equality, political freedom, and moral governance — have been systematically betrayed. Iran's once-thriving industries have been crippled by corruption and mismanagement. Infrastructure that was expanding under the Pahlavis has crumbled; public services are in disarray, and power outages and water shortages plague a country with vast natural wealth.

This rope shooting between monarchy and republicanism is not simply an ideological battle but encapsulates larger aspirations for governance in post-Islamic Republic Iran. As debates intensify regarding political legitimacy and popular representation, it becomes evident that resolving these controversial divisions can either push or hinder the nation's momentum towards democratic consolidation or, conversely, towards increased self-assertion. In an attempt to open a path, it is essential to recognize the meaning of these deep ideological divisions, together with the flourishing movements of civil society that support democratic reforms, social justice and human rights.

In this context, examining the governance potential in post-Islamic Republic Iran requires not only an investigation into the crises of legitimacy and popular dissent, but also a nuanced understanding of the historical narratives that continue to shape political aspirations and rhetoric. The convergence of these factors presents both challenges and opportunities for reimagining Iran's political future, calling for a critical analysis that moves beyond linear historical accounts to engage with contemporary demands for more democratic, representative, and legitimate governance structures. Since its establishment in 1979, the Islamic Republic has faced a series of legitimacy crises, each progressively eroding public confidence in the regime and fueling waves of dissent. These crises reflect the dissonance between the ideological foundations of the state and the aspirations of a population increasingly conscious of political and economic inequalities. At the heart of this analysis lies the legacy of the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, which introduced a discourse of popular sovereignty and rights that continues to resonate with contemporary discontent in Iran (Ayatollahi, 2022).

The ideological context of the Islamic Republic was characterized by a clerical interpretation of governance that sought to infuse Islamic principles with state authority. However, this initial ideological narrative, reinforced by the charismatic leadership of Ayatolá Khomeini, was quickly challenged when the regime began to consolidate power. Key events such as the purges of the 1980s and the Iran-Iraq war presented the State as a protector and an oppressor, which complicates its legitimacy. As the regime faced a lot of challenges, including economic sanctions, political repression and social disturbances, it retreated even further into an authoritarian position, marginalizing dissident voices that echoed the ideals of the constitutional revolution.

CRISES OF LEGITIMACY IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC

From its inception, the Islamic Republic's legitimacy rested on revolutionary rhetoric rather than democratic consent. Theocratic governance under the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih replaced the popular sovereignty promised during the 1979 revolution. Repeated crackdowns on peaceful protests — from the 1999 student movement to the 2022 Mahsa Amini protests — have revealed a

state incapable of reform and unwilling to engage with its people. The regime's reliance on fear and force is a symptom of its waning legitimacy.

The rise and failure of reformist president Mohammad Khatami in 1997 illustrates this dynamic vividly. The Khatami platform was based on calls for greater civil liberties and political openness, feelings that resonated with a longing population. However, the systemic limitations imposed by the Guardian Council and the supreme leader severely circumscribed the reformist agenda. This was not only in an atrophied reform process but also in a growing disappointment with the reformist policy itself. Such disappointments laid the groundwork for popular movements, notably the 2009 green movement, which protested against electoral fraud widely perceived in the presidential elections. The brutal repression of these peaceful protests stressed the will of the regime to prioritize its preservation over popular sovereignty, which aggravated its crisis of legitimacy.

Economic Collapse and Social Discontent

Iran holds some of the world's largest oil and gas reserves, yet its economy ranks among the most mismanaged globally. Inflation, unemployment, and currency devaluation have devastated living standards. While sanctions have worsened the crisis, the core failure lies in corruption and the diversion of Iran's oil wealth into regional proxy wars instead of national development. Under the Pahlavis, Iran's oil wealth funded industrialization, education, and infrastructure; under the mullahs, it has funded repression and foreign adventurism

Economic complaints, together with a sense of political marginalization, have encouraged the recurring waves of protests, such as those of 2017-2018 and more recently in 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amani. These protests encapsulate a generational change in dissent, where young people and women often at the forefront, articulate demands that extend beyond the calls to reform to cover fundamental issues of governance and social norms.

