



## THE POSITION OF THE SUPREME LEADER AND HIS POWERS IN IRAN'S SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

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**Annotation:** *The article analyzes the constitutional status, powers, and role of the Supreme Leader institution in the state governance of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Supreme Leader institution has been studied as the highest-ranking central governing body in terms of its powers. Special emphasis is placed on the role of this institution in ensuring the stability of the country within Iran's political system.*

**Keywords:** *Iran, Supreme Leader, "Velayat-e Faqih," Ruhollah Khomeini, theocratic governance, constitutional powers, Shia doctrine, "Khums," state governance.*

The Islamic Revolution carried out in Iran in 1979 fundamentally changed the structure of the state. As a result, a unique theocratic governance system was established in the country. While other Muslim states attempted to integrate secular principles of governance with Islamic doctrines, Iran successfully implemented a theocratic governance model.

In the post-Islamic Revolution period, there were intense debates regarding the structure of state power in the newly proclaimed Islamic Republic of Iran. The legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was confirmed by a nationwide referendum held on April 1, 1979. The peculiarity of the situation lies in the fact that the Supreme Leader's leadership in state governance was legitimized through the religious-political doctrine of the Shia school of thought.

The constitutional formalization of the new state system was completed in December 1979 with the adoption of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The central element of power legitimization was the "Velayat-e Faqih"<sup>6</sup> concept, developed by Ruhollah Khomeini. According to this concept, supreme authority in the state should belong to the most prominent faqih, as this ensures the integration of modern forms of governance with Shia political traditions.

The main institutional innovation introduced by the "Velayat-e Faqih" principle was the establishment of the position of the Supreme Leader, who holds the highest authority within Iran's state hierarchy. The primary debates during the process of incorporating this institution into the constitution were not about the legitimacy of the theocratic

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<sup>6</sup> Meaning "Administration of Jurists." During his time in the early 1970s in the Iraqi city of Najaf, Ruhollah Khomeini developed the basic concept of Islamic government in his book "The Rule of the Jurists: The Rule of Islam." This theoretical development formed the basis of the state structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran.





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governance principle but rather about defining the scope of the Supreme Leader's powers.

The constitutionally established powers of the Supreme Leader are characterized by their broad scope. In this system, the functions of the religious leader are combined with authorities that influence all branches of power—legislative, executive, and judicial. Since its establishment in 1989, Iran's institutional architecture has undergone numerous structural changes. Its personnel composition is determined by the decision of the Supreme Leader of Iran. The first category includes six representatives of the Supreme National Security Council, the heads of the three branches of government, a representative from the relevant parliamentary committees, ministers, and the Secretary of the Security Council. The second group is directly appointed by the Supreme Leader.

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran grants the Supreme Leader broad powers in the field of state governance. According to Article 110<sup>7</sup> of the Constitution, the Supreme Leader's powers encompass crucial aspects of both internal and foreign policy. The Supreme Leader determines the country's internal and external political direction, consults with the key political institutions of the state, oversees the implementation of general political strategy, and has the authority to initiate a referendum.

In the military field, the Supreme Leader is the highest commander of the armed forces, making decisions on matters of war and peace and declaring military mobilization. Additionally, he appoints the senior military command, including the leaders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Supreme Leader consolidates power entirely in his hands by changing key state institutions, such as appointing members of the Supervisory Council, the head of the Supreme Court, the prosecutor general, and the head of the state broadcasting corporation. He also confirms the elected president in office and has the authority to remove them under certain conditions.

The institutional structure of power under the Supreme Leader includes a network that extends from the State Supervisory Council to the heads of provinces. The Supreme Leader exercises his authority through issuing fatwas, government decisions, and procedural rulings. This system of state governance, which was formed in 1979, has maintained its position despite external pressures and threats (the Iran-Iraq war, social unrest, separatist movements, and sanctions). Its effectiveness lies in the integration of theocratic, republican, and democratic elements, which preserve the role of the clergy in governance while creating a system of checks and balances.

In the 1989 amendments to the Iranian Constitution, the issue of the Supreme Leader's (Ruhollah Khomeini's) successor was resolved not through direct popular voting, but by establishing a selection process through the Assembly of Experts. According to this new

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<sup>7</sup>قانون اساسی جمهوری اسلامی ایران.

(The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Article 110) [http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/content/iran\\_constitution](http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/content/iran_constitution)





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arrangement, the Assembly of Experts elected Ali Khamenei<sup>8</sup>, recognized as a religious and political figure, as the Supreme Leader the day after Khomeini's death. In 1994, after the death of Ayatollah Mohsen Araki, Khamenei's position as Supreme Leader was solidified. A key indication of this was his direct support for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidential candidacy, after which Khamenei began to openly intervene in political affairs.

For the first time in Iran's recent history, calls against the Supreme Leader were openly heard in 2018. This directly indicates that profound changes are occurring in the consciousness of Iranian society. During a demonstration near Tehran University campus, slogans such as "Death to Khamenei and the Basij!" and "Down with Velayat-e Faqih!" were chanted<sup>9</sup>. The significance of the institution of the Supreme Leader in the power system is also linked to its control over several financial flows. This includes not only the revenues of Islamic endowments and charitable foundations but also "Islamic taxes." The "Islamic taxes" are not part of the mandatory state tax system, but the majority of the Shia population voluntarily pays a tax—"Khums"—for charitable purposes. This tax, which constitutes 20 percent of annual income, is typically paid as an imam's share. Its total amount reaches several billion dollars, strengthening the Supreme Leader's economic power in addition to his religious and political authority.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that the institutional architecture of the Islamic Republic of Iran represents a unique development model that incorporates both theocratic and republican elements of governance. The central element of this system is the institution of the Supreme Leader, which holds absolute powers in the realm of state governance. The effectiveness of this state model is ensured by its stability in the face of internal and external risks and threats. The goal of the Shia clerical elite was to establish a new model of state governance based on Islamic principles in Iran. For this reason, the leadership functions of the clergy were expanded within the state political system. The constitutional reforms of 1989 optimized the system of state governance by abolishing the position of prime minister and changing the qualification requirements for the Supreme Leader.

The institution of the Supreme Leader controls the economic foundations of the government, including financial flows, Islamic taxes, and the revenues of endowments. The system of voluntary contributions under the clergy's control—"Khums"—provides significant financial independence to the theocratic institutions. In this context, the economic bloc of power holds considerable political influence over all state governance institutions in Iran.

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<sup>8</sup> Supreme Leader of Iran 1979 – 1989 yy.

<sup>9</sup> Filin N.A. The Unsuccessful Revolution of the Color of Islam. Reasons for the rise and decline of the Green Movement in Iran. M.: RDGU, Lenand. 2014.P. 182. (in russian)





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