

Proposed title of Paper: Reflections on the Iranian Presidential Institution, 1979-2009

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This paper, which is derived from the author's forthcoming PhD thesis, aims to offer a detailed overview of the presidential institution in Iran between 1979 and 2009. Included in the first draft of the post-revolutionary constitution and the final text subject to popular referendum in November 1979, the presidential institution was a unique introduction to Iranian political culture. For the first time ever, the Iranian society was equipped with the possibility of selecting one of the heads of its executive branch through a direct, nation-wide election. This characteristic meant that, despite the narrowing down of the post-revolutionary elite, presidential elections featured as an important barometer for gauging the extent of popular support both for the political regime as a whole and for the representatives of individual factions.

The presidential institution was greatly revised following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. As opposed to the first decade of the Revolution, when the balance of power within the executive branch tilted towards the prime ministerial position, the presidency became the sole titular of the executive branch and was invested with a major say over the conduct of day-to-day affairs of state. The Iranian presidency also became the only non-ceremonial institution of its kind in the world which was not also, at the same time, the more powerful element of its constituent state system. This crucial demarcation of the presidency's powers and its formal submission to the *velayat-e faqih* institution would characterise the presidencies of the three incumbents who emerged after Khomeini's death, Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Drawing from a wide range of primary sources, this paper shall go over each of the five presidencies which have occurred in Iran since 1979. It shall describe the challenges over the remit their institution faced by the various incumbents. By focusing on the latter's struggle for greater authority, the paper shall also seek to answer, *inter alia*, the pressing question as to whether the Islamic Republic can be today defined within the canons of the following Western-derived definition of the "state": a cluster of impersonal state institutions which interact with each other on the basis of rules and regulations clearly defined within the constitution.