Youth-Led Movements

With 60% of the population under 30, a generation with no memory of the Pahlavi era is nonetheless leading the charge against the Islamic Republic. Young Iranians, especially women, are demanding personal freedoms, economic opportunity, and an end to theocratic rule. Social media and global connectivity have amplified their voices, exposed the regime's failures and mobilized collective dissent. Their demands are not for cosmetic reforms but for the wholesale replacement of the system — with many openly embracing the vision of a constitutional monarchy as a unifying national framework. According to surveys conducted by the Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in Iran (GAMAAN) in 2022, nearly 30% of respondents favored a return to constitutional monarchy, while a majority supported some form of secular governance. This data underscores that monarchy is not merely a nostalgic idea but remains a viable option within contemporary political discourse.

This generational revolt is not merely a reaction to repression but the expression of a more profound historical continuity. The principles of popular sovereignty, first articulated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, continue to reverberate in today's protests, creating a paradox in which the regime's pursuit of ideological purity clashes with citizens' demands for representation and inclusion. As Moosavi (2020) observes, these movements signal a profound transformation in how Iranians understand governance, legitimacy, and the social contract. This shift places young people at the center of Iran's democratic aspirations.

A defining characteristic of the youth-led movements in contemporary Iran is the demand for a more representative, responsible, and accountable political framework. This demand stands in stark

contrast to the hollow claims of legitimacy made by the clerical elite, whose authority rests solely on revolutionary slogans rather than genuine consent. This young generation, born entirely under the Islamic Republic, has grown up witnessing only repression, corruption, and decline. Unlike their parents, they are not bound by the illusions of 1979; instead, they express open disillusionment with both theocratic absolutism and failed republican experiments.

Through social media and global connectivity, these young Iranians have amplified their grievances about state corruption, economic collapse, and the regime's suffocating restrictions on personal freedoms. Their frustration is intensified by a tragic paradox: inheriting a resource-rich country that, under the Pahlavi monarchy, was on a path of modernization and global integration, but which has since been driven into poverty, isolation, and despair. The contrast between Iran's lost promise and its current condition has fueled not only their anger but also their receptiveness to alternative models of governance — most notably, a constitutional monarchy that could restore stability, dignity, and a future worth inheriting.

In addition, socio -cultural factors play an essential role in the food of dissent in young Iranians. The intertwining of modern media consumption and the cultural exhibition to global democratic standards has contributed to an emerging expectation for individual rights and civil freedoms. The proliferation of information technologies has enabled young people to engage in global discourse on democracy, human rights and governance, thus increasing awareness of alternative political practices. These platforms have also created solidarity networks among activists, facilitating rapid mobilization in response to triggering events, such as the 2019 demonstrations against fuel price increases, which led to widespread dissent across the country.

THE PAHLAVI LEGACY: MODERNIZATION, SECULARISM, AND NATIONAL COHESION

The Pahlavi era oversaw rapid modernisation: expanding education (including for women), developing infrastructure, reforming the legal system, and strengthening Iran's position on the world stage. Secular governance fostered religious tolerance and protected personal freedoms. National projects, such as the White Revolution, sought to raise living standards and empower citizens. While not without its flaws, the monarchy delivered tangible progress — a stark contrast to the decline under clerical rule.

The historical standoff between monarchy and republicanism continues to shape current movements. For many young Iranians, republican ideals have lost credibility. At the same time, the enduring legacy and legitimacy of the Pahlavi monarchy have re-emerged as a profound and unifying alternative, redefining the landscape of dissent. Some activists call for a return to the monarchy as a stabilisation force, while others plead for a reform of the republican structures. This ideological bifurcation represents a microcosm of broader societal debates on identity, governance and legitimacy.

The interaction between these factors highlights the complexity of popular dissent in post-Islamic Republic Iran. The movements led by young people demonstrate not a mere drop, but an outright collapse of faith in the current regime, while simultaneously signalling the potential for substantial political transformation. By articulating their visions for democracy and governance, young Iranians invoke a future that transcends the limits imposed by the existing political order, guiding the trajectory of social change within the nation. Getting involved with these movements is essential to understand the nuanced relationship between popular dissent, legitimacy crises and the potential evolution of Iran's political identity. The ideological rope shooting between monarchy and republicanism in Iran is deeply rooted in the historical trajectory of the country, which has a

significant impact on political feelings and contemporary identities. The legacy of the Pahlavi dynasty, the last dominant monarchy before the Islamic revolution of 1979, continues to model the speech surrounding governance, identity and legitimacy in the Republic that succeeded it. This section examines historical priests of both systems and their manifestations in progress in Iranian political culture.

