

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN'S DOMINATION OF IRANIAN RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

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ABSTRACT

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 drastically changed the fate of religious minorities in Iran. During Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign, the previous Iranian state was increasingly more tolerant towards all its religious minorities. However, in the decade following the Revolution, the new Head of State, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, incessantly targeted specifically non-Muslim minorities. The new Iranian Islamic theocracy's aggressive strategies in response to diversity have proven effective. As of 2012, non-Muslim minorities constitute less than 2% of Iran's 75.2 million population, a drastic decline from 5.2% during the Pahlavi era (Choksy, 2012). This paper examines the increasingly belligerent transformation that ensued following the Iranian regime change in 1979 and its consequences for religious minorities. Accordingly, this paper identifies and assesses how the Islamic Republic of Iran responds to ethnic diversity and argues that its strategic approach to the country's religious minorities is hegemonic control; however, the domination approach varies depending on each target group. While the Iranian Islamic theocracy dominates all minority religious communities, this paper will focus in particular on the treatment of three non-Muslim communities: the Jews, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is.

Keywords: domination, religious minorities, Iranian Zoroastrians, Iranian Jews, Baha'i, Pahlavi government, Iranian religious intolerance, revolution

INTRODUCTION

Religion, ethnicity and nationality are pivotal factors in assessing how states govern deeply diverse populations. This is particularly the case when evaluating the implication of these divisive identity

markers for minority groups within authoritarian states. It is necessary to empirically and normatively assess how states respond to diversity and the strategies they adopt in order to understand the treatment of minorities.

As a case study, the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a heterogeneous population, demonstrates potential strategies a state can adopt in response to ethnic diversity. This specific case provides an in-depth examination of the motives behind state strategies and the conditions under which they are successful. Accordingly, this paper identifies and assesses how the Islamic Republic of Iran responds to ethnic diversity and argues that this Islamic theocracy's strategic response to religious minorities is hegemonic control; however, the domination approach varies depending on the targeted group. While the Iranian state dominates all minority religious groups, this paper will focus in particular on the treatment of three non-Muslim communities: the Jewish people, Zoroastrians, and Baha'is. To demonstrate the sharply contrasting domination response of the Iranian Islamic Republic with its preceding regime, this essay first assesses the treatment of religious minority groups during the Pahlavi era. Subsequently, it addresses how the Islamic Revolution of 1979 changed the fate of Iran's minority groups by focusing on the three non-Muslim communities mentioned above. Perfunctory integration and two methods of domination, minimization and erasure, are identified as the approaches adopted by the succeeding Islamic theocracy to address the perceived threats posed to its official ideology by these religious minority groups

BACKGROUND

Prior to becoming the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Iranian response to diversity was vastly different from current practices. The Imperial State of Iran under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1979)

was substantially more tolerant towards its religious minorities. However, the former regime's tolerance was predominantly a product of state interests. The rationale behind inclusivity and tolerance was the recognition that religious minorities served as assets and were tools for advancing the state's agenda. In particular, the courteous treatment of Iranian Jews was primarily a result of the state's desire to uphold its close ties with Israel (Sternfeld, 2014: 602).

After persisting discrimination under the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1736) and its successors, the Pahlavi regime (1925-1979) was the first Iranian government in centuries to be congenial towards Iranian Jews. During the Pahlavi era, Jewish minorities enjoyed increased political activity and cultural freedom, freely associating, organizing and practicing their faith in newly built synagogues (Sanasarian, 2012). By the 1970s, their growing political and social involvement gave way to the creation of The Association of Jewish Iranian Intellectuals (Jamicah-i Rawshanfikran-i Yahudi-yi Iran) This organization transformed into a flourishing Jewish community where activists freely engaged and participated in political affairs (Sternfeld, 2014). As a result, the Shah's government enjoyed the unwavering support of Iranian Jews (Sternfeld, 2014).

