

### Populism, jihad, and economic resistance: Studying the political discourse of Iran's supreme leader

Bazoobandi, Sara

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Bazoobandi, S. (2023). Populism, jihad, and economic resistance: Studying the political discourse of Iran's supreme leader. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 32(4), 321-339. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12303>

#### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

#### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

# Populism, jihad, and economic resistance: Studying the political discourse of Iran's supreme leader

Sara Bazoobandi 

Institute for Middle East Studies,  
The German Institute for Global and  
Area Studies (GIGA), Hamburg,  
Germany

## Correspondence

Sara Bazoobandi, The German Institute  
for Global and Area Studies (GIGA),  
Neuer Jungfernstieg 21 20354 Hamburg,  
Germany.

Email: [sara.bazoobandi@giga-hamburg.de](mailto:sara.bazoobandi@giga-hamburg.de)

## Funding information

H2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions,  
Grant/Award Number: 101025388

## Abstract

Political leaders of pariah authoritarian states communicate their political discourse unilaterally, in a closed environment without free and open media access or the space for public scrutiny or debate. They use their speeches for various aims such as to respond to external shocks, justify hardship, appeal to domestic and international sympathy, assert autonomy and power, and influence policy and governance. This research uses Iran as a case study and offers an in-depth analysis of 10 years of speeches by the country's Supreme Leader. In a case study of unilateral political communication method in an authoritarian environment, it sheds light on various aspects of the discourse generated by the country's Supreme Leader over a decade. It also analyzes the Leader's effort to influence policymaking and governance structure through practical official guidelines. Building upon existing theories of populism, the study seeks to unpack an understudied approach in populist politics that is based on a political discourse by the leadership which defines the populist dichotomy of people versus elite at the global level.

## KEYWORDS

authoritarian leaders, discourse analysis, economic resistance, Iran, jihad, political discourse, populism, sanctions

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

© 2023 The Authors. *Digest of Middle East Studies* published by Wiley Periodicals LLC on behalf of Policy Studies Organisation.

## 1 | RESEARCH AGENDA

In 2011, Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, used the term "resistance economy" for the first time. He has since used the term frequently, and it has been incorporated into various aspects of the government policies in Iran. Khamenei uses the term "resistance" alongside words with strong religious connotations, such as "jihad," "Islam," and "holy," attaching the concept of economic resistance to divine qualities that are ideologically sacred. He predominantly communicates through political speeches, a unilateral political communication method to convey his, and the regime's, vision to the public in an environment where public debate is heavily suppressed. This research examines 10 years of Khamenei's speeches as a case study of a unilateral political communication method in an authoritarian environment. It also analyzes the ways in which Khamenei seeks to both influence policymaking and advance the regime agenda—to maintain regime stability, uphold "strategic autonomy" (Kutlay & Öniş, 2021; Taş, 2022) and claim economic and political strength.

Speeches of political leaders are an important method for communicating political agendas and influencing policy. In democratic systems, the media enjoys greater freedom in facilitating engagement between the leadership and the public. Free media provides an opportunity to scrutinize political messages, hold leadership accountable, and express public demands. In authoritarian systems, however, the media is tightly controlled by the state, and objection to the leadership is suppressed. In the absence of freedom of speech and media, authoritarian leaders can communicate unilaterally without any pushback from the media or the public. Studying political speeches in authoritarian systems, then, is critical, as it can help to provide a deeper understanding of the overall political discourse and policy direction. Saddam Hussein, Muammar Ghaddafi, Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, and Ali Khamenei have all used speeches as their main political communication strategy to share their visions and propagate their respective regime's discourse. Each authoritarian system has its own traits defined by the vision, worldview, and ideology of its leaders. However, studying one example, that is Iran in the case of this research, can provide grounds for drawing conclusions that can be linked with a larger group of countries.

Since 2011, Khamenei has actively led a discourse around the concept of "economic resistance," which has been incorporated into practical guidelines. While maintaining the old claim for political autonomy, Khamenei's guideline is a declaration of aspiration for becoming an autonomous economic power. He also acknowledged that the path to such a goal requires individuals' and entities' dedication and sacrifice to overcome the hardship. He defines such dedication as a jihadi attitude.

The findings of this study indicate that economic resistance discourse is aimed at influencing the country's economic policies by (a) responding to sanctions escalation, (b) justifying economic hardship, and (c) asserting Iran's strategic autonomy by enhancing its economic power.

This research is informed by studies on populism. Populism has been on the rise globally in both democratic and authoritarian systems. Academic research indicates that the binary of the "elite" versus the "people," (Judis & Teixeira, 2002; Mudde, 2004) is often combined with factors such as national identity, collective political views, ideology, a common enemy, or a shared fear, to bind people and bolster effort toward achieving a common goal. Populist narratives create a binary of "us" versus "them," which is used to portray the leadership's discourse as driven by the will of the people (Kock et al., 2022). By adopting a discourse based on the common beliefs or perceptions, populist politicians appeal to the audience across various norms and interest groups (Hatzisavvidou, 2022) to advance their political agendas and preserve their own power

(Bos et al., 2020). This study adopts the ideational approach to populism, that assumes a shared trait among populist politicians is their effort to influence policy by presenting own ethos and worldviews as a “morally good” force (Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Stanley, 2008).

In the case of this study, Khamenei’s claim for holiness of his economic resistance vision, is understood as an indicator of his populist approach. Iran’s Supreme Leader has adopted a prime religious concept of the Shi’a faith—jihad—to embolden a populist division of “people” (i.e., the believers of this religious value system) versus the “elite” (those who reject this value system). This paper demonstrates a case study in which adoption of populist narrative of “us” versus “them” goes beyond the traditional theoretical understanding of populism. Khamenei seeks to present the concept of resistance in his speeches as the collective will of the people, defined as those who believe in his interpretation of core religious value system worldwide, which is against that of the Western elite.

This study seeks to bridge the existing work on Iran, populist politics, and political discourse analysis by analyzing the ways in which Khamenei, through adopting a unilateral communication method, has adopted a populist approach. Moreover, the study investigates the ways in which, by employing ideological and religious concepts as part of his bid, Khamenei aims to justify economic hardship in Iran caused by sanctions. By appealing to the public through association of economic hardship caused by sanctions with jihad, Khamenei seeks to dissuade the public from holding the country’s governance model accountable. While sanctions are prompted by foreign and nuclear policy choices that are guided by his own vision, Khamenei uses the binary of “people” versus “elite” to portray the country’s hardship as a collective punishment of the “people” imposed by the morally wrong “elite” of the West.

The content of the Supreme Leader’s speeches is analyzed here to identify the key elements of his political discourse, his vision for the ideal governance model in Iran, and the aspirations reflected in his speeches for strategic and economic autonomy. The analysis also reveals the use of Shi’a ideology in Khamenei’s economic resistance discourse as his populist position.

The findings of this study are not exclusively relevant to the political discourse in Iran. Given the shared pattern of unilateral political communication in authoritarian systems, the study will shed light on how the discourse is formulated in senior political offices, and how it influences policy, in a large group of authoritarian states, specifically the pariah states that are subject to international sanctions.