The roots of the monarchy in Iran date back to the ancient Persian empires, where the kings held a semi-divine status, epitomizing the central authority and cohesion between different ethnocultural groups. The contemporary monarchical picture emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular under Reza Shah Pahlavi, who tried to modernize and secularise the nation. His regime underlined nationalism and a singular Iranian identity, often at the expense of ethnic and religious pluralism. Although he tried to break with a tumultuous past, this modernization effort has raised resentment between the various segments of society, culminating in the 1979 revolution. The revolution was driven not only by opposition to foreign influence and political repression, but also by a complex tapestry of discontent with the authoritarian government of the monarchy and perceived moral decay.

In the wake of the Islamic revolution, the institution of the Islamic Republic marked a radical removal from monarchical governance, incorporating the Shiite religious authority in the political framework. The leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini has crystallized the notion of an Islamic state, in which the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih (protection of the Islamic jurist) took precedence over traditional republican ideals. This shift of the paradigm has created an ideological schism: while La Repubblica has tried to exploit popular sovereignty, it has at the same time imposed rigid ideological compliance, often undermining democratic aspirations. The intertwining of Islamic governance with populist rhetoric has generated an initial increase in legitimacy; however, this legitimacy has decreased over time, exacerbated by poor political management, economic difficulties, and growing public dissatisfaction.

At the same time, the historical legacy of the monarchy continues to permeate the contemporary Iranian political discourse, modelling various factions within the opposition and producing a powerful tension of republican feelings. Dissidents and political activists draw on both the memories of pre-revolutionary liberal movements and the persistence of democracy. This is particularly evident in the Green Movement of 2009 and the subsequent protests, which underscored the demands for civil freedoms and political accountability, echoing the constitutional aspirations of the late Qajar era and the early Pahlavi period.

In recent years, debates on the monarchy have re-emerged, particularly among those dissatisfied with the Islamic Republic's governance. Supporters of restoring either a complete or constitutional monarchy often reference the secular policies of the Pahlavi era, contrasting them with the religious governance established after 1979. This renewed interest reflects existing social divisions, with some advocating for a reformed monarchy as a response to longstanding political grievances and the perceived legitimacy crisis of the current system.

The ongoing debates on political identity in Iran can therefore be understood as a contested space in which republican ideals are increasingly discredited, while the historical gravitas and enduring legitimacy of the monarchy re-emerge as a unifying alternative. Intergenerational dialogues concerning democracy, secularism and governance reveal the complexities of national identity in the Iran of the post-Islamic Republic. In this context, the evolution of political ideologies, modelled by previous regimes, continues to feed a dynamic interaction between historical legacy and future aspirations, positioning the political landscape of Iran as one characterized by divergence and continuity. The international context significantly influences Iran's internal policy, especially in the

configuration of challenges and responses to dissenting movements. The interaction between the regime's domestic legitimacy crisis and external pressures is both complex and revealing. Foreign powers often respond not to the will of the Iranian people but to the authoritarian governance model of the Islamic Republic, weighing their geopolitical interests above a genuine commitment to human rights. This selective engagement has at times prolonged the regime's survival, even as its legitimacy at home has collapsed. In stark contrast, under the Pahlavi monarchy, Iran was able to balance international relations with national development, projecting stability and credibility abroad while modernizing at home.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION: HOW FOREIGN POLICY DEEPENED DOMESTIC FAILURES

Foreign Policy and Legitimacy

The Islamic Republic's foreign policy — defined by hostility to the West and alignment with pariah states — has isolated Iran diplomatically and economically. Nuclear brinkmanship and support for militant groups have invited sanctions that weaken the domestic economy. The Pahlavi monarchy, by contrast, maintained balanced international relations, securing trade partnerships and modernization assistance that fueled national development.