Zoroastrian Iranians were supported by the Pahlavi regime, on most fronts by Mohammad Reza Shah himself, for the purpose of advancing nationalism (Stepaniants, 2002). The religious group's traditional roots and historical ties to Persia - Iran's ancient name - made it a valuable asset for the Pahlavi regime, also officially known as the Imperial State of Persia. Given its nationalist efforts to ensure loyalty to the king, the Pahlavi regime was highly cognizant of the Zoroastrian religion of pre-Islamic Iran (Zenoozian et al., 2016). The state regarded its ancient Zoroastrian civilization to be equally influential as its Islamic society. The favorable attitudes of the Pahlavi government provided Zoroastrians with military career prospects, which implied that they were near-equals to their Muslim counterparts. The Shah's reliance on Zoroastrians as wealthy and influential societal figures, such as

bankers and intellectuals, further contributed to their fair treatment (Stepaniants, 2002).

The Pahlavi government's inclusive treatment based on self-interest extended to Baha'i Iranians. While Reza Shah never formally acknowledged their religion, he recognized that the Baha'is were important agents of modernity whose activities were promoting his own Iranian development strategy (Sanyal, 2019). As pioneers in health and education, the Baha'i community members were instrumental to the Shah's modernization ambitions. Therefore, many of them were appointed to high-profile jobs and positions to bring out their full potential in the service of the state. They were also permitted to open their own religious schools, which the Shah's children attended. In order to appease Iran's majority religious elites, the Pahlavi government rarely made public remarks about the Baha'i population. However, the Shah was aware of this community's unwavering loyalty and capabilities, so his government was significantly more tolerant than its successor regime (Sanyal, 2019).

TREATMENT OF RELIGIOUS MINORITIES AFTER THE 1979 REVOLUTION

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 drastically changed the fate of religious minorities in Iran. Unlike many other revolutions designed to break away from traditional values, the Iranian revolution re-established such sentiments. The revolution, led by the Shi'a clergy, went against all the efforts and ambitions of the Pahlavi regime. Its strong anti-Western and anti-modernization attitudes drew in people from all socio-economic classes, including intellectuals who had previously supported Reza Shah. In defiance of modernization and secularization, the revolution instead called for the recognition and dominance of an Islamic theocracy (Jahanbegloo, 2007).

The revolutionaries, spearheaded by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, wanted to insert religion into all domains of public and private life, including

education and government. Therefore, life for all religious minorities, and for non-Muslim communities in particular, became increasingly challenging. The new regime's initiative to make the state an Islamic theocracy disempowered religious minorities' organizations. The new authoritarian state had no motive to uphold the minorities' treatment policies of the previous regime since it was trying to reverse the advancements of the Pahlavi era. In the decade following the revolution, the new Head of State, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1979-1989), incessantly targeted minorities by declaring, "every aspect of a non-Muslim is unclean" (Choksy, 2012: 271).

The Islamic Republic of Iran's aggressive strategies in response to diversity have proven effective. As of 2012, non-Muslim minorities constitute less than 2% of Iran's 75.2 million population, a drastic decline from 5.2% during the Pahlavi era (Choksy, 2012: 271-272). The increasingly belligerent theocratic transformation that ensued following the Iranian regime change in 1979 had as consequence for the country's religious minorities the ongoing deployment of varying methods of domination.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Extensive literature has been published to track how states manage deeply diverse populations. One of the most prominent sources is the taxonomy of conflict regulation presented by John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary. Their macro-political taxonomy of ethnic conflict regulation is inclusive in its incorporation of both conflict management and conflict elimination. McGarry and O'Leary (1993) highlight eight distinct approaches states may employ when addressing and regulating diversity. However, in its study of three Iranian religious minorities, this paper will focus on only the two methods that are relevant to this analysis, namely integration and domination.

