

Effectiveness of Economic Sanctions on Nuclear  
Non-proliferation: Constructing Domestic Effects of  
International Sanctions within Iran's Elite Discourse  
in the Presidential Election of 2013

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– ABSTRACT–

The increase in the imposition of economic sanctions against nuclear proliferation has been the focus of many academic studies. This research examines the case of Iran by examining the role of discourse in creating nuclear policies during the presidential election in 2013 by presenting material elements of sanctions and ideational elements of Hassan Rouhani and Mohammad Ghalibaf. The sanctions were imposed to change Iran's nuclear choice. Sanctions can serve to change nuclear policy within a wider context of competing discourses during elections. The thesis considers the adequacy of existing analysis within the leading schools of thought and then explains why social constructivism is used. According to constructivism, actors' interests and identities are shaped socially and constructed by language, where individuals generate influence through ideas, conceptions and meanings. Yet, there has so far been insufficient sustained consideration of the role of discourse in producing policies. This thesis addresses the significant role of issue salience in the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf on sanctions and their contribution to affecting Iran's nuclear choices. To do so, the thesis analyses these discourses, Ali Khamenei, and some texts from the newspapers of Shargh and Kayhan. This study concludes that the main cause of economic harm within Rouhani's discourse was the sanctions, whereas for Ghalibaf it was mismanagement. Rouhani and Ghalibaf were influenced by sanctions and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests; therefore, they announced two different approaches to be adopted if elected: a flexible approach to renegotiating the nuclear programme as a high issue salience by Rouhani; and an inflexible approach to renegotiating the nuclear programme as a low issue salience by Ghalibaf. This study demonstrates the importance of the discourse on nuclear policy change based on understanding and explaining the effects of sanctions and actors' ideational elements.

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– DECLARATION –

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

## PART I – CHAPTER 1– INTRODUCTION TO THE THESIS

### **1.1. Introduction**

This study examines the relationship between economic sanctions and choices made by the Islamic Republic of Iran (hereafter Iran) on its nuclear programme. Its importance lies in explaining how elite discourse in the 2013 presidential election constructed the sanctions and their effects in relation to nuclear choices. The thesis aims to explore how the effects of economic sanctions on Iran's nuclear choices were framed based on conceptions of identity and interests within the texts of Hassan Rouhani (hereafter Rouhani) and Muhammad Baqer Ghalibaf (hereafter Ghalibaf) and how these align with the intended approach of sanctions regimes. More specifically, the thesis investigates the social construction of the effects of the economic sanctions, the main causes of economic harm, appropriate solutions to improve the economy, Iran's identity and interests, and consequently, Iran's future nuclear choices. These themes are investigated through discourse analysis of the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf together with the texts of the supreme leader, Ali Khamenei (hereafter Khamenei), and the national newspapers of Shargh and Kayhan.

The thesis illustrates that a direct linear relationship between sanctions and policy change is challenged by this research. Iranian narratives during the presidential election matter in explaining the process by which economic sanctions influenced Iran's nuclear choices. The thesis shows that elite discourses in the elections are competing as alternative systems of meaning about the relationships between sanctions, economic harm, the nuclear programme, and nuclear choices. These narratives reflect the issue salience in the discourses of the candidates about the sanctions regime, their interpretations, responses and policies on nuclear choices if elected. On this basis, the main issue salience within their discourses was the economy and its relation to the sanctions and Iran's nuclear choices. That is, the elimination of the effects of sanctions and the improvement of the economy requires a new flexible nuclear choice. This issue was salient and had high importance within Rouhani's discourse, while it had low importance within the discourse of Ghalibaf.

### **1.2. Research overview**

In this section, the thesis sets out the central research puzzle, aim, hypothesis, arguments, and objectives. In addition, this section contains the main and sub-questions that examine how the effects of economic sanctions and conceptions on Iran's identity and interests could affect Iran's nuclear choices through elite discourse in the 2013 elections. Rouhani's election may be the main factor that led to the change in Iran's nuclear policy in 2015 regarding the nuclear deal—

the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Therefore, investigating and analysing the elite discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf is necessary to explore the differences between them in the context of the election in which Rouhani proved to be more persuasive to the electorate.

#### Research puzzle

Iran chose a flexible approach to its nuclear programme after the presidential election of 2013. This is a puzzling situation because Iran has been sanctioned regarding its nuclear programme since 2006, and it has conducted nuclear negotiations since 2003 without substantial change to its nuclear policy; however, after the presidential election outcomes in 2013, Iran had serious negotiations and consequently had a nuclear deal in 2015 regarding the JCPOA agreement. To address the thesis puzzle, the main research question is:

#### Research question

How did economic sanctions and Iran's identity and interests affect its nuclear choices through elite discourse in the 2013 election? From this question, the logical development of sub-questions is as follows:

*(1) What is the most dominant factor expressed in the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf as the priority among other factors?*

*(2) How did the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf frame the main cause of the economic harm in light of nuclear non-proliferation sanctions and their conceptions of Iran's identity and interests?*

*(3) What were the most salient issues in the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf that expressed their approaches and policies to Iran's nuclear choices and resolving the economic harm?*

*(4) How can the tools of social constructivism contribute to examining the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf about framing Iran's future nuclear choices to be adopted if elected?*

#### Research aims and objectives

To explore the effect of economic sanctions and Iran's identity on its nuclear choices by examining elite discourse in the 2013 election, the thesis has two objectives:

(i) To review sanctions scholarship in light of economic sanctions imposed on Iran from 2006 to 2013 as well as Iran's identity and interests.

(ii) To investigate the importance of issue salience and language in constructing systems of ideas and meanings by examining the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf that constitute realities about Iran's identity and interests, the effectiveness of sanctions, economic harm, and nuclear choices.

To achieve the aim and objectives of the thesis, I identified the economic sanctions imposed on Iran by the UN, the EU, and the US and their contribution to deepening economic harm, as well as the ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf that construct different conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. In addition, a set of elite interviews was conducted with academics, experts, and policymakers to clearly understand the ambiguous relationship between the effects of economic sanctions and Iran's nuclear choices. Further, this study analysed the discourse on economic sanctions and nuclear choices through the key texts from the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in particular.

#### Research variables

The thesis considers three variables in order to address its puzzle and questions. The study's independent variables are economic sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation and Iran's identity and interests. The sanctions regime imposes sanctions on certain targets, according to Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter (Article 41). In addition, some states and unions impose sanctions unilaterally, such as the US and the European Union (hereafter EU). Iran's identity and interests are values that inherently reflect the history of the Iranian people and their national pride, as well as ways of behaving to preserve its national interests through influencing actors' conceptions. These two independent variables affect Iran's nuclear choices as a dependent variable within specific events, tools such as presidential elections, elite discourse, actors' ideational elements and experiences, as intervening variables.

#### Research hypothesis.

The social construction of language use based on conceptions of Iran's identity and interests and expressing the effects of the economic sanctions in the presidential election of 2013 explains Iran's nuclear policy change.

#### Research Argument.

The relationship between the effects of economic sanctions and nuclear policy choices in the Iranian case after 2013 is not straightforward to explain. The economic sanctions on Iran's nuclear programme from 2006 to 2013 were sustainable, inclusive, mandatory, collective, and articulated (SIMCA), and such sanctions are more likely to inflict severe effects on the economy and subsequently might affect nuclear choices relying on the salient issue within elite discourse; however, explaining this relationship properly can only be done through examining the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf, considering their ideational elements of understanding and explaining Iran's identity and interests during the 2013 elections. This study considers a counterargument that simply demonstrates a direct relationship between the material realities of

the severe cost of economic sanctions and nuclear policy change in the Iranian case, rather than ideational elements and ideas constituted by individuals.

#### Interview findings.

After analysing the interviews, genuine and novel knowledge emerged that supported the analysis of the study and addressed the puzzle and the research questions. For example, most participants believe that the effects of economic sanctions were the main cause of Iran's economic problems during 2006–2013; participants responded positively when asked about the importance of linking the effects of sanctions within the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf to influence voters' preferences; they believe that voters consider the effects of sanctions to be the main cause for economic harm regarding Iran's nuclear programme, and thus they would support a candidate who suggested flexible policies on that basis; participants emphasised the ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in affecting the way they response to sanctions regime through conceptions of Iran's identity and interests; they believe that the texts of Rouhani as a moderate revealed a new flexible approach to Iran's nuclear choice based on renegotiating the nuclear programme have contributed to his victory and consequently reaching the nuclear deal according to the JCPOA agreement; participants tended to believe that if Ghalibaf won the elections, he would adopt a less flexible approach to Iran's nuclear choice in terms of negotiations as well as the concessions.

#### Research findings

(i) The economic factor was a salient issue and the most expressed among other factors in the elite discourse during the election. Shargh newspaper and Rouhani were convergent over the significant effect of economic sanctions as the main cause of economic harm. In contrast, Khamenei, the Kayhan newspaper, and Ghalibaf were convergent about the minor effects of sanctions and the significant effects of mismanagement as the main cause of economic harm. This finding relates to questions (1) and (2) discussed in chapter 7.

(ii) Economic sanctions have hurt Iranians' daily lives significantly; as a result, improving economic conditions has been the main priority for candidates as well as voters; however, two different approaches were announced. Rouhani's discourse framed the issue salience of lifting or alleviating sanctions through renegotiating the nuclear programme as essential to improving the economy. While, within Ghalibaf's discourse, that issue was not salient as he framed enhancing management as an issue salience to improving the economy with high importance, This finding relates to question (3) discussed in chapter 8.

(iii) The salient issue of elimination of the effects of sanctions and the improvement of the

economy requires a new flexible nuclear choice was under dispute within the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf. The effects of sanctions, mismanagement, and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests contributed to differences in their assessments. Rouhani, as a moderate with a diplomatic background, considered it of high importance and thus adopted a flexible and constructive interaction approach to Iran's nuclear choices.

This would be mainly applied through renegotiating the nuclear programme in order to improve the economy. Ghalibaf, in contrast, as a conservative with a revolutionary background, considered it of low importance and thus adopted a different approach to Iran's nuclear choices, that was based on a resistance approach. This would be mainly achieved through enhancing internal cohesion as well as effective management. This finding relates to question (4), discussed in chapter 9.

This study is significant because it sheds light on the contribution of general elections, economic sanctions, identity and interests to nuclear policy change through elite discourse. As a result, adding a successful new case to the literature helps policymakers, leaders, and international institutions consider how the effects of (SIMCA) sanctions affect nuclear choices through elite discourse. In addition, it brings the discourse along with issue salience into consideration to be within the conditions that may increase the likelihood of sanctions success.

### **1.3. The originality of the thesis**

This study makes a number of original contributions to scholarship. Economic sanctions not only inflict heavy economic costs on a target but also have the political goal of affecting policy change. The thesis provides, first, a significant contribution to the economic sanctions scholarship regarding nuclear non-proliferation by examining Iran's nuclear choices based on issue salience in the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf during the general election. Hence, the second thesis contributes to social constructivism by constituting knowledge about the role of discourse in presenting material and ideational elements that contribute to creating policies.

It does this by providing the role of actors' conceptions of Iran's identity and interests in producing nuclear policy change. This study offers a systematic analysis of 97 texts belonging to Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh and Kayhan about how Rouhani and Ghalibaf framed the causes of economic harm, improving the economy, the effects of economic sanctions, Iran's nuclear choices. Moreover, it provides elite interview data to substantially complement the main analysis of Rouhani and Ghalibaf's statements about the effects of economic sanctions and Iran's identity and interests.

## 1.4. Iran's nuclear programme

In this section, the study briefly investigates Iran's nuclear choices under the conservative government of Ahmadinejad from 2005 to 2013, Rouhani's elections, and the JCPOA.

### 1.4.1. Iran's nuclear choice under Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Presidency

To constrain Iran's nuclear programme, the international community, through the (E3 countries consisting of France, Germany, and the United Kingdom) conducted nuclear negotiations with Iran from 2003 to 2005. Rouhani, the presidential candidate in 2013, was Iran's chief nuclear negotiator during Muhammad Khatami's presidency from 2003 to 2005. During these negotiations, Iran agreed to suspend its uranium enrichment. However, after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory in 2005, Iran's nuclear approach changed, starting with the violation of its nuclear obligations and re-enriching uranium. During Ahmadinejad's era from 2005 to 2013, Iran was not fully cooperative with the International Atomic Energy Agency (hereafter IAEA), and consequently, its nuclear file was referred by the agency to the United Nations Security Council (hereafter UNSC). Subsequently, the US, China, and Russia joined the nuclear negotiations in 2006. The so-called P5+1 or E3+3 refers to the UN Security Council's five permanent members (China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom, and the US + Germany).

Despite changing the negotiations' manner by offering significant incentives and strengthening the sanctions on Iran, the negotiations continued until 2013 without any tangible progress. As a result of these sanctions, Iran experienced a sharp increase in economic harm. However, significant progress had been made in the nuclear programme during the presidency of Ahmadinejad. As a result of Ahmadinejad's nuclear choices, the UN, the EU, and the US imposed economic sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme in 2006. The main purpose of the sanctions was to coerce Iran to change its nuclear policy by constraining its uranium enrichment and allowing the IAEA to access its nuclear facilities under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and its Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement with the IAEA.

The economic sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme resulted in severe effects on Iran and the economy in terms of inflation, unemployment, and GDP growth (The World Bank, 2021a), and this dominated the candidates' texts in the 2013 election, as I argue in chapter 7. The sanctions have specific features and were in line with the sanctions scholarship, which has identified the conditions and features that may increase the effects of the sanctions (I will elaborate on this further in chapter 2). These features, as described above, are (SIMCA) and will be used in this thesis to express the features of the economic sanctions on Iran.



The issue salience of the effects of sanctions can be understood and explained according to ideational elements and Iran's identity and interests. SIMCA can be understood within the Iranian case as the sanctions were: sustainable considering the length of the period from 2006 to 2016; inclusive as they were comprehensive and combined financial and economic sanctions; mandatory because they were implemented in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) and, thus, the international community must comply; collective or 'multilateral' where the sender is more than a state where states should cooperate within the international institutions to apply them, and; articulated by explaining them as issue salience in the discourse by emphasising the severe effects of them to the voters within the texts of the presidential candidates.

#### 1.4.2. Rouhani's election and the JCPOA agreement

In the 2013 presidential elections, the moderate candidate Rouhani won the first round with 50.7 per cent of the votes, compared to the conservative candidate Ghalibaf with 16.5 per cent (Irani Data Portal, 2013a). The difference between them was large, roughly 1/3, considering that the conservative Ahmadinejad had won the two previous presidential elections in 2005 with 61.7 per cent, and 2009 with 63.1 per cent (Irani Data Portal, 2009). This reflected a significant shift in Iranian voters' attitudes and responses to the two different competing discourses. The election of a moderate president after two terms of a conservative government along with different understandings and conceptions of Iran's nuclear interests prompted significant changes in the negotiation process at the end of 2013. Quick and intensified rounds of serious nuclear negotiations were held between Iran and the P5+1, resulting in the nuclear deal in July 2015 under the JCPOA.

The JCPOA stipulated that Iran's nuclear programme will be exclusively peaceful; under no circumstances will Iran ever seek, develop, or acquire any nuclear weapons. The deal also stipulated that the IAEA would inspect and verify all Iranian nuclear facilities. In return, the international community, according to the JCPOA agreement, would lift economic sanctions on Iran that were imposed through UNSCR (1696) (UNSCR, 2006). The US would also lift the sanctions through the revocation of Executive Orders 13574, 13590, 13622, 13645, and 13628 (JCPOA, 2015).

In addition, the EU would lift its restrictive measures according to Council Decisions No. 961/2010 and the suffix decisions, repealing Regulation (EC) No. 423/2007 EU in 2012 (JCPOA, 2015). All these sanctions were lifted on the JCPOA's 'implementation day' on 16 January 2016, after the IAEA issued its report confirming that Iran had fulfilled its first round of nuclear commitments according to the agreement (JCPOA, 2015).

#### 1.5. Elite discourse during the presidential election of 2013

There is a connection between elite discourse during the general election and policy change. Béland (2009) shows the power of ideas in discourse has a decisive role alongside other sources in shaping and changing policies. Béland explained that ideas can become a major causal element of discourse under particular institutional and political circumstances (Béland, 2009). With this in mind, one can perceive the extent to which expressing economic harm in the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in the elections is an appropriate way to communicate with voters about previous, current, and future policies, including nuclear policies. In turn, voters rank candidates in general elections on the basis of convergent announced policies with their desired policies through discourse and elect a candidate who reflects their interests (Sartori, 1997).

Discourse helps not just in representing ideas but also in exchanging them within the interaction and communication processes between political actors and people in many ways, such as by presenting, deliberating, and legitimising those ideas (Schmidt, 2010).

The effects of economic sanctions, along with other factors, have caused serious harm to the Iranian economy, and the economy was a top priority for all candidates, as I argue in chapter (7). This harm has been framed differently within the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in the 2013 election in relation to nuclear choices and mismanagement, as I argue in chapter (9). These narratives rely mainly on the constituent texts of Khamenei and key texts from Shargh and Kayhan. The difference in their ideational elements and their conceptions of Iran's identity and interests may form the crux of their texts in terms of the system of meanings that constructing effective policies to eliminate the economic harm as I argue in chapter (8). The ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf attribute this to their beliefs, ideas, experiences, ideologies, discourses and values, where their institutions refer to diplomacy and military respectively (as we will see in chapter '3').

The relationship between the effects of economic sanctions since 2006 and changes in Iran's nuclear choices in 2013 is ambiguous and not straightforward. For example, under the dominance of a conservative government from 2005 to 2013, Ahmadinejad adopted a resistant approach to Iran's nuclear policy. This caused severe impacts on Iran due to the sanctions when he was denying this tangible impact. Therefore, it is essential to understand the reality of the sanctions' effects and the role of ideational elements in influencing Iran's nuclear choices through elite discourse, especially the narratives of the two candidates, where one of them will become president. In accordance with the Iranian constitution, the president will have the authority, power, and a major role in making policies, including the nuclear programme, of course, after the Supreme Leader grants permission.

In this context, the main task of this thesis is to analyse the narratives of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in relation to Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan to map their discourses during the election in order to show how they interpreted and connected economic sanctions, Iran's identity and interests, economic harms, appropriate responses, and nuclear choices. This shows the validity of a social constructivist logic in understanding the effective role of language, identity, interests, shared ideas, and values within Iranian society in relation to sanctions' effects and influence on Iran's nuclear choices through elite discourse in the 2013 election.

## **1.6. Structure of the thesis**

This thesis is structured into three main parts. Part I consists of four chapters. Chapter 1 begins with the introduction; it demonstrates the aim, objectives, hypothesis, and puzzle. It also

revealed the originality of the thesis, Iran's nuclear programme, and candidates' narratives during the presidential election of 2013. Chapter 2 provides a review of the economic sanction scholarship on the effectiveness of economic sanctions against nuclear proliferation in general and Iran in particular. It also reviews the scholarship on discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis in the Iranian case. The chapter then demonstrates the gap in the existing scholarship, which has not fully explored the significant role of the discourse in presenting the effects of sanctions as a salient issue and Iran's identity and interests as a combination of material and ideational elements, and thus creating policies within the discourses of candidates if elected. The discourse does that by competing to produce realities about nuclear choices along with the desired approach of the sanctions regime. The chapter aims to situate the research within the scholarship on economic sanctions against nuclear proliferation—the Iranian case in particular. It also aims to investigate the relationship between the effects of economic sanctions in affecting nuclear choices through elite discourse in general elections.

Chapter 3 includes background on sanctions against nuclear proliferation. In addition, it reviews the UN, US, and EU sanctions against Iran and the presidential election in 2009. It also sheds light on the political factions and the historical development of Iran's nuclear programme under conservatives and moderates. The thesis in chapter 4 provides a statistical foundation from reliable resources for the significant changes in the Iranian economy from 2006 to 2013, the period when sanctions as independent variables were in place. It shows the differences between some economic indicators before and during the sanctions when considering the dependent variables that influence these independent variables. It is also essential to provide the reader with accurate data on sanctions' effects because, as we will see in chapters (7, 8 and 9) when Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan newspapers have marginalised the effects of sanctions on Iran in terms of unemployment, inflation, GDP growth, and so on.

Part II consists of two chapters. The study in chapter 5, the theoretical framework, focuses on social constructivism as a social theory in international relations and justifies the significance of this theory in underpinning the thesis. The chapter provides insightful details on why other theories do not adequately address the research puzzle and questions. Social constructivism helps to understand how perceptions of Iran's identity and interests influenced Rouhani and Ghalibaf to construct the effects of economic sanctions within their discourse. Iran's identity and interests have always been shaped by discursive narratives, and because of that, this study uses a social constructivist approach to address research questions and explain the puzzle. In chapter 6, the study implements the methodology of the study, as this is an in-depth case study on Iran. The methodological chapter contains a research design that consists of research methods, data gathering, and more details about the interviews that have been conducted with

academics, experts, and policymakers. The chapter also tackles problems such as validity and data access, along with ethical considerations.

And finally, Part III consists of four chapters. The first three chapters analyse key texts from the discourses of Rouhani, Ghalibaf and Khamenei as well as some key texts from Shargh, and Kayhan. Chapter 7 provides a detailed context for the presidential election of 2013. It also explores the factors that have been expressed and whether it was the economic, social or political ones. It also analyses their texts to investigate the main cause of economic harm, according to Rouhani and Ghalibaf. Following the main cause of the economic harm, chapter 8, investigates the approaches of Rouhani and Ghalibaf to resolving the economic problems. When Rouhani adopted renegotiating the nuclear issue to lift the sanctions, Ghalibaf adopted a different approach, relying on enhancing the management. The thesis then, in chapter 9 analyses their text to investigate the ways that the effects of economic sanctions affected Iran's nuclear choices. When Rouhani followed a flexible approach that might restrict Iran's nuclear programme (uranium enrichment), Ghalibaf followed an inflexible approach to the international community, that is, keep Iran's current nuclear choice as it is, because he does not trust the international community, especially the US and the West. Finally, chapter 10 concludes with the main findings, study limitations, and future work.

ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AND ELITE DISCOURSE: A NEW ROOM FOR INFLUENCE  
POLICY DURING ELECTIONS

**2.1. Introduction**

This chapter aims to explore the existing scholarship on the effectiveness of economic sanctions and their potential role in influencing nuclear choices within elite discourse during general elections. I will argue in this chapter that elite discourse during general elections is crucial to showing economic sanctions' impact on nuclear choices, especially when sanctions have features of SIMCA. I will show how this is associated with the condition of regime type and how scholars agree on its role in increasing the likelihood of the success of sanctions.

I will also show the contentions and convergences among scholars on economic sanctions' effectiveness by identifying their different qualitative and quantitative approaches and methods. I will explore in this chapter the factors that may undermine the effectiveness of sanctions, such as third-party involvement, the sender's goals, and a lack of international cooperation. In addition, I will also review conditions that are more likely to increase the likelihood of effectiveness, such as heavy cost, international cooperation, domestic factors, and regime type.

Finally, I will investigate the importance of elite discourse in presidential elections as a social practice in constructing determinant factors such as the economic one. The departure point of this chapter is to shed light on the core work that shaped a clear understanding of economic sanctions' effectiveness, especially the regime-type condition because it significantly relates to this study. I will use 'sender' to express the 'sanctioning actor', and 'target' to express the 'sanctioned actor'. The chapter consists of three sections: the first section focuses on economic sanctions' effectiveness; the second section explores economic sanctions against nuclear proliferation; and the final section focuses on the economic sanctions on Iran's nuclear programme and the role of elite discourse in presidential elections of 2013.

**2.2. Effective or ineffective; Economic sanctions remain contested**

The scholarship on economic sanctions acknowledged that imposing sanctions is a good alternative to the use of military force. Yet, scholars have always been in dispute about their effectiveness or success as either an instrument or symbolic tool of states' foreign policy.

### 2.2.1. Introduction

This section reviews the scholarship on economic sanctions' effectiveness in general when sanctions can be imposed against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (hereafter WMD), human rights abuses, terrorism, enhancing democracy, and so forth. Exploring ways that scholars have measured the success of economic sanctions in different approaches, methods, and perspectives is essential to expanding our knowledge of the possibility of sanctions' success and finding out new conditions that may ultimately contribute to the success of sanctions.

The section reviews the key contentions and convergences among sanctions scholars. It consists, first; the effectiveness of economic sanctions (Hufbauer et al., 2007; hereafter, HSEO; Elliott, 1998; Pape, 1998; Pape, 1997; Baldwin, 1985; Wallensteen, 1968; Galtung, 1967); second, the section focuses on factors that may determine the effectiveness or success (Hatipoglu and Peksen, 2018; Petrescu, 2016; Peksen and Son, 2015; Eyler, 2007; Drury, 1998; Nossal, 1989; Lindsay, 1986), and, finally; the section then investigates under which conditions economic sanctions are more likely to succeed. These conditions that the sections will investigate are multilateral sanctions or 'international cooperation' (Bapat et al., 2013; Drezner, 2000; Martin, 1992); destabilisation (Marinov, 2005); issue salience (Ang and Peksen, 2007); regime type (Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest, 2017; Lektzian and Souva, 2007; Evenett, 2002; Hart, 2000).

#### Pessimist scholars

Some scholars have adopted the conventional wisdom that economic sanctions often fail to succeed (Galtung, 1967; Wallensteen, 1968; Pape, 1997). Galtung (1967) argues that economic sanctions may increase political integration, and thus the resistance of the target might be strengthened against external pressure. He studied aspects of sanctions on Rhodesia as a complex case when Ian Smith's white supremacist regime in Rhodesia broke away from British rule.

Galtung considers economic sanctions to serve a symbolic function more than a foreign policy tool. He measured success in terms of inflicting a heavy cost on the target either economically, by decreasing the GDP, or politically, by changing the government or rulers. In other words, he linked successful economic boycotts with vulnerability, especially when the export target's economy depends mainly on one product, and these are concentrated with one trade partner. Galtung, who paid great attention to the internal cohesion within this case, disagreed with the naïve theory of quick political and social disintegration as a result of economic deprivation, as he restricted that to a specific level:

The naïve theory of the relation between economic warfare (and also military warfare) and political disintegration sees some kind of roughly proportionate relation: the more value-deprivation, the more political disintegrate...However, this theory disregards the simple principle of adaptation: that which seems unacceptable at the beginning of the conflict becomes acceptable as one gets used to life under hardship. Thus, the "upper limit" of what can be tolerated recedes as the value deprivation progresses, and political disintegration becomes less easily obtainable (Galtung, 1967, p. 388).

Considering the above definition of vulnerability, Iran can be considered a vulnerable case. Despite the different conditions between the Rhodesian case in 1966 and Iran in 2012, oil is the main source of the budget that Iran relies on, in particular, it exports it to the EU, the US, and China. After the embargoes, Iran lost nearly 60 per cent of its revenue when these partners complied with UNSCRs. Galtung concluded that sanctions may backfire, that is, external pressure may lead to strengthening the internal cohesion and thus supporting the government to resist the senders. This is in line with Smeets (2018), as Smeets concluded that sanctions backfired on the senders in terms of the cost of imposing sanctions not only on the targets but also on the senders. It is also consistent with Borszik (2016), who found that economic sanctions on Iran affected the elite and political factions but not the regime, as the latter was able to survive under economic sanctions.

Galtung also concluded that the likelihood of the economic sanctions' success is negative in general because he did not find evidence for any dramatic change in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This study is important because it guides other studies to pay more attention to international cooperation, as Galtung emphasised; universality is an important condition to increase the effectiveness of the economic sanctions. Yet, these findings have not stood up due to several factors that emerged later, such as the emergence of multilateral sanctions and international cooperation, as has been argued by Drury (1998) and Drezner (2000).

Another author, Wallensteen (1968), argues that controlling exports has been subjected to military force and diplomacy in order to affect the target. He studied 18 cases from 1932 to 1966, focusing on trade bans, boycotts, and embargos, and considered their limitations. Similar to Galtung, Wallensteen measured success in terms of full compliance with the sender's objectives. Success for Wallensteen is "the receiver's compliance to the demands of the sender" (Wallensteen, 1968, p. 249). He found that economic sanctions as a whole are highly unsuccessful if forcing a target to full compliance; only two cases out of 18 were successful as the target altered some of their behaviours following a short time of the imposition as the sender(s) demanded, and; economic sanctions are a symbolic policy and their performance is an 'expressive' tool and have been unsuccessful as a tool of influence in international politics.



These findings shed light on the importance of social pressure in bringing about policy change not only in democratic regimes but also in authoritarian and semi-democratic regimes. This is in line with Galtung's study (1967) concerning trade and universality; however, it is in contrast to Baldwin (1985), who considers a partial change in policies, "not full compliance", as a success. This is also consistent with Bolks and Al-Sowayel (2000), who found a long duration of imposing sanctions leads to failed episodes. Yet, Miyagiwa and Ohno (2015) found that sanctions must be sustainable for a long time, even if the target state becomes a nuclear state. Wallensteen's conclusion on the duration could be applied to some cases but not Iran since economic sanctions against its nuclear programme lasted almost a decade from 2006 to 2015. As I argue, SIMCA sanctions, including sustainability on Iran, may have contributed to the sanctions' success in changing Iran's nuclear policy by inflicting heavy costs when Iran showed compliance with the international community (P5+1) and accepted to restrict its nuclear programme.

A fair judgement of the previous pessimistic studies on the effectiveness of sanctions needs to be taken within their temporal context when supportive measures were absent. It is worth also considering that the majority of the above-examined cases as unsuccessful were authoritarian regimes at that time, and it is unlikely the sanctions work compared to democratic regimes after the democracy waves. The spread of waves of democracy started with the second wave in 1962 and the third wave in 1970 (Huntington, 1991).

The above valuable findings are significant at that time because other conditions have not been explored in the existing literature. For instance, international cooperation within international organisations (Drury, 1998), financial sanctions within the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT), and the banking system (Hatipoglu and Peksen, 2018). Democratisation era and, thus, the importance of regime type (Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest, 2017; Lektzian and Souva, 2007; Evenett, 2002; Hart, 2000). Considering the above conditions, economic sanctions' success has become increasingly evident and measurable in recent episodes.

### Optimistic scholars

Contrary to the previous studies, several optimistic studies have examined sanctions' effectiveness as an instrument of foreign policy (Hufbauer, et al. 2007<sup>1</sup>; Baldwin, 1985). Baldwin argues that "the utility of the economic techniques of state crafts has been systematically underestimated primarily because of inadequacies in the analytical frameworks used to make such estimates" (Baldwin, 1985, p. 58). Baldwin criticised Galtung's work as

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<sup>1</sup> (Hufbauer, et al., 2007). *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered*, 1st edition was published in 1985, as known (HSE, 1985). This thesis depends on the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition published in 2007 after Barbara Oegg joined, and the authors' abbreviation became (HSEO, 2007). While in the criticism section, I will use (HSE, 1990).

misleading, and therefore, he challenged the conventional wisdom that ‘sanctions are ineffective’ by using the approach of social power literature to evaluate the efficacy of economic statecraft. Social power literature focuses on the ability of actor (A) to influence actor (B) to do something that (B) does not want to do.

Interestingly, in order to evaluate the utility of the alternative tools of foreign policy, Baldwin highlighted the concept of economic statecraft, which includes features of the state such as geographic area, population, wealth, and rational statecraft, which includes outcomes, capabilities, results, and influence. Baldwin did not rely on measuring the effectiveness of the economic sanctions merely on the basis of inflicting heavy costs, although he stressed that, or compelling the target to change its policy, either when the economic sanctions’ utility is an instrument or symbolic. Success for him is just a matter of degree, as he stated that perfect success and/or failure are unlikely to occur, and thus, classifying such outcomes as successful or unsuccessful is misleading.

Baldwin found that the role of the cost to attain success as a matter of comparison between ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’ is not helpful, as the cost of power needs to be compared with other alternative policies; the effectiveness of sanctions as a symbolic response is based on their appearance in the international community, while as an instrument of economic statecraft through avoidance of engaging in war, economic sanctions are effective even if they are not severe enough to induce compliance from a target; and; economic sanctions work at a modest effect by other non-economic influence means and yield a political cost, i.e., the target’s isolation from the international community. Baldwin’s conclusions are contrary to Galtung (1967), Wallensteen (1968), Pape (1997), and to some extent to HSEO (2007), as they require full compliance from the target to the sender’s demands, and specifically, they have examined economic sanctions’ options without considering the social power of statecraft.

On the other hand, HSEO (2007) measured success differently than Baldwin. They consider that success should be measured based on changing a target’s behaviour: “In judging the success of sanctions, we confine our examination to changes in the target country’s policies, behaviour, or regime” (HESO, 2007, p. 7). As we have seen, initially the difference is that economic sanctions’ success requires target compliance, as they were sceptical about sanctions’ utility. Authors have been driven by the concern of military costs as an alternative, and thereby they have suggested some conditions under which sanctions may work and gain some positive outcomes. In their study, they relied on a historical record of episodes during the 20th century. They attempted to identify conditions in which economic sanctions may effectively attain foreign policy objectives. In more detail, they conducted a qualitative analysis, including 174

cases studied from 1914 to 2000. In contrast to Wallensteen (1968), HSEO emphasised the short-term and long-term sanctions in inflicting costs in relation to success.

Interestingly, the authors found that modest and limited-purpose cases, such as the release of a political prisoner, succeeded half the time; cases of sanctions imposed for regime change by destabilising a particular leader or encouraging democratisation to impair a foreign adversary's military prospects or significantly change its behaviour succeeded in about 30 per cent of cases. This is in line with Lindsay (1986), who considers economic sanctions ineffective when the goals are compliance, subversion, or deterrence; success depends on the type of policy change required; the cost can be accepted merely if sanctions are seen as appropriate tools to achieve foreign policy goals, and this is consistent with Galtung (1967), Wallesteen (1968), and Bapat et al. (2013); sanctions are more likely to succeed if they are imposed rapidly, and an unstable target politically increases the effectiveness of sanctions. This is in line with Marinov (2005), who considers destabilisation is essential for sanctions' success; sanctions are also more effective when targeting allies as well as close trading partners, in line with Galtung (1967) and Miller (2014).

Finally, if sanctions require a large number of actors to be imposed, they are less likely to work. The authors concluded that sanctions overall are partially successful in 40 cases at a rate of 34 per cent. This result is not in contrast to international cooperation conditions; it mostly relates to the target's status in terms of resources and its ability to resist sanctions' effects. If we apply carefully some of these results to the Iranian case, we may be surprised: Sanctions on Iran were not driven by the goal of regime change; they sought to change Iran's nuclear policy. Iran has suffered from severe collective and comprehensive economic sanctions that have resulted in paying a high price economically and politically. The cumulative effect of sanctions from 2006 to 2015 affected Iran's macroeconomic indicators such as unemployment, GDP, and inflation and contributed to the nuclear deal in 2015.

#### Criticism of HSE's work

Although HSE's study is valuable, Pape (1997) and Drury (1998) have criticised their findings. In his empirical study, Pape questions the expectation that sanctions are likely to be more successful in the future because economic punishment can influence a state's commitments to achieve a particular policy. In contrast to HSE (1990) and Baldwin (1985), Pape argues that the success of economic sanctions can be considered if the sanctions were the only factor that contributed to policy change.

Success, according to Pape's criteria, requires a concession from the target state and acceptance of the senders' demands, which must be threatened and/or imposed before changing the target's

policy. This is a high standard of success as described by Elliott (1998), as we will see later in this interesting debate. Pape valued the role of force and considered neglecting force as a serious problem by HSE: “Failure to consider alternative explanations, especially force, is the most serious problem in HSE’s empirical work—more serious, in fact, than the definitional problems” (Pape, 1997, p. 98). Pape focuses only on two variables: economic sanctions as an independent variable (IV) and policy change as a dependent variable (DV), and the latter can be considered a success once it has been influenced fundamentally and completely by the economic sanctions. To evaluate the independent utility of sanctions, he re-examined HSE’s study of the 115 cases from 1914 to 1990, as they concluded that sanctions succeeded in 40 cases.

After re-examining HSE’s database, Pape found that the study is seriously flawed because it neglected the modern nation-state’s features to resist economic sanctions, consequently decreasing the effectiveness of the economic sanctions; only five cases out of 40 successful: 18 cases were settled by the direct or indirect use of force; 8 cases have no evidence that the target made concessions; 6 cases do not qualify as episodes of economic sanctions; and 3 cases are indeterminate. International cooperation would not increase the effectiveness of economic sanctions without a high rate of economic punishment. This result is in line with Martin (1992) and Smeets (2018). Pape is consistent with Smeets (2018), who concluded that economic sanctions are more likely to work when they are imposed along with other options, such as coercive diplomacy, using force militarily, or threatening to use them.

To increase the effectiveness of economic sanctions, Pape proposed that they should work on minor issues without affecting the health, territory, and wealth of the target state to avoid the Iraqi case; economic sanctions might be effective against countries with highly uneven income compared to those that have income equality. This can be understood in the context of economic deprivation. Pape’s criticism triggered Elliott (1998), one of the authors of HSE’s work, to respond and criticise his work. She began her response ironically by expressing: “Why economic sanctions do not work. Robert Pape set up a straw man and then boldly proceeds to knock it down” (Elliott, 1998, p. 50). Elliott disagreed with Pape’s conclusion, as their findings were based on a different research design than the one he adopted. She criticised his work as he cites their work as key evidence to support ‘optimism’ about sanctions’ role in changing policies without citing their interpretation of evidence.

This criticism was constructed based on Pape’s critique of their work (1990). Elliott defended their findings, as they concluded that it is not true that sanctions ‘never work’, but they have limited success in changing foreign policy based on forcing the target that resists these measures. In addition, she quoted directly about what success depends on: “Success rate importantly

depends on the type of policy or government change sought” (HSE, 1990, pp. 92–93). Elliott also showed that the difference in defining success and economic sanctions, the optimism–pessimism spectrum, between their work and Pape’s work is the core of this disagreement.

Elliott criticised Pape (1997) because he asserts that ‘sanctions do not work’ and therefore has to ‘debunk’ evidence showing that sanctions have worked. As Pape argues, 35 cases out of 40, or 34 per cent have not succeeded but only 5 cases were considered to be successful. She defended that by clarifying that Pape arrived at this conclusion because he defined the ‘sanctions’ narrowly and adopted a high level of success, as he admits sanctions would succeed only if they happened without any other tools such as military threats. Moreover, he did not count cases where economic sanctions were imposed to ‘complement’ military actions, and he gave modest credit to sanctions to achieve any other goals except the economic one.

One can find here that Pape admitted that sanctions have an economic task that can be achieved by inflicting economic costs on a target, but they are useless in contributing to changing other policies, such as political ones. Elliot did not even accept Pape’s judgement of their work as ‘flawed’ because, according to her, their work concluded with several answers compared to Pape’s one answer. Elliott added that “we never expected to find slam-dunk successes, and we deliberately set a fairly modest standard for judging both the degree of policy success and the contribution to that outcome made by sanctions” (Elliott, 1998, p. 52).

The debate has not stopped. Pape, in response to Elliott (1998), published another article insisting on his standpoint under the title “Why Sanctions Still Do Not Work.” Pape (1998) reaffirmed his previous finding that “there is little empirical support that economic sanctions can achieve ambitious foreign policy goals” (Pape, 1998, p. 66), and then he showed the invalidity of Elliott’s charges in his work. Pape raised a central question that constitutes the core of the disagreement between him and Elliott: “How robust is the evidence that economic sanctions work?” (Pape, 1998, p. 66).

Pape again commented, maybe ironically, on the shift of moving the scholarship on sanctions effectiveness from ‘pessimism’ in the 1960s and 1970s to ‘optimism’ in the 1980s and 1990s. He stated that the concepts of optimism and pessimism are not absolutes but rather relative concepts, and HES were ‘widely’ optimistic about sanctions success compared to 1960–1980 sanctions scholars, including him. He justified that as, according to HES, 40 cases out of 115 must be considered ‘modestly robust,’ and when he claims that only 5 cases out of 115 were successful, sanctions are a ‘weak instrument’. Pape concluded that if I counted them as successes, which I do not, then the cases would be 8 out of 115, which is too small to ‘affect my conclusion’. Recent scholarship on sanctions effectiveness is more likely to support the

optimistic group about the utility of sanctions both as an instrument and a symbolic tool with attempts to reduce moral criticism, especially when comprehensive sanctions bite poor people and leave thousands of victims behind them.

Another critique is done by Drury (1998). He argues that the participation of international organisations in imposing economic sanctions is more likely to increase the effectiveness of sanctions through international cooperation. International organisations represent international law and legitimacy and are more able to compel their members to obey their resolutions. He reanalysed HSE's results in an empirical study, 'Revisiting Economic Sanctions Reconsidered'. The main problem with HSE's results, from Drury's point of view, is the variable of contribution, namely, using such a variable causes a problem with the dependent variables. Substantial results have shown that the HSE's recommendations have problems between the variables.

Drury found that only 4 of 11 are supported; the size ratio between the sender and target is insignificant; cost as a part of GNP is effective positively; a weak target is subject to sanctions more than a strong one; and cooperation could affect the effectiveness. However, he found that cooperation only in specific situations could negatively affect the effectiveness when the international institution did not impose sanctions, as collective punishment produces the desired cost: "The greater the cost of sanctions to the target, the greater the likelihood they will succeed" (Drury, 1998, p. 509). This is in line with Martin (1992) and Drezner (2000). He concluded that states succeeded in 'subverting' economic sanctions only when the target's imports depended mainly on the sender; this is consistent with Galtung (1967) and Miller (2014). The significance of Drury's findings is attributed to analysing the role of the UN and other institutions to be seriously involved in imposing sanctions to contribute positively to the success of sanctions.

Yet, inflicting a high cost and causing pain to the target as a whole, including the elite and ordinary people without distinguishing between them economically or politically, has stimulated authors to consider smart sanctions. Some episodes ignited a hot debate among scholars due to the catastrophic effects of sanctions, such as the Iraqi episode that resulted in the deaths of over 500 thousand children in the 1990s. This conflicts with international law and human rights, and some authors such as Drezner (2011) emphasise making sanctions smart, or 'targeted sanctions', that only target the regimes, designated individuals, and companies and minimise their effects on poor people.

## Smart sanctions

Drezner (2011) was driven by the Iraqi episode in the 1990s and the humanitarian crisis that resulted from comprehensive sanctions. Drezner argues that in many ways, the development of the targeted sanctions approach has contributed to addressing some problems politically at the first stage before imposing comprehensive trade sanctions, and it has contributed to collaboration among policymakers and scholars. Yet, he stated that there is no evidence that smart sanctions will yield better policy results. Drezner distinguished between smart sanctions in theory and practice. That is, in theory, the framework of targeted sanctions has been effective, but in practice, in particular cases, comprehensive sanctions should be imposed.

Drezner found that smart sanctions have solved some political problems in the face of the ‘transgressions’ of sanctioned targets but cannot achieve the policy goal of forcing the target to change its behaviour. Drezner recommended two areas of this work are needed: empirical research considering the ‘relativity’ of effect between smart sanctions and comprehensive sanctions, and statecraft scholarship that pays attention to the successful work in nondemocratic countries.

Despite that, Drezner stressed the importance of this new direction in sanctioning scholarship. He considers smart sanctions’ utility as relative: smart sanctions can serve to solve some political issues but are unable to achieve policy change. Although Drezner has stood on a moral stance, he seems to value inflicting heavy costs through sanctions to change policy or behaviour, and this can be done in non-democratic regimes by changing the leadership through general elections. The Iraqi case has also been studied by Lopez and Cortright (2004) and is considered a successful episode in imposing sanctions against proliferation. I will review this study in the third section of this chapter (2.3).

### 2.2.2. Undermining the effectiveness of sanctions

Scholarship has recently shifted the focus on sanctions effectiveness from answering the dominant question: “Do economic sanctions work?” to a more comprehensive question of “When do economic sanctions work?”. The latter opened new windows for policymakers and academics to identify what factors may undermine the effectiveness of sanctions and under what conditions economic sanctions work better. Several studies suggest that some factors may affect the effectiveness of economic sanctions, such as the sender’s goals, the involvement of a third party, duration, and the role of international organisations in international cooperation in imposing sanctions (Eyler, 2007; Bolks and Al-Sowayel, 2000; Nossal, 1989, and; Lindsay, 1986).