The structure of the paper is as follows: First, it reviews the role of ideology in Iran’s postrevolution politics. It highlights the importance of the concept of jihad in the country’s political discourse and puts forward three propositions, the validity of which are tested in the following sections. Second, it elaborates on the importance of political speeches of the Supreme Leader in understanding the strategies and visions of the Islamic Republic of Iran. A brief review of the country’s media law highlights the importance of this study, considering the limitations in Iran for public debate around the Supreme Leader’s views. Third, it provides details of data collection and data analysis strategies of the study. Fourth, it ends with some final conclusions on communication strategies applied by political leaders in pariah authoritarian states.

## 2 | POPULISM, AND JIHADI GOVERNANCE IN IRAN

The 1979 Islamic Revolution, which, in Abbas Milani’s words, was a replay of Iran’s Constitutional Revolution (1905–1911) (Milani, 2009), gave the country’s Shi’a clergy the opportunity to develop an ideology-driven discourse. The post-Islamic Revolution political

discourse then became one of the most influential factors shaping the country's governance model. A substantial body of academic literature that deals with the postrevolutionary Iran is unsurprisingly focused on the most influential Shi'a clergy in the country's politics, the founder of the revolution, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Adib-Moghaddam, 2014; Dabashi, 1993; Kimmel & Tavakol, 1986). This is mainly due to his important role in forming the discourse in the early years after the Revolution.

Scholars have previously investigated populism in Iranian politics through various lenses. Abrahamian investigates Khomeini's fundamental role in post-1979 Iran. He examines various aspects of Khomeini's politics and suggests that he had demonstrated characteristics of a populist leader (Abrahamian, 1992). Scholarly work has also examined Iran's presidential elections' results to show that in the country's authoritarian political landscape, complex and uncertain components and preferences determine voting behavior in relation to populist candidates (Raisi, 2019).

Academic research on Iran has also dealt with the discourse that was created around reforming the Islamic Republic by former President Mohammad Khatami and the broader successes and failures of the reformist camp (Tazmini, 2009; Wastnidge, 2016). Khatami is considered as the most influential reformist political figure, who brought a new narrative into the postrevolutionary Iranian politics.

In addition, there has been a body of scholarly work on Iran's political economy and economic history that unpacks the economic structure in postrevolutionary Iran, elaborates on the impact of the ideology on economic policies, and analyzes the consequences of such policies (Bayat, 1998; Harris, 2017). A few scholars, including Sadjapour (2008) and Hovsepian-Bearce (2017), have provided deep insight on Khamenei independent of his predecessor and outside of the debate around reform of the Islamic Republic. This paper seeks to contribute to the existing scholarly work by offering an analysis of Khamenei's resistance discourse, vision, and preferred governance model. Against that backdrop, this research seeks to fill the gap in scholarly work on post-Khomeini Iranian politics by providing a deeper understanding of the vision, discourse, and world views of Khomeini. It also sheds light on his role in formulating the country's political, social, and economic strategies.

There is a scholarly debate over defining populism. This study uses a definition based on the constructs of "people" and "elite" (Destradi et al., 2022) that incorporates Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's (2013) minimal definition of populism. In this definition populism is described it as "a thin-centered ideology" that divides the society into two equal and opposing camps of "pure people" and "corrupt elite." In this definition, politics should be a manifestation of the common will of the people. In Islamic populism, like populist politics elsewhere, the main claim is to address the issue of inequality across the society (Hadiz, 2019). The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Muhammadiyah in Indonesia, and the Islamic Revolutionary government in Iran have all had an expressed common goal to establish an Islamic rule that can deliver social equality. The debate over Islamic populism has been exploring two contrasting views. While some believe that Islamic populism seeks to mobilize the economically underprivileged, but ideologically righteous, Muslim communities against their corrupt elites (Hadiz, 2014), others argue that by adopting a populist approach, Islamist political groups are purposely constructing populist dichotomies, polarizing their societies, and exploiting their constituencies for their personal electoral benefit (Yilmaz, 2018, 2022).

Studying Khamenei's speeches indicates that, within the construct of Mudde and Kaltwasser's definition, the leader of the Islamic Republic (similar to his predecessor, Khomeini) has used Shi'a theological concepts to define the "pure people" and the "corrupt

elite” to create a dichotomy that binds the people together based on their religious ideology. The “pure people” in Khamenei’s populist discourse are the pious Shi’a community who are assumed to be supportive of the Islamic Revolutionary government in Iran, notwithstanding their geographic location, and have pledged allegiance to the *vali e-faqih* (i.e., the living supreme leader).

Khamenei’s populist position is apparent in his choice of language. The speeches indicate that he assumes much of the Iranian people adhere to his interpretation of Shi’a Islam in which individuals are motivated by the concept of jihad that requires the willingness for self-sacrifice for the betterment of society (i.e., overcoming economic problems through policies that are influenced by the discourse of resistance). The elite, according to this interpretation, is comprised of the West and its supporters, including those within the Shi’a and broader Muslim community. The elite are presented as being driven by materialistic values that exploit the underprivileged globally, and specifically Muslims. In this discourse, jihad is a response aimed at pushing back against the elite’s values. It captures all aspects of Muslims’ lives and is manifested in the commitment of the people to selfless and collective efforts aimed at political, social, and economic resistance of the community.

The term “jihad” has been a major element of Iran’s revolutionary discourse and incorporated into the governance structure of the country since the early years after the Islamic Revolution. Khomeini ordered the establishment of Construction jihad (*Jahad-I Sazandegi*), a voluntary organization to help with the 1979 harvest. Over time, it was developed into the Ministry of Jihad, which has built transnational links with Shi’a political groups around the world (Lob, 2018).

In the aftermath of the war, Tehran was determined to resolve economic challenges caused by the war by attracting foreign investors and normalizing foreign relations; hence, jihad was less frequently used in the official discourse of that period to avoid giving foreign investors the perception that the country was an unreceptive state. In 2001, the War on Terror started, and due to its association of term jihad with operations carried out by Islamist terrorist and extremist groups, Iranian officials consciously held back in using the term. In the same year, Iran’s former president, Khatami, proposed the “Dialogues of Civilization” to the United Nations (UN) that called for the Eastern and Western civilizations to put their differences aside and cooperate with each other toward building a better world for everyone (Khatami, 2001).

Under Khatami’s successor, former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran escalated its nuclear program. This prompted an international dispute over Iran’s nuclear ambitions, and economic pressure coming from US-led sanctions increased. The term jihad was quickly brought back into the country’s political discourse.