An analytical framework that incorporates the taxonomy of conflict regulation presented by McGarry and O'Leary will be applied to the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran to demonstrate the

state's integration and domination of religious minorities. The methods for eliminating and managing differences are examined to argue that the Iranian Islamic theocracy's response to diversity varies depending on the group. While each ethnic minority group has its own distinct narrative, they all shared a common fate under the new regime following the 1979 religious revolution that incessantly targeted non-Muslims in particular. The paper will analyze both methods for eliminating and managing differences, specifically integration and domination, to identify and assess the Islamic Republic's response to Jewish and Zoroastrian religious minorities. As the reaction to these two religious groups has been similar, they will be grouped together and evaluated on the same scale. However, as the approach of the Islamic theocracy vastly varied with respect to Baha'i minorities, the domination of that group will be examined separately. While domination is the common strategy deployed against all three groups, it is not a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, it is used and enforced in manifold ways by the state. This paper will examine two specific forms of domination, namely 'minimization' and 'erasure', as the Iranian state has specific motives underlying its varying responses to its religious minorities.

INTEGRATION

Given its intolerance towards religious diversity, the Islamic Republic of Iran has resorted to domination as a tool for managing differences. However, to mask said domination, it employs integrationist policies in response to Jewish and Zoroastrian minorities as per the criteria outlined in the taxonomy of conflict regulation developed by McGarry, O'Leary and Simeon (2008). As these authors explain, integration as a method for eliminating differences seeks to promote a single and uniform public identity. While cultural and ethnic differences within group identities can exist, they must be privatized and ignored by the public. The existence of differences distinguishes integration from assimilation. Integrationist policies do not seek to erase diversity; instead, they merely privatize it. Integrationists turn a blind eye to ethnic, national, and cultural differences

in public spheres as they identify group-based partisanship as a source of conflict. Therefore, diversity can only be accepted and addressed in private realms (McGarry et al., 2008: 41-43).

In an earlier study, McGarry and O'Leary (1993) noted that while assimilation aims to merge different groups, integration policies advocate for reducing ethnic segregation. Building on this work, McGarry, O'Leary and Simeon (2008) posit that integrationists justify privatization by asserting that group-based political differences are the causes of political instability and tension, and believe that in order to eliminate conflicts, a state must refrain from serving the ethnic and cultural interests of different communities. Therefore, integrationists oppose granting religious minorities official public roles. Their motive for maintaining a common public culture is to ensure that all citizens are equal before the law in all public domains (McGarry et al., 2008: 41). By limiting diversity to private sectors, integration policies bind citizens to one common homogenous unit and outlaw ethnic discrimination (McGarry and O'Leary, 1993: 17). These integrationist policies outlined above were evident in the Iranian Islamic theocracy's response to Jewish and Zoroastrian minorities following the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

The new regime took various measures to ensure the integration of specific religious minority groups. Following the Revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran created its own constitution that paradoxically was the first legal document officially acknowledging religious minorities (Stausberg, 2012). Article 16 of the official document recognized Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians as the only religious minority groups (Choksy, 2012). The formal recognition of these groups as *dhimmi*s guaranteed them legal protection as non-Muslims living in an Islamic theocracy. Under the Islamic constitutional framework, Jews and Zoroastrians were allowed to hold government positions. Each group was permitted to have one elected national legislator to represent them in the *Majles*, the parliament, among the other two hundred and ninety Muslim members

(Choksy, 2012). Beyond government involvement, Article 13 of the constitution outlines that "within the limits of the law" Jewish and Zoroastrian Iranians "are free to perform their religious rites and ceremonies, and to act according to their own canon in matters of personal affairs and religious education" (Stausberg, 2012: 187).

Numerous non-Muslim schools, including the Jewish system of Alliance Israelite Universelle schools, were allowed to continue operating and were incorporated into the state education system (Choksy, 2012). Article 14 of the constitution provides more protection for non-Muslim religious minorities by calling on the duty of Muslim citizens to "treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity, and to respect their human rights" (Stausberg, 2012: 187). By creating constitutional boundaries aimed at holding its Muslim citizens accountable, the Islamic Republic of Iran proclaimed its commitment to equality in the presence of ethnic diversity. Thus, in its response to religious diversity, the new regime implemented integrationist strategies by allowing differences to exist in private sectors and treating citizens as equals before the law, in the public sphere. However, upon deeper examination, it becomes evident that many of these policies were merely perfunctory.