Reviewing the sanctions scholarship shows there is a relationship between the sender's goals and their effectiveness (Nossal, 1989; Lindsay, 1986). Lindsay argues that when sender(s) impose trade sanctions, they have at least one or more goals such as "compliance, subversion, deterrence, or international symbolic or domestic symbolic" (Lindsay, 1986, pp. 153–154). To measure the success of trade sanctions, he analysed empirically 19 cases from 1933 to 1982 depending on three variables: (i) the proclaimed aims of imposing sanctions; (ii) differences between sanctions and restraints; and (iii) trade impacts on independent states regardless of the sender(s) or target(s).

The results indicated that: sanctions lose the initiator's future economic leverage over the target and reinforce its behaviour; sanctions fail to achieve goals of compliance, subversion, and deterrence as they yielded no significant relationship between success and the goal of compliance (1/12), subversion (0/6), and deterrence (0/19). This is consistent with Galtung (1967), as he argues that sanctions often fail when seeking compliance from the target with the sender's demand, but they succeed as a symbolic tool. Yet, data provide preliminary evidence and empirical support for the successful half of the cases when the goal was international symbolism and/or domestic symbolism sanctions succeeded (4/6); the international symbolism of imposing sanctions intends to deliver a message of 'reputation' to the international community of disapproval of the regime's acts. However, the effects of sanctions, in this case, are irrelevant while the domestic symbolism is pursued to increase internal cohesion and "rally-round-the flag" to support its foreign policy by acting conclusively.

Lindsay concluded that international and domestic symbolism often affect the goals of compliance and subversion. For example, if we consider international and domestic symbolism to be some of the sanctions' goals, the results explicitly indicate that sanctions succeeded in attaining that. This is in line with Baldwin (1985), and HESO (2007) as they found that the limited goals of senders were successful half the time. Lindsay's evaluation might be done based on considering various circumstances when economic sanctions outcomes would be different from one case to another, such as Iran compared to the DPRK and China's role in line with Shen (2008) and Kim and Lee (2019).

Although the findings are modest, Lindsay's study has shown concrete evidence that trade sanctions per se cannot guarantee successful outcomes, in particular when the senders aim for deterrence, compliance, and subversion. This is in line with Drezner (2011). Sanctions imposed against Iran's nuclear programme were inclusive, sustainable, mandatory, and collective. These sanctions led to severe economic harm from 2006 to 2015, and Iran reached a nuclear deal with the P5+1 in 2015 to restrict its nuclear programme.



In contrast, Nossal (1989) argues that economic sanctions as a punishment toll –from a human perspective– can help in exploring insights about the benefits of international sanctions. He examined the US sanctions against the Soviet Union after the latter’s invasion of Afghanistan. Nossal found that punishment serves domestically and internationally in prevention by deterring others from acting the same way; compulsion by inflicting harm to force an offender to stop wrongful actions, and; retribution by inflicting harm on an offender as a result of inflicting pain on society.

Nossal concluded that it is difficult to understand punishment as a purposive human behaviour relying on the rational model, and it is also difficult to understand sanctions as a tool of international punishment. If the main aim of the economic sanctions is retribution, they will be more effective than those for compliance and deterrence. This is in line with Galtung (1967), who considers punishment a separate goal and neither a ‘sufficient’ factor nor a ‘necessary’ factor to achieve compliance and policy change. The significance of this study lies in the explanations of the differences between the purposes of multilateral and unilateral sanctions. Usually, multilateral sanctions, especially within international institutions, aim to change a target’s behaviour rather than seeking punitive purposes as unilateral sanctions do. A third party may contribute negatively to the success of sanctions through subversion.

Eyler (2009) argues that if a third party broke the imposed sanctions and helped the target, this would affect the effectiveness of sanctions. In his empirical study, Eyler develops two theories based on the realist and liberal schools, which provide sufficient analysis for a third–party in sanction–busting. The results of this study revealed strong evidence that supports the liberal hypothesis, while the realist hypothesis has lower support. In other words, the liberal variables, including past colonial relationships, trade openness, and the presence of a democratic institution in both countries, have shown a positive effect on increasing the likelihood of busting sanctions. Whereas realist variables include defence pacts between third parties, with the target and sender having a significant positive effect on sanctions–busting. This is consistent with this study’s argument, as I consider realist theory as a counter-argument, which is inappropriate for adequately answering the research questions.

Other interesting results have shown that international institutions are significant because they have tools and laws to compel the member states to adopt international resolutions. In this context, a lack of engagement will affect sanctions effectiveness; this is in line with Martin (1992), Drezner (2000), and Bapat et al. (2013); the duration of sanctions is more likely to increase the likelihood of busting sanctions by third parties; and this is in line with Wallenstein (1968), and; Bolks and Al-Sowayel (2000), as we will see below. Although third parties have a decisive role in reviving the target and therefore affecting the effectiveness of economic

sanctions, this cannot be generalised. For instance, if the third party – who usually is a neighbour to the target – has a small economy, limited type of exports, and is dependent on the sender states, it will not produce significant effects on the sanctions process.

The duration of sanctions plays a decisive role in the target's compliance with senders' demands and sanctions' success at large. Bolks and Al-Sowayel (2000) argue that the target's institutional structure and political stability are crucial to the duration of the sanctions. They have examined the sanctioning process through 108 cases using hazard analysis, including the sender's power and demands. The authors relied on the duration to distinguish between successful and failed sanctions and to understand why some cases last longer than others. The authors found that some cases of sanctions can last for a long time regardless of the heavy cost on both sides and the average length of a case is 16 years; most long cases failed, while shorter cases were more successful, as the failed cases were doubled by 100 months (8.3 years), compared to the successful cases of 50 months (4.1 years); the imposition of sanctions regarding duration is costly; and the target's regime stability and its political structure are determinants of duration.

These results are partially inconsistent with the thesis' findings related to 'sustainability'. That is, the thesis values the importance of sustainable sanctions for success. For instance, reflecting on the Iranian case, the duration of sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme was from 2006 to 2015, lasting 9 years, and they were severe with SIMCA features. In this phase, sanctions were successful in extracting concessions and compliance from Iran through the JCPOA agreement. Previous authors have determined some factors that may affect the effectiveness of economic sanctions. On the other hand, some authors have identified under what conditions economic sanctions are more likely to succeed.

### [2.2.3. Conditions for increasing the effectiveness of sanctions](#)

A group of authors have identified some conditions that potentially increase the effectiveness of economic sanctions such as international cooperation (Bapat et al., 2013; Drezner, 2000; Martin, 1992); political stability (Marinov, 2005); issues salience (Ang and Peksen, 2007); heavy costs (Hatipoglu and Peksen, 2018; Petrescu, 2016; Peksen and Son, 2015), and; regime type (Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest, 2017; Major, 2012; Lektzian and Souva, 2007; Evenett, 2002; Hart, 2000). International cooperation 'multilateral sanctions' have been studied as one of the significant conditions (Bapat et al., 2013; Drezner, 2000; Martin, 1992).

Martin (1992) argues that "institutional factors did influence state actions in several ways and that organisations' calls for sanctions did not simply reflect prior government decisions about sanctions. Instead, some governments made their decisions contingent on institutional approval or rejection of economic sanctions" (Martin, 1992, p. 8). International cooperation, according to

Martin, could have a double-edged sword as it enhances collective action against norm violators through economic sanctions, which in turn increases the likelihood of the success of sanctions. However, they may have backfired on the economic and security aspects, entailing benefits of trade with the target and security threats when sanctioning others. This is in line with Smeets (2018).

Martin investigated 99 cases based on HSE's database. Martin identified three problems with bilateral sanctions: coincidence when we observe 'cooperation' on economic sanctions if senders have interrelated interests when a target is vulnerable; coercion, when a powerful sender can compel a partner to impose sanctions due to the high cost of sanctions; and co-adjustment, when states realise that unilateral sanctions may achieve poor outcomes at large. The results have indicated that: high costs afforded by the major sender and the effective role of a third party may positively affect international cooperation to compel a target, and thus, she considers a collective action of imposing sanctions and the initiator sender's interest by international institutions having a larger impact on cooperation; sender states should suffer for a short time rather than pay a high price if they lose control of the target.

Martin's study is valuable because it demonstrated ways to enhance international cooperation between senders and targets, especially when the main sender pays a heavy price as a result of sanctions backfiring, requiring other senders to bear some of the effects of these costs. This is because international cooperation is a necessary condition to increase sanctions' effectiveness. On the other hand, some authors have studied the poor results of international cooperation; that is, when is cooperation counterproductive?

In line with Martin (1992), Drezner (2000) argues that multilateral cooperation and the success of sanctions can be evident intuitively, but there is no positive correlation empirically between multilateral cooperation and sanctions success. Drezner examined some potential explanations to test the absence of this correlation. He constructed these explanations based on two main issues of cooperation: sabotaged by bargaining difficulties and a low level of enforcement. He defined the success of sanctions as "measuring the extent to which the target country met the sender's publicly stated demand" (Drezner, 2000, p. 89).

Drezner also mentioned two dilemmas of cooperation: between the sender and the target, and between the 'primary' sender and the rest of the senders. Drezner found that cooperation does not succeed due to bargaining strategies between senders and the target; cooperation does not succeed due to successful bargaining between the primary sender and all senders to prevent any potential compromising with the target; and cooperation does not succeed due to the absence of

the primary sender's ability to enforce the application of sanctions regarding a third party and backsliding by nation-states.

Drezner concluded that international organisations are essential for solid coalitions among senders, which led the target to wait out the cooperation instead of complying with the senders' demands. Cooperation outside of international institutions is ineffective in exerting concessions, and cooperation under international institutions is useful for the primary sender, but cooperation without international institutions' support leads to tangible worse consequences, even more than unilateral efforts. These results are in line with Eckert (2009) and Drury (1998).

Another study that investigated international cooperation, especially among international institutions, was done by Bapat et al., (2013). The authors argue that the involvement of international institutions and heavy sanctions are more likely to increase the success of sanctions. In their empirical study, they examined (888) cases in which sanctions were either threatened or imposed from 1971 to 2000. The authors found some differences between threats and imposed sanctions; senders are more likely to achieve their goals when they provide some incentives when: (i) they are democratic; (ii) the target is classified as a nondemocratic regime; and (iii) the sanctions do not include export restrictions; issue salience is also more likely to increase success when it relates to threats of imposing sanctions, and; the threats and imposed sanctions showed that international institutions and severe sanctions are 'positively and robustly' connected to the success of sanctions at any phase. The authors concluded that international cooperation may affect a target's political stability through destabilisation. Some authors, such as Major (2012) and Marinov (2005), identified 'destabilisation' or political stability as a necessary condition for success.

Marinov (2005) argues that the political cost for the targeted leaders of losing office after imposing sanctions is the real result of economic pressure. Hence, they would act positively by offering some policy concessions to avoid sanctions. Marinov conducted an empirical study by using panel data from 136 states over an average of 3 years, depending on HSE's database. He found that in an average of 136 cases when the leader remains in office at the end of the year, (0) if they leave, and (1) if they do, leaders' risk of losing their positions is 0.146 when sanctions are not imposed compared to 0.183 when sanctions are imposed, which means a 28 per cent average increase by sanction as the GDP portion is the measurement of the cost of sanctions. Marinov concluded that "greater optimism regarding the effectiveness of sanctions should be balanced by careful consideration of the policy's real and sizable costs for those caught in the middle" (Marinov, 2005, p. 564).

Marinov tries to provide evidence on how sanctions might be effective by targeting elite leaders rather than innocent people ‘in the middle’. Those people must be avoided. In other words, maybe he encourages policymakers to impose targeted ‘smart’ sanctions rather than comprehensive ones. However, the former did not succeed in many cases in altering behaviours, as Drezner (2011) found. It may be because the real destabilisation process mainly begins from below, along with the role of leadership. People, according to the naive theory, must suffer from sanctions-induced ‘economic deprivation’, and they realise that this crisis has emerged because of their government’s performance. Hence, they can either mobilise against the government in the form of demonstrations or vote to support the opposition in elections; consequently, changing the leadership may lead to policy change, as happened in the presidential election in 2013 and nuclear policy change in 2015 when reaching the JCOPA agreement. Therefore, scholars have investigated the crucial role of domestic instability’s linkage with sanctions’ success.

Ang and Peksen (2007) argue that the ways that actors perceive the salience of the issue are significant in determining when sanctions work. They explained in their empirical study the issue of salience by saying that if state (A) sanctioned state (B) for human rights violations (C), then state (A) expressed its respect for the human rights norm (C). The state (B) may deal with the matter from a different perspective than from the norms of human rights (C). The authors found the ways in which states perceive the issue(s) at dispute matters in determining the results; a high level of perception from the sender of issue salience would increase the likelihood of sanctions’ success, while the target’s perception of the issue salience does not significantly influence the outcomes of sanctions, and; there is a strong connection between the sender’s perception of the issue salience under dispute and their obligations to realise success.

The authors concluded that the level of commitment of states to seek positive outcomes in a particular case is subject to perceptions of issue salience. This can be applied to the Iranian case. Iran was adhering to international norms regarding the nuclear non-proliferation regime and imposing sanctions on this basis is more likely to increase sanctions’ success than having historical hostility with a target and exploiting the context for revenge. These findings are in line with Bapat et al. (2013), who found that issue salience is more likely to increase the effectiveness of sanctions in terms of the threat and imposition of sanctions.

The findings are important as they reveal the real intention of the sender and the target when perceiving sanctions because whenever the issues are clear and well understood from the sender’s perspective, it is more likely to increase success by preventing a huge cost that damages the economic, social, and political aspects. The thesis builds on the literature about the role of issue salience in affecting sanctions outcomes. It considers analysing the discourse of

Rouhani and Ghalibaf drawing on the salient issues and their influence on the outcomes of sanctions as the relationship, as we will see, between lifting sanctions and improving the economy by adopting a flexible approach to Iran's nuclear choices if elected, conceived and explained differently based on their conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. Inflicting heavy costs on a target, either for policy change or punishment, has received great attention. Some authors have investigated particular aspects of the target's economy and measured the role of sanctions in affecting the target's currency and banking system (Hatipoglu and Peksen, 2018; Petrescu, 2016; Peksen and Son, 2015).

Peksen and Son (2015) argue that economic sanctions are more likely to affect the target's currency and that financial problems also affect economic growth and prosperity. The authors found that economic sanctions are more likely to increase the number of currency crises in the targets; high and low-cost sanctions are significant in increasing the possibility of currency crises in the target states as high-cost was at 136 per cent while low-cost 40 per cent; and; sanctions in general increase the expected possibility of currency crises 100 per cent. They concluded that the "frequent use of sanctions as a foreign policy tool suggests that economic coercion is a popular policy instrument of international politics" (Peksen and Son, 2015, pp. 458–59).

If we want to build on these results, we should review the interesting results that have been reached by Hatipoglu and Peksen (2018), who argue that economic sanctions are more likely to cause systemic banking crises by affecting macroeconomic conditions and limiting their ability to access the global system. The authors found that sanctions significantly affect a banking system's stability in the target; the impacts of financial sanctions on the banking system are more significant than trade sanctions; and the high cost resulting from financial sanctions is more likely to affect the banking system compared to low sanctions costs.

The authors concluded that sanctions are more likely to destabilise the financial stability of targets and have adverse effects on several aspects such as political stability, economic growth, and humanitarian conditions. The findings of Peksen and Son (2015) and Hatipoglu and Peksen (2018) are in line with those of Borszik (2016), Smeets (2018), and Majidi and Zarouni (2016), as the latter study found that economic sanctions have affected Iran's national currency value, the rial, and that sanctions have influenced negatively the banking system in Iran when isolating Iranian banks from transactions internationally. This might lead to social problems at large in terms of the relationship between economic sanctions and informal markets, robbery, crime rates, and corruption.

Petrescu (2016) argues that economic sanctions increase the informal and black markets. She measured the size of the black market in a particular country as a percentage of GDP. The author used the variable 'shadow' as the logarithm of the shadow economy per capita in US dollars. Petrescu found the shadow economy increased by 9 per cent as a result of sanctions and that when international cooperation is high, sanctions increase the size of the shadow economy and vice versa; economic sanctions increased corruption in many areas, with the largest effects related to public contracts and the lowest effect related to tax payments; and sanctions increased the robbery rate to 32 per 100,000 inhabitants. Petrescu concluded that the policymakers in sending states should be aware of such informal markets when they design and impose economic sanctions to change policies.

This study is important because it empirically tests the effects of sanctions on informal markets, consequently generating social problems such as robbery, a high crime rate, and corruption. Now, I will move on to review another crucial condition for increasing the success of sanctions: regime type. According to the sanctions scholarship, this is a necessary condition and plays a significant role in sanctions' success, as I argue in this thesis that the general elections in the sanctioned democratic regimes are a significant context that affects Iran's nuclear choice through the texts of the presidential candidates.

#### 2.2.3.1. Regime Type

A series of studies have emphasised regime type as one of the supportive conditions to increase the likelihood of economic sanctions' effectiveness (Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest, 2017; Lektzian and Souva, 2007; Major, 2012; Evenett, 2002; Hart, 2000). Hart (2000) argues that democratic countries should be on average more successful in imposing economic sanctions. Hart developed an informal general theoretical framework to explain the relationship between international relations and domestic politics. He defined success on the basis of achieving part or all of the sending state's demands. This is consistent with Baldwin (1985) and inconsistent with Pape (1997, 1998) and Wallenstein (1968), as they consider success based on full compliance with the target. He found that: democratic states are more successful when they impose economic sanctions than non-democratic countries; democracies are more likely to generate a positive effect on the target than non-democratic states; when the target's economic health is having some significant economic problems or the economy is distressed, sanctions are more likely to achieve significant success; high costs in target states have a significant effect on success; most of the senders are democratic; and the US is the country that most impose sanctions. This is in line with Galtung (1967), Major (2012), and Miller (2014); the US is the most sanctioning state in line with Evenett (2002).

The current study has added a new supporting condition for success concerning regime type, particularly democratic sanctioning states. It sheds light on the importance of expanding and empowering the efforts of democratisation in the world at large. The previous study examined the democratic senders, whereas most of the literature examines the target state. Most of these results can be applied to the Iranian case in terms of vulnerability since Iran was sanctioned by democratic senders as well as having significant economic problems. Democratic targets have also shown their vulnerability to sanctions, as we will see in the following episode. South Africa is a successful case of imposing sanctions in order to end apartheid from 1980 to 1991.

Evenett (2002) argues that imposing sanctions against South Africa's exports has significantly affected its economy. Evenett examined eight industrialised economies that imposed sanctions on South Africa. In her empirical study, she examined the extent to which exports from South Africa recovered after sanctions were lifted as she examined the eight years after the apartheid regime ended from 1991 to 1999. Evenett found that economic sanctions imposed by the US were the most significant in reducing South Africa's exports; the effects of these trade sanctions lasted sometime after their removal; the lifting of US sanctions did not contribute significantly to South Africa's exports in 1991 compared to European countries that led to some 'bounce back' and the US comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act was crucial to reduce mutual imports by a third. These results are in line with Hart (2000) and Galtung (1967). The democratic structure in South Africa contributed to ending the Apartheid era as a result of the sanctions. Other authors have also investigated the role of domestic political structure.

Lektzian and Souva (2007) argue that economic punishment's effect depends on the domestic political structure of the target. The authors found statistically a linkage between two processes of "initiation and success": broad sanctions against democratic states led to a policy change, while against non-democratic states it led to empowering leaders in power without changing policy, and the key success of all successful cases is that they placed political costs on the 'targeted regime's winning coalition'; the cost of sanctions has a conditional relationship with regime type; success is more likely to be achieved when targeting leaders in non-democratic regimes, and democratic regimes are less likely to use trade sanctions against another democracy.

Lektzian and Souva's study can be considered guidance for future studies to focus on how domestic factors such as public opinion, opposition, and non-government organisations (NGOs) should be supported to enable them to achieve success. These results are in line with Marinov (2005) and Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest (2017). These results apply to the Iranian case. If we consider Iran as a successful case of sanctions against nuclear proliferation due to the nuclear deal in 2015 that constrained Iran's uranium enrichment, then we can realise that it occurred due



to the political costs for the conservative coalition when losing the elections in 2013, as they were against any compromise regarding Iran's nuclear choices with the US and the West. On the other hand, how would sanctions affect dictators in dictatorship regimes?

Major (2012) argues that “windows of opportunity” make dictators vulnerable to sanctions by generating domestic instability. He developed a theory to examine whether dictatorships are less vulnerable to sanctions or not. The author used regression analysis to test the conditional relationships between “domestic political crises”, regime type, and economic sanctions. Major found that democracies are more vulnerable to economic sanctions; the interaction between government crises and polity is statistically significant; and in a negative trend, controlling for regime type and crises, democratic leaders are significantly less vulnerable than dictators to economic coercion when domestic discontent is expressed; the relationship between ‘election year’ and the success of the economic sanctions is positive; and demonstrations in authoritarian countries could affect leader stability. Major’s study is consistent with the scholarship on the essential role of the domestic structure within the regime type, and this, in today’s context of imposing sanctions, can be associated with the issue of salience that has a positive contribution to the outcomes of sanctions as one of the important conditions for success. This can be achieved in democratic regimes when the electorate votes against the poor performance of leaders in the context of sanctions. But how could the international community support the effectiveness of sanctions in target states through threatening and imposing sanctions as well as encouraging such protests against regimes?

Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest (2017) argue that the “messages of regime disapproval—and opposition support—conveyed by sanctions provide the key mechanism through which sanctions encourage protest. Sanction threats create perceived opportunities for protesters because they constitute an international stamp of approval for anti-regime activity” (Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest, 2017, p. 86). The authors examined the period in which sanctions were threatened before they were imposed, hypothesising that if sanctions increase domestic mobilisation against the regime and thus anti-government activities, such protests should be happening.