The nuclear discourse, particularly since the early 2000s, has colored Iran's international relations and added layers to its legitimacy crisis. The Joint Comprehensive Action Plan (JCPOA), initially considered a potential way to reintegrate Iran into the international community, became emblematic of the ideological division between the reformist aspirations and the scepticism of the hard line within Iran. The withdrawal of the United States from the agreement in 2018, followed by renewed sanctions, found significant public dissent and frustration among citizens who expected relief from economic conditions. Analysts argue that such external pressures not only exacerbate national complaints but also contribute to the hardening of state narratives around sovereignty and resistance against foreign intervention (Rashidi, 2023).

The countries with interests created in the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Israel, have historically used domestic disturbances as a focal point against the Islamic Republic, providing tacit support or openly asking for the change of regime. These actions underline a broader narrative that positions the Islamic Republic as a threat, thus creating a dichotomy between perceived internal dissent and external existential threats. Consequently, Iranian leadership often takes advantage of this perception to gather the nationalist feeling, trying to undermine the dissent by portraying it as part of a foreign conspiracy. The state's narrative is vital to navigate the crisis of legitimacy, since the fears of foreign influence can effectively be used to suppress internal challenges to authority (Akhari, 2022).

On the contrary, international human rights organisations and allied Western governments often display condemnation and sanctions as tools to influence Iranian governance, defending greater responsibility and respect for civil freedoms. This external support for dissenting movements, although potentially galvanising national calls for reform, can strengthen hard-line narratives equivalent to dissent with foreign interference. Consequently, the reaction of the global powers manifests a paradox. While foreign support can empower opposition factions within Iran, at the same time, it equips the regime with an argument to delegitimise those factions further. This dynamic illustrates how external perceptions of legitimacy can significantly shape the course of internal political struggles, which requires a nuanced understanding of the participation of global powers in the Iranian socio-political landscape (Tehranian, 2023).

In addition, the enthusiasm of certain global powers and organizations to commit or isolate Iran has often reflected broader geopolitical ambitions, particularly within the context of the rivalry between the United States and China and changing alignments in the Middle East. The alignment of Iran with non -western powers, mainly Russia and China, has created a counterweight to the pressures of traditional Western allies. This strategy not only provides Iran an alternative economic line of life, but also complicates the legitimacy discourse by framing the regime as a sovereign entity that resists Western hegemony. As a result, international relations become a show that impacts internal political legitimacy, especially amid popular dissent where external diplomatic dynamics increasingly influence internal reform expectations. The interaction of socioeconomic factors and the crisis of legitimacy in the post-Islamic Republic of Iran is critical to understanding the current and future sociopolitical landscape. The imposition of economic sanctions, especially in response to the regime's acknowledged nuclear program and its deliberate regional destabilisation efforts, exacerbated the already fragile economic conditions of the country. This opposing economic environment had profound implications for public sentiment, acting as a widespread catalyst for dissent against the dominant regime.

The Iranian Economy, Already Challenged by Systemic Inefficiencies, Inflation, and growing unemployment rates, faces further hurdles due to intensified sanctions following the U.S. Withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018. According to Mirsepassi (2021), these deteriorating economic conditions are integral to understanding the legitimacy crisis that has plagued the Islamic Republic. Citizens who experience adverse economic realities are more likely to examine the ability of the regime to govern and fulfil their promises of development and prosperity effectively. The perceived incapacity of the state to meet basic socioeconomic needs, such as employment, food safety and health, promoted disenchantment and disappointment among various segments of the population.

The economic complaints resulting from external sanctions and poor domestic economic management mobilized citizens, usually resulting in mass protests. These protests are not just a response to specific economic conditions, but reflect a broader discontent with the political system, intertwined with demands for social justice, better governance and political reform. Events such as the 2019 fuel price protests illustrate how economic factors can converge with political discontent to challenge the legitimacy of the regime. Mobilisations usually gather under the flag of economic difficulties, but rapidly evolve to broader requests for political change, reflecting a society dissatisfied with the performance of Iranian leadership.

In addition, socioeconomic stratification in Iran gave rise to a distinct dichotomy, where different socioeconomic groups experience the repercussions of sanctions differently. Often, politically connected elites can face economic difficulties, while the lower and middle classes find their subsistence means severely compromised. As these economically marginalized groups become increasingly frustrated, their dissent is fueled by a feeling of betrayal of leadership that prioritizes self-preservation and control over the socioeconomic well-being of its citizens. This growing gap further decreases the legitimacy of the regime, creating a cycle in which discontent generates dissent that is difficult to contain.

