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► **To cite this version:**

Guillaume Beaud. Negotiating public service bargains in postrevolutionary times: The case of Iran's diplomatic corps. *Governance. An international Journal of Policy, Administration and Institutions*, 2023, 36 (3), pp.909-931. 10.1111/gove.12712 . hal-04123638

HAL Id: hal-04123638

<https://sciencespo.hal.science/hal-04123638v1>

Submitted on 9 Jun 2023

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Negotiating public service bargains in postrevolutionary times: The case of Iran's diplomatic corps

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Abstract

New political regimes stemming from revolutions eventually find themselves confronted with the imperative to build upper bureaucratic apparatuses geared towards facilitating regime stability. This article examines the process of “re-bureaucratization” in the Islamic Republic of Iran, whereby institutions are designed and reworked over time to accommodate distinct features of the reshuffled bureaucratic elite initially incongruous in a deregulated revolutionary environment. Precisely, it examines state institutions established to recruit and train postrevolutionary Iranian diplomats following the purges of state bureaucracies. Relying on qualitative and quantitative data, the article shows how such institutions allowed to outstrip loyalty-driven politico-administrative arrangements that are essentially short-sighted, as once their aim fulfilled—asserting regime elites' control over the state—, they channel policy-making deficiency. Conversely, their very designs craft a “Public Service Bargain” that concomitantly fosters diplomats' loyalty, expertise, and representativeness—which, for to the revolutionary canon, commingles diplomats' plebeianization and provincialization—into stabilized institutional arrangements.

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1 | INTRODUCTION

New political regimes' stabilization rests upon their state bureaucracies—upper civil services in particular—, that act as pivotal policymaking institutions and, in turn, instruments of legitimation over time.¹ Yet, a “division of labor” between regime and state scholarships (Slater & Fenner, 2011) has contributed to eclipse upper state bureaucracies in the making and reshaping of political regimes. Prominent works that bridged the regime-state nexus following regime change (Dreyfus, 2004; Grzymała-Busse, 2007) have emphasized democratization paradigms in which the institutional and normative weight of political institutions (e.g., political parties) have depoliticized the *issue* of bureaucratic reform. (Re)making the state apparatus is depicted as framed by political elites' need to control the state bureaucracy and mitigate strife by ensuring civil servants' acceptance of the new political order. Thus, while the literature has emphasized patronage mechanisms in new regimes' bureaucratic reforms (Grzymała-Busse, 2007; Kostadinova & Neshkova, 2020), it has understated that assessing the reconfiguration of upper bureaucracy strata—pivotal to new regimes' exercise of power—requires to probe, beyond the issue of bureaucrats' politicization, into that of their competency. Moreover, revolution scholars have long been established in the regime literature, which led to a broader focus on *why and how revolutions arise and ensue*, rather than *how revolutionary regimes are perpetuated*. Accounting for the stabilization of politico-bureaucratic arrangements in postrevolutionary setups thus requires to revalorize institutional transformations in the long-term.²

However, revolutions that successfully led to a change of political regime and aspire to overhaul state-society relations constitute critical junctures at which the issue of state reforms is heightened.³ Indeed, the durability of postrevolutionary regimes hinges upon their ability to deliver on revolutionary popular expectations as regards public policies, the reworking of the former bureaucratic elite, and state sovereignty. To this end, regime elites require the state apparatus to be responsive to political demands and to hold policy implementation capacities.

This study argues that the postrevolutionary reformatting of senior bureaucracies—instrumental in revolutionary regimes' legitimation—is governed by tradeoffs between three components: administrative elites' *loyalty*, *expertise*, and *representativeness*. By asserting that politicization and professionalization are not mutually exclusive but can be accommodated into stabilized arrangements, we refine Hood and Lodge's (2006) “Public Service Bargain” (PSB) in light of postrevolutionary transformations during which, we argue, the bureaucratic elite's social composition critically shapes regime-state and state-society relations. Politico-administrative bargains are molded towards stabilized arrangements that regulate tensions between PSBs' components over time, which prevents the need to revive pre-revolutionary “Thermidorian” arrangements.

Iran's 1979 revolution is an archetypical case of the politicization of the *issue* of reforming upper state bureaucracies amid regime change. Revolutionary elites aimed to substitute former bureaucrats—deemed unaccountable, unresponsive to, and unrepresentative of society—by individuals originating from lower-middle classes and embodying provincial diversity. Former civil servants indeed constituted a narrow and powerful elite who entertained patrimonial ties with the Shāh (Farazmand, 1989) and symbolized a highly centralized and expanding state power. In the late 19th century, the establishment of centralized bureaucratic recruitment and European-inspired universities to train administrative elites further restricted access to bureaucratic posts, as higher education was limited to an exclusive elite (Zonis, 1971).⁴

While the early revolutionary period featured civil servants' overall maintenance, they then underwent thorough purges as the balance of power among revolutionary elite groups tilted in

favor of the more radical. The diplomatic corps was initially substituted by loyal yet poorly qualified revolutionaries appointed under revolutionary clerics' patronage. This tradeoff between loyalty and competency generated an expertise vacuum that soon jeopardized the newborn regime, especially as it faced a protracted conflict against Iraq and international seclusion.

We identify a sequence of three bargains that illustrate distinct combinations and designs of diplomats' loyalty, competency, and representativeness. First, revolutionary politics and bureaucratic purges (1979–1982) shaped a revolutionary bargain framed by the primacy of loyalty above competency, and the circumscription of diplomats' representativeness to its *social* component (i.e., coming from lower-middle classes). Second, from 1982 onwards, the formalization of recruitment and training institutions rebalanced towards competency, while preventing diplomats' autonomization. Third, following regime stabilization, arrangements framing diplomats' recruitment, training, and careers, were incrementally institutionalized in a bargain that brought about both diplomats' *geographic* representativeness (i.e., coming from small cities and rural areas) as a discrete politicization tool, and professionalization, while adapting to endogenous (e.g., the pluralization of training institutions) and exogenous changes (e.g., incentives for regime normalization).⁵

2 | MAKING SENSE OF BUREAUCRACIES IN THE CONSOLIDATION OF POSTREVOLUTIONARY REGIMES

2.1 | Politicizing the issue of bureaucratic reforms

Scholars of regime change have largely overlooked civil services as *loci* of analysis to account for processes of political change, stabilization of newly established political regimes, and redesign of state-society relations. This conceptual neglect results from a depoliticization of civil bureaucracies as a contending *issue* of reform. On the one hand, Weber's ideal-type of a neutral and corporatist bureaucracy postulates the continuity of the bureaucratic machinery “even in the case of revolution by force” (Weber, 1978, p. 224). Suggesting that new regimes inherit former states (Slater & Fenner, 2011), this assumption—particularly present in postcolonial (Goonatilake, 1975) and developmentalist (Beck et al., 1963) paradigms—reduces bureaucracies to rational instruments, construed as “receptacle[s] of regime decisions, uninvolved and unaffected by political forces [...] clashing in the social arena” (Cariño, 1991, p. 731). On the other hand, Marxist and transitory scholarship have downplayed state autonomy and questioned structuralists' “stickiness” of institutions, thus implying a natural reshuffle of state elites in periods of change. Moreover, by blurring the conceptual distinction between regimes and states in a teleological fashion, the scholarly legacy of Weber's “Sultanism” further downplayed bureaucracies as a substantive *issue* at the core of the establishment of new regimes that ultimately espouse authoritarianism.