Significant results of this empirical study have shown that international sanctions threats deliver a stronger message that sanctions’ economic cost destabilises the target government and changes the leadership; the threat of sanctions encourages public protest; and the destabilising effect of sanctions disputes that involve more than one sender means that a group of sender’s threats contribute to increasing the number of protests. These results are in line with Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi (2014).

This study is significant because it shows the important role of the international cooperation condition in increasing the success of sanctions by motivating domestic dissent even through the threat of sanctions. This may lend a clearer interpretation of the Iranian incident in 2009 when the Iranian Green Movement emerged and had a strong protest throughout the whole country. This movement consisted of vast groups of society, particularly the middle class and urbanites, who had been marginalised during Ahmadinejad's administration (Tezcür, 2012). That was in the wake of the re-election of Ahmadinejad for a second term, as they believed that the government had manipulated the results. As a result, unprecedented support for the protesters has been announced by some countries, along with imposing sanctions on Iran-related human rights.

#### 2.2.4. Conclusion

As we have seen, the debate among scholars about the effectiveness and success of sanctions remains contested. This dispute centres on whether sanctions serve as an instrumental or symbolic tool. When some scholars questioned sanctions' effectiveness as an instrumental tool of foreign policy, they admitted their effectiveness as a symbolic tool. A pessimistic perspective dominated most of the studies that were conducted in the early phase until 1985 when a group of scholars became more optimistic about the use of sanctions as an instrumental tool in foreign policy.

This optimism contributed to challenging the conventional wisdom that says sanctions always fail. Therefore, the focus has mainly shifted from examining whether the sanctions are effective to under what conditions they are more likely to succeed. The consequences of sanctions on Iraq have influenced the sanctions scholarship to find a way of imposing sanctions without having any or at least a minimal effect on ordinary people. Smart sanctions were the alternative to comprehensive sanctions, regardless of the debate over their effectiveness. Scholars identified international cooperation, destabilisation, salience issues, heavy cost, and regime type as significant conditions, and they are more likely to increase the likelihood of sanctions' success. The role of third parties, senders' goals, duration, and the lack or absence of involvement of international organisations are considered factors that are more likely to undermine sanctions' success.

#### 2.3. Economic sanctions against proliferation

The imposition of economic sanctions against the proliferation of WMD is one of the policies that the international community uses to inhibit proliferation, as sanctions can be an effective tool among a set of non-proliferation tools.

### 2.3.1. Introduction

This section aims to narrow down sanctions scholarship to shed light on sanctions against proliferation, especially nuclear proliferation. The section investigates whether conditions and factors affecting sanctions' effectiveness, in general, apply to nuclear proliferation, in particular. Great attention has been paid to strengthening the non-proliferation regime in the wake of the Indian peaceful explosion in 1974. Nuclear proliferation has not received great attention from the most influential international policymakers, and thus they have to afford the consequences to prevent proliferation (Gavin, 2012). Preventing proliferation can be done through the use of security commitments, sanctions, and economic coercion, and in some cases, it may be necessary to resort to using preventive force (ibid.). The US is the actor that has the most used threats, the imposition of sanctions, and force against nuclear proliferation (Hart, 2000). It is willing to use two kinds of policies that result in paying a high cost economically, diplomatically, and militarily, including coercive and friendlier policies (Gavin, 2012). The former includes preventive strikes, threats, and severe sanctions, and the latter includes facilitating conventional arms sales and providing broad deterrent guarantees for states that have opted to stop developing nuclear weapons (ibid.). In this section, I will review the role of sanctions in reinforcing non-proliferation regimes and some successful and failed cases such as those in North Korea, Iraq, and Libya (Kim and Lee, 2019; Barnum and Fearey, 2016; Miyagiwa and Ohno, 2015; Miller, 2014; Eckert, 2009; Shen, 2008; Lopez and Cortright, 2004; and Paul, 1996).

### 2.3.2. Successful and failed episodes

Paul (1996) argues that in the absence of a non-discriminatory and universal regime, sanctions will be imposed selectively, as they will remain ineffective. In his qualitative study, Paul analysed the Iraqi and North Korean cases. Paul found that coercive measures, including sanctions, have 'serious' limitations in preventing proliferation, despite their appearance as politically attractive as they depend on the context. This is in line with Smeets (2018) and Baldwin (1985). He also found that sanctions' success depends on applying them against targets in the early stages of developing nuclear weapons. This is in contrast to Miyagiwa and Ohno (2015). These measures can succeed in the short term but may backfire in the long term, and thus may increase the target's resistance to ending a nuclear weapons programme as the target's choice depends mainly on 'security threats', and the UN sanctions have advantages compared to unilateral behaviour in terms of international legitimacy. This result about the importance of international cooperation in inflicting heavy costs is in line with Martin (1992), Drury (1998), Drezner (2000), and Bapat et al. (2013).

Paul concluded that without a non-discriminatory and universal regime, sanctions will remain as tools in the hands of powerful states; to make economic sanctions against proliferation effective, they have to be costly, and collective, as international cooperation yields a wide range of economic coercion, and they also need to be sustained. This is also in line with Martin (1992), Miyagiwa (2015), and Ohno (2015). This qualitative study is interesting as a comparative study of two different cases, Iraq and North Korea, by showing the role of the third party as well. It shows the conditions of duration and costs that could make economic sanctions work effectively in different cases. In addition, it explained the role of the UN as a founder factor for international cooperation by inflicting heavy costs to ensure positive outcomes, in line with Eckert (2009) and Drury (1998). These results are in line with the study's argument that imposed sanctions on Iran were more likely to inflict a heavy cost on Iran and thus affect nuclear choices through elite discourse in general elections.

The role of duration and the heavy cost of economic sanctions against nuclear proliferation have also been examined empirically by Miyagiwa and Ohno (2015). They argue that making sanctions effective requires stating that imposing economic sanctions against a target will continue after the target becomes nuclear. The authors examined whether the imposed economic sanctions against a target caused an irrevocable change within the same time of the imposition of the sanctions. They defined the effectiveness of sanctions based on the heavy cost they imposed on a target. Nonetheless, they expected sanctions to fail in inflicting such harm due to: the absence of limited economic relationships with the senders, in line with Miller (2014); and if a third party has played a crucial role in circumventing the sanctions regime. This is in line with Takeyh and Maloney (2011), Paul (1996), Eckert (2009), and Early (2009).

The authors found that economic sanctions become ineffective and even backfire when senders cannot commit to imposing sanctions for a long time after the target becomes a nuclear state and thus motivate the target to keep developing nuclear bombs, especially when sanctions are imposed gradually and the target is at the final phase; if the target expects sanctions to be lifted once it becomes a nuclear power, it makes the matter harder to resolve, and to succeed, economic sanctions must be severe in line with Galtung (1967), Wallensteen (1968), and Pape (1997). These results are in line with this study's argument that 'sustainable' and 'inclusive' sanctions yield heavy costs, and 'collective' and 'mandatory' sanctions that encounter the effective role of a third party are more likely to inflict a heavy cost and thus increase the possibility of sanctions' success, especially when portraying these effects within elite discourse during general elections.

Although some authors were pessimistic about the role of sanctions against proliferation, others were optimistic and provided successful cases such as Iraq and Libya (Barnum and Fearey, 2016; Lopez and Cortright, 2004). The Libyan case contributes to supporting the optimistic group of authors on the role of sanctions in inhibiting proliferation when the regime announced in 2003 ending all efforts were sought to develop WMD. In their qualitative study, Barnum and Fearey (2016) argue that economic and diplomatic sanctions against Libya concerning its WMD programme played a supportive role in weakening the economy and assisting as a ‘magnifier’ tool for the economic and social difficulties rather than a ‘primary’ cause. The authors found that sanctions can be an effective tool against non-proliferation: when they are imposed under international cooperation, in line with Martin (1992), Drezner (2011), and Drury (1998); when they take advantage of a lack of political stability, in line with Bapat et al. (2013), Marinov (2005), and Major (2012); and when the imposition of sanctions is a complementary tool with other tools, in line with Smeets (2018) and Martin (1992).

This is in line with the Iranian case, as mentioned above, concerning oil embargoes. Libya’s budget significantly depends on exporting oil; therefore, fluctuating prices alongside the oil embargo work significantly in affecting the economy, and sanctions contributed to this success by increasing uncertainty and decreasing foreign direct investment (FDI). The authors concluded that in 2003, concerning its WMD programme, the Libyan government announced the termination of its WMD programme. Another Arabic country that faced tough sanctions against proliferation was Iraq.

Lopez and Cortright (2004) argue that economic sanctions against Iraq concerning its biological and chemical weapons programme have succeeded and that the invasion of Iraq is related to “systematic misrepresentation” by White House officials and “incorrect estimates” by intelligence. In their qualitative approach, the authors shed light on evidence of sanctions success in achieving their goal in the Iraqi case when robust evidence was provided by the UN and the IAEA. For instance, from 1991 to 1998, the Special Commission appointed by the UN (UNSCOM) dismantled almost 90 per cent of Iraq’s biological and chemical weapons in cooperation with hundreds of inspection rounds conducted by the IAEA. The UN disarmament mission had great success in the nuclear field as they destroyed all facilities related to the nuclear programme, and in 2002, Mohamed ElBaradei, the General Director of the IAEA, confirmed that Iraq no longer had a nuclear weapon programme.

The authors found that sanctions extracted significant concessions from Iraq regarding disarmament by giving the IAEA permission to monitor and investigate its suspected WMD

sites; sanctions also significantly affected the Iraqi military capability and prevented Iraq from securing oil revenue to be used in developing its military forces when Iraq lost an estimated amount of oil revenue of up to \$250 billion; and the adoption of smart sanctions on Iraq also harmed the regime and forced it to renew inspections with a very strong monitoring regime.

This is partially consistent with Drezner (2011), as he considers to some extent that smart sanctions are effective in solving political issues but not effective in some other cases without having comprehensive sanctions. These results are in line with the Iranian case in terms of comprehensive ‘inclusive’ sanctions on Iran that inflicted heavy costs on the economy, especially the oil embargo by the US and the EU in 2012. This affected Iran’s economy sharply, as the economy was vulnerable to resisting sanctions because it mainly relied on oil exports. Similarly to Iraq, Iran has given significant concessions on its nuclear programme, restricting uranium enrichment to under 3.67 per cent according to the JCPOA agreement. The Iraqi and Libyan cases might be considered easy cases, but other cases are quite complex, such as North Korea and Iran.

Some authors (Kim and Lee, 2019; Shen, 2008) have taken up the challenge and examined the role of economic sanctions in inhibiting nuclear proliferation in North Korea and Iran. In a comparative study, Shen (2008) argues that economic sanctions imposed on Iran and North Korea until 2008 are less likely to succeed and that China may engage responsibly in the sanctions regime. Shen emphasised, in his qualitative study, some factors that may increase the success of international sanctions, such as legitimacy, the effects of sanctions on the senders and international cooperation, and the ability of sanctions to serve as a deterrent.

In the Iranian case, Shen set out two scenarios to understand Iran’s nuclear programme: either Iran might be honest but careless, that is, it was developing a civilian nuclear programme without reporting its activities, or Iran pursued developing nuclear weapons at some stage later after having acquired the nuclear know-how. In terms of legitimacy, the UNSC issued Resolutions 1737, 1747, and 1803 that imposed sanctions on Iran. Shen considers Iran’s challenge to the legitimacy of the sanctions when Iran did not pay great attention, which resulted in a lack of cooperation with the IAEA and succeeded in advancing the enrichment while sanctions were in place.

In the DPRK case, the sanctions have more legitimacy because the case was clear—weaponization after withdrawing from the NPT—and therefore, international cooperation and comprehensive sanctions can be easily done. With respect to the sanctions’ strength, Shen found that the sanctions imposed on Iran have not been strong enough to have a serious impact because they were limited. Considering the date of publishing this study in 2008, he was right

given the severity of sanctions imposed on Iran since 2006. This result is now invalid because the international community later imposed embargoes on Iran's oil and gas as well as intensified punishment against the third party. Yet, Shen is right regarding the vulnerability of Iran's economy given its reliance on oil. After the 2012 oil embargo, Iran significantly suffered, losing almost 60 per cent of its revenues.

Whereas, in the DPRK case, the US imposed financial sanctions in 2006 on Macau-based Banco Delta Asia due to its financial transaction assistance to the DPRK. These sanctions have affected North Korea financially. The UNSC also issued Resolutions 1695 and 1718 against DPRK's tests that imposed a wide range of sanctions and banned it from engaging within the international community; in addition, Japan imposed tough trade sanctions as well. Shen found the sanctions on DPRK were organised and severe, and they were effective leverage tools. Yet, they have not achieved their goal, and the US administration, later, has offered the DPRK some incentives to halt its nuclear programme. These results are in line with Galtung (1967) and Martin (1992).

Regarding China, Shen found that regardless of Beijing's assertion that imposing pressure on nations to solve international conflicts is unacceptable, it engaged gradually in the sanctions regime, considering its interests and the consequences of the isolation. In the two cases, China decided to honour its pledges to the NPT and join the UN sanctions regime against DPRK and Iran, and it considers its responsibility towards stability in the region. Shen concluded that unless these factors are met, the effectiveness of sanctions cannot be guaranteed, but if the sanctions are developed in a way that considers these factors, they are more likely to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons (Shen, 2008). In my turn, I would support Shen's conclusion because the above factors have been considered and resulted in imposing severe sanctions on Iran, which subsequently prevented Iran from having nuclear weapons given the JCPOA agreement in 2015.

Another comparative study was conducted by Kim and Lee (2019). The authors investigated the sanctions conditions between Iran and North Korea from 2012 to 2015 and from 2013 to 2017, respectively. They examined the relationship between non-proliferation and sanctions. They develop a sequential model that deals with the sanctions process within three distinct stages that begin with the imposition of economic pain, dialogue towards political pressure, and the possibility of creating a 'zone of possible agreement' (ZOPA). Whereas, sanctions' success in each phase depends upon particular contextual variables, which serve to measure sanctions' success individually.

The authors identified three factors in the literature that were connected to the success of sanctions and linked them to the three stages above Stage (i) with the severity level of the target's dependence on trade and the involvement of key parties in trade; Stage (ii) with the power of a winning coalition and the institutional mechanisms that lead to a change in leadership; and Stage (iii) with incentives and the target's nuclear technology level. The authors found that 'evident and indisputable' sanctions on Iran were imposed under 'favourable' conditions that emerged as a result of severe pain. This occurred due to the increasing export of shale oil into the global oil supply market, vulnerable Iranian institutions to resist the economic pain, and the low cost of concessions that Iran and the US had to meet to reach a deal. The outcome of the sanctions, that is, the JCPOA, mandates a significant rollback to Iran's nuclear programme and constrains Iran to maintain a stockpile of low-enriched uranium at 3.67 per cent. This is consistent with Smeets (2018).

Regarding the North Korean case, considering the sanctions conditions against the current nuclear inhibition strategy are far away compared to Iran, the authors found that economic sanctions alone are less likely to reach a deal that applies 'comprehensive, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement'; the severity of sanctions was objected to circumvent due to China's questionable commitment; institutions in the DPRK are more insulated from economic isolation because the winning coalition instructs that the regime can adequately manage the distribution of private goods and remains stable; given the advanced nuclear programme and the need for incentives from the US and the high cost of concessions from the country, the US making any potential effort to reach a ZOPA is quite complex.

Geographic location matters. When a third party has borders as a neighbour with targets, the possibility of an effective role as a third party is more likely to occur through smuggling. China and Russia are neighbours of North Korea, as they played a more effective role in circumventing sanctions compared to the Iranian case. After emerging terrorist groups were able to seize biological weapons, some authors investigated the role of imposing economic sanctions against non-state actors to prevent them from acquiring any kind of WMD.

Eckert (2009) argues that the role of the UN in non-proliferation can be effective through expanding the UN initiative and sanctions within the UNSCR (1540). He investigated in his qualitative study the economic sanctions against Iran and North Korea. He also examined the relationship between broadening the UN initiative and sanctions under the umbrella of Resolution (1540). Eckert found that UN sanctions against proliferation were minimally successful in changing the behaviours of Iran and North Korea as both continued developing nuclear capabilities. However, the existing sanctions may become effective by reinforcing them through other coercive measures. This is in line with Smeets (2018) and Martin (1992).



Consistent with Paul (1996), who examined the non-discriminatory sanctions regime, Eckert found that increasing the consensus among UNSC members and having a political will are crucial to sanctions success and that Resolution 1540 has a vital role in enhancing the non-proliferation regimes, such as strengthening norms and international operations. The US took measures to restrict refined petroleum products in 2009, and this might affect the Iranian economy significantly. However, it might generate a 'rally-round the flag'. This is in line with Broszik (2016).

Whereas, in the case of North Korea, the objective was to compel it to change its behaviour, as sanctions alone are less likely to succeed in line with Kim and Lee (2019), and the innovations of the counterterrorism regime strongly affected the imposed economic sanctions against non-proliferation. Eckert concluded that to strengthen the non-proliferation regime, sanctions need to be effective, and we should learn from previous episodes of sanctions and depend on particularly targeted measures. This study is significant because it sheds light on the importance of expanding the non-proliferation objectives under UNSC Resolution 1540 when some terrorist groups were able to acquire biological weapons (BW) and then increase the possibility of threatening and using them, especially after the 9/11 attacks. It also stresses the importance of international cooperation by international institutions such as the UN for the sake of non-proliferation and legitimacy, which increases the economic and political cost of a target.

Cost is still an inspiring condition for scholars to prevent proliferation in general, and some current studies argue that it is also valid against nuclear proliferation in particular, which may contribute to economic sanctions effectiveness. Miller (2014) argues that economic and political sanctions are effective means against proliferation. The departure point of Miller's study is that rational leaders evaluate the cost of sanctions before they begin their efforts in developing nuclear weapons. Miller found that: on average, states that sought to acquire nuclear weapons before 1976 were more dependent on the US than after 1976; decreases in independence score significantly minimise the likelihood of proliferation after 1976, whilst before 1976 dependence score had an insignificantly positive effect; states with less relative dependence on the US have an insignificant increase in the likelihood of seeking nuclear weapons, whereas states with high dependence have a significant decrease in the likelihood of seeking nuclear weapons, such as Taiwan and South Korea.

These results are in line with Galtung (1967) and Kim and Lee (2019). It is also in line with Drury (1998) and Martin (1992). Miller also found that the economic and security costs are a very sensitive issue for the proliferator states, mainly when such states depend on the US. Miller concluded that rationality has been the crux of success in the two cases. Indirectly, this study is consistent with this thesis. That is rational leaders, according to Miller, do calculate the cost and

benefits of seeking nuclear weapons. On this basis, Rouhani's approach to Iran's nuclear choices is flexible, and he can be considered a rational leader because he considered the benefits and the cost, as we will see in chapters 7, 8, and 9, when he kept expressing during elections the heavy cost of the effects of sanctions on Iran as a result of Iran's nuclear programme.

This study revealed the importance of dependency among states. It emphasised the role of a state in engaging in the international system as a necessary factor for states to integrate and exchange their needs with other states when isolation is an unproductive situation. It also stressed the role of US aid and relationships with states in countering nuclear proliferation, especially when these states are largely dependent on the US; thus, increasing and strengthening such relationships would significantly assist in stopping some ambitious states from acquiring WMD.

### 2.3.3. Conclusion

This section has shown the extent to which imposing economic sanctions for several reasons can be effectively applied to efforts in non-proliferation, in terms of costs, the relationship with senders, especially with the US, and targeting the vulnerable parts of the target. Imposing sanctions against proliferation has received great attention compared to other reasons for the imposition because of the proliferation consequences. Economic sanctions against proliferation have succeeded in many cases, such as in Iraq, Libya, Taiwan, and Iran, but have failed in the case of North Korea due to several reasons, especially the effective role of the third party. International cooperation through international organisations plays a key role in strengthening the proliferation regime's objectives and measures. China's role in engaging in non-proliferation efforts through the imposition of sanctions has become increasingly responsible. Adoption of equal standing, and political will, and assisting states to legitimise sanctions are more likely to enhance sanctions' effectiveness.

## 2.4. Economic sanctions on Iran's nuclear programme and the elite discourse in general elections

Iran has a long history of sanctions. The main three episodes began in 1952 with the nationalisation of the Iranian oil industry; in 1979 with the Islamic Revolution and the American embassy's hostages; toughest economic sanctions imposed with respect to Iran's nuclear programme from 2006 to the date of reaching a nuclear deal with the P5+1 in 2015.

### 2.4.1. Introduction

This section investigates economic sanctions imposed against Iran's nuclear programme from 2006 to 2013. The section considers the general elections that depend on the type of regime as a

supportive condition for increasing the likelihood of success. It reviews the effects of sanctions on Iran's nuclear programme from 2006 to 2013, with a focus on some Iranian literature. The section then reviews the importance of elite discourse in general elections and, in particular, the critical discourse analysis of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in the presidential election campaigns in 2013.

#### 2.4.2. The effects of economic sanctions on Iran

A body of recent literature has argued that economic sanctions on Iran had devastating impacts on the economy in terms of inflation, GDP, reduced investments, and unemployment (Dastgerdi, Yusof, and Shahbaz, 2018; Majidi and Zarouni, 2016; Sha'bani, Mahkoei, and Ghorbani, 2015; Aghazadeh, 2014; Takeyh and Maloney, 2011); they also had impacts on the elite and Iran's nuclear choices (Smeets, 2018; Rezaei, 2017; Borszik, 2016; Seeberg, 2016).

Takeyh and Maloney (2011) argue that economic sanctions on Iran had heavy financial costs, but they failed to convince Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions. The authors, in their qualitative study, reviewed all sanctions on Iran, including the nuclear sanctions. The authors stated that the US sanctions on Iran after the embassy incident were severe and 'crippled' the Iranian economy, leading to negotiations and the release of hostages. Yet, international cooperation was not crucial, and only a few states engaged in taking substantial measures against Iran. Over time, Iran also faced sanctions in 1992 concerning the US Non-Proliferation Act, and later, the George W. Bush administration succeeded in convincing the international community to impose economic sanctions on Iran with respect to its nuclear programme in 2006. The Obama administration, after 2009, had a different approach to Iran based on direct negotiations and trying to prioritise the carrot option in foreign policy alongside crippling sanctions.