DOMINATION

Contrary to its integrationist claims, the Islamic Republic of Iran is not treating all its citizens equally before the law. In fact, its use of integrationist policies constitutes a perfunctory facade to mask the state's underlying use of domination strategies. As McGarry and O'Leary (1993) detail, hegemonic control is the most commonly used tool of management that allows authoritarian regimes to control the diverse cultural groups existing within their territory. Instead of privatizing differences like integration, domination seeks to suppress them (McGarry & O'Leary, 1993: 23-25). Hegemonic control fosters a one-sided relationship in which one side maintains superiority and ensures stability by constraining the political opportunities and endeavors of the other side. The domination approach to resolving differences is the "effective exertion of the superior power" to serve the

interests of superordinate power (Lustick, 1979: 330). Within authoritarian states, the exertion of power does not require majority support. The driving force for domination in such nations is control over the coercive state apparatuses such as the security services and police systems. When a regime enjoys the loyalty of its security apparatus and does not fear military rebellion, it can confidently enact its domination policies. By successfully controlling the security sector, a state can coerce a group into domination through intimidation. Many controlled groups refrain from expressing dissatisfaction because they lack security and support (Phillips, 2018: 2-4). These policies of coercive domination have been heavily apparent in the Islamic Republic of Iran's response to ethnic diversity ever since the 1979 Revolution.

Domination as a difference management tool is not a one-size-fits-all strategy. When there are multiple dominated groups within a state, as in Iran, it is expected for a regime to treat such groups differently. In the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jewish and Zoroastrian minorities are subject to a less violent method of domination compared to Baha'i minorities. The state responds to ethnic diversity using two forms of domination: *minimization* and *erasure*. The Iranian Islamic theocracy seeks to minimize the religious influence of Jews and Zoroastrians. However, it actively ignores the Baha'i population.

DOMINATION STRATEGY: MINIMIZATION

While the Iranian constitution grants Jewish and Zoroastrian minorities official recognition, the seemingly generous legal document is largely conditional and manipulated by the Iranian Islamic theocracy to justify its arbitrary treatment of non-Muslims. There has been a "dramatic reduction" in the positive perception and fair treatment of such groups following the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Sanasarian, 2012: 316). Their effective disempowerment has rendered their official legal and social status virtually irrelevant.

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran is

grounded in the application of Shari'ah legal principles (An-Na'im, 1987). Thus, the legal document creates a tension between its foundational religious principles and its commitment to fair treatment of minorities, which allows for interpretations by the theocracy's legislature, the Islamic Consultative Assembly - the Majlis, that discriminate against non-Muslim minorities. Article 12 of the Iranian constitution recognizes the Twelvers Shi'a sect as the official and dominant faith of the state. Under this distinction, the Islamic Republic of Iran overtly endorses religious discrimination, increasingly prevalent with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism (An-Na'im, 1987: 1-2). Following the 1979 Revolution, the official Islamic identity of Iran bears exclusive authority over all aspects of the country's life, as outlined in Article 4: "All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution, as well as to all other laws and regulations." (Stausberg, 2012: 187).

The Islamic Republic of Iran implemented these policies following the Revolution to prevent ethnic challenges to its rule. Contrary to its integrationist provisions, the theocracy's disempowerment of Jews and Zoroastrians prevents their equal treatment before the law. These religious minority groups are not entitled to the same equal treatment that the Shi'ia Muslim majority enjoys (An-Na'im, 1987). Shortly after the Revolution, in the 1980s, Iranian Jews and Zoroastrians began facing heightened job discrimination, losing opportunities they had under the previous regime (Stausberg, 2012). To reinforce the official Islamic identity of the state, careers in the army and public sector are exclusively reserved for Shi'ia Muslim citizens. Religious minorities, including Jews and Zoroastrians, are "blocked" off from participating in such career paths (Stausberg, 2012: 188). Therefore, Jewish and Zoroastrian representatives previously admitted to the Majlis under integration policies lost their positions under the domination strategy.