By contrast, following Peters and Pierre's (2004) view that “the public service is inherently a political creation” (p. 2), we argue that the establishment of revolutionary regimes constitutes a juncture generating a politics of institutional reforms that frames public administrations and their composition, and is instrumental to regimes born out of revolutions. Departing from a perspective on public administrations as mere instruments of domination and development, we argue that reforms of upper bureaucracies are pivotal to consolidating revolutionary regimes by shaping states' capacity to both answer policy expectations (*output legitimacy*) and represent the people (*input legitimacy*).

2.2 | Embedding bureaucratic reforms in *public service bargains*

The formalization of political regimes marks a critical juncture during which political elites seek to regulate the then exclusive tension between politicization and professionalization of the bureaucracy, that initially mirrors the loyalty-competency nexus. On the one hand, regime consolidation rests upon policy capacity, requiring skills whose monopoly is often held by former bureaucrats (Peters, 1995, p. 128).⁶ On the other hand, bureaucrats' loyalty to the new political order is sought—may they be new or inherited from the old regime—, to prevent their “sanctuarization” from political elites that would threaten regime-state cohesion (Hood & Lodge, 2006, p. 88). Thus, to build functional, reliable, and stable politico-administrative arrangements, new regime leaders have engineered contrasted loyalty-competency tradeoffs which, on the short-term, overlaps with the rupture-continuity nexus.

Throughout democratization processes, political elites have first often led purges, yet limited to few senior bureaucrats, both as they seek to gain democratic credentials, restore the state, and handle material emergencies (Dreyfus, 2004). Most senior bureaucrats of former—often undemocratic—regimes are then maintained in a “differed compromise” (Dreyfus, 2004, p. 19) and overseen by new civil servants (König, 1993; Peters, 1995). Conversely, when former bureaucrats were closely tied to the former regime and embedded in clientelist networks, their maintenance may hinder democratization if they face little competition from new actors (Cariño, 1991; Higley & Pakulski, 1999), as they may thwart civil service reforms (Kostadinova & Neshkova, 2020).

2.3 | Revalorizing the temporal variable and the weight of institutions in the postrevolutionary sequence

The establishment of revolutionary regimes spawns distinctive loyalty-expertise tradeoffs. Scholars of Cuban (Valdés, 1979), Russian (Dullin, 2003; Moore, 1950), and French revolutions (Church, 1981), put forth a three-phased sequence. First, revolutionaries maintain bureaucracies as “necessary evil”—yet highly distrusted hence placed under control—, because their monopoly of expertise is required to carry out revolutionary reforms. Second, revolutionary deepening—often in favor of groups endorsing radical rupture—ultimately triggers debureaucratization—hence purges—to assert control over the state.⁷ This prompts a politico-administrative bargain whereby loyalty takes precedence over competency, rendering bureaucracies mere transmission belts of regime decisions. Third, as the distribution of power is stabilized within the state that comes to incorporate revolutionary structures while “[going] back to the production of public goods” (Stinchcombe, 1999, pp. 63–65), politicized appointments induce a shortage of qualified personnel that impedes long-term state legitimacy.

However, the study of regime-state arrangements in postrevolutionary setups often ceases as the scholarship points to the emergence of this tenuous bargain that calls for an ex post rebalancing towards competencies while concomitantly sustaining bureaucrats' loyalty. Thus, this article not only shows that the politicization of the bureaucracy holds converse effects *during the revolution*—regime-state cohesion, that is, stabilization—and *once the revolutionary regime is formalized*—inability of the state to deliver and subsequent instability—, it equally aims to grasp how in postrevolutionary regimes, politico-administrative arrangements are stabilized in the long-term. To do so, it posits that institutions matter, as they illustrate a “practice of depersonalizing power” in the long run, which enhances the stability of the state in that it “decreases the likelihood of [...] challenge and lessens the investment of resources required to reproduce

authoritative rule” (Clemens & Lu, 2020, p. 437). While authors have pointed to the critical junctures that spawned revolutionary regimes' stabilization (e.g., the Directory in France [1795–99], the failed 1970 harvest in Cuba, Mao's death and the decline of the Gang or Four in China [1976], the first Five-Year Plan [1928–32] and World War II in the USSR), few have emphasized the politics of politico-administrative arrangements in lengthier institutional processes, instead advancing dynamics of institutional inertia towards impersonal rule (Becker & Goldstone, 2005). This strikes as a scholarly blindspot, as many have examined causal mechanisms framing politico-administrative bargains' reforms over time in non-revolutionary states (Grindle, 2012; Hollyer, 2010; Lapuente & Nistotskaya, 2009). Emphasizing temporality in postrevolutionary states allows to move beyond purges and political appointments as politicization mechanisms, to examine how politicization is incrementally embedded in formalized institutions.

3 | CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 | Conceptual framework

Since Wilson (1887) advocated for the separation of political and administrative realms, civil servants' *professionalization* and *politicization* have been perceived as mutually exclusive processes. Bureaucrats' politicization—the “substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the[ir] selection, retention, promotion, rewards, and disciplining” (Peters & Pierre, 2004, p. 2)—would weaken their “technical superiority” (Weber, 1978, p. 973) and foster corruption (Dahlström et al., 2012), thus be detrimental to governance efficiency (Evans & Rauch, 1999). Yet, scholars have shown that politicization and professionalization can go hand-in-hand. Politicized appointments may enhance bureaucratic expertise (Krause et al., 2006), service-delivery (Grindle, 2012), and responsiveness to “short-term [political] pressures” (Moe, 1985, p. 152). Precisely, merit-driven recruitment meant to enhance bureaucrats' professionalization often encompasses politicization interstices stemming either from “sorting effects” within formalized processes (Duong, 2021; Gravier, 2008), or from recruitment's limited institutionalization (Sundell, 2014). Thus, bureaucrats' politicization and professionalization can be accommodated within recruitment and training institutions as for post-1976 China (Pieke, 2009; Andreas, 2009, p. 213–247).

In revolutionary contexts, loyalty-expertise or politicization-professionalization nexuses are often framed as zero-sum games. Rather than dilemmas, this article argues that these constitute *tensions* or *tradeoffs* regulated by civil service reforms. Precisely, we focus on the establishment, formatting, and reforms of recruitment and training institutions that regulate bureaucracies' loyalty, competency, and representativeness. We argue that these institutions' formalization does not prompt their depoliticization. Rather, politicization plays out within professionalization mechanisms.

The article adapts its theoretical framework from Hood and Lodge's (2006) “Public Service Bargain” (PSB), a conceptual tool designed to grasp tradeoffs between three features framing the relations intertwining political and bureaucratic elites, that are shaped by formal and informal arrangements, and cannot be maximized: *loyalty*, *expertise*, and *reward*. They can take varying forms. Loyalty may entail specific politicization (e.g., personalized loyalty) and depoliticization mechanisms (e.g., banned party membership), and be directed towards different political entities. Expertise is defined by its significance, and its form (e.g., from technical-cameral expertise to organizational or Mandarin-like moral competencies). Finally, reward ranges from psychic, material, to financial and professional retributions.