The authors found that sanctions achieved partial success by impeding the most problematic policies in Iran without making adequate progress in reversing them and that international cooperation was crucial to that success. This is in line with Martin (1992) and Drury (1998): Sanctions affected Iran's economy in terms of trade with Europe, which sharply declined, and forced Iran to recapitalise its banks and seek out new mechanisms for increasing its trade finance requirements. To illustrate the Iranian crisis, the authors gave some examples, such as Iran waiting for months before getting its payment from Indian imports of gasoline; Iranian jets having a real crisis and having to be grounded in Europe given the US restrictions on sales of refined petroleum products; Sanctions have been integrated into the Iranian narrative, especially the discourse of resistance and independence. Entrenching Iranian intransigence through a

discourse of resistance is an essential component of Iran's nuclear policy discourse, along with discourses of justice and independence (Moshirzadeh, 2007).

Iranians conceived the external economic pressure as representing an international conspiracy to undermine the Islamic Revolution's principles. They have been portrayed as a plot that has been foiled by Iran's wise leaders, and they claimed that sanctions contributed to strengthening Iran's national capabilities and sovereignty. This result is in line with Broszik (2016). China and Russia have also played an important role as third parties to Tehran and somewhat mitigated the impacts of the sanctions alongside the Turkish and Brazilian initiatives in 2010. This is in line with Nossal (1989) and Early (2009) regarding the effective role of a third party. Iran has tackled to some extent severe economic sanctions by taking some effective measures to mitigate gasoline consumption, increase its refinery capacity, and eliminate longstanding subsidies on goods such as bread and gasoline.

Takeyh and Maloney's study is holistic, given the periods it covers. It investigated the measures that Iran has taken to deal with the economic sanctions impacts, which in turn shed light on the weak aspects of the implementation of the sanctions. This thesis agrees with the first part of this argument with respect to the effects of sanctions that affected Iran's economy significantly, but it disagrees with the rest of the argument as it is not valid today given the research was published in 2011 before the nuclear deal in 2015.

Over time, under sanctions, many profound economic and societal problems have emerged in Iran. Sha'bani, Mahkoei, and Ghorbani (2015) argue that international sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme have generated a depression and rising unemployment and inflation. The authors found that under economic sanctions: the unemployment rate increased to 30.2 per cent in 2007 in urban areas; business growth to the GDP is much lower; economic growth has a low ratio of -2.2; a decrease in the average rial expenditure of every household from 7.24 million in 1998 to 6.50 million in 2006; and low revenue from sold oil. This is consistent with Takeyh and Maloney (2011). The authors concluded that sanctions have affected Iran significantly because they were effective.

These results are consistent with Peksen and Son (2015) and Hatipoglu and Peksen (2018), who argue that economic sanctions are more likely to affect the target's economic growth and prosperity. It is also in line with Galtung (1967) and Marinov (2005) regarding the impact of sanctions on GDP. Despite the serious impacts such as increasing inflation, unemployment, and decreasing GDP in targeted states, some authors investigated the effect of economic sanctions on the target country's currency. Other authors have found some positive effects of sanctions along with their negative impacts on Iran's macroeconomics.

Majidi and Zarouni (2016), in their qualitative study, argue that sanctions affected Iran's plan to achieve economic development, but that sanctions also had positive outcomes. The authors reviewed the impacts of US and international sanctions on oil projects, inflation, currency, unemployment, investments, economic growth, and the banking system. The authors found that sanctions affected Iran's economy in terms of expanding economic isolation and reducing investments due to the lack of domestic capital and frozen oil projects; generating economic uncertainty which attracted foreign investors to invest in regional countries; affecting employment due to the embargo and limited access to the international markets as this affected the workforce; increasing inflation and thus affecting the currency value as the sanctions increased the entry fee of imported goods where Iran had to import them indirectly, and; influencing negatively the banking system in terms of credit risk and banks' sources and the freezing of assets abroad prevented banks from investing or transactions due to the embargo.

This led to a reduction in Iran's economic development and commercial exchange value and affected its industry. These results are in line with Peksen and Son (2015), Petrescu (2016), and Hatipoglu and Peksen (2018) regarding the role of sanctions in affecting the target's currency and banking system. It is also consistent with Dastgerdi, Yusof, and Shahbaz (2018) and Aghazadeh (2014) regarding the impact of sanctions on the flow of investments. Yet, the authors found some positive effects of sanctions, such as the improvement of the domestic industry in Iran by relying on non-oil sources and strengthening the economy to eliminate its vulnerability to external pressure. The result can be considered at a minimum level in the Iranian case, as sanctions may have backfired as unexpected or unwanted outcomes from the sender's purpose, in line with Galtung (1967) and Smeets (2018). It is also consistent partially with Broszik (2016).

Another Iranian author emphasised the above results and added the role of mismanagement to the sanctions as a secondary cause of serious effects. Aghazadeh (2014) argues that multilateral sanctions on Iran along with domestic economic problems have contributed to serious problems. She investigated the effects of sanctions on Iran in several aspects, such as GDP, inflation, unemployment, foreign direct investment (FDI), exports and imports in the oil industry, and the banking system.

Aghazadeh found that sanctions had a major role and negatively influenced the GDP due to the oil price increase, especially after the oil embargo and the unfavourable business environment decreased FDI that negatively influenced the oil industry, which at the same time requires a foreign investment that has already been affected; Sanctions increased inflation as people purchased and saved many goods to avoid higher prices because of sanctions, which resulted in increasing demand for goods; sanctions affected economic growth, which leads to increased

unemployment as many companies have left Iran; Inflation caused an increase in the prices of goods and services, the value of the currency, and the purchasing power of consumers. Inflation rates increased because they influenced Iran's national currency's value (the rial). The inflation rate in Iran is also examined depending on sanctions severity.

Dastgerdi, Yusof, and Shahbaz (2018) argue that inflation increases depending on the severity of sanctions, whether they are light, high, or the country is free of sanctions. The authors in their empirical study examined inflation from 1970 to 2011 using a model of the Trade-Financial Sanctions (TF) index, which is a linear combination of indicators that includes 'trade openness and foreign investment' when implementing the principal component model. The authors found that in the first phase when Iran was free of economic sanctions from 1970 to 1980, the TF index showed negative impacts on inflation in Iran; in the second phase, when sanctions were high from 1981 to 1999, the index showed positive impacts on inflation due to sanctions on foreign investment and trade as it increased by 14 per cent because of price shocks and thus generated instability in exchange rates; and in the third phase when sanctions were light from 1999 to 2011, they had no significant effects on the TF index and thus no effects on inflation when Iran had international trade and foreign investment and international trade and foreign investment.

The authors justified the light phase due to this period from 1999 to 2005 under Khatami, who adopted some reforms that allowed Iran to export more oil and non-oil products when the price of the oil and other products was relatively high, and that also continued during Ahmadinejad's government, which eventually resisted to some extent the inflation. The authors concluded that economic sanctions restricted Iranian trade, limited the flow of foreign investment, decreased the value of the rial, and increased inflation, and thus they recommended that the Iranian government engage seriously in negotiations with the P5+1 to lift sanctions. These results of inflation rates in Iran concerning sanctions are consistent with the scholarship that links sanctions' effects, inflation, and a currency's value, such as (Hatipoglu and Peksen, 2018; Petrescu, 2016; Majidi and Zarouni, 2016; Peksen and Son, 2015; Sha'bani, Mahkoei, and Ghorbani, 2015; Aghazadeh, 2014).

The effects of the economic sanctions do not only confine to the economic aspect but also affect the political aspect by affecting Iran's nuclear choices. The above studies are valuable because they were able to access specific data in Iran as well as reveal some tangible consequences of the sanctions. Yet, these studies were specifically focused on the economic outcomes of the sanctions. They did not examine the role of the sanctions' effects in affecting Iran's nuclear choices, neither through the discourses of Iranian leaders nor the texts and discourses of

presidential candidates through elections. The latter is an essential part of this thesis that it seeks to examine.

A group of authors (Rezaei, 2017; Seeberg, 2016) have examined the effects of sanctions on Iran's nuclear programme. Seeberg (2016) argues that the EU's role in imposing sanctions and as a negotiator was crucial and that international sanctions have affected Iran's foreign policy. In his qualitative study, Seeberg investigated the extent to which sanctions have affected Iran's nuclear choices through the sanctions regime's influence on the relations between Iran and international actors, especially the EU. Seeberg found that the EU was able to create a solid coalition from powerful states within negotiations. This is in line with scholarship on international cooperation, especially through international organisations, such as Martin (1992), Drury (1998), and Drezner (2000). Sanctions influenced Iran's nuclear choices by compelling Iran to accept the JCPOA; sanctions affected Iran's power in the Gulf and Levant regions; and Iran could be a good example where the regime can get along with sanctions for a long time without change. This is consistent with the scholarship about 'duration', such as Wallensteen (1968) and Bolks and Al-Sowayel (2000), that is, a long duration of imposing sanctions is unlikely to lead to success.

Seeberg concluded that the devastating effects of sanctions generated social pressure threatened its legitimacy, and drove the regime to accept restricting its programme according to the JCPOA agreement. This is consistent with the scholarship about the effective role of inflicting heavy costs on a target, which is more likely to lead to the success of sanctions. One can assume that a heavy cost can also be placed on the social aspect, which usually triggers people to seek policy change through new leadership, either through elections or public unrest.

Rezaei (2017) argues that the effects of smart and super-smart sanctions compelled Iran to restrain its nuclear programme. In this qualitative study, Rezaei investigated 'social anomie' through the relationship between economic deprivation and legitimacy. Rezaei found that smart and super-smart sanctions against Iran have significantly affected the Iranian economy, especially the oil embargo, which led to Iran losing nearly \$65 billion in less than two years. This is consistent with some authors of sanctions scholarship who have investigated the vulnerability of the target, such as Barnum and Fearey (2016) and Lopez and Cortright (2004); imposing SWIFT sanctions shocked the regime as they knew three days before the formal announcements; sanctions generated a huge shortage of products, basic needs, and advanced medicine, and the national currency drastically dropped. This is consistent with Peksen and Son (2015) and Hatipoglu and Peksen (2018); the inflation rate reached nearly 50 per cent, and this is in line with Sha'bani, Mahkoei, and Ghorbani (2015), Petrescu (2016), and Majidi and Zarouni (2016).

Regarding social anomie, the author found that sanctions have significantly increased the level of anomie from 2005 to 2013 in terms of high levels in virtually every category: divorce, adultery, homicide, and violent crime, particularly in large urban areas. Concerning the anomic behaviour, the author found that it posed a real threat to the survival of the regime, and the effects of the sanctions dominated the 2013 presidential elections; thus, on the one hand, Rouhani led a coalition of moderate politicians known as ‘normalizers’, arguing that the costs of sanctions outweighed the benefits of the nuclear programme. This coalition called for giving up the vision of a nuclear deterrent and normalising Iran’s relationship with the community of nations.

On the other hand, the principlists—a coalition Ahmadinejad founded in 2005 as opposed to a nuclear compromise—urged Iranians to absorb the costs of the sanctions in the name of national pride. The author concluded that Iran made the painful decision of restricting its nuclear programme as a result of sanctions effects that triggered people to stand up against the regime in line with the naive theory about economic deprivation, which claims the latter leads to political and social disintegration. This is consistent with Baldwin (1985) and Seeberg (2016), but it is in contrast to Galtung (1967), who sees sanctions sometimes leading to a ‘rally-round-the-flag’. The author considers the JCPOA as the most successful example of sanctions’ role in halting the nuclear programme.

These are interesting results that show the effectiveness of sanctions against Iran’s nuclear behaviour. However, the author did not explain in detail using a CDA model to demonstrate how the moderates and the principlists expressed their views through texts and speeches about sanctions’ effects on Iran, which led, according to him, eventually to the election of Rouhani and reach the nuclear agreement in 2015. It also missed investigating some texts and speeches of Khamenei and some domestic newspapers and their intertextuality with the main factions mentioned above. This is the major task of this thesis, which I will analyse, as we will see in chapters (7, 8, and 9), the texts and speeches of Rouhani as a moderate and Ghalibaf as a principled conservative, and the intertextuality with the texts of Khamenei and some domestic newspapers in the 2013 presidential elections, to examine the effects of sanctions on Iran’s nuclear choices in order to reach valid findings. As such, the Iranian elite has always been an area of research interest to examine its role in Iran's nuclear choices.

A series of recent studies (Smeets, 2018; Borszik, 2016) have argued that economic sanctions have affected the elite and Iranians’ attitudes towards general elections, particularly the 2013 presidential election. Borszik (2016) argues that despite the economic outcomes of economic sanctions, they have not affected the Iranian regime. In his qualitative study, Broszik found that despite the elite infighting in Iran, sanctions have not affected the Iranian regime, even though



they have affected the Iranian people in terms of the increase of inflation, unemployment, and goods prices, while oil income, national production, and currency have decreased. He also found that the performance of the Ahmadinejad administration was partly responsible for Iran's economic decline, which was also partly caused by the comprehensive US and EU sanctions, and thus generated public frustration; the public protest was not completely against the sanctions or the regime; and the economic pressure has increased elite infighting. Broszlik concluded that the Iranian regime dealt with the Green Movement protests in 2009 as part of an external plot and Rouhani constituted a good choice for the Iranians to increase economic growth and engage in fruitful negotiations.

This study is significant because it revealed the linkage mainly between the heavy economic sanctions impacts, mismanagement, and the emergence of elite disputes among the political factions. It is valid to explain the Iranian case, as the heavy impacts of the economic sanctions on the Iranians might be the tangible factor that contributed to motivating voters to elect the moderate candidate Rouhani in 2013 (50.71 per cent) against the conservative candidate Ghalibaf (16.56 per cent). Rouhani was also re-elected for a second term in the presidential election in 2017 (57.14 per cent) against the hard-line candidate Ebrahim Raisi (38.28 per cent), where the latter as a president was elected in 2021 (72.35 per cent).

Although the above study is valuable, it did not investigate how the texts and speeches of the elite, especially the presidential candidates of 2013, can contribute to the sanctions regime. It also failed to examine the relationship between the effects of sanctions and nuclear choices. This thesis adds to this study by investigating how elite infighting among reformists, moderates, and conservatives regarding the effects of sanctions led to two different approaches to solving the economic problem and changing nuclear choices through the texts and speeches of presidential candidates.

Another author emphasised the role of economic sanctions in inflicting high costs not only on the target but also on the senders. Smeets (2018) argues that economic sanctions in general not only affect the target states heavily but also the sender states as well. He conducted a qualitative study by focusing on the Iranian and Russian cases. The focus here will be on the Iranian case. Smeets found that sanctions have usually gone in tandem with diplomacy and other forms of pressure; sanctions contributed to bringing the Iranian government to the negotiation table as a result of economic sanctions' impacts and diplomacy that played a crucial role in compelling Iran to meet the demand of the senders; and Iranian political improvements and the election of Rouhani in 2013 were decisive factors in policy change in Iran. These results are consistent with sanctions scholarship regarding the contribution of heavy costs to increasing sanctions success, such as (Bapat et al., 2013; HSEO et al., 2007; Pape, 1997; Baldwin, 1985; Wallenstein, 1968;

Galtung, 1967). It is also consistent with Martin (1992) regarding sanctions being costly even for the senders. Smeets concluded that the sender states that taking action may end up “shooting themselves in the foot” (Smeets, 2018, p. 15).

This study is valuable because it illustrates the importance of international cooperation, which can be an essential factor for success in the Iranian and Russian cases. It also examines how sanctions can backfire on their senders. Moreover, it highlights the political improvement during the many years in Iran before the nuclear deal and the change in leadership, particularly the election of Rouhani. Yet, this study did not provide further analysis of how Rouhani was elected; therefore, this thesis may contribute to Smeets’ study by offering a CDA of Rouhani and Ghalibaf that might have led voters to elect Rouhani. Although this study belongs to a large body of research that has explored and re-examined factors and conditions that may contribute to the effectiveness of economic sanctions, there has been less interest in the role of the heavy cost of economic sanctions on nuclear choices through the elite discourse of candidates in general elections.

#### [2.4.3. Elite discourse in general elections: The power of language and the opportunity for policy change](#)

To date, numerous studies, in particular on domestic politics and regime type, have focused on the role of the political structure and decision-making process in increasing the likelihood of the effectiveness of economic sanctions. A promising body of sanctions scholarship, however, is focusing on the role of economic sanctions effects and general election outcomes through elite discourse. General elections are considered significant events where politicians and parties communicate and engage with voters. It gives candidates a chance to announce their promises and future policies and, in more detail, to share with voters their ideas, values, beliefs, experiences and specific meanings. Therefore, the discourses and speeches of candidates are crucial to revealing the reality of the status quo in terms of causes that resulted in serious problems and proposing approaches to solving them. Elections are also a mechanism to punish leaders due to their negative performance under economic sanctions (Park, 2018; Brooks, 2002).

Park (2018) investigated the role of electoral performance in punishing leaders driven by sanctions outcomes. He argues that sanctions hurt incumbents’ vote shares, and voters are more likely to punish elected officials for their poor performance related to sanction-induced economic hardships and political instabilities. Park also argues that ‘electoral punishment’ can be seen in the semi-democratic states based on the combination of sanctions and elections, which constitutes a crucial factor in decreasing the strategy of the dictator’s co-optation and opening opportunities for suppressed opposition.

In his significant study, Park examined 381 multiparty elections in both authoritarian and democratic regimes in 79 countries from 1972 to 2012. Park found as he expected that: the relationship between sanctions and the share of voters in the government is statistically significant; sanctions affected the electoral performance of the incumbents, in particular, their vote share; autocratic leaders are significantly more vulnerable to sanctions during elections than democratic leaders, and; sanctions hurt the incumbent's vote shares significantly in less democratic states, with voters in less democratic states are more likely to punish their incumbent by using the electoral machine under the pressure of ongoing economic sanctions. He concluded that "elections are important because they lay out official and tangible mechanisms for holding incumbents accountable, although the effect of elections varies across different kinds of elections" (Park, 2018, p. 12). These results are consistent with Smeets (2018), Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest (2017), Borszik (2016), and Lektzian and Souva (2007).

This study enhances the role of elections in holding leaders accountable for their negative performance under sanctions. In this sense, incumbents' changes through elections demonstrate a divergence from the current and past policies that led to the economic crisis as a result of sanctions. Whereas, electing new leadership usually occurs due to their criticism of the past policies and their announcement of new policies that converge with the voters' desired policies. Election campaigns are a typical context for the electorate to listen, assess, and judge candidates' policies through their texts and speeches.

This study underpins to great part the argument of the thesis that the effects of economic sanctions affect nuclear choices through candidates' texts and speeches during elections. The main difference between this thesis and the previous study lies in the incumbents' share (current leaders) more than new leaders as well as using a social constructivist approach. Therefore, Park's study can be applied indirectly and partly to the Iranian case in the context of sanctions in the 2013 election because there were no incumbents as candidates.

Notwithstanding the interesting results of Park's study, it did not examine the effective role of analysing discourses of the incumbents or the new candidates in general elections to find out how they assessed sanctions' effects and their future approaches to nuclear choices driven by their conceptions of Identity and interests.

Hence, one can, according to this study, consider the Iranian case to lie within this logic concerning the affiliations of the candidates and their political factions. For example, one can review Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy as a conservative, which led to the deterioration of Iran's economy as a result of sanctions. Likewise, Ghalibaf, the presidential candidate in the 2013 election, who belongs to the same faction of conservatives, had no major difference from

Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy, and, thus, Iran's economy will continue suffering under a new conservative leadership. Therefore, it seems like the Iranians understood the case properly and consequently decided to punish the conservative candidate as an indirect incumbent and elect the moderate Rouhani. This electoral behaviour may demonstrate the preference of the median voter, who prefers centrist policies to extremist ones.

More precisely, Brooks (2002) argues that democratic and authoritarian regimes respond differently to different types of sanctions. He examined the relationship between comprehensive sanctions, harming the median voter, and the effectiveness of economic sanctions. Brooks stated that sanctions' success in achieving positive responses is more likely to occur against democratic regimes compared to authoritarian regimes. Brooks gave examples of the responses of the two different regimes: against authoritarian regimes when comprehensive sanctions were imposed on Iraq from 1991 to 2003, where the regime was able to resist and gain some benefits from lifting some sanctions; against Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1995, as they were vulnerable to the effect on the economy; against the military coup in Haiti from 1993 to 1994, which ended when Haiti's military leadership gave up in September 1994; and, in contrast, imposing sanctions against democratic regimes such as South Africa that affected the economy by 1–3 per cent of economic growth a year and led to the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa in 1990.

Brooks found that inclusive sanctions affect macroeconomic indicators; hence, the median voter will be successful against democratic states as they contribute to politicians 'mobilising' new approaches and policies that mitigate the effects of sanctions. This result relates to South Africa, where voters elected Nelson Mandela in 1994 in response to the effect of sanctions as he announced new policies against Apartheid: inclusive trade sanctions are ineffective against authoritarian regimes; sanctions are effective when targeting assets and travel bans of individuals and groups in authoritarian regimes; announcing new policies needs a proper and motivating context, and; election campaigns, especially discourses and speeches, are among the most influential tools. These results are consistent with sanctions scholarship about regime type. That is, sanctions against democratic regimes are more likely to succeed with less cost than non-democratic ones— Park, 2018; Lektzian and Souva, 2007; Evenett, 2002).

The results of this study also apply to the Iranian case in terms of comprehensive sanctions on Iran that yielded heavy costs to the economy, and this may have driven the voters in the presidential elections in 2013 to elect a particular candidate. Yet, the study did not apply CDA to investigate how candidates expressed different policies and approaches related to economic sanctions within their texts and discourses about these policies. This is what the thesis seeks to add to the literature.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) during general elections has been used to investigate the extent to which the speakers can persuade voters of their announced policies (Khajavi and Rasti, 2020; Kim, 2014). Khajavi and Rasti (2020) examined the 2012 US presidential election speeches by Barack Obama (Democrat) and Mitt Romney (Republican) and explored the way they portrayed themselves to convince voters. The authors collected data from thirty speeches by Obama and Romney from June 2011 to November 2012. They investigated their strategies: positive and negative representations of others, self-representation, legitimization, and delegitimization. They applied the CDA approaches of Dijk (1988, 2013), Leeuwen (2008), and Wodak (2015).

