Response Paper #1: Evaluating Iran’s Political Development

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In *Political Order and Political Decay*, Francis Fukuyama defines three institutions that determine and sustain political order: a strong, independent, and impersonal state that holds a monopoly on force; a present and legitimate rule of law; and accountability to the people.[[1]](#footnote-1) All states with strong political order have these three principles, however, in most cases one or two of these principles are stronger than the others. In Iran, political accountability is the oldest and strongest principle, followed by rule of law and then lastly the state.

The best example of the Iranian people’s strong political accountability is the Iranian Revolution, where a movement led by students replaced the Shah and his regime with Khomeini, who was formerly exiled.[[2]](#footnote-2) The revolution was in response to high inflation rates, a poor standard of living, and the overall cruelty of the Shah’s regime which included censorship and torture.[[3]](#footnote-3) Iran remembers its history, and Iranians are not afraid to hold their government accountable.

While being second to accountability, Iran’s new government has a strong rule of law that reflects the broad consensus of its people in how they should be governed. Iran has a constitution that separates powers between an executive, legislative, and judicial branch.[[4]](#footnote-4) With a parliament, judiciary, and a president, Iran is fully capable of enforcing rules and laws. The only reason that rule of law ranks behind accountability is because the church sets some of the rules in Iran, therefore limiting the legislature’s power.

Iran’s state is weaker than the other two principles for one clear reason: the church is supreme over the state in all matters. Fukuyama clearly stated that a state must be hierarchical and hold a monopoly over force and decision making.[[5]](#footnote-5) In Iran, the Supreme Leader is able to remove the president and appoint half of the Guardian Council which controls who can run for office.[[6]](#footnote-6) Despite having a very large bureaucracy that is effective in managing and enforcing the laws, its lack of independence from the church is disqualifying.

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1. Francis Fukuyama, Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Janet Afary, "Iranian Revolution of 1978-79," Encyclopedia Britannica, April 13, 2018, accessed August 27, 2018, https://www.britannica.com/event/Iranian-Revolution-of-1978-1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. "Governance of Iran," Fanack.com, April 19, 2018, accessed August 28, 2018, https://fanack.com/iran/governance/. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Francis Fukuyama, Political Order and Political Decay. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. "Iran's Power Structure," The Washington Post, June 13, 2013, accessed August 27, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/apps/g/page/world/irans-power-structure/226/. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)