This article adapts the PSB's interactionist framework to a postrevolutionary state in which the issue of reward conflates with the "loyalty pact", and where the *notion* of "representativeness" is pivotal to regime legitimation. Successful revolutions share a discursive apparatus that seeks to replace an elitist bureaucratic class deprived of societal input, liable for the unaccountability and unresponsiveness of a hegemonic and centralized state. We here refine politico-administrative arrangements' components as *loyalty*, *competency*, and *representativeness*. By overlooking postrevolutionary states, the representative bureaucracy scholarship has failed to grasp that while "passive representation" initially involves that bureaucracies' sociological congruence with the society as a whole holds positive effects on policy-implementation and state legitimation (Mosher, 1968), revolutionary states construe a selective understanding of the "society" they claim to represent. Nonetheless, alike the representative bureaucracy literature on Western states, revolutionary regimes derive democratic credentials in claiming their states to be representative. Hence, though representativeness intersects with loyalty—in that lower-middle classes claimed to be represented within the state made up the bulk of the revolutionary movement—it constitutes a distinct PSB feature as it proved to be a core regime tenet.

We explore the conditions under which Iran's 1979 revolution generated three successive public service bargains layered over time. We probe into the mechanisms that frame bargains at their outset, yet unexplored by a PSB literature that has not engaged with postrevolutionary regimes.

3.2 | Case selection: Postrevolutionary Iran's diplomatic corps

This article examines the Islamic Republic of Iran, born out of the 1978–1979 revolution that led to the dismantling of political, institutional, and social structures of the Pahlavi regime (1925–1979). The revolution fundamentally sought to reshape the Pahlavi's elitist (Zonis, 1971) and centralized state bureaucracy to the benefit of lower-middle classes of all provinces (Ehsani, 2009). Iran's swift revolutionary sequence and international isolation—thus policymaking sovereignty—eases the isolation of variables that frame the emergence and reconfiguration of public service bargains.

Precisely, it studies the reconstruction of the diplomatic corps as a segment of the upper civil service. Diplomats constitute a relevant locus of analysis as they prove pivotal to the consolidation of the new regime internally and externally. First, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was a primary target of revolutionaries' ambition to reform—then purge—the bureaucracy (Djalili, 1989; Ramazani, 1989). While former diplomats embodied the image of an exclusive bureaucratic elite cut from lay society and staffed with Westernized educated upper classes predominantly raised in Tehran, the anti-imperialist repudiation of the Shāh's foreign policy—particularly, unprecedented ties with Washington after it instigated nationalist Prime Minister Mossadegh's 1953 overthrow—constituted a leading revolutionary creed for revolutionary clerics and radical student organizations. The ability to answer revolutionary demands proved key to state legitimation. Moreover, diplomats' policymaking did shape domestic stakes (i.e., security, economic opportunities). Second, the MFA was instrumental in stabilizing the regime externally. While purges had generated a competency vacuum, the new regime's international isolation and military aggression by the Iraqi-led coalition from September 1980 onwards made its survival depend upon the MFA's ability to conduct an efficient external action, responsive to political elites.

We ultimately wish to revalorize diplomatic elites as *loci* to examine state bureaucracies, a scholarly blindspot few have bridged (Haglund, 2015), especially in non-democratic setups (Ekman, 2013).

3.3 | Methodology

This research was conducted as part of a larger study of postrevolutionary Iran's foreign service. It first draws on archival work conducted in British National Archives (FCO 8/3660, 8/3661, 8/3662, 8/4100, 8/4671), and secondary sources (institutional and press documents, memoirs available in English or Persian) to examine pre-revolutionary diplomats and revolutionary transformations' intricacies. It then relies on qualitative interviews with current and pre-revolutionary Iranian diplomats, former students of the School of International Relations, and Iranian university professors involved in diplomatic training. Finally, we draw on the generation of a prosopographic database compiling data on senior diplomats' backgrounds and biographical trajectories ($N = 166$)⁸ to quantitatively assess the transformations of diplomats' social fabric, educational and career trajectories.

4 | THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD: LIMITED ACCOUNT FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF REGIME DURABILITY (1979–1982)

The revolution claimed to dismantle the former bureaucracy. As a powerful, centralized, and pervasive instrument of control and patronage (Ehsani, 2009), it aimed to enhance the Pahlavi regime, the Shāh's personal interests, the bureaucracy's power, and the bourgeoisie's capital accumulation. In the 1970s, the parallel emergence within the bureaucracy of a middle-class intelligentsia critical of patronage, and of "regime-oriented" petit-bourgeois technocrats, strengthened a wide opposition to the bureaucracy, notably from within (Bill, 1972; Farazmand, 1989). The MFA was no exception. While former diplomats symbolized Iran's educated elite group neither seen representative of nor responsive to society groups, foreign policy garnered revolutionaries' anti-imperialist and nationalist opposition (Djalili, 1989; Ramazani, 1989).

Like Russian and Cuban revolutions, the Iranian revolution unfolded in a two-phased sequence. As the new regime was yet to be formalized, civil servants were initially largely maintained to benefit from their monopoly of competencies. The disruption of revolutionary elite politics then triggered purges and new diplomats' appointments. Debureaucratization induced a first revolutionary bargain whereby loyalty took precedence over competency in a mutually exclusive fashion. While representativeness was fostered, it remained a secondary priority.

4.1 | The revolution: From short-lived maintenance of bureaucracy, to diplomatic purgesk

As Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Tehran on February 1, 1979, revolutionary elites were split between a clerical fringe rallying behind Khomeini and an educated lay elite whose political thought combined Islam and Marxism. The former aspired to substitute inherited institutions

with a system based on Islamic grounds and authority (*velāyat-e faqih*). The latter aimed to reform yet maintain state institutions and most bureaucrats, diplomats included. Because they held key positions in state institutions under Mehdi Bāzargān's interim government (February–November 1979), a bureaucratic status quo prevailed. Most diplomats—including heads of department—were maintained (Author interview, 03.12.2019). Iran's then Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs recalls:

The vision of revolutionaries is one thing, the reality is another. As I took office on February 14th, I gathered diplomats and said “there is a revolution, everything will change, we have to clear everything”. Two days later, I realized this was a stupid statement. I needed specialists. [...] The head of the personnel department brought me the files: I saw quality experts. A diplomat isn't trained overnight. It is believed to be interchangeable. No, diplomacy is an art, in which you must be trained. [...] In four days, I became the defender of the staff, in a revolutionary context that disliked the diplomat, suspected for his lifestyle. [...] I became their protector, saying “I have seen the files”. [...] I told them “it is crazy to think that this personnel belongs to the old regime, they are professionals”. (Author interview, 18.12.2018)

Limited purges were conducted, restricted to political nominees and alleged former members of the Shāh's intelligence services (SAVAK) (Author interview, 02.12.2019). He adds:

It was sufficient to see who had not passed the entry examination. We found 117 who seemed to have become diplomats at the request of SAVAK. It was agreed that purges should be limited to them. [...] This mass of civil servants was a servant of the state. (Author interview, 18.12.2018)

New ambassadors were appointed under the interim government to conduct a nationalist foreign policy promoting independence. Most held no diplomatic experience, which ensured impartiality vis-à-vis factionalized revolutionary elites. Yet, their socio-educative features did not significantly break with that of former diplomats: highly educated, they often held PhDs from foreign universities. Elite circulation was therefore quantitatively limited, and “superficial” in scope—i.e. most appointed diplomats shared sociological affinities with those they replaced.⁹ The tradeoff opposing “loyalty”, literally “engagement” (*ta'ahod*) to “expertise” (*takhasos*) framed as a dilemma can be traced back to the 1979 debate between Bāzargān and Ayatollah Beheshti—core architect of the *velāyat-e faqih*—, as the former asked: “Let's suppose that you wish to travel to Tehran. One driver knows the way like the back of his hand, but he is a sinner. Another driver is inexperienced, but pious and devoted. With which driver do you drive your family?”¹⁰

From November 4, 1979 onwards, the American Embassy's take-over by revolutionary militants deepened the polarization of the revolutionary movement in favor of clerical elites. This shift triggered purges of diplomatic personnel. Within embassies, while power struggles had crystallized between senior diplomats and young revolutionaries, the latter, backed by revolutionary clerics, incrementally took over as revolutionary politics tilted in favor of *velāyat-e faqih* proponents.