The authors found that Obama focused on the importance of implementing the ‘myth of the American dream’ as he ran for a second term, while Romney focused on the ‘other’s negative representation as he portrayed Obama’s performance in the first term as weak and unsuccessful. Both portrayed the special position of the US and Americans globally using populist slogans concerning national identity and the US’s status in the world. Obama succeeded in achieving his goals through discourse, whereas Romney, due to the overuse of others’ negative representation, was unsuccessful in achieving his goals (Khajavi and Rasti, 2020).

As long as the US is not suffering from sanctions, these results can be understood in the context of the role of persuasive discourse in convincing voters and policy change through presidential elections. Elections enable candidates to present themselves, criticise the current policies and leaders’ performance, and announce new policies. It is also a significant event for voters to consume candidates’ texts and discourses, thus enabling them to punish incumbent leaders for poor performance, evaluate the current and future desired policies, and contribute to electing a new leader who announced policies that converge with their preferences. In this sense, general elections in democratic regimes provide voters with the opportunity and ability to either punish or reward incumbent leaders and candidates based on their announced policies related to political, social, security, and economic issues. This is consistent with Park (2018), Smeets (2018), Major (2012), Brooks (2002), and Evenett (2002). For a better understanding of elite speeches and texts that responded to economic sanctions in authoritarian regimes where there are no elections, it is worth reviewing the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea’s response (DPRK) to sanctions as a non-democratic regime.

Kim (2016) argues that non-democratic regimes such as the DPRK use political discourse as a preferred tactic to respond to the negative effects of economic sanctions, using the political rhetoric of backlash, appeasement, and surveillance to mobilise their people. In his empirical study, Kim used time-series data from 1949 to 2010 derived from the rhetoric of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un in their New Year’s Day speeches. Kim found that: domestic

and international instability affected the rhetoric of surveillance; economic sanctions are more likely to affect the rhetoric of appeasement and backlash; positive sanctions increase economic prosperity and decrease appeasement rhetoric as a result of having economic aid, which does not require further reform; only positive sanctions increase the rhetoric of backlash; and no relationship was found between surveillance rhetoric and economic sanctions as it was the most preferred strategy for the DPRK in responding to any economic threats.

These results are consistent with the sanctions scholarship on the role of sanctions in destabilising autocratic leaders and compelling them to respond differently: Marinov (2005) and Major (2012). As sanctions make them vulnerable, vulnerability can be understood in the context of non-democratic regimes within the political rhetoric as a tactical mechanism, especially in the rhetoric of appeasement and surveillance, where leaders driven by sanctions' effects try to meet the public's demands and make them satisfied with the regime by promising further reform.

The three types of political rhetoric can be found within the Iranian narrative according to power distribution, that is, normally Khamenei adopts the rhetoric of 'backlash' as the leader of the Islamic Revolution who challenges the West and US policies and plots against Iran. The rhetoric of 'appeasement' and 'surveillance' is normally adopted by a president, given the special relationship with voters as well as being the head of administrative institutions. It can also be said that the rhetoric of 'surveillance' can be adopted by the leader of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The Iranian case has been examined by applying CDA to analyse the texts and speeches of the presidential candidates Rouhani and Ghalibaf in the 2013 elections. The discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in the elections of 2013 were examined to explore which discourse was hegemonic and able to convince voters (Jahangiri and Mousavi, 2017; Mirzaei, Eslam, and Safari, 2017; Parvin, 2015, and; Gowhary et al., 2014).

Jahangiri and Mousavi (2017) argue that Rouhani's discourse was dominant in the elections and thus won the presidential election. The authors applied the Laclau and Mouffe model to examine the antagonistic discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf, along with the 'Transitivity analysis' for the headlines of the two Iranian newspapers (Kayhan and Shargh). The authors found that both candidates blamed Ahmadinejad's government for managing the economic crisis, and both focused mostly on economic chaos. This result is consistent with the thesis result that the economic factor was the most articulated factor among others; Rouhani accused Ahmadinejad's government of inefficiency, which was the main cause of Iran's problems, especially the economy; and Rouhani linked economic prosperity with a new non-partisan government. To express that, authors found that Rouhani used terms such as moderation, production instability of economic regulations, inflation control, controlling unemployment,

economic justice, decentralisation, real privatisation, freedom of speech, improvement of the business environment, and fair national media.

Ghalibaf stated that Iran is in social chaos and has a mismanagement problem, and solving that requires a clear economic plan and reforming the current policies. This is in line with the thesis result as Ghalibaf adopted mismanagement to be the main cause of economic harm. To express that, authors found that Ghalibaf used terms such as instability of prices, controlling unemployment, inflation, justice, economic growth, and currency stability. One can realise that Rouhani stressed the importance of moderation, while Ghalibaf ignored it and cannot be found within his discourse. This might be interpreted within the context of members' resources MR and how these resources can influence a person. For example, Rouhani, a former diplomat, is the leader of the 'Moderation and Development Party', and he fought against 'extremism', especially within the international sphere, including complex issues such as the nuclear programme and sanctions. Ghalibaf has a military background and adopted the resistance discourse of the Islamic revolution, which considers the West and the US as enemies.

The authors also found that voters realised that the fundamentalist party supported the policies of Ahmadinejad's government, and as a result, Rouhani obtained substantial support from the voters who were dissatisfied with Ahmadinejad's policies; Shargh's headlines represented the events to encourage people to participate and strongly emphasised the material processes. Whereas Kayhan's headlines exposed confusion over supporting any candidate in particular and were mostly convincing people to participate in the election. This study is significant because it examined the hegemonic discourse in the 2013 elections. Yet, it did not analyse articles from Shargh and Kayhan concerning the effects of sanctions, the main causes of economic harm, and Iran's nuclear choices; instead, it reviewed only the headlines regarding participation in the elections. It also missed an analysis of the discourse of the supreme leader and how this may or may not influence the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf. The main focus of their study was on the economic problems and how Rouhani and Ghalibaf announced their policies to resolve them without examining how sanctions' effects and ideational elements might affect Iran's nuclear choices. This is what this thesis seeks to add through a deep focus on the neglected aspects that the previous study missed to examine. It seems like Rouhani's discourse in the 2013 presidential elections was inspiring for further studies. Rouhani's rhetoric, in particular within Fairclough's model, has been analysed.

Mirzaei, Eslam, and Safari (2017) argue that Rouhani's rhetoric in the 2013 elections was a discourse of 'persuasion'. The authors applied Fairclough's model to examine the relationship between discourse and power and the expression of religious, cultural, and political values. They investigated 'scrutinising sound', selecting lexical elements, and text structure to deliver

political nuances. In particular, tripartite construction, repetition in parallel lines, alliteration, metaphor, personalization, and allusion.

The authors found that: Rouhani was successful in understanding the policies that voters wanted to hear; Rouhani's campaign was also successful in using a 'unique and memorable' slogan; he was able to be a 'man of people' as he shared values and interests with people; he was able to convince many voters by criticising the current situation and emphasising the urgent need to solve problems by using visual symbols and dynamic metaphor; he expressed his views over many issues institutionally rather than individually, that is, he was representing them within his party, and; Rouhani's aim was not only to blame the 'fundamentalist' party on the mess, he aspired to eliminate the current situation by using his assertive tone in his rhetoric (Mirzaei, Eslam, and Safari, 2017).

Although this is a deep-focus study on Rouhani's rhetoric, it is evident that it used linguistic features to find out whether Rouhani's rhetoric was persuasive, ignored other candidates' rhetoric, and missed analysing Rouhani's rhetoric based on important themes such as the relationship between the effects of sanctions and the economic harm as well as Iran's nuclear choices. This is crucial to revealing the candidates' approaches, whether flexible or inflexible, towards economic and political policies. Another model of CDA was used to analyse the presidential candidates' discourse in the three debates that took place in the 2013 elections.

Parvin (2015) argues that a strong candidate with a more flexible approach is likely to win the election. She applied the CDA of Laclau and Mouffe to analyse the discourses of presidential candidates in the three debates that took place from the 31st of May to the 7th of June 2013. Parvin aimed to discover the ideological purposes, where language drives the political discourse to express unexpressed realities. She examined hegemony that related essentially to ideologies and identities. Parvin found that there were two main discourses in the 2013 election: extremist and moderate. This is partly consistent with Jahangiri and Mousavi (2017), who found that Rouhani used 'moderation' and his discourse was dominant. She also found that neither extremist nor moderate groups have been able to offer new valuable discourses; they mostly deliver a defensive discourse rather than a real discourse; The critical condition of the economy and the offensive foreign policy had led to putting the two major discourses in confrontation, and; the two discourses relied on blaming each other for the whole problem.

The extremist discourse insists that the country's conditions are "calm and ideal", and if there is any problem, it is related to the distance from principles and values. While the moderate discourse attributed that the government has ignored solutions, innovation, and seeing everything as either black or white, foreign policy and international sanctions were also among



the major causes of economic hardship, and this motivated candidates to produce new discourses. This result is significant and supportive of this thesis' findings, as we will see in chapters 7, 8, and 9. Rouhani's discourses tried to show that he belonged to the reformists, and he won the election because he succeeded in excluding other discourses resulting from the rising socio-political crisis and because he wanted to be seen as close to the reformists. Notwithstanding, according to Parvin, and in contrast to Mirzaei, Eslam, and Safari (2017) and Jahangiri and Mousavi (2017), Rouhani's discourse was not hegemonic (Parvin, 2015).

Although Parvin's study reached some interesting results, it had some issues, such as context: when eight candidates produced or reproduced new texts in the form of "defensive discourse" against accusations, the produced texts struggled to demonstrate and deliver new policies properly to people. The candidates were in a sensitive situation when they had a confrontation in a national television debate where everyone tried to gain attention and appear as the most suitable next president. In addition, despite the interesting themes that were mentioned in the debate, the discourses were limited and focused only on the three debates. For instance, if other well-prepared and systematic discourses that have been expressed in various contexts, such as meetings with supporters in different places and conducting interviews domestically and internationally, were examined, they would be more valid and representative of real discourse, as this thesis intends to do.

Another study on the Iranian case was conducted by Gowhary et al. (2014). The authors argue that the candidates constituted their discourses based on their MR such as their beliefs and political and social motivations. They applied the CDA of Fairclough's model to analyse the talks of Ghalibaf and Rouhani. The authors selected some lines from the speeches of each of them. They found that the two candidates mentioned external and internal issues that Iranians are struggling with, such as the economic crisis, international sanctions, inflation, and the nuclear programme, and that they have two different styles of producing their speeches around such issues, driven by their different resources. Ghalibaf, who belongs to the conservative faction, did not announce clearly that he would change the current foreign policy significantly, which can be recognised as a 'rigid' one. Rouhani, who belongs to the moderates, announced that he would eliminate of the 'rigidity' within the foreign policy domain; they both used language as a tool for promoting their political and personal interests, and they also used language as an effective tool through their speeches to persuade voters and thus win the election.

Gowhary et al. (2014) have not examined deeply the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf regarding Iran's nuclear choices in particular that have intertextuality with Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan. Analysing their produced texts through "discursive practice" is essential to reveal the reality of the real cause of economic harm, economic sanctions' effects, and the role of sanctions in

affecting Iran's nuclear choices in the 2013 presidential elections. They have not also investigated their plans and approaches to resolve the above issues. More importantly, the previous studies did not analyse the importance of MR, either for Rouhani or Ghalibaf, in influencing their texts along with sanctions' effects and how their MR may contribute to producing a new system of meanings that provide clarity in understanding their texts in the context of economic sanctions and beyond.

For example, in terms of limited resources, as I commented above on Parvi's study, it strictly examined the texts of the candidates in the three debates and ignored other speeches and interviews of the candidates that represented clear expressions over the sanctions' effects and Iran's nuclear choices. Similarly, Gowhary et al. (2014) have examined some texts from only one discourse from Rouhani and Ghalibaf, which makes their study poor and needs further research to build on it to gain a better understanding of the role of the CDA in examining the role of sanctions in affecting Iran's nuclear choices.

Although the literature has examined some episodes to understand the relationship between economic sanctions' effects and policy change, there is still considerable ambiguity in the literature regarding the use of discourse to successfully frame the consequences of economic sanctions along with conceptions of identity and interests. What is missing in the existing scholarship on economic sanctions and nuclear proliferation is that it has not fully explored the significant role of discourse in presenting material elements of sanctions effects and actors' ideational elements of conceptions of identity and interests that construct and create nuclear choices through the texts of the presidential candidates to be adopted if elected. As their discourses compete to produce realities about nuclear choices along with the desired approach of the sanctions regime, This is the gap that this study intends to fill.

In this sense, and in order to examine in depth the effectiveness of sanctions in affecting nuclear choices, this thesis developed a feasible research design to achieve its aim and objectives by analysing some representative key texts from the discourses of Rouhani, Ghalibaf and Khamenei, as well as some key texts from Shargh and Kayhan in the 2013 presidential elections, through investigating salient issues such as the effects of the economic sanctions, the main cause of the economic harm and solutions, and Iran's nuclear choices. To do so, I will apply a social constructivist approach to analysing their discourses.

#### 2.4.4. Conclusion

This section has shown under what conditions sanctions are more likely to work. Precisely, the section has shown the effects of economic sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme were severe and crippled the economy significantly in terms of inflation, GDP, unemployment, and

so on. It has also revealed that economic sanctions were the main cause of Iran's economic harm. The section has explored the importance of the elite discourse in general elections in terms of announcing new policies that converge with voters' desired policies and using language to express values, reality, beliefs, and policies to persuade voters either to elect new candidates or punish incumbents during elections.

Discourse analysis is an effective tool to identify, understand, and compare the competitive discourses that may converge or diverge between voters and producers. The section finally revealed that the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf have been analysed using the models of Fairclough, Laclau, and Mouffe. However, these studies were purely descriptive and engaged with linguistic features more than political themes and meanings concerning economic sanctions' effects, economic harm solutions and causes, and Iran's future nuclear choices.

## **2.5. Chapter conclusion**

The chapter has situated this research among the existing literature on economic sanctions and nuclear non-proliferation. It reviewed the arguments of some pessimistic and optimistic scholars about sanctions' effectiveness in general and against nuclear proliferation in particular, and whether they are effective or ineffective. The chapter then moved on to explore what factors might undermine the effectiveness of sanctions, such as the sender's goals, third parties, and duration. The chapter then continued to explore what conditions are more likely to increase the effectiveness of economic sanctions, such as political stability, issue salience, heavy costs, international cooperation (multilateral sanctions), regime type, and so forth. As it has been argued that democratic target states are willing and more likely to respond positively to sanctions compared to non-democratic target states, the literature, as we have seen, has valued the importance of regime type to sanctions' success.

The chapter also sheds light on the effects of economic sanctions on Iran as they had specific features of SIMCA that are consistent with the literature, which in turn are more likely to inflict a heavy cost when the latter may increase the sanctions' effects explaining and articulation within the texts of candidates and ultimately might affect nuclear choices. The chapter then illustrated the power of language and its role in policy change by emphasising the importance of the elite discourse that frames the effects of sanctions during elections. The chapter finally reviewed some Iranian literature that examined the central role of the models of CDA in analysing discourse in the 2013 elections. Although they examined linguistically the features of the candidates' texts and reached some interesting results, they missed investigating the role of ideational elements that influenced Rouhani and Ghalibaf differently to construct effective policies to resolve the economic harm that resulted from sanctions, and Iran's nuclear choices. The chapter has shown how this study contributes to filling the gap in the existing literature by

examining the role of discourse on sanctions in presenting material and ideational elements to affect nuclear choices by analysing some key texts from discourses of candidates in general elections using a social constructivist approach. A social constructivist approach to analysing discourse is crucial for clarity and understanding the effective role of issue salience along with perceptions of identity and interests in affecting policies.

## CONTEXTUALISING IRAN'S NUCLEAR PROGRAMME

### 3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter situated the research within the existing scholarship and highlighted the gap that this study aims to fill. This chapter provides important background context for the study. Specifically, it examines Iran's domestic politics to gain a greater understanding of the nuclear programme and the international community's response to Iran's violation of its international obligations and the nuclear non-proliferation regime when developing secret nuclear capabilities. This chapter explains Iran's nuclear programme developments under the political factions of the conservatives and the moderates after the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The chapter then moves on to explore in detail the economic sanctions imposed by the UN, US, and EU against Iran's nuclear programme. In addition, it reviews the historical context of the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the E3 from 2003 to 2005 and with the P5+1 from 2006 to 2013. Finally, the chapter provides the context of the presidential elections in 2009 whereas the presidential elections of 2013 will be explained in depth in chapters 7, 8, and 9.

### 3.2. The main Iranian political factions post-Islamic Revolution 1979

The Iranian political system of 'political Mullahs' is the name of the teachers and scholars of Islamic learning in mosques. It was established based on Shiite Islamic principles as a result of a deal between secular groups, i.e., nationalists and the political left, and Islamist groups after the revolution in 1979 (Abdolmohammadi and Cama, 2015). The Islamic Republic of Iran was established after a referendum in April 1979, when the majority of Iranians (98.2 per cent) voted for ending the monarchy. Iran is classified as a theocratic country, especially after the revolution (ibid.). Two political factions dominated Iran after the Revolution; conservatives and reformists, and later on a moderate faction emerged.

The cleric's hard-liners, conservatives, regime loyalists or principlists, and reformists are both known as 'insiders' (Abdo, 2004). Both factions are eager to preserve the principles of the Islamic Revolution and 'Velayat-e Faghih'. Velayat-e Faghih is the "source from which the Supreme Leader derives legitimacy for his simultaneous political and religious authority over the country" (Nader, Thaler, and Bohandy, 2011, p. 21). The roots of velayat-e Faghih lie in Shi'a Islam<sup>2</sup>. Iran's history after the Islamic Revolution can be divided into three eras: the war with Iraq (1981–1989); reconstruction (1989–1997); and political and economic reform (1997–2005) (Asayesh et al., 2011). Over the years, specifically in 2000, after the parliamentary

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<sup>2</sup> For more details, see Muhammad Shaker: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/96773593.pdf>

elections, more than 30 new members launched the Moderation and Development Party. It is interested in modernisation and economic aspects more than social justice, and its ideology is moderation, pragmatism, Islamic democracy, and technocracy (Rabasa et al., 2004).

### 3.3.1 Conservatives

Religious conservatives and traditionalists identify with anti-Westernism, while reformists and modernists identify with secularism and pro-Western tendencies (Tarock, 2002). After a short period of liberal rule, the hardliner clerics defeated their rivals. Two main factors contributed to empowering the clergy: first, the failure of Pahlavi's secularism to achieve political or economic development; moreover, humiliating the people by making Iran a proxy of the West; and second, the war with Iraq, which supported the clerics' stance to postpone political and economic reform (ibid).

The new governors 'clerics' established the religious basis of the new regime's agenda. However, this was not easy because they had to manage the political transition from the perspective of opposition to one of authority (Mir-Hosseini, 2002). The conservatives have set out their political and economic interests, i.e., domestic and foreign policy issues, by relying on the Office of Khamenei and justified their concentration of power in response to internal and external challenges (Gheissari and Nasr, 2005). They support government control of the economy and a stricter and more aggressive foreign policy to support the Shi'a movement, i.e., in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and Yemen (ibid.).

They fully committed to their perspective on Islamic regulations and the absolute power of the office of Khamenei (Fazili, 2010). The conservatives' leadership is linked together and they share political and economic interests and a common strategic outlook. This leadership asserts its power because of the ideology and values of the Islamic Revolution and uses strong-arm tactics to threaten the opposition. Yet, "it also appeals to national aspirations, is increasingly eager to manipulate public opinion, and, by using its extensive control of the country's economic resources and output, is keen on creating new patronage networks to assert its will" (Gheissari and Nasr, 2005, p. 176).

Foreign policy under the radical conservatives was based in the early stage of the revolutionary years on a set of principles: a "neither East nor West" policy connected to Iran's domination by the great powers; export of the revolution; militant Third-Worldism, which sees the world in terms of imperial powers against downtrodden nations; and anti-imperialist tendencies by describing the US as the great devil (Hunter, 2010). After the Islamic Revolution, Iran had a new constitution until the death of the first Supreme leader 'Khomeini'. Subsequently, the Expediency Council added some articles in 1989 to revise and provide major issues of

Khamenei's authorities, particularly long-term grand strategies on foreign policy and the economy (Kazemzadeh, 2017). The first president of Iran after the revolution was Sayyid Abolhasan Banisadr from 1980 to 1981, and then Muhammad Rajai for the year 1981.

The first radical conservative president was Ali Khamenei during the Iraq-Iran war from 1981 to 1989, who turned out to be the second Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran after Ruhollah Khomeini. The pragmatic Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was the President for two terms from 1989 to 1997 and tried to make a fundamental change in the relationship between the state and the people. He identified himself as a pragmatic conservative. Rafsanjani focused on the development of the economy of the country more than economic justice and civil society (Farhi, 2012). During his presidency, he also tried to focus more on practical promises than spiritual salvation by relaxing the restrictions of Iranian culture and attracting investments from outside the country, which was a difficult mission because of the hard-liners (Fazili, 2010).

In 2005, after eight years of the reformist government of Muhammad Khatami from 1997 to 2005, the neo-conservative 'ultra-conservative' Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president for two terms from 2005 to 2013. Ahmadinejad called in both campaigns for a stronger government, improving the economy and social welfare, and improving the conditions of the poor and middle class (ibid.). The conservatives have lost their grip on the government since the controversial election in 2009. International pressure on the nuclear programme resulted in economic difficulties because of imposed economic sanctions and social unrest that may have contributed to the election of the moderate President Rouhani in 2013 after defeating the conservative candidate Ghalibaf (Kaya and Sartepe, 2016).

### 3.3.2. Reformists

Reformists is a new name for an old-time radical faction of 'left fundamentalists' who suffered from marginalisation in the early 1990s (Bjorvatn and Selvik, 2008). The majority of the leaders<sup>3</sup> of the leftist fundamentalists transferred to reformists after the Iraq-US war from 1990 to 1991 (Kazemzadeh, 2017). The declared stance of reformists in Iran is that they are seeking regime reform rather than changing the regime. The reformists drew attention to the ideals of the revolution's anti-authoritarianism, in which conservatives violated one of the central pillars of the Islamic constitution, i.e., human rights and the rule of law (Farhi, 2012).