In a speech in March 2011, Khamenei used the term “economic jihad” for the first time. In his speech he stated:

Our government pursues Islamic and Quranic goals—the goals that have been specified in “and to Allah belongs the might and to His Messenger and to the believers.” [The Holy Quran, 63: 8] It relies on the kind of belief that cannot be shaken by any pressure. It is an Islamic system. This resistance against the greed of foreigners is enough to enrage the centers of global power. It is 30 years that they have been expressing their anger in one way or another, but the willpower of the Iranian people—which depends on the will of Allah the Exalted and on their faith in the divine promise of victory—has disappointed the enemies, and the Iranian nation has been treading the path of progress, growth, and transcendence every



day. I named this year as “The Year of Economic Jihad”. This means that this year the Iranian nation should focus the major portion of its efforts on the economic arena. (Khamenei, 2011a)

In another speech in August 2011, he stated:

...the Revolution had clear goals. Demanding Islam, fighting the arrogant powers, demanding independence for the country, bringing about dignity for humanity, defending the oppressed, bringing about scientific, technological, and economic progress for the country (Khamenei, 2011b).

In these speeches, he calls on the people to resist against the greedy foreigners and outlines the goals of the Islamic Revolution as bringing dignity to “humanity” and fighting for the rights of the “oppressed.” Such a narrative reveals his populist tendencies, fitting well into the dichotomy of pure people versus evil elite put forward by Mudde and Kaltwasser.

The political discourse of Iran's Supreme Leader has evolved over time. As noted above, post-2001, Iran's official rhetoric was to distance the state from the notion of jihad as it was adopted by Islamic radicalized groups. The chronology of events related to the US-led sanctions indicates a link between the discourse formed around the concept of economic jihad and the tightening of sanctions. In June 2011, the US Treasury Department adopted a law that allowed the administration of President Barack Obama to penalize foreign banks that handled financial transactions linked to Iranian hydrocarbon exports. Consequently, Noor Islamic Bank in the United Arab Emirates, which has reportedly been handling 60% of such transactions, stopped all business links with Iranian entities (Reuters, 2012). The timing of Khamenei's speech on economic jihad implies his intention to preempt Noor Islamic Bank's decision, which was perceived in Tehran as the start of an economic war with the United States. As reflected in the above-mentioned speeches, he called on the people to adopt a jihadi attitude that was needed to withstand the economic pressure caused by the US-led sanctions. Moreover, the timing, shortly after the 2008–2009 global financial crisis, can be interpreted as a signal of Khamenei's effort to assert Iran's economic strength in the post-2008 global economic system. Despite the sanctions, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis that marked the decline of Western economies, Khamenei has been seeking to create a discourse that presents Iran as a strategically autonomous and significant global player.

Khamenei has advanced several official initiatives to forward this vision that is presented in his discourse. In 2014, the Office of the Supreme Leader issued a communique titled “General Policies of Economic Resistance” to which all government entities are required to comply (Official Portal of the Government, 2014). The document sets broad guidelines for all government entities. It requires all individuals and entities to formulate necessary regulations and mechanisms to play a role in what Khamenei defines as the country's “Holy Jihad” (Khamenei, 2014). In this document, Khamenei states that compliance with the guideline helps “the economic epoch of the great Iranian nation—like its political epoch—to shine in front of all eyes around the world” (Khamenei, 2014). Two official documents, the Islamic Iranian Progress Model (Markaze Olgouye Islami Irani-ie Pishraft, 2011) and the Second Phase of the Revolution (Khamenei, 2019) have also been compiled and launched over the past decade to disseminate the Supreme Leader's long-term vision for Iran. The Second Phase of the Revolution identifies the priorities and aspirations of the regime, addressing a wide range of issues such as the formation of independent foreign and economic policies, and the code of conduct for lifestyle of the Iranian citizens in accordance with the government's interpretation of Shi'a Islam. The guideline puts a strong emphasis on the concept of jihad. For example, the

term “intelligent jihad” is used to define the effort that is required, by both the citizens and the state, to undermine cultural influence of the West. Implementation of the guideline appears to heavily rely on a group of policymakers and government executives that Khamenei refers to as “jihadi managers,” whose appointment to senior offices is based on their ideological and political loyalty and commitment to implementation of his vision (Bazooabandi, 2022).

The empirical analysis of this research yields various findings. It observes a strong link between the escalation of sanctions on Iran and Khamenei’s economic resistance discourse. It highlights populist rhetoric with a heavy reliance on Shi’a Islamic religious concepts in his speeches. Finally, the analysis identifies the economic sectors and governance model that are critical to Khamenei’s economic resistance discourse.

This study considers three propositions:

- P1: Authoritarian leaders use unilateral communication methods (i.e., speeches) to respond to hardship caused by external factors. As a normative justification, they tend to attribute the hardship to the hostility of adversaries, rather than internal governance failure.
- P2: In response to isolation, leaders in pariah states are likely to incorporate ideological concepts (like jihad and Islam in the case of Iran) into their discourse to appeal to a global sympathetic public.
- P3: The unilateral communication method of authoritarian leaders does not offer space for public scrutiny. In the absence of a public debate, they seek to influence policies, and governance models that are compatible with their own vision.

To test the validity of these propositions, the study applies a social network analysis (Brewer & Webster, 2000) method to investigate Khamenei’s speeches. Network analysis is extensively used to understand the relationships among various elements of a network and examine their behavior (Christakis & Fowler, 2007, 2008; Fowler et al., 2011; Hanneman, 1998). In political science, the method has been used to study a wide range of topics, including political partisanship (Fowler, 2006), political coalition building (Grossmann & Dominguez, 2009), and how policymakers form networks (based on their belief systems) to engage with one another and generate discourses and narratives (Leifeld, 2020).

The research is also informed by existing literature and theories in linguistic studies (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; van Dijk, 1995; Wignell et al., 2017). Existing scholarly works have employed computational linguistic tools and content analysis in various contexts, such as providing insights into persuasion strategies of radicalized Islamist groups (Windsor, 2020). This study uses the framework of the Sussex School of discourse analysis and is inspired by the studies conducted by Leifeld and his colleagues (Leifeld, 2017, 2020; Leifeld et al., 2021; Malang & Leifeld, 2021) in which network analysis is used as a method to examine content of political communication to identify links between verbal content and normative claims or policy formation.

The analysis in this study indicates that, in his speeches, Khamenei uses religious concepts to attract, unify, and persuade his audience in a populist manner. Political actors tend to apply normative justifications to be accepted by a sympathetic and unsympathetic audience (Sundaram, 2021). The evidence found in this research indicates that Iran’s Supreme Leader uses methods of strategic (dis)association to filter audience types, adjust justifications, and provide reasoning to supporters and opponents. Both in terms of content and context, he heavily relies on the ideologic value system of the state to strengthen the populist binary that is manifested in his speeches.



### 3 | THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUPREME LEADER'S SPEECHES

The chronology of events indicates that as sanctions' pressure mounted on Iran, the Supreme Leader sought (in his speeches) to generate a populist discourse built on the state's ideological structure as a normative justification for the economic decline in Iran and resulting hardship experienced by the population. In June 2010, the UN imposed a new round of nuclear-related sanctions on Iran. UN Security Council Resolution 1929 was passed to force Iran to comply with international regulations that required transparency and limitation of the country's nuclear activities. In September 2010, Khamenei used the term “economic resistance” for the first time. In that speech, he described the US-led economic sanctions as a tool to apply pressure on the Iranian people to sour state-citizen relations and claimed that the nuclear program was merely an excuse for the West to impose pressure on the nation, aiming to force Iran to give up on its revolutionary ideals (Khamenei, 2010). In his speech he clearly stated that through his vision for “economy of resistance,” “the people of Iran and the officials of the country will sidestep sanctions and thus, they will frustrate those who impose sanctions.” Timing, context, and content of this speech corroborate the first proposition of the paper.