The lack of official and political representation significantly affects the religious influence and freedom of these minorities. The constitution's Article 13, granting religious minorities freedom to act according to their cultures "within the limits of the

law" has proved to be more restricting than liberating (Stausberg, 2012: 187). While Iran's integrationist commitments promise religious minorities the freedom to engage in their private canons and religious education, such is not the reality in practice. Instead, the Islamic theocracy dominates these private spheres and continues to implement and reinforce its own official Islamic values. The Islamic Republic's Ministry of Education and Training interferes with religious minority schools to override their teachings and instead enforce state-approved Islamic course materials. In the state-assigned textbooks distributed in non-Muslim religious schools, non-Muslim minorities are commonly referred to as infidels, *kāfers*, with Baha'is specifically targeted as "followers of a false sect" (Choksy, 2012: 276).

Educators in Jewish and Zoroastrian religious schools have reported that government officials and officially-sanctioned Islamic religious leaders are persistently present in academic settings to ensure state-endorsed Islamic values and teachings supersede those delivered by the religious minority group. These domination tactics are evident in the Iranian Islamic theocracy's educational requirement of *konkur*, which includes an Islamic exam for non-Muslim students, necessary for admission into state-controlled universities (Choksy, 2012). The controlling approach of the state has actively sought to reduce the role and influence of Jewish and Zoroastrian minority groups by actively degrading the autonomy and relevance of their education systems.

The persistent attempts of the Iranian Islamic theocracy to diminish the role of Jews and Zoroastrians have rendered the prospects of these religious minority groups to pursue vibrant community lives virtually impossible. However, despite their misfortunes, minorities in Iran remain relatively silent and passive because they are fully aware that any form of perceived resistance would trigger brutal retaliations by the Islamic authorities (Stausberg, 2012). The state uses coercive domination and elite co-optation to control these religious minority groups. Thus, the domination policies of the Iranian Islamic theocracy to manage differences has proved to be effective over time: not only did these minority groups lose their influence, but most of their members left the country.

A 2011 census revealed that Zoroastrians constituted 0.003% of the population and Jews 0.012% (Choksy, 2012: 272). Prior to the Revolution, in the 1970s, 75–80,000 Jewish Iranians lived in Iran; however, the number had decreased to 20–30,000 individuals by the 1990s. The most recent national census reports that the number of Jews living in Iran has fallen to only 9,250 (Sanasarian, 2012: 314). A similar pattern is evident across the Zoroastrian population living in Iran. Before the Islamic Revolution of 1979, an estimated 30,000 Zoroastrians lived in Iran; however, the 2012 national consensus reported the new figure to be between 13,000 to 15,000 (Choksy, 2012: 272). The minimization of their religious influence has discouraged these religious groups from living in an Islamic theocratic state.

DOMINATION STRATEGY: ERASURE

Despite their limited rights as religious minorities, Jews and Zoroastrians were nonetheless treated better than Baha'is after 1979. The Islamic Republic of Iran responds to its Baha'i population with a more aggressive method of domination: erasure. To assist in erasing Baha'is from the country's narrative, it employs discrimination and violence. Following the Islamic Revolution, the persecution of Baha'i minorities intensified because the state perceived them as a direct defiance to the official Islamic ideology.

It is widely accepted amongst Shi'ia leaders that Baha'is are heretic Muslims (Choksy, 2012: 274). Warburg (2012) explains how the Baha'i religion emanated in nineteenth-century Iran as Babism, acting as a heterodox view of Shi'ia Islam. Their religious leader Báb presented himself as the Hidden Imam, and the movement quickly attracted followers. The gradual radicalization of Babism resulted in its official repeal of Shi'ia Islam. By the summer of 1848, the Babis announced the end of Islam and the dawn of a new religion. The Islamic government retaliated against this revolution with military force to suppress the movement. The Babism faith would later transform and re-emerge in 1860 as the Baha'i religion. However, Baha'is were still subject to riots and killings encouraged by the Ulama (Islamic scholars) spreading anti-Baha'i sentiments (Warburg, 2012: 195-198). Before the revolution, the Iranian state and the Ulama community constituted different

entities, often at odds with each other. However, following the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the two powers joined forces to become one totalitarian theocratic regime increasingly hostile towards Baha'i minorities.