Reformists believe that: (i) people are the source of governance. Hence, the legitimacy comes from them through the ballot box; (ii) modifying the absolute power of Khamenei; and (iii)

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<sup>3</sup>Some of the reformist leaders: Ayatollah Mohammad Moussavi Khomeini (the leader of the fundamentalist students who took over the American embassy and their liaison with Ayatollah Khomeini), Hojatolislam Ali Akbar Mohtashami-pour (minister of interior and ambassador to Syria who helped found the Lebanese Hezbollah), Hojatolislam Hadi Ghafari (one of the most extreme, violent, and authoritarian members of the oligarchy), Mir Hussein Moussavi, Mehdi Karrubi, and Mohammad Khatami.

ending Iran's isolation by seeking integration into the international community, particularly in the economic sphere, that is, emphasising privatisation, facilitating the flow of Foreign Direct Investment (hereafter FDI), and reducing the government's role in controlling the economy (Fazili, 2010). From 1997 to 2005, in order to gain greater democracy, Muhammad Khatami became the first reformist president of Iran.

Khatami's victory achieved promises of a 'politics of hope' to change devastating policies during the conservatives' tenure. In other words, the majority of Iranians accepted a new phase of the democratisation process that may contribute to limiting the authority of Khamenei. After the Khatami elections, reformists, including the left, progressive clergymen, the modern right, and Islamic intellectuals, became known as the May 23 Front, in which they stood against the conservative right, the neo-fundamentalists, and Khamenism (Moslem, 2002).

The reformist discourse of Khatami, as well as the mobilisation of reformist forces, paved the way for the election of Rouhani in 2013 (Behraves, 2014). The term 'civil society' concerning Iran is related to Khatami's discourse (Kamrava, 2001). He explained that there is no conflict between creating a civil society and the Islamic Revolution. Khatami mentioned the most significant achievement that has been made by Ayatollah Khomeini is to prevent dictatorship and despotism with an emphasis on the rule of law (Moslem, 2002). Khatami explains that to keep the Islamic Republic of Iran strong, people should enjoy the freedom and their rights extracted from the constitution (ibid.). In other words, when the reformist president was in office profound changes were expected both in the configuration of power distribution within Iranian society and with the international community (Behraves, 2014).

### 3.3.3. Moderates

"Iran will be in a disaster" if one of the two main factions rules the country. This was the conclusion that Hashemi Rafsanjani, the president of Iran from 1989 to 1997, stated in a meeting with some open-minded politicians from the two main factions: conservatives and reformists (Mousavian, 2013). He met with Deputy Foreign Minister Mahmoud Vaezi, MP Mohammad Bagher Nobakht, Deputy Cultural Minister Ali Jannati, and Seyed Hossein Mousavian (ibid.). Rafsanjani suggested that a new movement or party under the title of "centrist or moderation" must be established in order to preserve the Islamic Republic, and subsequently, in 1999, Hassan Rouhani became the leader of the "Moderate and Development Party" (ibid.).

The mission of the party is the preservation of Islamic values, and the necessity of providing for the rational needs of the youth is determined. The political, social, cultural, economic, military, administrative, judicial, and legislative goals of the party with a deep belief in the principles of



“God-centeredness” and national sovereignty and the strict implementation of all the principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Constitution. The party was established to achieve political goals such as “Trying to maintain national security in order to provide national goals and interests; defence of people’s political rights and freedoms stipulated in the constitution; Efforts to strengthen national harmony; maintaining and protecting the authority of the members of the system; reducing the violence in individual and social behaviour within the framework of national security; and increasing Iran's international credibility<sup>4</sup>.”

Within its economic goals, the party stresses a new economic system that needs to perform in a balanced way in order to engage constructively with the global market, such as: pursuing and implementing balanced and all-around development in agriculture, industry, and service sectors within the framework of the principles of the constitution; emphasising the necessity of legality and accountability of the government’s economic behaviour, and; trying to institutionalise the use of the country’s economic resources for public welfare, economic stability, and security.

The party also has some social goals, such as emphasising development and social freedoms through respect for political ideas, citizenship rights, rational interaction with the country’s parties and press, and eliminating any violence in social relations within the framework of the constitution. The party focuses on strengthening the foundations of the family and enhancing public institutions and trade unions, employers, and employees in line with civil society (Moderate and Development Party, 2023). There are some cultural goals the party promoted based on the dynamic thoughts of Imam Khomeini (RA), such as strengthening the elements of national culture and the religious and national identities of the people in line with the authority, national pride, and ideals of the Islamic Revolution (ibid.).

The Moderation and Development Party started its activity by participating in the 6th parliament elections in 2000. This participation was based on several moderate figures on the right wing, together with a group of moderate leftists. “I want to live happily, proudly, and in prosperity” was the main slogan of the party (Moderation and Development Party, 2023). Although many obstacles affected the party, Hassan Rouhani won the presidential election in 2013, which is the most significant victory for the party in the 15 years since it was established. The party still exists and works actively to this day.

### **3.4. The Iranian nuclear programme and Proliferation**

Since the US used nuclear weapons in World War II against the two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, some countries have successfully developed nuclear weapons (O’Neil, 2009). States have different reasons for this, i.e., purists of prestige, seeking international

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<sup>4</sup> Moderation and Development Party website: <https://www.hezbollah.ir/vsdb4ubuun4rknrun.ei7pu.html>

recognition, countering global and regional threats, and protecting national security interests through a nuclear deterrent (ibid.). As a result, a group of states have acquired nuclear weapons. For instance, the Soviet Union (Russia) in 1949, the UK in 1952, France in 1960, China in 1967, India in 1974, Pakistan in 1998, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in 2006, and Israel with an ambiguous position (Toon et al., 2017).

The process of developing nuclear weapons is complicated, and a set of factors may cripple states from going nuclear. The high economic cost of developing nuclear weapons, technical difficulties, diplomatic, economic, and military challenges, and international norms have contributed significantly to constraining any ambitions of going nuclear (Schneider, 1994). The idea of acquiring nuclear weapons to achieve deterrence attracted great attention for investigation. Cimbala (2017) looks at deterrence through a 'rationalist lens'. Rationalism takes the view that when two nuclear states conflict, each one when thinking of attacking first will assess the costs and benefits relatively (Ritchie, 2019; Miller, 2018; Cimbala, 2017; Sagan, 1994).

In 1968, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was opened for signature and entered into force on 5 March 1970. It aims to prevent the production, receiving, and transfer of nuclear weapons or nuclear explosive devices (NPT, 1970). The regime also considers other treaties and initiatives such as (i) Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zones (NWFZ); (ii) Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG); (iii) Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material (CPPNM); (iv) Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); (v) the Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone (MEWMDZFZ) (Dhanapala, 2014), and; (vi) the UN Security Council Resolution UNSCR 1540 (Woolf, Kerr, and Nikitin, 2018).

Resolution 1540 called on countries to set controls on financial services that can be used to reduce proliferation trade and criminalise proliferation financing at their lowest national levels. (Dall, Berger, and Keatinge, 2016). The logic of the prohibition on nuclear proliferation is subjected to contests of legitimacy and value. The Humanitarian Initiative on Nuclear Weapons (HINW) contributed to the crystallisation of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and will grow up and achieve success based on the norm of 'unacceptability' concerning its humanitarian consequences (Considine, 2019). Economic sanctions against proliferation are increasingly becoming the most used tool in foreign policy as well as the proliferation regime, as I will discuss throughout the thesis. Now, I will turn to focus on Iran's nuclear programme.

### 3.4.1. Historical context

The Iranian nuclear programme was established based on US President Eisenhower's initiative in the 1950s, 'Atoms for Peace' to enable countries to benefit from nuclear technology for peaceful purposes (Hicks, 2014; Warnaar, 2013). Nuclear cooperation for peaceful purposes between Iran and the US emerged through assistance in establishing the Tehran Nuclear Research Centre (TNRC) in 1967 (van Kemenade, 2009). After Iran benefited from the surge in oil prices during the 1970s, the Shah became enthusiastic about developing a nuclear programme for peaceful purposes (ibid.). As a result of the Islamic Revolution, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini disrupted the nuclear programme because Islam prohibits nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, because of the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, the decision was revisited during the presidency of the pragmatic conservative President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani. Iran attempted to revive its nuclear programme with assistance from Germany, Brazil, Spain, and Pakistan. In order to get uranium, Iran had to build another partnership with South Africa (Henderson and Heinonen, 2015). The programme continued to develop during the presidencies of Rafsanjani (1989–1997) and Khatami (1997–2005).

Yet, Khamenei expressed his disapproval of acquiring WMD in the 1990s, in a meeting with Iranian academics in 2004, and then as an official fatwa in 2005, which stated that “[t]he production, stockpiling, and use of nuclear weapons are forbidden under Islam and that the Islamic Republic of Iran will never acquire these weapons” (Sirjani, 2013, p. 65). Khamenei continued declaring his unchangeable stance in 2010 in a letter to the Tehran International Conference on Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. In 2012, in a meeting with nuclear scientists, Khamenei drew the scientists' attention to the overwhelming disadvantages and dangers of nuclear weapons. Khamenei stressed that “having a nuclear weapon is not advantageous to us; Iran's Nuclear Fatwa (66), that is, in addition to the point that, in truth, morally, intellectually, and from a religious point of view, we regard this possession of nuclear weapons as illegitimate, and we regard the move to acquire them as an illegitimate act” (Sirjani, 2013, pp. 65–66).

Analysts argue that Iran's motives for developing nuclear weapons are for political value, prestige, enhancing its status, and greatness and deterring external threats, especially the US (Hashim, 1995; Kinch, 2016). In 2002, the Iranian opposition group Mujahideen-e-Khalq revealed that Iran was developing an extensive nuclear programme (Smith, 2003). Moreover, the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported that Iran had a uranium enrichment facility in Natanz, 200 miles south of Tehran, and that the Iranian plan was to acquire 5,000 operational centrifuges that would enable Iran to produce enough highly enriched uranium for a nuclear

bomb within 3–8 years (Takeyh, 2003). It was also reported by the CIA that Iran had completed building the Arak reactor to produce heavy water for a nuclear programme (ibid.).

This disclosure posed a threat to Iran because it came at the worst time when Al Qaeda attacked the US on 9/11, and this, in turn, would lead Iran to take measures to decrease the potential risks of a US attack as part of the ‘war on terror’ (Thaler et al., 2018). The international community has three options for addressing Iran’s nuclear issue: diplomacy and sanctions, regime change by using force, or economic freedom (Kinch, 2016). Iran’s chief negotiator, Rouhani, met with the IAEA’s director, Mohamed ElBaradei, in 2003 and pledged Iran’s commitment to cooperate with the IAEA over its past nuclear activities (Porter, 2014). Until 2008, the Safeguard Department at the IAEA continued to “verify that all of the declarations Iran was required to make, providing detailed chronologies of its decisions, were accurate and complete” (Porter, 2014, p. 7).

The negotiations were not taken seriously by Iranian officials under the leadership of Mohammad Khatami and Ahmadinejad (Dobbins et al., 2011). Yet, the negotiations under Rouhani with the EU from 2003–2005 kept the nuclear issue in the IAEA without referring it to the UN Security Council (UNSC), as he agreed to suspend uranium enrichment temporarily. However, this did not last long; in 2005, when Ahmadinejad took office, Iran’s team for nuclear negotiations was replaced. The second round of nuclear negotiations took place from 2006 to 2015 with E3+3/P5+1. Nuclear negotiations during Ahmadinejad’s presidency from 2005 to 2013 did not lead to an agreement because of the tough and uncooperative Iranian stance, and consequently, the UN, the US, and the EU imposed economic sanctions against Iran.

As a result, tough economic sanctions imposed on Iran included a travel ban, an arms and oil embargo, and asset freezing (Giumelli and Ivan, 2013). These sanctions targeted Iran’s ability to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technologies in order to meet its commitments to international non-proliferation regimes. The US and EU imposed sanctions on Iran concerning uranium enrichment alongside the UN sanctions. These sanctions might have affected the Iranian economy in terms of inflation (consumer prices), which rose from 14.3 per cent in 2002 to 27.3 per cent in 2012, and the unemployment rate, which reached 13.7 per cent in 2010 compared to 12.8 per cent in 2002 (The World Bank, 2021b). In 2012, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate in 2002 was 8.1 per cent, compared to -3.7 per cent in 2012 (ibid.). The Iranian economy experienced major changes during the Obama administration (2009–2016), particularly in 2011, which resulted in significant inflation (Wertz and Vaez, 2012). Iran’s oil exports were hit by economic sanctions, and Iran lost approximately \$104 billion in 2012, 2013 and 2014 (Shirazi, Azerbaijani, and Sameti, 2016).

Inflation might affect all aspects of the economy by “influencing economic growth, employment, investment, distribution of income and wealth, and even social and political conditions in Iranian society” (Mohseni and Jouzaryanb, 2016, p. 282). Economic sanctions on Iran have widely affected the Iranian economy, and, as a result, the middle class has been undermined dramatically. Thus, the gap between the rich and the poor has widened (Bazoobandi, 2012). During the sanctions on Iran, particularly before the presidential election in 2013, Iranians suffered from a declining economy in terms of unemployment, social and political instability, and a significant increase in crimes. These economic circumstances are “even worse than that of pre-revolutionary Iran’s economic malaise” (Nader, 2013, p. 10). The Iranian economic hardship was the main source of anxiety for the public and elite, which shaped the tendency towards the presidential election along with some other factors (Ansari, 2016).

After Rouhani’s victory, he began fulfilling his promises to the Iranians made during the election campaign regarding the nuclear issue when he took office in 2013. On November 13, 2013, a new phase of serious negotiations between Iran and the P5+1 began after President Rouhani’s speech at the UN in New York in September 2013 (Jenkins and Dalton, 2014).

After more than a year of hard negotiations between Iran and the P5+1, specifically in 2015, Iran reached a nuclear deal in the form of the JCPOA that preserved Iran’s right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes under full inspections and investigations by the IAEA. Iran had to constrain uranium enrichment and open its nuclear facilities to inspection by the IAEA. In return, economic sanctions would be lifted through the timeline agreed upon in the nuclear deal. In August 2018, the US withdrew from the nuclear deal and re-imposed all the lifted sanctions and more by Executive Order 13846 of August 6, 2018 (Presidential Documents, 2018).

#### [3.4.2. Nuclear programme under conservatives](#)

The nuclear programme under the conservatives became a bellwether of Iranian independence, technological knowledge, and national pride. Conservatives also wanted to demonstrate that Iran was a strong country, especially in negotiations, and that it would use the nuclear programme domestically to paint its rivals as working against the Islamic Republic (Thaler et al., 2018). In the 1990s, during the presidency of the pragmatic conservative Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Iran had an agreement with Russia to rebuild the two reactors in Bushehr that were destroyed during the Iran-Iraq war (Ehsani and Toensing, 2004). The agreement included a new research reactor and centrifuge facilities to enrich uranium (ibid.). As a result, the US enacted an executive order to impose economic sanctions against Iran through the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act of 1996 (ibid.).

The neo-conservative President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during his term worked to increase the level of uranium enrichment along with looking for new allies, i.e., Russia, China, and India. As a result, the UN imposed the first round of sanctions against Iran in 2006 (McDowall, 2008). Khamenei reaffirmed Iran's right to improve nuclear technology, with the justification that strengthening Iran's internal foundations was crucial to preventing conspiratorial plots from Iran's enemies (Sohrabi, 2006). Many conservatives believe that abandoning the nuclear programme would motivate the US to raise many other issues such as democracy, human rights, assistance to radical Islamist groups, and recognition of Israel—issues that could affect the legitimacy of the regime at large, thus their decision to take a stand on the nuclear issue (Kazemzadeh, 2017).

Some politicians and leaders in Iran have publicly said that sanctions and international pressure will have no impact on Iranian nuclear activities. In return, in order to create domestic political problems, the US led a huge campaign to affect the presence and authority of Khamenei that resulted in the election of former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in 2007 as the speaker of the Experts Assembly (Clawson and Khalij, 2007). During the conservative government of Ahmadinejad, the Iranian economy faced serious difficulties despite the high oil prices and huge amounts of money that were still inside the country because of the sanctions. That is, people were unable and unwilling to invest money inside the country due to the unstable political situation, which eventually led many Iranians to transfer money outside Iran to invest in some regional cities (McDowall, 2008).

Ahmadinejad stressed that Iran would continue to improve its nuclear programme regardless of economic sanctions. He also stated that Iran had 3000 centrifuges running and that sanctions had no impact on the nuclear programme (Savyon and Mansharof, 2007). Regarding the full nuclear fuel cycle, Ahmadinejad stated in a press conference during a visit to Azerbaijan in 2007 that:

The West's attempts to stop Iran's nuclear programme had been in vain, and Iran had not changed its policy... Iran's enemies have not succeeded in preventing its progress and in imposing their positions upon it, for Iran has now achieved a full nuclear fuel cycle... [The Western countries] know very well that their actions do not affect Iran (Savyon and Mansharof, 2007).

Political and economic harms have had an impact on the regime's thinking in Iran. Kenneth Katzman, an expert on Iranian affairs, argued that signs were seen for strategic assessment in the Islamic Republic of Iran concerning the US strategy towards the nuclear issue (Slavin, 2007). The Iranian regime was restored to enhance and use the democratic forces in Iran to gain support. This is one of their ways of countering external threats regardless of war or sanctions,

and thus, this might strengthen the regime through nationalist sentiments (Ehsani and Toensing, 2004). The formal discourse in Iran over the nuclear programme under Ahmadinejad was continuous and consistent. Tracing such discourse helps to understand Iranian foreign policy behaviour in this context, which led to the 2010 Tehran Declaration that announced Iran's right to develop nuclear technology for civilian purposes (Warnaar, 2013).

### 3.4.3. Nuclear programme under reformists

On essential issues such as national security and regime survival, there is no conflict among different factions in Iran. On issues such as the nuclear programme, all factions speak as one. No candidate who is against the Velayat-e Faghih has ever been accepted for a public position (Timmerman, 2003; Warnaar, 2013). The reformists' rule was short compared to the traditionalists and neo-conservatives. It took place during Khatami's presidency from 1997 to 2005. Regarding the nuclear programme, strategic and tactical decisions were made: strategically, Iran decided to develop nuclear technology 'know-how' by stating that it is for civilian purposes while implicitly desiring a military programme while maintaining close relations with Russia and China (Clawson, 1998).

Tactically, and in proof of Iran's commitment to the non-proliferation regime, Iran sent a proposal to the US administration as well as to the West calling for negotiations over the nuclear programme based on Khatami's perception that it is not a skill to make enemies; the real skill is to neutralise those enemies; thereby, Iran wanted to achieve its interests through diplomacy (Takeyh, 2003). When the US refused the proposal, the E3 agreed, and thus, the first round of nuclear negotiations began in 2003 under the leadership of Rouhani, as he was Iran's chief negotiator of the nuclear programme with the E3.

It is argued that there was a "determination among clerics to develop a wide range of WMD that were relatively low-cost force multipliers" (Timmerman, 2003, p. 205). Despite this, there was a consensus among all factions that Iran at least should have nuclear technology as permitted under the NPT. Hence, none should prevent Iran from acquiring it (Gheissari and Nasr, 2005). Khatami's discourse reshaped the construction of Iranian national identity around three pillars: Iranian-Islamic culture, Iranian democracy, and dialogue among civilizations (Holliday, 2010). To some extent, this shows the flexibility of reformists and their slight disputes with conservatives on some issues in domestic and international politics.

### 3.5. Economic sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme

After the discovery of the Iranian nuclear activities and sites that Iran did not report to the IAEA along with a lack of serious cooperation, Iran failed to meet the international requirements that

called for further transparent cooperation, and consequently, severe sanctions were imposed from 2006 to 2013.

### 3.5.1. Economic sanctions: An overview

Hufbauer et al. (2007) define economic sanctions as “the deliberate, government-inspired withdrawal, or threat of withdrawal, of customary trade or financial relations” (Hufbauer et al., 2007, p. 3). Whereas Eyler (2007) defines them as “a country’s discriminatory economic restriction of either trade or credit flows with another country in an attempt to affect or reverse current policy in the sanctioned nation” (Eyler, 2007, p. 4). States and organisations usually resort to imposing economic sanctions to address the gap between diplomacy and war, since diplomacy alone is too little and war is too much (Speier, Chow, and Starr, 2001). Imposing economic sanctions against states is not new; they were used unilaterally in ancient Greece in 432 BC in response to the abduction of three women (Hufbauer et al., 2007). They have also been used extensively as a multilateral instrument since US President Woodrow Wilson’s speech in 1919, in which he said: “A nation that is boycotted is a nation that is in sight of surrender. Apply this economic, peaceful, silent, deadly remedy, and there will be no need for force” (Hufbauer et al., 2007, p. 1). This happened when the League of Nations imposed economic sanctions against Yugoslavia in 1921, Greece in 1925, and Italy in 1935 (ibid.).

Economic sanctions have been set to coerce the target to change its behaviours and policies based on restricting trade policy by two measures: boycotts<sup>5</sup> and embargoes<sup>6</sup> that ban purchasing or selling any goods, weapons, or services with the target state (Smeets, 2018; Carisch and Martin, 2011). Furthermore, in some cases, economic sanctions seek to change the regime in the target state (Masters, 2015). In other words, the main purpose of imposing economic sanctions related to international criminal law is to punish, deter, and rehabilitate the target through implementing the following procedures: “(i) imposing an arms embargo; (ii) limiting exports; (iii) restricting imports; and (iv) impeding the flow of finance through freezing assets or seizing target-country and travel bans” (Hufbauer et al., 2007, pp. 44-45). Over time, after establishing the UN, Article 41 (Chapter VII) of the Charter mentioned actions related to threats to breach peace and aggressive acts. Indeed, this article paved the way for the norms’ foundations to impose economic sanctions. The first cases of imposing sanctions after the establishment of the UN for human rights were against the apartheid system in South Africa in

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<sup>5</sup> Boycott means according to the Oxford dictionary: “Withdraw from commercial or social relations with (a country, organisation, or person) as a punishment or protest” or “Refuse to buy or handle (goods) as a punishment or protest” Which is related to Captain Charles C. Boycott (1832–97).

