

The Ideal of Election: Norms of a “Proper” Election in the First Iranian Parliament (1906-1908)

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Abstract

While elections are considered as an inevitable and minimum part of a democracy, early experience of elections has not been much studied in Political Science. The rare studies on this topic are usually done with an ahistorical approach, and are focused on the western part of the world. Adopting a different approach and case, in this research I try to reconstruct the first Iranian electoral experience after the 1906 constitutional revolution in Iran.

Building mainly on the first 33 sessions of parliamentary debates, I answer this question that what forms of election could be considered acceptable by the political actors of the time. While employing interpretive methods for analyzing electoral discussions and practices, I show that election was not a necessary part of entry to the parliament. In addition, in this research we can see that appointment of a representative by some specific people, or appointment made by a group of ordinary people could be considered as an acceptable or “normal” way of election in many occasions inside and outside the parliament. While discussing the logic behind these practices and understandings, this research also suggests a possible way of religious legitimization of elections.

The findings of this research suggest that the concept of fair election is not an obvious, universal, and unchangeable concept, as we can see a different understanding of elections. However, we can still see a similar logic behind contemporary and historical electoral practices, not only between contemporary and historical Iranian elections, but also between Iranian 1906 elections and elections in contemporary consolidated democracies.