He gradually sought to translate his resistance discourse into practical guidelines. In February 2014, in consultation with the Council of Expediency, Khamenei issued a communique on the policies of the resistance economy. Through this, economic resistance discourse became an integral element of the government's economic strategies. The communique outlined several aspects of the country's economic strategies and demanded full compliance by all government bodies. One of the most significant elements of the document was its strong emphasis on the role of knowledge-based economy in economic resistance (ISNA, 2012). The significance of knowledge-based economy in Khamenei's resistance discourse will be discussed further in the following section. It is important to note that highlighting the importance of a specific sector is an indicator for his effort to influence the country's economic strategy—supporting the third proposition of this paper.

Khamenei, who formerly served as Iran's president, has been one of very few world leaders to refrain from traveling abroad, giving access to domestic media, and engaging with the international media. Beyond his social media activities in recent years (mostly on Twitter and Instagram) Khamenei has not engaged with any international media outlets throughout his political career. In addition, there are severe restrictions for domestic media engagement with the Supreme Leader in Iran. To highlight the extent of those restrictions, this study conducted thorough research on Iran's media law. All aspects of the law are written to protect the country's supreme leader from domestic media scrutiny. For example, according to Article 24 of Iran's Constitution, any media content deemed offensive to the Islamic faith or Iranian government officials (especially the supreme leader) or encouraging disunity and prodigality is forbidden (Media Law, 1989). Moreover, Article 514 of Iran's Islamic Penal Code lists insulting the country's supreme leader as a punishable crime. The penal code, however, does not clearly explain what constitutes an “insult.” As such, any scrutinizing or criticism of the supreme leader could be interpreted as an insult and therefore is banned.

Able to operate without scrutiny from the media, Khamenei has employed a unilateral political communication strategy that plays an important role in the dominance of his discourse and ultimately enables him to influence the policies of all political entities in Iran. Considering Khamenei survived an assassination attempt in 1981, such limited access to media is widely perceived as a security precaution. Since his inauguration, Khamenei has occasionally given

one-on-one interviews to state-sponsored broadcast media. These interviews are pre-staged on politically important occasions, such as election days. The videos of his interviews are available on his official website and were reviewed as part of this study. Two patterns are apparent with all his interviews: first, interviews are arranged as opportunities for Khamenei to give a statement rather than being questioned; second, interviews are only given to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting—no other media outlet has ever been granted close contact with him. Additionally, Khamenei has held infrequent question-and-answer sessions with select groups, such as industrial labor groups, or students (from schools, universities, and seminaries). The questions raised in those meetings never scrutinize his or the government's performance. The sessions are treated as an opportunity for the students to seek guidance on ideological issues that are in line with his world views, such as how the universities can become fully compliant with Islam. Thus, the initial stage of this research concluded that Khamenei's speeches are his most frequently used communication method. They capture a wide range of issues and are the most important channels for sharing his views with the public and policymakers.

In authoritarian systems, political leaders often rely on state-controlled media to perpetuate their discourse, endorse state propaganda, and communicate their vision. For example, Chinese President Xi Jinping has made more intensive use of the official newspaper of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, *People's Daily*, than almost any of his predecessors (Esarey, 2021). Former Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez hosted an unscripted talk show, "Alo Presidente," (Nolan, 2014) that was broadcast live by state-owned television, on which he discussed a range of issues, spontaneously announced major decisions, and publicized his foreign policy vision. Similarly, state-controlled media has played an important role in delivering Khamenei's economic resistance discourse by providing extensive coverage of his speeches.

Khamenei has used his speeches over the last decade as the main communication method to convey his discourse of economic resistance. He has been seeking not only to justify the hardships of sanctions pressure and offer alternative strategies for economic survival of the regime, but he also aims to project his own authority as *vali e-faqih*, or guardian, within the country's political and ideological structure (Aarabi, 2019). *Vali e-faqih*, a Shi'a Islamic concept that is incorporated into Iran's postrevolution political system, grants the country's supreme leader unlimited power and control over all decisions concerning the society during *Gheibat* (the time until the 12th Shi'a Imam, who according to Shi'a theology is the ultimate leader of the world, returns). The analysis of his speeches indicates that, by relying on his position as the *vali e-faqih*, Khamenei has also been seeking to pursue his vision for Iran's strategic autonomy and economic strength in a global system. In this vision, only those who comply with his religious philosophy are ultimately the righteous winners. They are the ones who comply with his call for economic jihad and are ready to implement his desired jihadi governance model. He seeks to justify the country's hardship, as a part of this battle between the "pure people" and the "evil Western elite," and claims that by adhering to his guidelines and through self-sacrifice and jihad, pious Iranian Shi'as will eventually triumph over the West.

#### 4 | DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This study adopted a mixed method in two steps. First, as outlined above, it qualitatively analyzed three sets of qualitatively collected data: transcripts of the Supreme Leader's speeches, recorded footage of his televised interviews, and recorded footage of his question-and-answer

meetings with select groups. Second, a quantitative network analysis was conducted to examine qualitatively collected data.

The unit of analysis in this research is Iran, the case study is economic resistance discourse of the country's Supreme Leader, and the period is the decade starting from 2010, when Khamenei first used the term "economic resistance," to 2020. The choice of case in this study is valuable as it offers insight into an aspect of the Iranian political system that has not been studied before. Through its foreign and nuclear policies, Iran has threatened regional destabilization and jeopardized global efforts toward nonproliferation. Therefore, understanding the vision and world view of the highest-ranking politician in Iran is of value both for academic and policymakers.

The method of analysis is based on two components:

1. *Dynamic network and text mining*: The dynamic network analysis provides a quantitative analysis of the Supreme Leader's speeches. This technique analyzes the transcripts of his speeches to (a) identify the significant ideological concepts in Khamenei's discourse that are used to influence the public and policymakers in Iran, (b) shed light on his desired governance model; (c) provide insight into his vision for the country's strategic autonomy and economic strength.
2. *Populist discourse analysis*: The findings of the network analysis are reviewed in the context of populist political theory to advance the scholarly conversation on populist discourse analysis on Iran. This segment of the research offers a theoretical contribution to the field of populist politics that is applicable to authoritarian systems beyond Iran, where collective ideologies, like religion, are used by populist leaders to manage public expectations, influence state institutions, manipulate government policies, and assert the leadership's vision for the respective country's global position.

As noted, qualitative data was collected for both qualitative and quantitative segments of the research method in this study. The transcripts of Khamenei's speeches, available publicly in Persian on his personal website ([www.khamenei.ir](http://www.khamenei.ir)), were the primary source of data for this study's network analysis. The data collection was conducted in three steps to identify the top 50 most frequently used words in Khamenei's speeches between 2010 and 2020. A key assumption in this method is that the frequency of use of a word is an indicator of the importance of that word to the speaker.