Elite circulation followed a “replacement” pattern, that is, rapid, broad (i.e., the majority of diplomats were purged) and profound change (i.e., replaced by agents with distinct social

characteristics), ensuring diplomats' subordination to political elites. Reshuffles leveled off as clerical elites strengthened their grasp on state power, as President Abolhassan Bani Sadr was dismissed by the Parliament in June 1981, former pediatrician Ali Akbar Velāyati was appointed Foreign Minister in August 1981, and Ali Khāmene'i was elected president in October 1981. While purges were consistent for MFA employees in Teheran, reshuffles followed a heterogeneous pace abroad, contingent upon embassies' size, strategic importance,¹¹ and regional location (e.g., in the Near East, diplomats were often purged from the revolutionary outset). By 1982, approximately 90% of senior MFA bureaucrats had been dismissed or had left their position, the remaining 10% being composed of former administrative staff then promoted to senior positions (Author interview 03.12.2019). This sequencing exemplifies how purging patterns are consequential of the interplay between moderate and radical revolutionary factions, settling in late revolutionary stages alongside regime consolidation and control over state power (Brinton, 1938).

While the whole Pahlavi bureaucracy experienced purges, they were the most pronounced within the MFA, and the Judiciary, whose bureaucracies were primary targets of Iran's social revolution, as they embodied Iran's former social elite. The MFA was also comparatively more thoroughly purged because it was not balanced by a parallel revolutionary organization. The war had indeed prompted the establishment of revolutionary organizations to rebuild service-provision capacities while bypassing inherited state organizations, which resulted in a division of labor with ministries on domains such as health, agricultural or housing policies, and were staffed with revolutionary militants (Farazmand, 1989; Harris, 2017). When such state fragmentation occurred, ministries could afford lower purges without jeopardizing transformative policy demands.

4.2 | First revolutionary diplomats: Missing expertise, lacking representativeness

The revolution claimed to be “egalitarian and lower-middle-class oriented” (Farazmand, 1989, p. 183), aiming to favor the interests of the “mostazafin” (*deprived*), excluded from the former state's social and economic policies. As purges ensued, revolutionary militant credentials—evidencing political loyalty—provided the basis for new diplomats' selection and promotion. Peters (1995) indeed showed how in transitional periods, competency is construed to be inversely proportional to loyalty (p. 132). Politicization was pursued at the expense of diplomatic competencies, the monopoly of which being detained by former diplomats. Consequently, new diplomats were largely deprived of academic qualification and relevant professional (administrative, linguistic) skills (Author interviews, 10.08.2019, 23.09.2019). As in the Cuban, Chinese, and Russian revolutionary reworkings of regime-state relations, initial bureaucratic purges in Iran sought to foster regime consolidation by enhancing political control over the state. This mechanism was particularly prevalent as the regime was still unstabilized and institutional informality, power volatility, as well as elite conflict prevailed.

The appointment of *pāksāzi* (“forged-of-purity”) diplomats under political patronage anchored their subordination to political demands. While curbing counter-revolutionary threats within the state, they filled the “human vacuum” purges had spurred. Yet, their legitimacy was soon threatened by weak skills and reliance on patronage for recruitment. Following months of conflict within the London embassy opposing young revolutionary militants and the ambassador, the

first “revolutionary ambassador” Forough-Rouz was appointed in March 1981 with his deputy, Mobarhani, aged 24, who had spawned dissidence and precipitated the former ambassador's exiting. British diplomats described him as “a typical bearded and somewhat scruffy student in the usual revolutionary garb, [...] lack[ing] professional competencies” (FCO 8/4100).

Diplomats' politicization was embedded in both trajectories (e.g., members of student revolutionary movements, Islamic networks abroad) and extra-legal patronage recruitment, that involved loyalty to revolutionary clerics led by Khomeini's charismatic authority. In contrast to pre-revolutionary diplomatic appointments that hinged upon *holding* elite status, entering the MFA during the revolutionary period meant *acquiring* elite status, which not only was not an a priori condition to enter the MFA, but an obstacle.

Beyond poor competency, an unwanted effect of loyalty-driven appointments were the limits to the congruence of diplomats' characteristics with revolutionary expectations regarding the bureaucracy's social composition. From 1979 to 1980 onwards, while diplomats gradually indeed met demands of *plebeianization* (i.e., coming from lower-middle classes), diplomats' *provincialization* was limited, as Tehran proved a linchpin for politicized recruitment.¹² Indeed, one's ability to enter the MFA first derived from militancy in Tehran (e.g., American embassy takeover) or abroad (e.g., against Iranian diplomatic representations) where Iranian students mostly came from Tehran, due to its concentration of universities and scholarships. Second, patronage opportunities emerged in big cities, Tehran in particular, via both networks of clerical families as well as networks tying traditional middle-class *bazāri* families with revolutionary clerics, negotiating positions for relatives against political support. In 1979–1982, as regime-state relations were not embedded into stabilized institutions, but relied upon informal mechanisms, a “revolutionary PSB” crystallized: to assert regime control over the state, it combined an emphasis on diplomats' loyalty with weak competency and limited representativeness (Figure 1).

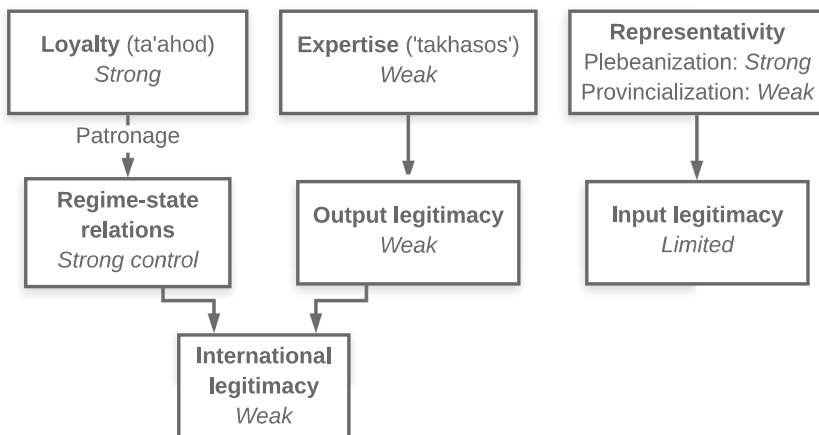


FIGURE 1 Regime-diplomats arrangements and Ministry of Foreign Affairs legitimization: non-institutional revolutionary paradigm (1979–1982)