In their efforts to deal with the perceived threat being posed by the Baha'i minority, the Islamic Republic of Iran's leaders go beyond the minimization of this community's religious influence and freedom; they seek to actually erase them from the national consciousness by refusing to acknowledge their existence. The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran recognizes Zoroastrian, Jewish, and Christian Iranians as the only religious minorities within the nation. Despite comprising 1.79% of the population and constituting the largest non-Muslim minority group, Iran does not recognize its Baha'i population officially (Choksy, 2012: 272).

One strategy deployed by the Iranian Islamic theocracy as it actively seeks to erase Baha'i culture is to prevent the religion from being taught. Unlike Jewish and Zoroastrian Iranians, Baha'is are prohibited from operating public schools; if caught doing so, the institution is closed, and the parties involved are arrested. In accordance with the widely held perception that the Baha'i religion is a defiance of Islam, under Shar'ia law, teaching this religion is an offense punishable by execution (Choksy, 2012). Pursuant to the same claim of religious heresy, the Islamic Republic of Iran has further sought to delegitimize and erase its Baha'i citizens by proclaiming that their religion is invalid, thus creating a narrative that Baha'ism is merely a political movement of defiance, not a genuine religion. Ayatollah Khomeini initially voiced this opinion to defend his public defamation of the minority group. It has since become a commonly used claim to justify the persecution of Baha'is (MacEoin, 1987: 75-76).

In its efforts to erase the Baha'i population, the Iranian Islamic theocracy resorted to discrimination against Baha'is representatives. Iranian political leaders have publicly declared that Baha'is "are a political faction; they are harmful; they will not be accepted" (MacEoin, 1987: 75) and have constructed false narratives to portray Baha'is as unpatriotic and as supporters of the previous Pahlavi regime, specifically of the Shah's secret police - the feared

SAVAK (Danesh, 1988). The leading Iranian Islamic elites have also continuously accused this minority group of espionage, particularly as foreign agents working for Israel (MacEoin, 1987).

In the immediate years following the revolution, national news publications associated Baha'is with political ideologies criticized by the Islamic Republic of Iran, such as imperialism, Zionism, and Iraqi Ba'athism (Danesh, 1988). Public condemnations have strongly influenced the general national psyche, resulting in a societal sentiment of hatred against Baha'i Iranians (Danesh, 1988). Members of this minority group became isolated and often referred to as "perverted Baha'is", seen as followers of Satan (Danesh, 1988: 5). This public narrative of Baha'is transformed the members of this minority group into national scapegoats during the transitional period following the revolution, when the new theocratic state faced instability and various crises. The negative perception of Baha'i Iranians has led their Muslim counterparts to create anti-Baha'i organizations to exclude them entirely from public life.

Violence is another strategy through which the Islamic Republic of Iran sought to erase Baha'is. Following the Islamic Revolution, Baha'i Iranians were subject to a "systematic campaign of persecution" encouraged by the new religious leaders (Danesh, 1988: 2). They used violence as a means to instill fear and make the domination process more effective. The incoming Islamic theocratic regime began massacring Baha'is to frighten the minority group into submission. The new judge of the Central Revolutionary Court at Evin Prison, Ayatollah Gilani, publicly announced his commitment to exterminate the Baha'i community to "purify the Islamic republic from the wrong ideology" (Ibid.). Such sentiments fostered organized campaigns which soon became full-scale pogroms.