First, all speech transcripts (texts) were scraped with the web-scraping tool BeautifulSoup4 in Python to pool those related to "resistance economy" as one text corpus. Second, a list of most frequently used key words in the corpus was created to be then used to create the network. This was done through adopting a term frequency-inverse document frequency (TF-IDF) algorithm. TF-IDF is an information-retrieval method that can quantify the importance and relevance of terms (words and other string representations) in a collection of texts. The TF-IDF algorithm is designed in a way in which two metrics are measured regarding; (1) how many times a word appears in one document, (2) what is the inverse document frequency of the word across several documents. For this research, TF-IDF has, therefore, identified the most frequently used words in each single speech, and across all speeches. In other words, a word's importance is decided based on frequency of use of that word by Khamenei not only in one speech, but also in all his speeches over the period of this study (2010–2020). To strengthen the validity of the keyword list, the TF-IDF process was repeated three times to identify 50 most frequently used words. The lists were then compared and collated to limit the list of keywords to

the most frequently used keywords that are most relevant to economic resistance strategies. Connector and irrelevant words were deducted from the lists of keywords. A final list of key words formed of 46 words were created that is demonstrated in Table 1.

Fourth, the keywords were then translated into English and defined as nodes of a network to analyze the importance of each keyword for the speaker (Khamenei). Fifth, an undirected (asymmetrical) and binary network was created, and the edges of the network (the lines that connect two key words) were defined by a simple relationship between the nodes (key words). Each edge was created between two nodes when two keywords appeared in the same speech at least once. The weight of each edge (thickness of the lines in the network presented in Figure 1) reflects how often the two keywords were repeated together in the same speech. Heavier edges are, therefore, created between two nodes (keywords) that have been repeated together a greater number of times in the same speech. Figure 1 shows the results of the network analysis.

TABLE 1 List of keywords extracted by TF-IDF.

Keywords					
1	Future	آینده	24	Technology	فناوری
2	Endurance	ابستادگی	25	Security	امنیت
3	Decision Making	تصمیمگیری	26	Stability	ثبات
4	Knowledge-based	دانشبنیان	27	Austerity	ریاضت
5	Growth	رشد	28	Capacity	ظرفیت
6	Industry	صنعت	29	Strong	مستحکم
7	Resistance	مقاومتی	30	Dependence	وابستگی
8	Need	احتیاج	31	Jihadi	جهادی
9	Resilience	استحکام	32	Monopoly	منحصراً
10	Islamic	اسلامی	33	Self-sufficiency	خودکفایی
11	Research	تحقیق	34	Food	غذا
12	Capitalism	سرمایه‌داری	35	Expectation	انتظار
13	Problems	مشکلات	36	Export	صادرات
14	Strengthening	محکمسازی	37	Contingency	برونرفت
15	Oil	نفت	38	Efficient	موثر
16	Robust	مقاوم	39	Development	توسعه
17	Steadfast	پایدار	40	Comprehensiveness	جامعیت
18	Islam	اسلام	41	Inclusion	فراگیری
19	Holy	الهی	42	Sacrifice	مجاهدت
20	Role model	الگو	43	Flourishment	شکوفایی
21	Crisis	بحران	44	Healthcare	درمان
22	Effectiveness	تاثیرگذاری	45	Inward looking	درون‌نگرا
23	Dialogue creation	گفتمان سازی	46	Popular	مردمی

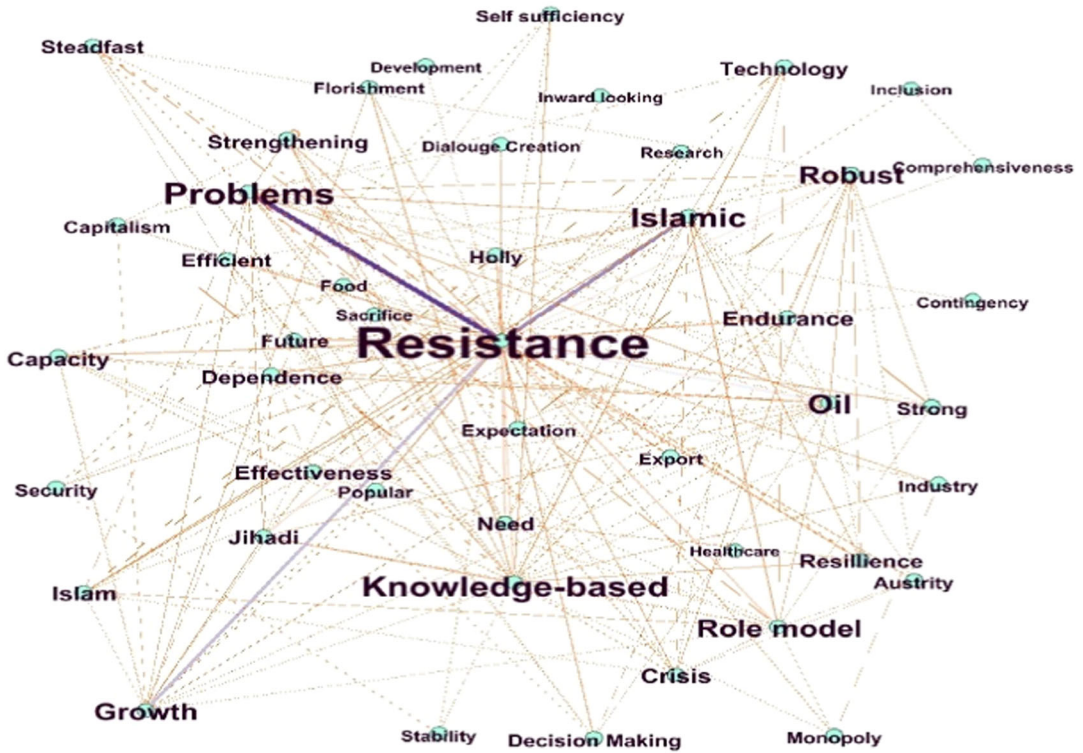


FIGURE 1 Semantic network of economic resistance discourse.

#### 4.1 | Network-level analysis findings

As it is demonstrated in Table 2:

- The heaviest edge in the network is formed between the words “resistance” and “problems.” This indicates a strong link between the discourse of resistance and hardship (presumably economic hardship caused by the sanctions) and corroborates P1. In other words, Khamenei’s economic resistance discourse is a response to the challenges that Iran faces caused by escalation of US-led sanctions on Iran’s nuclear development program.
- The edge between “Islamic” and “resistance” is the second heaviest in the network. This indicates a heavy reliance on religious concepts in the resistance narrative. Moreover, the term “jihadi” has one of the top 10 heaviest edges in the network. Both points highlight the reliance on religious concepts in the resistance discourse and supports P2. The result of the network level analysis helps to triangulate above-mentioned findings with regards his effort to translate the concept of economic resistance and jihad into practical guidelines. It sheds light on Khamenei’s vision for the future of Iran, in which hardship is justified by religious values and decision making is delegated to those who possess ultimate loyalty to this narrative.
- The knowledge-based economic sector is the only economic sector in the top 10 heaviest edges of the network with word resistance. In other words, it is one of the most frequently used terms appearing in the same speeches with the word resistance. Other terms, such as



TABLE 2 Top ten heaviest edges of the network.