5 | THE STABILIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE BARGAINS AFTER REVOLUTIONS: BUILDING INSTITUTIONS, ENHANCING PROFESSIONALIZATION (1982–)

5.1 | Stabilization of the regime, shifting priorities

5.1.1 | Providing the institutional architecture for long-term regime legitimation

Revolutionary clerics' take-over of the revolution in November 1979 and bureaucracies' politicization had, by 1982, stabilized power distribution mechanisms, hence a regime. Priorities mutated towards substituting unformalized politico-bureaucratic arrangements with formalized and depersonalized rule. While purges and loyalty-driven appointments had enhanced short-term regime stabilization via ensuring regime-state cohesion, this revolutionary bargain shortly proved incapable of fostering long-term regime legitimation. As Iran endured a sustained conflict against Iraq on its territory together with diplomatic and commercial seclusion, regime survival hinged upon designing an external action that answered two necessities. Domestically, to ensure welfare provision, infrastructural and economic development. Internationally, to be recognized as a sovereign actor, enhance security and stability via diplomatic and trade deals—firstly, involving armament purchases. To this end, the regime required a diplomatic corps both well-functioning and breaking with the *image* of unilateral revolutionary diplomacy. Just as the Bolsheviks catalyzed Brest-Litovsk negotiations to safeguard peace and regime durability, or Chicherin's cooperation at the 1922 Genoa Conference (Moore, 1950, pp. 204–205), the longevity of Iran's young revolutionary regime was contingent upon its ability to circumstantially resocialize into “business as usual”.

Thus, the postrevolutionary sequence called for an adjustment of politico-bureaucratic bargains, that is, valorizing diplomats' professionalization (*output legitimacy*) and representativeness (*input legitimacy*) without thwarting their loyalty to the new order. This rebalancing relied on the formalization of recruitment and training institutions, the formatting of which accommodated non-exclusive mechanisms—politicization, professionalization, representativeness—instrumental to long-term regime legitimation.

5.1.2 | Building ad hoc institutions of diplomatic training

While the revolution had established the supremacy of new diplomats' loyalty over expertise, many have traced the revived emphasis on expertise to the end of the Iran-Iraq war (1988), Khomeini's death (1989), and Hāshemi Rafsanjāni's presidential election (1989), who attempted a foreign policy shift to reintegrate Iran in the concert of nations (Mozaffari, 1999; Rakel, 2009). Rafsanjāni established a technocratic government and affirmed that “[revolutionary] slogans are holy, but should not [...] create obstacles to reconstruction. [...] [Khomeini's] guidance was to relegate the task of reconstruction to skilled experts without fear of the religiously narrow-minded and pseudo-revolutionaries” (in Moslem, 2002, p. 147). However, while professionalization mechanisms were fully institutionalized in the 1990s, the revalorization of expertise took root from 1982. The combination of regime stabilization and the “[inability] to find competent substitutes among revolutionaries” (Montazeri, 1984), owing to purges and a significant brain drain, led policy entrepreneurs to instigate reforms to professionalize diplomats. Launched in

September 1980, the war further incentivized the need to revalorize competency in the MFA, notably because it cemented loyalty behind the regime hence lessened the necessity to merely emphasize politicization.

Yet, postrevolutionary lack of professionalization structures dates from May 1980, as the “cultural revolution” ambitioned to merge public universities with theological seminaries. Historical *loci* of student politicization and Left-wing opposition, universities were closed and professors purged. As they reopened in 1983, public universities still garnered regime distrust, had to obey by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution regulations, and because they became vehicles of the democratization of higher education, faced demographic stress resulting in a weakened educational quality. Consequently, enhancing bureaucrats’ “Weberianness” required to establish ad hoc training bodies. In 1982, three training institutions with organizational autonomy were established: the Emām Sādegh university, initially training most of the administrative elite, established by senior revolutionary clerics in the former premises of Harvard University’s Tehran branch; the university of Judicial Sciences, under the authority of the Ministry of Justice; the School of International Relations (SIR) (*dāneshkade-ye ravābet-e beinalmellal*) under MFA tutelage, originally named the Institute for Superior Training in International Relations. Originally offering a 4-year training, SIR was designed to address human resources “loop-holes” (*kambūd*) in the MFA in training a new diplomatic personnel both loyal (*mota’ahod*) and devote (*maktabi, mo’men*), as well as competent (*metekhašos, māher*) (Dehshiri, 2020). Hence, up to 1992, graduates were promoted diplomats ipso facto. To this day, SIR claims to have trained 70% of the diplomatic corps (Sajjadpour, 2019), which includes current foreign minister Hossain Amir-Abdollahian.

5.2 | The School of International Relations: Institutionalizing regime-state arrangements

5.2.1 | Professionalizing the diplomatic elite, normalizing its international image

While Halliday (1999) showed that “revolutionaries doubt the need at all for diplomacy in the sense of regular inter-state relations” (p. 95), and in the face of deficiency (*nāresāii*) in implementing foreign policy, the regime soon recognized that its stability hinged upon the ability to train future diplomats, as well as those who had entered the MFA before 1982 without qualification (Author interviews, 10.08.2019, 23.09.2019; Dehshiri, 2020, pp. 118–122).

As a centralized institution, SIR crafted diplomats’ professionalization, which provided ground for effective international cooperation, feeding regime enhancement. SIR’s autonomy was pivotal to enhance diplomatic competencies, in allowing to circumvent cultural revolution regulations and maintain pre-revolutionary features. First, to overcome Iran’s defective university system in the 1980s, most SIR professors possessed foreign qualification (Europe, America).¹³ Throughout SIR’s first 25 years, 22 years saw it deans holding PhDs from the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands. Though abated, this trend has not been fully reversed: in 2019, less than 25% of professors had conducted their PhD in Iran. Second, curricula widely mirrored transnational norms of diplomatic training—emphasizing international law, economics, protocol, foreign languages—officially to cope with global transformations, that were further formalized in 1987 with the creation of three separate bachelor programs in international organizations,

foreign economic relations, and consular law (Dehshiri, 2020, p. 144). By doing so, it provided an epistemological continuity with pre-revolutionary Iran's legalist political science tradition.

As a “normalized” training institution, SIR allowed a distancing from the *image* of a revolutionary diplomacy conducted by “apostles of the revolution” (Khāmeni, in Ramazani, 1986, pp. 19–20). Since the 1994 development plan¹⁴ and in the 2000s increasingly, international legitimacy both hinged on—and generated—foreign partnerships—with East Asian and European institutions, notably —, to “present the Islamic Republic in a positive light internationally” (Dehshiri, 2020, p. 124).

SIR presented itself like European and American universities, open minded [...]. Courses would never be doctrinal [...], [emphasizing] how the Republic's main values were not Islamic but embedded in universal concepts. [...] The cafeteria had screens showing CNN news. It felt strange, CNN cannot be accessed in Iran (Author interview, 09.09.2019a).

5.2.2 | Professionalizing without challenging loyalty: Institutionalizing diplomatic recruitment and training

There was a strong belief within the MFA that [SIR was founded] to bring unqualified people who could not get a degree within Iranian diplomacy (Author interview, 10.08.2019).

Formalized institutions allowed to accommodate mechanisms that proved mutually exclusive in a deregulated revolutionary setup. After 1982, the formalization of instruments framing diplomats' recruitment, training, and careers, fed diplomats' professionalization while simultaneously sustaining politicization mechanisms to ensure diplomats' loyalty and prevent their autonomization.