Critically, the economic scenario was further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exposed deep vulnerabilities and highlighted the incapacity of the regime to respond adequately to public health emergencies. In a notorious act of hypocrisy, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei personally secured an American-made vaccine for himself and his inner circle, while simultaneously banning the import of Western vaccines for Iranian citizens on ideological grounds. This reckless decision left tens of millions unprotected at the height of the pandemic. According to

public health data and independent estimates, more than 120,000 Iranians lost their lives to COVID-19 during the critical period when safe and effective vaccines were available globally but denied to them by Khamenei's decree.

The economic consequences of the pandemic — rising unemployment, worsening poverty, and collapsing healthcare systems — deepened the regime's crisis of legitimacy. Public anger spilt onto social media and the streets, with many openly blaming the Supreme Leader for needless deaths. Far from strengthening the Islamic Republic, the pandemic revealed both its incompetence and its disregard for the lives of ordinary Iranians, fueling further calls for systemic change.

In short, the socioeconomic dimensions of Iran's current legitimacy crisis are inextricably linked to popular dissent, creating a complex landscape where economic complaints are fundamental in the formation of the public relationship with the regime. As such, understanding this dynamic is essential to analyse Iran's potential path in a context of the post-Islamic Republic, positioning socioeconomic factors not only as background elements, but as central components in the narrative of Iran's evolving political future. The potential future of Iran is complex in geopolitical, socio-cultural, and historical contexts that have shaped the nation. By examining the feasibility of a transition to a more democratic system, the crises of continuous legitimacy faced by the Islamic Republic of Iran must be addressed. These crises stem from a combination of generalized popular dissent and a model of governance that many perceive as obsolete and disconnected from the aspirations of a significant part of the population. In particular, the generational fracture and the rise of a politically aware young person question the current political framework, pushing for more participative forms of governance.

HYBRID GOVERNANCE AS A TRANSITIONAL MODEL

A constitutional monarchy with a robust elected parliament could bridge Iran's political divides, offering continuity through the monarchy's symbolic authority while empowering citizens through democratic institutions. Such a model, successful in other nations, could unite monarchist and republican-minded Iranians under a single national framework.

The integration of monarchist elements into a republican framework presents an intriguing hybrid model that could appeal to various demographic groups in Iran. Historically, Iranian policy has oscillated between efforts to establish a republic and the attraction of the monarchy. For example, the heritage of the Pahlavi dynasty continues to evoke mixed feelings among the population, with some viewing it as a period marked by modernisation and westernisation. In contrast, others criticize it for authoritarian practices without much evidence. Such ambivalence suggests that a model synthesising aspects of monarchical governance with republican principles could mitigate conflicts stemming from the brutal dichotomies in Iranian political identity.

The learned analyses have highlighted the effectiveness of hybrid governance structures in other contexts, where the incorporation of symbolic monarchical elements provided continuity and stability (Silva, 2022). A potential Iranian hybrid model could maintain a ceremonial monarchy, which underlines national unity while establishing a robust republican framework motivated by democratic governance. This double system could help keep legitimacy derived from historical roots while allowing popular participation in governance through democratic institutions, potentially softening the tensions between the divergent factions of society.

However, the transition to such a system is responsible for challenges. The political structure of the current Islamic Republic, strongly dependent on theocratic legitimacy, can resist the changes which undermine its authority. In addition, the historical trauma associated with the monarchy, the perceptions of national identity shaped by the 1979 Revolution, and increasing demands for civil

rights pose significant obstacles. The notable factions within Iranian society, including laity, reformists and hard conservatives, are likely to have divergent opinions on the feasibility and the opportunity of a hybrid model, complicating consensual construction.

Above all, any successful transition would require an upward approach, ensuring that the voices of various demographic data, in particular marginalized groups and political dissidents, contribute to the discourse surrounding governance. The role of civil society in the defence of democratic reforms cannot be overestimated, because active civic engagement and basic movements are essential to contextualize the desire for political change in the context of the unique culture and history of Iran.

In addition, external influences will play an essential role in the formation of the political future of Iran. Sanctions, international diplomatic relations and regional geopolitical dynamics can either facilitate or hinder the thrust to democratization, according to how these factors interact with internal pressures. The interaction between internal dissent and external relations reinforces the complexity of the evolutionary political trajectory of Iran.