Rank	Network edges		
	Source	Target	Weight
1	Problems	Resistance	48
2	Islamic	Resistance	38
3	Growth	Resistance	32
5	Robust	Resistance	24
6	Jihadi	Resistance	22
7	Knowledge-based	Resistance	22
8	Need	Resistance	20
9	Role model	Resistance	20
10	Endurance	Resistance	16

“industry,” “export,” “food,” “development,” “oil,” and “technology,” which are also related to economic policies, are on the list of 46 most frequently used keywords in all the speeches (Table 1). However, none of them are in the list of top ten heaviest edges of the network. The weight of the edge between “knowledge-based” and “resistance” indicates a stronger emphasis on the knowledge-based sector in comparison with the others in Khamenei’s resistance discourse. Such emphasis on this sector corresponds with P3 and indicates Khamenei’s strong effort, made in his speeches, to influence economic policymaking and emphasis on a specific economic sector to implement his own economic vision.

- The weight of the edge between “resistance” and “knowledge-based” is the same as between “resistance” and “jihadi.” This validates P3 and sheds light on Khamenei’s desired governance model for how economic policies related to resistance, particularly those associated with knowledge-based sector, in Iran should be developed. In developed economies, the knowledge-based sector is developed through innovation and transparent competition and with the help of intellectual property rights. In Khamenei’s vision, however, development of this sector in Iran is heavily driven by ideology and through what he refers to as a “jihadi management” (Bazoozbandi, 2022) style of governance.
- As indicated in Table 1, “jihad,” “sacrifice,” and “holy” (i.e., terms that signify divinity and association with God) are among the most frequently used terms in the speeches during the period between 2010 and 2020. Such linguistic choices indicate his populist position through a heavy reliance on Shi’a religious concepts that divide the world into “us” and “them.” At the same time, they define characteristics of his desired governance model in which the power and legitimacy to govern are delegated from God, economic hardship is justified as a holy war, and policy is quickly shifted toward newly emerging fields such as knowledge-based economy. These observations corroborate P2 and P3. Over time, the notion of jihad in Khamenei’s views has evolved. The qualitative data collected for this study helps triangulate the finding of network analysis and confirms such evolution. In the first two decades after the Revolution jihad was defined by the war with Iraq, aimed at post-war reconstruction, and focused on defending the country against external influence. However, in the last two decades it is defined as efforts to achieve scientific and intellectual advancement. Economic hardship and isolation caused by the international sanctions, have clearly prompted



Khamenei to redefine this concept. In his view that is disseminate in his discourse, development of knowledge requires a jihadi approach, in which jihadi managers, loyalists and those who identify with his populist binary of “people” versus “corrupt foreign elite” are in control of resources and decision making in Iran.

## 4.2 | Node-level analysis results

A two-level analysis of the network was used to confirm the findings (i.e., at the network level and node-level). Analyzing the position of the nodes also, provides an in-depth understanding of the network (Bloch, Dutta, et al., 2019; Jackson, 2010; Mesgari et al., 2015). Below some features of the network at the node level are highlighted. Table 3 shows nodes with the top 15 heaviest centralities in the network of this study.

### 4.2.1 | Degree centrality

Measuring degree centrality is a method to assess the importance of each node by the number of nodes connected to it (Bloch, Jackson, et al., 2019; Pachayappan & Venkatesakumar, 2018).

TABLE 3 Top 15 network centralities of the network.

Rank	Degree centrality		Betweenness centrality		Closeness centrality		Eigenvector centrality	
	Keyword	Value	Keyword	Value	Keyword	Value	Keyword	Value
1	Resistance	45	Resistance	0.578501	Resistance	1	Resistance	1
2	Problems	24	Problems	0.068244	Problems	0.681818	Problems	0.704947
3	Knowledge-based	22	Knowledge-based	0.059151	Knowledge-based	0.661765	Islamic	0.649632
4	Islamic	20	Islamic	0.036839	Islamic	0.642857	Oil	0.649584
5	Oil	19	Oil	0.026125	Oil	0.633803	Knowledge-based	0.6372
6	Robust	16	Robust	0.017655	Robust	0.608108	Role model	0.575605
7	Role model	16	Role model	0.017508	Role model	0.608108	Robust	0.550154
8	Growth	15	Growth	0.015487	Growth	0.6	Growth	0.532589
9	Endurance	10	Endurance	0.00463	Endurance	0.5625	Endurance	0.423923
10	Islam	10	Islam	0.00447	Crisis	0.5625	Crisis	0.408633
11	Crisis	10	Crisis	0.004129	Islam	0.5625	Islam	0.401915
12	Effectiveness	9	Effectiveness	0.003572	Jihadi	0.555556	Capacity	0.39332
13	Capacity	9	Capacity	0.003149	Effectiveness	0.555556	Dependence	0.378616
14	Jihadi	9	Jihadi	0.002898	Capacity	0.555556	Effectiveness	0.371431
15	Need	8	Need	0.002367	Need	0.54878	Jihadi	0.371079

Studying degree centrality provides insight into the popularity of nodes and in this analysis is used to assess the importance of certain keywords and concepts in Khamenei's discourse. As shown in Table 3, "resistance" and "problems" have the highest degree centralities in the network (i.e., these two words have been the keywords most frequently used together in the speeches), which supports both P1 and the above-mentioned network-level analysis findings. "Jihadi," "Islam," and "Islamic" are also among the highest degree centralities of the network—corroborating P2. "Knowledge-based," "oil," and "growth" are, respectively, ranked as third, fifth, and eighth regarding degree centrality in the network. This indicates that, in his discourse, the Supreme Leader perceives the oil and knowledge-based sectors are significance to economic growth and indeed policies that are aimed at building the country's economic resistance.

#### 4.2.2 | Betweenness centrality

Betweenness centrality is a characteristic of the nodes that measures the importance of each node based on its role in connecting two other nodes in the network. Betweenness captures the role of a node as an intermediary between other nodes. It quantifies the significance of the nodes based on the number of times that each node falls on the shortest path between other nodes (Bloch, Jackson, et al., 2019). "Knowledge-based," "oil," and "jihadi" ranked the same as they did in degree centrality. Therefore, these three keywords are not only among the most connected keywords, but they have also been used to connect other keywords to one another. This demonstrates the significance of these three words in Khamenei's vision for formulating policies and indicates his governance model that is heavily relying on populist ideologically driven discourse of jihad. These corroborate P2 and P3.

#### 4.2.3 | Closeness centrality

Closeness centrality measures the distance between a node and other nodes, showing the importance of nodes based on their closeness to other nodes (Pachayappan & Venkatesakumar, 2018). After "problems," "oil," "knowledge-based," and "growth" rank high in closeness centrality. These three words also rank the same in all other centralities, which confirms the importance of these keywords in the discourse presented through the speeches. Moreover, "jihadi," "Islam," and "Islamic" also rank high in closeness centrality, indicating the significance of religion in Khamenei's populist position in resistance discourse. These validate P1, P2, and P3.