Recruitment first allowed politicization interstices to thrive and shape selection. Entering SIR combines one's ranking at the national university entrance exam,¹⁵ and interviews at SIR. The exam allowed for political filters, blending quotas allocated to the regime's social backbone (families of war veterans or “martyrs”, Revolutionary Guards, *bassij* militia members), and investigations into candidates' backgrounds¹⁶ as “control of moral aptitudes” (Rafsanjāni, 1982). Interviews scrutinized support for revolutionary and religious values, as well as participation in the war, and probed non-involvement in domestic politics. Politicization took the form of partisan depoliticization, as the prohibited membership to political organizations. As such, “the oral exam tests *ta'ahod* [loyalty], while the written exam tests *takhaşos* [competency]” (Author interview, 07.10.2019).

Politicization unfolds upstream but also downstream of recruitment. SIR proves a locus of governmentality, where a conformist outbidding rationale lies in students' ability to display expected behavioral norms (e.g., rhetoric, religious, or clothing identities, attendance to events organized by the school's *bassij*). It became salient after 1992 recruitment reforms, as graduates did not anymore join the MFA automatically.

5.2.3 | Where input legitimation meets politicization: Institutionalizing diplomats' representativeness

Prior to regime stabilization, patronage arrangements tying revolutionary diplomats to political elites showed limited consistency with revolutionary demands regarding diplomats' representativeness. Prosopographic data show how, though many originated in lower-middle classes—*plebeianization*—, recruitment's informality limited diplomats' *provincialization*. Institutionalizing recruitment instruments thus allowed to diversify diplomats' provincial origins, enhancing the *image* of an inclusive postrevolutionary state. While many diplomats appointed before the mid-1980s were born in Tehran, from 1987—as SIR's first graduates became diplomats—to 1991, 18% of graduates came from mid-sized cities, and 33% from small cities or rural areas (Graph 2).¹⁷ Diplomats corroborate: “Right after the revolution, diplomats came from Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz, Yazd [...], definitely not from Sistan-Baluchestan [...]. As time passed, they came from other cities” (Author interview, 24.12.2019). “Since 1982, diplomats come from small cities, villages. Many have regional accents” (Author interview, 06.10.2019). Moreover, *provincialization* furthered *plebeianization*.

I shared a room with two students from the Caspian. [...] The first came from a rural area, his dad was a farmer. His house was small, few rooms, no second floor, a little garden, a car, no television, socially conservative. [...] The second was from the middle-class, from Gorgān suburbs. [...] The ground floor was the garage, the first floor the reception and kitchen, then small sleeping rooms. They had a second-hand car, a TV (Author interview, 09.09.2019b).

Most came from small cities. One was from a rather poor background. His dad had fought the war, lost his leg. [...] Two others came from a rural area near Mashhad. Dads were farmers, conservative. For many, it was their first time in Tehran. [...] Despite exceptions, most came from blue-collar families (Author interview, 01.08.2019).

There was a sharp contrast between [SIR students] and guys from North Tehran [Author's note: upper-class neighborhoods where SIR is located]. You could see it from their clothes (Author interview, 09.09.2019a).

Hence, diplomats' professionalization did not run counter to loyalty and representativeness. Moreover, shaping diplomatic careers' attractivity became an indirect politicization instrument that shaped the sociological reality of recruitment, as it generated a dialectical funnel of incitation and deterrence for candidates. Historically, bureaucratic careers were monopolized by upper classes and proved a strong marker of social status. In the 1960–1970s, as the prestige of private sector careers grew, civil service jobs—including the elitist diplomatic apparatus—opened to an emerging educated middle-class that denounced nepotism and pushed to democratize recruitment (Bill, 1972; Author interviews, 23.09.2019, 03.12.2019). The revolution heightened the decline of the civil service as a social marker. Consequently, while postrevolutionary new affluent classes invested private sector careers by means of socio-economic capital and networks, bureaucratic careers became *loci* of upward social mobility for lower-middle classes, whose access to education had enhanced, yet whose possibilities for professional advancement were restricted by weak personal connections. Because lower-middle classes formed the revolution's

demographic backbone, the MFA's ability to offer professional stability, social advancement and geographic mobility via engineering retributions (e.g., SIR covers tuitions and North Tehran's deterrent housing costs) maximized candidates' loyalty profiles a priori and forged regime-state ties a posteriori. The plebeianization-provincialization nexus therefore did not merely apply to the public sector at large (Ehsani, p. 45–48) but also for the upper bureaucracy.

Thus, the formalization of recruitment and training institutions rebalanced a loyalty-driven politico-administrative bargain towards competency and provincialism, while institutionalizing politicization mechanisms. Beyond short-term revolutionary priorities, ad hoc institutions appeared conducive to accommodate loyalty, competency, and representativeness in non-exclusive tradeoffs that enhanced regime stabilization by building efficient policy-implementation capacities and international legitimacy (Figure 2).

6 | INSTITUTIONALIZING A PUBLIC SERVICE BARGAIN (1992-)

6.1 | Institutionalizing recruitment, institutionalizing professionalization

In 1992, as SIR achieved to re-staff the MFA with generalist diplomats, recruitment was reformed. SIR graduates did not anymore enter the MFA ipso facto. A centralized diplomatic exam was opened to public university graduates. This followed demands for specialization, that elite social science universities (Tehran University's Department of Law and Political Science, Shahid Beheshti University, Allāmeḥ Tabātabā'i University) aimed to fill, claiming a historical prestige the cultural revolution had failed to dismantle. As diplomatic training became a *site of struggle* between SIR and the ministry of science, research and technology, prestigious public universities that are regulated by the latter laid the foundation for a pluralization of diplomatic training institutions. While SIR is threatened since a 2005 parliamentary decision to close ministerial training bodies, its resilience involved sharpening its ability to answer multilateral and global transformations via fostering international partnerships, emphasizing foreign languages and pioneer training on cyber, scientific, or public diplomacy (Dehshiri, 2020).

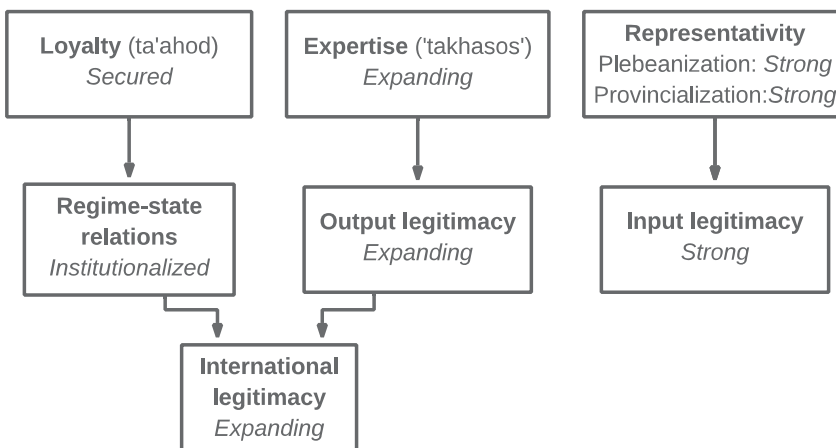


FIGURE 2 Regime-diplomats arrangements and Ministry of Foreign Affairs legitimacy: postrevolutionary institutionalized paradigm

SIR sought students with best ranks, between 1st and 100th at the national university exam. They called me. Like students with excellent rankings, I declined, went to Tehran University (Author interview, 06.10.2019).