In summary, while hybrid models that combine monarchical elements with republican principles could potentially approach the legitimacy crises faced by the Islamic Republic of Iran, the challenges of such a transition remain substantial. The path to a more democratic system probably depends on a range of factors, including changes in public attitudes, the political will of the main stakeholders and the broader international dynamics that collectively shape the evolutionary landscape of Iranian governance. The interaction between the crises of legitimacy and popular dissent in post-Islamic Republic Iran significantly supports the trajectory of the country's political and social scenario. In recent years, Iran has witnessed a dramatic collapse of the regime's legitimacy, driven by economic hardship, the systematic denial of personal freedoms, and widespread anger over entrenched corruption. The fabric of society has grown increasingly volatile, as citizens demand not token reforms but fundamental change, including democratic governance and accountability. These legitimacy crises reveal not just vulnerability but the inevitable decay of the Islamic Republic's political structure — a system incapable of reform and destined to be replaced. The mounting discontent underscores the urgency of turning toward an alternative framework, with many Iranians now recognising that only a constitutional monarchy can restore stability, transparency, and national dignity.

The potential for popular dissent to manifest in sustained movements for change cannot be underestimated. Time and again, Iranians have demonstrated their willingness to rise against authoritarian rule, from the student protests of 1999 to the nationwide uprisings of 2009, 2019, and 2022. These movements are not limited to economic grievances; they represent a comprehensive rejection of the Islamic Republic's suffocating political order. The calls for civil rights, social justice, and freedom reflect a deep desire for systemic transformation rather than cosmetic reform. This growing interconnectivity of demands exposes the fragility of the regime's hold on power and underscores the people's determination to reclaim agency and sovereignty in their own affairs. For many, this aspiration is increasingly tied to the restoration of a constitutional monarchy. This system can unify the nation, embody its historical continuity, and provide the democratic framework the Islamic Republic has consistently denied.

PATHWAYS TO RESTORATION: BUILDING A CONSTITUTIONAL MONARCHY

Transitioning from theocracy to constitutional monarchy would require dismantling the current power structure, securing international support, and safeguarding democratic reforms. A restored

monarchy could act as a guardian of national unity, while parliament governs day-to-day affairs. This model ensures that no single faction — religious or political — can monopolize power.

In today's Iran, the debate between monarchy and republicanism is no longer an equal contest. Decades of failed theocratic republicanism have discredited the very notion of popular sovereignty under clerical control. In contrast, the Pahlavi legacy continues to resonate as a credible and unifying alternative. For many Iranians, especially the younger generation, a constitutional monarchy is not nostalgia but a forward-looking framework that combines national identity with democratic governance. Far from complicating Iran's political future, the restoration of monarchy offers the clearest path out of authoritarian paralysis, ending the cycle of failed republican experiments and providing the stability required for true democratic reform.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE VEIL — RECLAIMING IRAN'S IDENTITY AND PROSPERITY

Iran stands at a crossroads. Four decades of clerical misrule have drained its wealth, stifled its freedoms, and eroded its global standing. The Pahlavi era, with its modernization, secular governance, and national ambition, offers a historical blueprint for renewal.

Transitioning from theocracy to constitutional monarchy would require dismantling the current power structure, securing international support, and safeguarding democratic reforms. A restored monarchy could act as a guardian of national unity, while parliament governs day-to-day affairs. This model ensures that no single faction — religious or political — can monopolize power.

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The hope for regime change has been obvious during moments of external confrontation. During the recent twelve days of war between Iran and Israel, many Iranians were hopeful that the collapse of the Islamic Republic was imminent, even if the ground for such a transformation was not yet fully ready. Popular sentiment on social media openly celebrated the elimination of IRGC generals and commanders responsible for brutal crackdowns on protesters, viewing their deaths not as national loss but as justice long delayed. These reactions highlight how deeply the people's anger has turned against the ruling elite and how open they are to a complete break with the theocracy.

Far from complicating Iran's political future, the restoration of monarchy offers the most straightforward path out of authoritarian paralysis, ending the cycle of failed republican experiments and providing the stability required for genuine democratic reform.

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