

The Discussions on Suffrage in Iran during the Qajar-Pahlavi Transition Period: The Establishment of the Article 1 of *Act of Tir 22, 1306* (1927)

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In the contemporary parliamentary elections, universal suffrage is the fundamental principle worldwide. However, this system was still relatively rare at the beginning of the last century. The history of the global diffusion and acceptance of universal suffrage continues to be incompletely understood, particularly in non-Western countries. It is necessary to analyze the actual practices in general elections in the background of the political and social context of each country. In this regard, the electoral history of Iran takes on importance. This is because Iran established a modern parliament in 1906 and became one of the pioneer countries in constitutional developments in Asia. Besides, the *1329 National Assembly Election Act* (1911) gave provisions for a direct election by universal male suffrage in Iran ahead of other Asian countries, including the Ottoman Empire and Japan. Analysis of the implementation of the act and arguments for its reform is crucial to determine the gap between the ideal and the reality of parliamentary elections, not merely in Iran but in other non-Western countries as well. This presentation reports the discussions on the electoral reforms during the transition period from Qajar dynasty (1796–1925) to Pahlavi dynasty (1925–1979). The discussions were held from the 4th National Assembly (1921–1923), which was the second congress elected through direct universal suffrage, to the 6th National Assembly (1926–1928), which was the first congress of the Pahlavi era.

In the modern history of Iran, the founding of the Pahlavi dynasty meant establishment of the dictatorship of Reżā Shāh (Prime Minister 1923–1925; Shah 1925–1941). Reżā Shāh gained administrative powers with the backing of the army. Furthermore, he mobilized the government and the army in order to rig the elections. This systematic and nationwide campaign pushed anti-Shah politicians, such as Seyyed Ḥasan Modarres (1870–1937) and Moḥammad Moṣaddeq (1882–1967), off the National Assembly. Previous studies repeatedly mentioned how the government interfered in the elections and brought the parliament under Reżā Shāh's control. However, these studies have not examined the arguments and legislative measures of the National Assembly against the governmental interference. For clarifying these points, this presentation focuses on the electoral reforms during the Qajar-Pahlavi transition period, particularly on Article 1 of *Act of Tir 22, 1306* (1927). This Article is the representative amendment for imposing restrictions on government officials' eligibility for election. Therefore, analysis of the legislation of Article 1 of *Act of Tir 22, 1306* shows how the National Assembly dealt with the rise of Reżā Shāh.

This presentation is divided into five parts. The first part presents the primary research question and the sources of this presentation. This presentation refers mainly to parliamentary papers that consist of the published *Bulletin of the Laws* (*Majmū'e-ye Qavānīn*) and the *Minutes of the Diet* (*Mozākerāt-e Majles-e Shūrā-ye Mellī*). This presentation also analyzes state documents, newspapers, reports, and memoirs, which were authored by Iranian politicians and British diplomats.

The second part of this presentation reviews the history of Iranian electoral laws and introduces the amendments on suffrage, including Article 1 of *Act of Tir 22, 1306*. This part shows that the Qajar-Pahlavi transition period was the era when most of the electoral amendments were made till the abdication of Reżā Shāh (1941). The restrictions on government officials' eligibility for election was one of the most important points of these amendments. On this point, there were three amendments that were legislated, Article 57 of *Act of Shahrivar 12, 1304* (1925); Notice 1 of Article 1 of *Act of Khordad 28, 1306* (1927); and Article 1 of *Act of Tir 22, 1306*. Among them, Article 1 of *Act of Tir 22, 1306* had the widest application.

The third part mentions the political and theoretical backgrounds of the Article 1 of *Act of Tir 22, 1306*. With regard

to the political background, this part discusses the development of the governmental bureaucracy. Particularly, there were two major reforms: the financial reform led by Arthur Millspaugh (Treasure General 1922–1927) and the judicial reform that ‘Alī Akbar Dāvar (Minister of Justice 1922–29) strongly pressed forward. ‘Alī Dashtī (1894–1982), the proposer of the *Act of Tir 22, 1306*, and the members of the parliament (MPs) who did not have bureaucratic careers were cautious about these developments. This is because they thought that government officials who gained more power by the bureaucratic reform became their formidable competitors in the elections. Therefore, these MPs tried to expel government officials from elections. With regard to the theoretical background, the discussions on a free election of the day are mentioned in this part. Pro-Reza newspapers, such as *Mīhan* and *Eṭṭelā‘āt*, as well as anti-Reza media claimed to limit government officials and landlords in their eligibility for election, for they could affect the voting behavior of others. Furthermore, Moḥammad‘alī Forūghī (Minister of War 1926–27) and Moṣaddeq proposed depriving illiterate peasants of the right to vote, because they did not have much information for selecting a candidate.

The fourth part examines the parliamentary deliberations on the *Act of Tir 22, 1306*. Some MPs who had bureaucratic careers were against this bill. Among them, Aḥmad Sharīatzāde (1883/84–1968/69) and ‘Alīrezā Eḥteshāmzāde (b. 1894/95) claimed it as unfair that only government officials were limited in their eligibility for election because of their influence, as this was also applicable to landlords. Abū Ṭāleb Shīrvānī (b. 1890/91) rebutted this argument and disputed that the influence of government officials on elections was illegal, because this influence was derived from public authority. In the deliberations of this bill, Mīrzā Moḥammad‘alī Khān Bāmdād (1884/85–1951/52) also proposed an additional amendment concerning deprivation of illiterates’ right to vote. However, Seyyed Ya‘qūb Anvār Shīrāzī (1876/77–1955/56) did not support this idea and insisted on defending the principle of universal suffrage. Eventually, this bill was passed roughly in its original form. Rezā Shāh and other high officials did not intervene in this legislation at least tangibly. This is because the *Act of Tir 22, 1306* only assumed the situation that government officials individually abused their powers for their own election. Thus, this act could not prevent Rezā Shāh’s election rigging, which was organizational and government-wide.

Finally, this presentation concludes that the *Act of Tir 22, 1306* and other amendments on suffrage were the MPs’ reactions to the development of governmental bureaucracy. These amendments limited government officials’ eligibility for elections; however, they did not disadvantage the landlords who held the majority in the National Assembly. In other words, MPs tried to secure their opportunity for re-election by excluding government officials from elections. On the other hand, they did not dare obstruct Rezā Shāh’s election rigging.

The discussions around the Article 1 of *Act of Tir 22, 1306* show the difficulty of ensuring effective elections. During the Qajar-Pahlavi transition period, most Iranians lived in the countryside as illiterate peasants and they were economically and politically dependent on landlords and village headmen. Therefore, the peasants’ right to vote was confined to these rural elites, whether Rezā Shāh rigged elections or not. In these political circumstances, universal suffrage was maintained for the benefit of pro-Shah rural elites.

## Comments

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At the outset, I would like to say that it is beyond my ability to make a valuable comment on the two presentations dealing with different topics and periods in two states, the Ottoman Empire and Iran. Therefore, I would like to elucidate