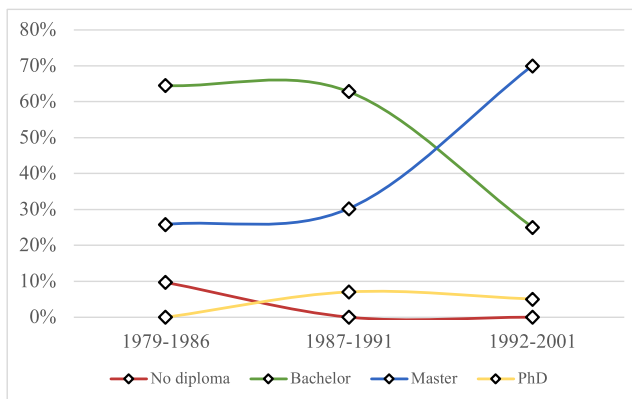
While SIR had filled the competency vacuum by providing consistent diplomatic training, postrevolutionary stabilization enhanced professionalization by furthering specialization and university qualifications. Between 1987–1991 and 1992–2001 periods, the proportion of senior diplomats holding a Master when joining the MFA rose from 30% to 70% (Graph 1). This went alongside an increase in the average age of entry, moving from 25.6 (1979–1986) to 30.6 years old (1992–2001).¹⁸ Moreover, the gradual institutionalization of arrangements framing diplomatic recruitment, training and careers, reflects the standardization of promotion schemes from the early 1990s onwards (Table 2).

Importantly, although this incremental revalorization of competency may trigger generational tensions, resulting in a dual elite (Konrád & Szelényi, 1979; Pieke, 2009), administrative elite cohesion was upheld as 45% of senior diplomats have pursued university degrees—Masters but especially PhDs—after joining the MFA. This further enhanced professionalization (see Table 1).

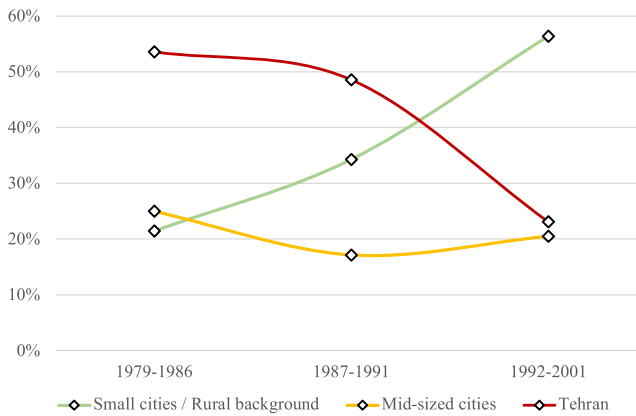
Critically, incentives were institutionalized to mitigate disparities. First, pursuing a PhD during the career does not lengthen the period before which a diplomat reaches the position of ambassador or consul by contrast with Master holders (19 years, respectively) ($N = 96$). Crucially, in-career PhDs enhances diplomats' propensity to be appointed head of MFA Directorates-General (45%, vs. 34% for MA holders, 31% for BA holders, and 20% for diplomats who held a PhD at entry level) ($N = 136$).¹⁹

6.2 | Institutionalizing politicization: The building of institutional identity

Initially promoted under patronage as purges ensued, first revolutionary diplomats displayed personal loyalty towards revolutionary clerics. As loyalty patterns were embedded into formalized institutions, they thereafter morphed to “serial loyalty” (Hood & Lodge, 2006, p. 117) towards



GRAPH 1 University qualification at entry level, by year of entry in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ($N = 114$)



GRAPH 2 Senior diplomats' place of birth, by year of entry in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs ($N = 102$)

TABLE 1 Senior diplomats' university qualification

	Upon entry into the MFA ($N = 129$) (%)	Upon becoming ambassador/consul ($N = 149$) (%)
No diploma	2.3	0
Bachelor	44.7	10.7
Master	40.2	56.4
Ph.D.	12.9	32.9

Abbreviation: MFA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

the MFA's *esprit de corps*. This was notably made possible as the MFA's political head overlapped with ministerial ethos, the Foreign Minister having in most cases been a career diplomat.²⁰ By contrast to most upper bureaucratic domains in Iran whereby appointments are governed by personal loyalty, the vast majority of ambassadors or consuls are career diplomats. Career trajectories display generalist patterns of circulation, both across foreign regions and MFA thematic departments—except specific geographical areas and policy domains, unexamined here. Moreover, promotion patterns were increasingly standardized in 1987–1990, further in 1991–2001 (Table 2). Serial loyalty reflected a depersonalization of power within the MFA.

Yet, diplomats' loyalty remained expected to lie with the political order (*nezām*) embodied by the Supreme Leader and revolutionary values (anti-Imperialism, sovereignty), recalling syncretic loyalties in the Chinese diplomatic corps, whereby the MFA managed recruitment while the party forged dependency ties (Ekman, 2013). This accounts for diplomats' politicization despite depoliticization from domestic politics.

6.3 | Institutionalizing provincialization: Embedding revolutionary expectations

While unformalized recruitment mechanisms limited first revolutionary diplomats' provincialization, the formalization of recruitment and training under the MFA after 1982 allowed to incorporate diplomats born in small cities and rural areas. As SIR was gradually dispossessed of its training monopoly, the pluralization of training institutions and reforms towards centralized

TABLE 2 Variance, interval separating recruitment and promotion at a given position, by year of entry in the MFA, indicator of the standardization of promotion patterns ($N = 138$)

	1979–1986	1987–1991	1992–2001
Chief of Bureau ($N = 74$)	42.1	36.5	21.8
Ambassador/Consul ($N = 119$)	85.0	59.1	31.5
Vice-Head of Directorate-General ($N = 33$)	100.1	49.4	32.3
Head of Directorate-General ($N = 46$)	92.4	55.0	14.3

Abbreviation: MFA, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

TABLE 3 Senior diplomats' place of birth, by university background ($N = 89$)²¹

Place of birth	University background	SIR ($N = 51$) (%)	All public and private universities ($N = 78$) (%)	Elite public universities ($N = 41$) (%)
Small city/rural background		33	41	49
Mid-/large-sized city		18	22	24
Tehran		49	37	27

Abbreviation: SIR, School of International Relations.

recruitment under the Ministry of Higher Education fostered provincialization (Author interview, 24.12.2019). In the 1990s, senior diplomats from small cities or rural background rose to 56% (Graph 2). Although elite universities are Tehran-based, scrutinizing geographical origins in relation to university backgrounds confirms that prestigious universities' increased leverage over diplomatic training nonetheless enhanced provincialization (Table 3).

This was facilitated by the gradual institutionalization of the university entrance exam. Increased merit-driven access to elite universities via a centralized exam and inclusive educational policies enabled to institutionalize tradeoffs in which professionalization and representativeness (both its social and geographical components) can be accommodated, embedded into stabilized institutions. This nurtured the regime's legitimizing discursive apparatus highlighting the representativeness of Iran's postrevolutionary upper state bureaucracy, congruent with revolutionary demands.