What was initially a method of intimidation soon spiraled into a brutal, murderous campaign. In 1986, two Baha'i teenagers, aged 15 and 16, were beaten and stoned to death by a mob led by a local religious leader. Within the same year, an elderly Baha'i couple were drenched in kerosene and set on fire (Danesh, 1988: 6). Within the first seven years of the revolution, over 100 Baha'is were killed by mob violence or execution (MacEoin, 1987: 75). The Iranian Islamic theocracy specifically targeted Baha'i

leaders; as a result, by 1980 all members of the National Council of the Bahá'is were kidnapped and murdered (Danesh, 1988: 5). In addition to inflicting physical harm, the new regime also targeted their homes and cultural identities. All Baha'i property, particularly places of worship, was arbitrarily destroyed or confiscated (Warburg, 2012: 198).

Similar to Jewish and Zoroastrian minority groups, the domination of Baha'is proved to be an effective strategy for managing diversity within the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 1979, the number of Iranian Baha'is was estimated to be 400,000. However, thousands of Baha'is fled Iran over the following years. Those who remained were brutalized and forced to renounce their faith. By 1981, according to estimates, the number of Baha'is living in Iran had decreased to 300,000 (Smith, 1984: 296).

It remains challenging for researchers to have an accurate account of the current number of Baha'i Iranians due to their status as an officially unrecognized and oppressed religious minority. Baha'i Iranians predominantly live in extreme secrecy and conceal their faith (Smith, 1984). A prominent majority of Baha'is carefully hide their faith and publicly identify as Zoroastrians instead (Choksy, 2012). Therefore, the Iranian Islamic theocracy's use of erasure domination as a means to manage religious diversity has been successful, as Baha'is are now largely removed from society. This outcome illustrates that in all methods of domination, the relationship between the superordinate segment and the subordinate segment is "penetrative" (Lustick, 1979: 330): the superordinate extracts what it requires and desires from the subordinate group and arbitrarily returns only what it deems favorable (Lustick, 1979).

The reason for the differential approaches of the Iranian Islamic regime to the management of the country's various religious minorities becomes evident when examining its key internal and external political interests and objectives. The laxer form of domination of Jewish and Zoroastrian minority groups can be attributed to the fact that their religious beliefs do not threaten the regime's core ideology. While the Islamic Republic of Iran seeks to undermine and stifle the influence of Jewish Iranians, it realizes that it must maintain a modicum of accommodation towards them because Judaism is

one of the Abrahamic faiths (Sternfeld, 2014). It also recognizes that its Jewish minority enjoys international protection and support from Israel (Sternfeld, 2014). Therefore, to avoid international conflict, it is in Iran's best interests not to persecute its Jewish population. The Islamic Republic of Iran perceives its Zoroastrian population as an unthreatening and relatively cooperative group, which helps explain its nonviolent domination strategy. It also publicly honors Zoroastrian Iranians who served as soldiers in the Iran-Iraq war (Stausberg, 2012: 189). Therefore, members of the Zoroastrian minority group, which comprises only 0.003% of the population, are treated with less aggression because their small population does not pose a substantive risk to the Islamic regime, as well as because they have proved their loyalty to the state. However, the Iranian Islamic theocracy has greater incentives to resort to violent means in its domination of Baha'is because this religious minority group is considered to actively undermine its official ideology and its legitimacy as the country's ruling government.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the strategic response of the Islamic Republic of Iran to religious diversity and has argued that it has employed different methods for managing and eliminating diversity. This research has focused on the treatment of Jewish, Zoroastrian, and Baha'i minority groups. This paper asserts that the Iranian Islamic theocracy's response varies depending on how it perceives the level of threat posed by each religious minority group to the country's official ideology. While it applied to its Jewish and Zoroastrian minority groups a policy of integration, it is evident that this proclaimed approach was merely a perfunctory facade. The de facto response of the post-1979 Tehran regime to religious diversity has been domination. However, the domination strategy is implemented in two distinct ways: minimization and erasure. The Iranian Islamic theocracy has actively minimized the religious and cultural influence of its Jewish and Zoroastrian populations by interfering with their religious teachings. However, because it perceives the Baha'i population as a major ideological threat, it responds to them with a more violent form of domination – erasure.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to erase Baha'is from the national narrative using discrimination and violence. These findings inspire further research to determine whether religious minorities in other theocratic states have had similar experiences and share similar fates.

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