#### 4.2.4 | Eigenvector centrality

Eigenvector centrality measures the influence of the nodes in the network. A node with a higher eigenvector centrality has greater influence on the other nodes. Unsurprisingly, "resistance" had the highest eigenvector centrality, which indicates the primacy of this concept. "Problems," "Islamic," "oil," and "knowledge-based" are also among the top eigenvector centralities, demonstrating their importance in Khamenei's resistance discourse and supporting P1, P2, and P3.

Among the degree centralities that are measured in this network (shown in Table 3) "Problems," "oil," "knowledge-based," and "Islamic" ranked the highest. This is a clear

indication of the link between the discourse of economic resistance and existing problems (mostly economic) in Iran. It can also be interpreted as the significant role of religion in Khamenei's discourse. The country has fallen behind other regional oil exporters in economic diversification efforts. The US sanctions that targeted the government's oil export income, have highlighted the degree of state's reliance on petrodollars. The finding of the network analysis reflects the importance of economic challenges in Khamenei's speeches. Lastly, in the above-mentioned quotes from his speeches, he indicates that the solution to address the challenges, is development of knowledge that helps the government to sidestep sanctions. The findings of the network confirm the interpretation of the verbal content of his speech.

## 5 | CONCLUSION

Authoritarian leaders communicate their political discourse unilaterally (through speeches) and in a closed environment without free media access or the space for public scrutiny or debate. By adopting such a communication method, they respond to external shocks, justify hardship, appeal to domestic and international sympathy, assert autonomy and power, and influence policy and governance. This research sheds light on various aspects of the discourse generated by Iran's most influential political figure over a decade. It has sought to advance scholarly work on one of the world's most difficult environments to conduct scholarly research.

Tightened economic sanctions on Iran have prompted Khamenei to adopt his populist discourse of economic resistance, which defines the "people" and "elite" according to Shi'a ideology. Through this discourse he aims to justify economic hardship by promoting religious virtues, such as self-sacrifice and jihad. By generating such discourse, he has also gained influence over the country's governance model. He has formulated a new governance model, through various official guidelines, that relies on what he defines as a jihadi approach. An integral element of the model is the appointment of loyal forces who support and promulgate his discourse. By adopting such a model, he seeks to influence policies that assert political autonomy and economic power. He divides the world into a populist binary of us versus them according to his interpretation of Shi'a Islam and presents economic hardship as a spiritually motivated jihad against the corrupt elite in the West. Studying the case of Iran demonstrates how external pressure may be instrumentalized to influence statecraft in authoritarian systems.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Speical gratitude to the GIGA intern, Mr. Mohammad Sadeghi Hamedani, whose help and assistance with this project was highly valuable. Open Access funding enabled and organized by Projekt DEAL.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## ORCID

Sara Bazoobandi  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8925-3631>

## REFERENCES

Aarabi, K. (2019, March 20). *What is Velayat-e Faqih?* Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. <https://www.institute.global/insights/geopolitics-and-security/what-velayat-e-faqih>

- Abrahamian, E. (1992). Fundamentalism or populism. In E. Abrahamian (Ed.), *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (pp. 13–39). University of Californian University Press.
- Adib-Moghaddam, A. (2014). *A critical introduction to Khomeini*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bayat, A. (1998). *Street politics: Poor people's movements in Iran*. Colombia University Press.
- Bazoobandi, S. (2022, November 3). Re-revolutionising Iran: Condemning prosperity and jihadi management. *GIGA Focus*. <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/de/publikationen/giga-focus/re-revolutionising-iran-condemning-prosperity-and-jihadi-management>
- Bloch, F., Dutta, B., & Manea, M. (2019). Efficient partnership formation in networks. *Theoretical Economics*, 14(3), 779–811. <https://doi.org/10.3982/TE3453>
- Bloch, F., Jackson, M. O., & Tebaldi, P. (2019). *Centrality measures in networks* (SSRN Scholarly Paper ID 2749124). Social Science Research Network. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2749124>
- Bos, L., Schemer, C., Corbu, N., Hameleers, M., Andreadis, I., Schulz, A., Schmuck, D., Reinemann, C., & Fawzi, N. (2020). The effects of populism as a social identity frame on persuasion and mobilisation: Evidence from a 15-country experiment. *European Journal of Political Research*, 59, 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12334>
- Brewer, D. D., & Webster, C. M. (2000). Forgetting of friends and its effects on measuring friendship networks. *Social Networks*, 21(4), 361–373. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-8733\(99\)00018-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-8733(99)00018-0)
- Christakis, N. A., & Fowler, J. H. (2007). The spread of obesity in a large social network over 32 years. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 357, 370–379. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMsa066082>
- Christakis, N. A., & Fowler, J. H. (2008). The collective dynamics of smoking in a large social network. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 358, 2249–2258. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMsa0706154>
- Dabashi, H. (1993). *Theology of discontent: The ideological foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. New York University Press.
- Destradi, S., Plagemann, J., & Taş, H. (2022). Populism and the politicisation of foreign policy. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 24(3), 475–492. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481221075944>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1995). Discourse analysis as ideology analysis. In C. Schäffne & A. Wenden (Eds.), *Language and peace* (1st ed., pp. 17–33). Routledge.
- Esarey, A. (2021). Propaganda as a lens for assessing Xi Jinping's leadership. *Journal of Contemporary China*, 30(132), 888–901. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2021.1893555>
- Fowler, J. H. (2006). Legislative cosponsorship networks in the U.S. house and Senate. *Social Networks*, 28(4), 454–465.
- Fowler, J. H., Heaney, M. T., Nickerson, D. W., Padgett, J. F., & Sinclair, B. (2011). Causality in political networks. *American Politics Research*, 39(2), 437–480.
- Grossmann, M., & Dominguez, C. B. K. (2009). Party coalitions and interest group networks. *American Politics Research*, 37(5), 767–800. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X08329464>
- Hadiz, V. R. (2014). A new Islamic populism and the contradictions of development. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 44(1), 125–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2013.832790>
- Hadiz, V. R. (2019). Islamic populism and the politics of neoliberal inequalities. In C. de la Torre (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of global populism* (pp. 163–176). Routledge.
- Halliday, M., & Matthiessen, C. (2004). *An introduction to functional grammar* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- Hanneman, R. A. (1998). *Computer-assisted theory building: Modeling dynamic social systems*. SAGE Publications.
- Harris, K. (2017). *A social revolution: Politics and the welfare state in Iran*. University of California University Press.
- Hatzisavvidou, S. (2022). The rhetorical strategy of moralisation: A lesson from Greece. In C. Kock & L. Villadsen (Eds.), *Populist rhetorics: Case studies and a minimalist definition* (pp. 141–164). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hawkins, K. A. (2009). Is Chávez populist? Measuring populist discourse in comparative perspective. *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(8), 1040–1067. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414009331721>
- Hawkins, K. A. (2010). *Venezuela's Chavismo and populism in comparative perspective*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hovsepian-Bearce, Y. (2017). *The political ideology of ayatollah khamenei: Out of the mouth of the supreme leader of Iran*. Routledge.

- Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran. (1989). *Ghanoon-i Mat'boo'aat (Media Law)*. Retrieved July 2022, from <https://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/91180>
- ISNA. (2012, February 19). Siasat-ha-i Kolli-i "Eghtesad-i Moghavemati" Eblagh shod. *Iranian Students' News Agency*.
- Jackson, M. O. (2010). *Social and economic networks*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400833993>
- Judis, J. B., & Teixeira, R. (2002). *The emerging democratic majority*. Scribner.
- Khamenei, A. (2010, September 7). *Leader's speech in meeting with entrepreneurs* [Speech Transcript]. Khamenei.Ir. <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1863/Leader-s-Speech-in-Meeting-with-Entrepreneurs>
- Khamenei, A. (2011a, March 28). *Leader's speech in Asalouyeh* [speech transcript]. Khamenei.Ir. <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1440/Leader-s-Speech-in-Asalouyeh>
- Khamenei, A. (2011b, August 10). *Leader's speech to students* [speech transcript]. Khamenei.Ir. <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1506/Leader-s-Speech-to-Students>
- Khamenei, A. (2014, February 18). *Ayatollah Khamenei announces general policies on the economy of resistance* [Speech Transcript]. Khamenei.ir. <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/5396/Ayatollah-Khamenei-Announces-General-Policies-on-the-Economy>
- Khamenei, A. (2019). *The "second phase of the revolution."* Statement addressed to the Iranian nation [Speech Transcript]. Khamenei.ir. <https://english.khamenei.ir/news/6415/The-Second-Phase-of-the-Revolution-Statement-addressed-to-the>
- Khatami, M. (2001). *Dialogue among civilizations: Contexts and perspectives*. UN Chronicle. <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/dialogue-among-civilizations-contexts-and-perspectives>
- Kimmel, M., & Tavakol, R. (1986). Against Satan: Charisma and tradition in Iran. In R. M. Glassman & W. H. Swatos Jr. (Eds.), *Charisma, history, and social structure* (p. 101–112). Greenwood.
- Kock, C., Villadsen, L., Ulrich, A., Kramer, O., & Till, D. (Eds.). (2022). Populism and the rise of the AfD in Germany. *Populist rhetorics case studies and a minimalist definition* (pp. 107–139). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87351-6\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-87351-6_5)
- Kutlay, M., & Öniş, Z. (2021). Turkish foreign policy in a post-Western order: Strategic autonomy or new forms of dependence? *International Affairs*, 97(4), 1085–1104.
- Leifeld, P. (2017). Discourse network analysis: Policy debates as dynamic networks. In J. N. Nicoll Victor, A. H. Montgomery, & M. Lubell (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political networks* (pp. 301–325). Oxford University Press.
- Leifeld, P. (2020). Policy debates and discourse network analysis: A research agenda. *Politics and Governance*, 8(2), 180–183. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i2.3249>
- Leifeld, P., Henrichsen, T., Buckton, C., Fergie, G., & Hilton, S. (2021). Belief system alignment and cross-sectoral advocacy efforts in policy debates. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29(8), 1225–1248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1945131>
- Lob, E. (2018). Construction jihad: state-building and development in Iran and Lebanon's Shi'i territories. *Third World Quarterly*, 39(11), 2103–2125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1460197>
- Malang, T., & Leifeld, P. (2021). The latent diffusion network among national parliaments in the early warning system of the European Union. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(4), 873–890. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13135>
- Markaze Olgouye Islami Irani-ie Pishraft. (2011). *Olgouye Islami Irani-ie Pishraft*. <https://olgou.ir/images/olgou/Olgou.pdf>
- Mesgari, I., Kermani, M. A. M. A., Hanneman, R., & Aliahmadi, A. (2015). Identifying key nodes in social networks using multi-criteria decision-making tools. In D. Mugnolo (Ed.), *Mathematical Technology of Networks* (pp. 137–150). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16619-3\\_10](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-16619-3_10)
- Milani, A. (2009). *The three paradoxes of the Islamic revolution in Iran*. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/three-paradoxes-islamic-revolution-iran>
- Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), 541–563.
- Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2012). Populism: Corrective and threat to democracy. In C. Mudde & C. Rovira Kaltwasser (Eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?* (pp. 205–222). Cambridge University Press.

- Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2013). Exclusionary vs. inclusionary populism: Comparing contemporary Europe and Latin America. *Government and Opposition*, 48(2), 147–174. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2012.11>
- Nolan, R. (2014, May 4). The realest reality show in the world. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/06/magazine/hugo-chavezs-totally-bizarre-talk-show.html>
- Official Portal of the Government. (2014, September 29). مقاومتی اقتصاد کی سیاستهای اجرای شخصا وزرا. کنند پیگیری. [dolat.ir. https://dolat.ir/detail/249937](https://dolat.ir/detail/249937)
- Pachayappan, M., & Venkatesakumar, R. (2018). A graph theory based systematic literature network analysis. *Theoretical Economics Letters*, 8(5), 960–980. Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.4236/tel.2018.85067>
- Raisi, A. (2019). The puzzle of populism in Iran's electoral politics. *Democratization*, 26(6), 916–934. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2019.1573815>
- Reuters Staff. (2012, February 29). US targets Dubai Bank over Iran. *Reuters*. <https://www.reuters.com/article/iran-sanctions-noor-idUSWNAB751020120229>
- Sadjapour, K. (2008). *Reading Khamenei: The world view of Iran's most powerful leader*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- Stanley, B. (2008). The thin ideology of populism. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13(1), 95–110. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569310701822289>
- Sundaram, S. S. (2021). Strategic legitimation through rhetorical dissociation in international relations. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 6(2), ogaa001. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogaa001>
- Tazmini, G. (2009). *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the turbulent path to reform*. Tauris and Palgrave Macmillan.
- Taş, H. (2022). Erdoğan and the muslim brotherhood: An outside-in approach to Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East. *Turkish Studies*, 23(5), 722–742.
- Wastnidge, E. (2016). *Diplomacy and reform in Iran: Foreign policy under Khatami*. I.B. Tauris.
- Wignell, P., Tan, S., & O'Halloran, K. L. (2017). Violent extremism and iconisation: Commanding good and forbidding evil? *Critical Discourse Studies*, 14(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2016.1250652>
- Windsor, L. (2020). The language of radicalization: Female Internet recruitment to participation in ISIS activities. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 32(3), 506–538. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2017.1385457>
- Yilmaz, I. (2018). Islamic populism and creating desirable citizens in Erdogan's new Turkey. *Mediterranean Quarterly*, 29, 52–76.
- Yilmaz, I. (2022). *Authoritarianism, informal law, and legal hybridity: The Islamisation of the state in Turkey*. Palgrave Macmillan.

**How to cite this article:** Bazoobandi, S. (2023). Populism, jihad, and economic resistance: Studying the political discourse of Iran's supreme leader. *Digest of Middle East Studies*, 32, 321–339. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dome.12303>