7 | CONCLUSIONS: INSTITUTIONALIZING REVOLUTIONS BY DESIGNING STABLE REGIME-BUREAUCRACY ARRANGEMENTS

Following President Ahmadinejad's contested 2009 re-election, a series of diplomats defected (Green Embassy Campaign, 2010) yet failed to precipitate a cascade of defections. This ability to withstand crises illustrates the stability of politico-bureaucratic arrangements framing Iran's postrevolutionary diplomatic corps, and of which a three-phased institutionalization process was examined. While the revolution entailed former diplomats' purges—deemed unrepresentative of society yet monopolizing skills—the appointment of under-qualified loyalists soon incentivized the new regime to maximize tradeoffs between three components pivotal for regime stabilization—competency, loyalty, representativeness—, mutually exclusive in a debureaucratized revolutionary setup. We argued that the regime's ability to accommodate these features required to design instruments to recruit, train, and frame diplomatic careers, and reform them

over time. Critically, although diplomats do not entertain direct contact with citizens, their ability to “represent” the “people”—socially and geographically—strengthens state-society relations.

First, the formalization of the School of International Relations and recruitment enhanced diplomats’ professionalization while embedding their politicization and representativeness’ bedrock into institutions that regulate distinct sources of legitimation (output, input, and international legitimacies). Bureaucratic elites combine these distinct elements, as in post-1976 China (Andreas, 2009, p. 213–247; Pieke, 2009) without resorting to a dual elite as in 1949–1968 China (Andreas, 2009, p. 61–83) or post-1956 Hungary (Konrád & Szelényi, 1979). Second, regime stabilization (i.e., the end of the Iran-Iraq war, restaffed bureaucracies, channeling of elite conflict within a pluralist institutional setup) allowed the state to move from building institutions to institutionalizing arrangements.

By over-emphasizing revolutions as *critical junctures* and neglecting that few infinite loops exist, the revolution scholarship often overlooked postrevolutionary developments whereby regime-state arrangements are carved, reformed, and stabilized in formatting institutions that reduce uncertainty, moving from “utter underdetermination into patterned and somewhat predictable lines of opportunity, thought, and action” (Clemens & Lu, 2020, pp. 438–439). Yet, the paper does not claim to neglect revolutionary politics. Conversely, it allows to bridge two temporalities governed by distinct political elite preferences. First, the revolutionary sequence, driven by revolutionaries’ seizure of state power. Second, the postrevolutionary sequence, aiming to provide robust and adaptive institutional foundations for stable politico-administrative relations. Like party reforms in Deng Xiaoping’s China, institutions regulate tensions between loyalty, expertise, and representativeness, displaying a “modernized exterior” while embedding politicization in “normal bureaucratic practices”, “to resolve the ago-old Maoist [...] tension between expertise and ideological merit” (Pieke, 2009, pp. 141, 161–163).

Chiefly, stabilizing regime-state relations formalizes bureaucrats’ dependence (e.g., via the design and provision of state jobs), enhancing regimes without unwavering political loyalty, through “*quid-pro-quo* exchange[s]” (Slater & Fenner, 2011, p. 23). While crises may push bureaucrats to bite the hand that feeds them, adaptable institutions allow political elites to exploit institutional resources to adapt bargains without questioning its core arrangements.

Postrevolutionary states’ legitimation lies in an ability to design a two-sided relationship with the “revolution”, both a *juncture*, and an *idea*. While postrevolutionary states must move past revolutionary structures’ short-termism and embed bureaucracies into institutionalized arrangements, they must nonetheless institutionalize the revolution’s normative apparatus; they should *reform* the former, while continuously *reenact* the latter. Drawing this distinction allows to bridge the polarized debate on the Islamic Republic’s foreign policy as being either “revolutionary” (Terhalle, 2009) or “Thermidorian” (Adelkhah et al., 1993; Mozaffari, 1999).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank both Philippe Bezès (CEE-Sciences Po, CNRS) for his feedbacks and for having supervised with great attention the research from which this article stems, as well as the editors and three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this article.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

This data is only available upon request, as it contains personal and sensitive data about civil servants, though anonymized. Access to data is also restricted as it is part of an ongoing PhD research project.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ We define a *regime* as formal and informal arrangements that constitute the modalities of access to, exercise of, and distribution of power within the state.
- ² For an extensive literature review, see Beck (2020).
- ³ Following Stinchcombe (1999), we define *revolution* “the rapid and erratic change of relative power and the uncertainty of powers” (p. 54), aligning with a structuralist definition of *revolution* as the overhaul of political, economic, cultural, and social structures, entailing the state capture.
- ⁴ Dar ol-Fonūn was established in 1851, followed by the School of Political Science in 1899.
- ⁵ Building on the neo-institutionalist scholarship, we define an *institution* as a set of norms and rules embedded in an organizational structure. Its formalization occurs via a process of *institutionalization*.
- ⁶ Especially when former states held weak private sectors, as pre-revolutionary Iran.
- ⁷ Our narrow definition of “revolutions” enables to generalize because it sets aside revolutions that did not induce a thorough overhaul of state power, like most unrests leading to postcolonial independences (Tunisia, British India, postcolonial West Africa), and secessions (Bangladesh, Kosovo).
- ⁸ All have been ambassador or consul.
- ⁹ For a theorization on elite circulation patterns, see Higley and Pakulski (1999).
- ¹⁰ Debate organized by the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (1979, exact date unknown).
- ¹¹ While embassies in London, Rome and The Hague underwent purges from November 1979 (FCO, 8/3660), reshuffles occurred from the mid-1980 in Berlin (Terhalle, 2009, p. 562) and December 1980 in Stockholm (Rakel, 2009, p. 149).
- ¹² We borrow the terms “plebeianization” and “provincialization” from Dullin's (2003) work on the Soviet diplomatic corps after 1930s purges.
- ¹³ Emām Sādegh University's autonomy equally enabled to hire foreign professors and others dismissed from public universities.
- ¹⁴ See article 92.
- ¹⁵ Between 1983 and 1987, batches were recruited through an ad hoc exam (Dehshiri, 2020, p. 146).
- ¹⁶ In 2017, 5% and 25% quotas persist, often accompanied by lowered tuitions. They formerly rose to 40%.
- ¹⁷ We resorted to birth places to categorize geographical origins. Mid-sized cities are those of over 500,000 inhabitants in the 1986 census (Mashhad, Esfahān, Tabriz, Shirāz, Ahvāz, Kermanshāh, Qom). Though place of birth may hide subsequent migrations to Tehran, “provincialization” demands referred to provincial origins.
- ¹⁸ Our data cover 1979–2001. While no diplomat from SIR was recruited in the MFA in 2002–2005 due to significant recruitment in the 1990s, data consistency of the sample of upper diplomats recruited after 2001 is biased towards those who experienced swifter promotions.
- ¹⁹ Political nominees are excluded from the sample, identified as those who became ambassador/consul less than 3 years after joining the MFA.
- ²⁰ Yet, this unsurprisingly does not prevent Foreign Ministers' factional orientations to shape nominations.
- ²¹ One diplomat may hold degrees from different university categories. Those merely holding degrees either from foreign universities ($N = 2$) and Emām Sādegh ($N = 4$) are excluded from the sample.

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How to cite this article: Beaud, G. (2023). Negotiating public service bargains in postrevolutionary times: The case of Iran's diplomatic corps. *Governance*, 36(3), 909–931. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12712>