<sup>6</sup> Embargoes: “An official ban on trade or other commercial activity with a particular country” according to the Oxford Dictionary, which derived from the Spanish in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.



1963 and then against Southern Rhodesia in 1965 concerning the unilateral declaration of independence from the UK (Security Council Report, 2013).

### 3.5.2. Nuclear proliferation sanctions

The main purpose of imposing economic sanctions against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) is to compel or persuade the targeted state to change its policy and behaviour, and in some cases, to punish the target (Biersteker et al., 2013; Hufbauer and Oegg, 2003). This process begins when one or more trigger actions violate international norms. For example, Iran did not meet the IAEA's safeguards agreement in full compliance to facilitate the IAEA's inspectors' access to Iranian nuclear facilities. These actions could consist of developing WMD weapons, conducting a nuclear test, selling, purchasing, or transferring prohibited technology that is related to their development, including nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons (Speier, Chow, and Starr, 2001).

### 3.5.3. Mechanisms of the UN, the US, and the EU in imposing economic sanctions

The imposition of economic sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme was through three main senders: the UN, the US, and the EU. The US and the EU imposed sanctions on Iran under the UN's umbrella as well as according to their foreign policy tools.

#### 3.5.3.1. UN sanctions

The Security Council is responsible for maintaining or restoring international peace and security. It imposes sanctions in cases such as peaceful transition, democracy, counter-terrorism, human rights, WMD proliferation, and non-constitutional changes. The countries that have been sanctioned due to the proliferation of WMD are Iraq, Libya, Syria, the DPRK, and Iran. In 2004, in order to strengthen the UN non-proliferation regime, UN Security Council Resolution 1540 was agreed to control the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by focusing on non-state actors (UNSC. Res. 1540 (28 April 2004) UN Doc S/RES/1540).

The resolution called on all member states to create an appropriate environment to prevent the development, acquisition, manufacturing, transporting, and transferring of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and their means of delivery (ibid.). Over time, the committee requested to enhance and strengthen their mission through Resolutions in 2006 (1673), 2008 (1810), 2011 (1977), 2012 (2055), and 2016 (2325); 1540 Committee, 2004. DPRK and Iran are the two countries that have been sanctioned due to their nuclear programmes.

In 2006, the UN sanctioned the DPRK under UNSC Resolution 1718 after its first nuclear test. Following that, a series of Resolutions have been adopted against the DPRK: 1774 (2009), 1928

(2010), 1985 (2011), 2050 (2012), 2087-2094 (2013), 2141 (2014), 2207 (2015), 2270-2276-2321 (2016), 2345-2356-2371-2375-2397 (2017), and 2407 (2018) (UNSC.R. 1718, 2006). The sanctions imposed on the DPRK included an arms embargo, a ban on financial transactions, asset freezes, a travel ban, and a ban on luxury goods.

The UN also sanctioned Iran in 2006 for its non-compliance with the IAEA's safeguards obligations concerning its nuclear activities (Tabrizi and Santini, 2012). Although Iran has allowed the IAEA inspectors to detect its declared nuclear facilities, it has not seriously cooperated with the IAEA's safeguard agreement concerning undeclared nuclear activities and full access to operating records at the Pilot Fuel Enrichment Plant (PFEP). The IAEA issued reports in February, April, June, August, and November 2006 and concluded that Iran has not fully cooperated with the IAEA, according to the summary (28) of the report.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, the IAEA issued another report in November 2006 stating that Iran is not in compliance with its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, according to the summary (20) of the report.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, relying on the IAEA's reports in 2005 and 2006 due to Iran's uranium enrichment, the UN imposed sanctions against Iran on 31 July 2006 based on the UNSC Resolutions 1696 (2006); 1737 (2006); 1747 (2007); 1803 (2008); 1835 (2008); 1887 (2008); 1929 (2010); 1984 (2011); 2049 (2012); 2105 (2013); and 2159 (2014). UN sanctions are crucial given the multilateral sanctions or the international cooperation, especially through international organisations. US sanctions, however, are significant and an essential instrument in US foreign policy.

### 3.5.3.2. US sanctions

The US non-proliferation and counter-proliferation strategy began as early as 1945 as a grand strategy that aims to prevent states from acquiring or developing nuclear weapons or at least minimise proliferation outcomes (Gavin, 2015). Most US officials believe that proliferation has been a major threat to the national security of the US since the 1960s (ibid). As a result, the US sanctions regime against nuclear proliferation was strengthened in 1976 after Congress amended the Non-Proliferation Act (Miller, 2018). Nevertheless, the US overlooked the nuclear relationship between France and Israel in the 1950s (Zaman, 2016). Given the ease of access to nuclear material and its technology, proliferation has been considered the gravest challenge to the US (Perry and Scowcroft, 2009). Therefore, it seeks to prevent proliferation through various

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<sup>7</sup> IAEA, 2006: <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2006-53.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> IAEA, 2006: <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov2006-64.pdf>

policies such as agreements, security guarantees, pre-emptive military action, and sanctions (Gavin, 2012).

Credibility is an important element of the US non-proliferation strategy. The US imposed economic sanctions on India in 1964 and against Pakistan in 1979 to hinder those countries' efforts to acquire nuclear weapons (Malik, 2012). The US should have a wide range of options to deal with the rogue states concerning the spread of WMD, particularly nuclear weapons due to their massive destruction (Chomsky, 2000). In 1992, the US imposed sanctions to prevent the transfer of goods or technology to Iraq and Iran, which could improve their abilities to develop WMD (U.S. Congress. Gov. 1992). The US strategy against WMD proliferation was strengthened in 1990 by Executive Order (E.O): No. 12735 and later from 1994 to 2018 by Executive Orders No: 12938, 13084, 13382, 13608, and 13846.

The US broadened its non-proliferation policy during Bill Clinton's administration by issuing E.O. No. 12938 (1994) and George W. Bush issued E.O. No. 13382 (2005). The US created a wide range of tools to confront nuclear proliferation. However, the US supported the United Kingdom to acquire its nuclear weapons based on bilateral cooperation on the Manhattan Project in the 1940s (Ritchie, 2008). The US imposed sanctions against foreign individuals, private entities, and governments that engaged in proliferation activities with Iran in 2000 (Public Law 106-178—March 14, 2000). The US added Syria to the non-proliferation Act (INA) and became (ISNA). In 2006, after the first nuclear test in the DPRK, the US added the DPRK to the Iran and Syria Non-Proliferation Act (INKSNA).

US sanctions aim to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon by placing great pressure and pain on it through financial sanctions (Jacobson, 2008). As a US foreign tool, economic sanctions are considered an effective tool for the non-proliferation regime because of their credibility in imposing sanctions and their strong commercial and military relationship with the targeted state, which makes them vulnerable to resist the US sanctions (Miller, 2014). In 2009, President Barack Obama affirmed the "US efforts to spread peace and security in the world without nuclear weapons through a range of non-proliferation initiatives oriented towards someday achieving what has been called global zero" (Gavin, 2012, p. 157).

The US sanctions regime was updated in 2017 by Article 231 of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act. (CAATSA). It aims to impose more sanctions on Iran, Russia, and the DPRK. This new update gives the US President more authority to impose five or more sanctions. The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), along with the Department of the Treasury, the Department of State, and other federal agencies, is responsible for implementing economic sanctions (Carter and Farha, 2013). In addition to the Department of

Commerce, the Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS). These sanctions can be imposed under US laws and Executive Orders and implemented through regulations issued by the Office of Economic Sanctions Policy and Implementation (TFS/SPI) based on Presidential Executive Orders. The office was established to counter US national security threats in cooperation with the Department of Treasury and Commerce. It also seeks to maintain and enforce sanctions to maximise their economic impact on our targets and minimise the damage to US economic interests.

The US imposed economic sanctions on Iran regarding its uranium enrichment under E.O. No. 13382. (2005) aimed at freezing the assets of the proliferators of WMD and their supporters and isolating them financially. Designations under E.O. NO. 13382 prohibits all transactions between the designees and any US person and freezes any assets the designees may have under US jurisdiction. In 2010, the US tightened the sanctions against Iran. Over time, sanctions against Iran were tightened under E.O. NO. 13590, ‘Authorising the Imposition of Certain Sanctions With Respect to the Provision of Goods, Services, Technology, or Support for Iran's Energy and Petrochemical Sectors; E.O. NO. 13574, ‘Authorising the Implementation of Certain Sanctions Set Forth in the Iran Sanctions Act of 1996, as Amended’; E.O. 13622, ‘Authorising Additional Sanctions With Respect to Iran’; E.O. NO. 13599, ‘Blocking Property of the Government of Iran and Iranian Financial Institutions’; E.O. NO. 13608 ‘Prohibiting Certain Transactions With and Suspending Entry Into the US of Foreign Sanctions Evaders With Respect to Iran and Syria’ and 13645, ‘Authorising the Implementation of Certain Sanctions Set Forth in the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act of 2012 Additional Sanctions With Respect To Iran’.

Iran reached a nuclear deal in 2015 with the so-called JCPOA agreement with the P5+1. The agreement stipulated the gradual lifting of sanctions imposed by the UN, the US, and the EU related to the Iran nuclear programme if Iran adhered to the agreement’s conditions. Despite Iran’s showing its commitment to the deal, the US withdrew from the agreement during President Trump’s administration and reimposed sanctions.<sup>9</sup> by issuing E.O. 13846, “Reimposing certain sanctions concerning Iran” (Presidential Documents, 2018); E.O. NO. 13871 “Imposing Sanctions For the Iron, Steel, Aluminium, and Copper Sectors of Iran” (Presidential Documents, 2019); and E.O. NO. 13902 “Imposing Sanctions Concerning Iran”.

### 3.5.3.3. EU sanctions

The EU has played a major role in imposing sanctions known as “Restrictive Measures” against WMD proliferation since 1993. The basic principles of using such measures are to “maintain

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of the Treasury: <https://home.treasury.gov/policy-issues/financial-sanctions/sanctions-programs-and-country-information/iran-sanctions>

and restore international peace and security in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter and our common foreign and security policy”.<sup>10</sup> The EU has long recognised that the proliferation of WMD is one of the main threats that can affect EU security. Therefore, in 2003, the EU strengthened a policy which aims to counter WMD proliferation effectively. To reinforce the restrictive measures policy, the EU created a Commission for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI), established by the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) (Giumelli and Ivan, 2013). The EU has developed five areas for considering sanctions: “(i) conflict management; (ii) democracy and human rights promotion; (iii) post-conflict institutional consolidation; (iv) non-proliferation (e.g., Iran and Libya in 1994); and (v) countering international terrorism” (Giumelli and Ivan, 2013, p. 12).

Although the EU sanctioned Iran under the UN’s sanctions, it extended the list of asset freezes and travel bans on Iranian companies and individuals that were issued by UN Resolution (1737) in 2008, 2009, and 2010 (ibid). The EU imposed additional sanctions on Iran according to EU Nos. 413/2010 (Official Journal of the EU, 2010a) and 961/2010 (Official Journal of the EU, 2010b) in July and October 2010, respectively. The EU’s restrictive measures against Iran targeted: (i) trade in several goods: such as prohibiting exports to Iran’s arms industry, dual-use goods, and goods that are used in enrichment-related activities; prohibiting the import of crude oil, natural gas, petrochemicals, and petroleum products; (ii) financial sector: such as freezing the assets of the major Iranian commercial banks, including the Central Bank of Iran, as well as transfers of funds above certain amounts to financial institutions in Iran. (iii) Transport sector: such as preventing access to EU airports for Iranian cargo flights, prohibiting the maintenance of Iranian cargo aircraft or vessels carrying materials or goods that have been identified as prohibited, and (iv) travel restrictions and asset freezes against other listed persons and entities.<sup>11</sup>

In 2012, two rounds of economic sanctions were imposed against Iran: in January, severe sanctions targeted “the import, purchase, or transport of Iranian crude oil and petroleum products will be prohibited” (EU) No 35/2012 (Official Journal of the EU, 2012a). In March, in order to isolate it from access to the international financial system, the EU imposed severe sanctions on 19 Iranian banks by disconnecting Iran from messaging services and transactions from and to Iran according to (EU) No 267/2012 (Official Journal of the EU, 2012b). This resulted in disconnection from the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) network (Draca et al., 2018). The imposition of severe sanctions on Iran contributed to bringing Iran to the negotiating table, which ran from 2003 to 2015.

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<sup>10</sup> Council of the European Union, 2004: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10198-2004-REV-1/en/pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Council of the EU: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/iran/>

### 3.6. Nuclear negotiations

When the international community was imposing sanctions against Iran, the ebb and flow of the nuclear negotiations did not stop and took different directions. Although the E3 and later the P5+1 offered Iran significant inducements to stop enriching uranium, negotiations were not productive until Rouhani's victory in 2013, as they provided a diplomatic foundation for solving the nuclear issue in 2015 without resorting to the use of power.

#### 3.6.1. Iran- E3 nuclear negotiations from 2003 to 2005

When the political wing of the opposition organisation Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), announced in 2002 that Iran has undeclared nuclear facilities close to Natanz and Arak, Iran's nuclear programme became a serious concern for the international community (Tabatabai, 2020). Iran insisted that it acted according to its rights under its safeguard agreement with the IAEA and as a member of the NPT and the facilities are for peaceful purposes. Nevertheless, building new facilities without informing the IAEA made it appear suspicious and secretive (Oborne and Morrison, 2013). Consequently, intensive efforts began to address Iran's nuclear programme. In September 2003, the IAEA called on Iran to suspend its uranium enrichment and provide full cooperation with the IAEA before October 31, 2003. The purpose of the suspension was to gain time for a diplomatic resolution. However, the range of suspension remained disputed between the E3 and Iran (Meier, 2013).

After exploring Iran's new nuclear plants, the US tried to persuade the IAEA's Board of Governors to send Iran's nuclear issue to the UNSC (Oborne and Morrison, 2013). To avoid this situation and to urge Iran to comply with the IAEA's resolutions, the foreign ministers of the EU-3 launched an initiative of diplomatic talks. They met with the Iranian negotiation team headed by Rouhani in October 2003. The main purpose was to persuade Tehran to upgrade its safeguard agreement and sign and ratify an Additional Protocol (AP) with the IAEA along with other requirements from the IAEA (Oborne and Morrison, 2013). They succeeded at first and, as a result, in 2003 further nuclear negotiations took place between Iran and EU-3 during the reformist presidency of Khatami (Lebovic, 2016). The Tehran agreement of November 2003 meant different things to its signatories:

For the EU3, a confrontation between Iran and the US had been avoided. The diplomatic engagement had succeeded where military action could not. A process of confidence-building had begun. For Iran, concessions had been secured from the West and an immediate crisis had been overcome. "Iran awaited a more favourable political climate to reopen negotiations (Mazzucelli, 2007, p. 6).

In 2004, Iran and the EU-3 signed the Brussels Agreement, in which they expressed their commitments to reach a long-term cooperation agreement and trade deal, but this did not last long due to US pressure and the conflict between Iranian reports and what the IAEA found in Iran (Warnaar, 2013). Yet, these negotiations did not stop and led to a road map for comprehensive arrangements with the support of the High Representative for the EU, Javier Solana. This was the so-called Paris Agreement in November 2004, wherein the focus was on technical and security aspects as well as economic cooperation, i.e., a trade deal alongside substantive incentives for Iran (Osborne and Morrison, 2013).

Later on, in the same year, the situation became even more complicated after the conservatives dominated the Iranian parliament and accused the negotiators of making unjustified concessions to the EU-3. The EU-3 tried to maintain a balance between Iran's rights to develop peaceful nuclear technology and providing the required guarantees that Iran would not pursue nuclear weapons. Nevertheless, due to mistrust as well as Iran's suspicion that the US would not engage, the nuclear negotiations resulted in a deadlock (Mazzucelli, 2007).

The EU-3, however, under US pressure, violated its pledge to recognise Iran's right to enrich uranium (Osborne and Morrison, 2013). Later on, the EU-3 made an inclusive proposal for a long-term agreement that offered, among other things: (i) a guaranteed supply of low-enriched uranium (LEU) for light-water reactors (LWRs); (ii) to establish an assured supply of nuclear fuel from a third party; and (iii) an obligation that Iran remains a member of the NPT. In turn, Iran rejected this proposal because it did not mention Iran's right to enrich uranium and prevented Iran from legal enrichment for peaceful purposes under the NPT (Meier, 2013). Two months later, Ahmadinejad took office on August 8, 2005, and Iran removed IAEA seals on processing lines and continued to produce hexafluoride (UF<sub>4</sub>) at the Uranium Conversion Facility (UCF) in the Isfahan plant<sup>12</sup>. The IAEA responded with a resolution on August 11, 2005, that Iran should stop uranium enrichment at the UCF (Cordesman and Al-Rodhan, 2006). As a result, the EU-3 decided to stop talks with Iran because it breached the Paris Agreement when it resumed uranium enrichment at the Esfahan site (ibid.).

### 3.6.2. Iran and P5+1 (EU+3) nuclear negotiations from 2006 to 2013

After the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005, Iran declared in April 2006 that it had enriched uranium up to 3.5 per cent, and, as a result, the IAEA this time referred Iran's nuclear issue to the UN Security Council (Miller, 2018; Warnaar, 2013). Following that, the EU-3 negotiations with Iran stopped, and the process expanded to include the permanent members of the Security

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<sup>12</sup> IAEA Confirms Iran has Removed Seals at Uranium Conversion Facility  
<https://www.iranwatch.org/library/international-organization/international-atomic-energy-agency-iaea/other-iaea-document/press-release-iaea-confirms-iran-has-removed-seals>

Council—Russia, China, the US, and Germany—which is so-called the P5+1/EU-3+3 talks (Draca et al., 2018). To persuade Iran to comply with UNSC resolutions, the P5+1 group offered a framework agreement that included additional inducements, i.e., increased economic cooperation, the lifting of some US sanctions, and enhanced cooperation regarding the energy sector. Iran refused this deal because it did not recognise its right to enrichment (Miller, 2018; Jessen, 2017). To force Iran to comply with the IAEA’s demands to suspend its enrichment and to pressure it to make more concessions through negotiations, the UNSC issued and strengthened economic sanctions on Iran. Resolutions (1696) and (1737) banned the transfer of material related to nuclear and missile technology as well as freezing the assets of some Iranian companies and individuals due to their involvement with Iran’s ballistic and nuclear programmes.

In November 2006, the IAEA reported that Iran had produced 55 tonnes of uranium (UF6) out of 160 tonnes of uranium in Isfahan since 2006. One year later, Iran cooperated with the IAEA in light of UNSCR 1737, whereby IAEA General Director Mohamed ElBaradei sent a report from the IAEA’s Board of Governors to the UNSC, in which it concluded that “Although the Agency has not seen any diversion of nuclear material to nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, the Agency is not at this point in time in a position to conclude that there are no undeclared nuclear materials or activities in Iran”.<sup>13</sup> After several months, on June 24, 2007, ElBaradei and Iranian nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani announced that Iran and the IAEA would work on a plan of action that would address all of the disputed issues regarding Iran’s nuclear programme. The main outstanding issues are related to centrifuges and uranium enrichment. At first, Iran was asked for ‘zero enrichment’, that is, to halt all the centrifuges, even the first generation. Iran rejected this as unrealistic because it prevented Iran from exercising its legal rights as a member of the NPT regime, and Iran described this as ‘apartheid’ (Kenyon, 2014).

Another important issue that appeared on the negotiation table was the Arak heavy water reactor. The P5+1 hoped that Iran would offer to halt the Arak plant. Instead, Iran proposed to redesign the reactor to minimise its production of plutonium, but the negotiations were suspended (ibid.). Later, Javier Solana sent a letter to Iran, offering a package of inducements to halt uranium enrichment and restart negotiations to resolve the nuclear crisis. The letter itself stated that if the offer was rejected, sanctions could be imposed within a month (IAEA, 2008). Although negotiators had hoped to move forward in negotiations after the election of Barack Obama in 2009, Iran’s domestic policy during Ahmadinejad’s presidency was not cooperative, and no tangible progress was made (Jessen, 2017). In the same year, Solana was replaced by Catherine

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<sup>13</sup> Security Council consults on IAEA report relating to Iran’s nuclear ambitions: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2006/03/172562>



Ashton as the EU's High Representative. Ashton sought to engage Iran in nuclear talks and preserve the cohesion of the EU.

In 2009, when new secret facilities were discovered at the Fordow plant close to the holy city of Qum, negotiations became even harder. In the same year, Ali Akbar Salehi, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, told reporters "We are not going to discuss anything related to our nuclear rights, but we can discuss disarmament, we can discuss non-proliferation, and we can discuss any other issues" (Cowell and Fathi, 2009). The IAEA proposed in October 2009 a 'fuel swap' whereby Iran would transfer 1.200–2.200 kg of its 3.5 per cent enriched uranium (LEU) to France through Russia to be further enriched and fabricated into fuel assemblies for the Tehran Research Reactor TRR (IAEA, 2009).

The US felt that the Iranian programme was achieving advancement, and thus it launched a new dialogue by abandoning the precondition of the suspension of enrichment, in which the international community at large accepted Iran's right to enrich uranium (Van Ham, 2011). Nonetheless, reaching an actual agreement was very difficult due to the hostile discourse in Iran, and consequently, convergence became more difficult at the end of this period (Jessen, 2017). In 2009, Iran accused the EU of interfering in its presidential elections and claimed that the EU was 'ineligible' for further negotiations over the nuclear issue (Tabrizi and Santini, 2012; Van Ham, 2011). The negotiations were not productive, and subsequently, the UN, the EU, and the US imposed more severe sanctions (Van Ham, 2011).

In 2010, Türkiye, Brazil, and Iran issued a joint 'Tehran Declaration' for another 'fuel swap' in which Iran agreed to ship 1200 kg of its LEU at 3.5 per cent to Türkiye in exchange for 120 kg of fuel from France and Russia for the Tehran Research Reactor (Joint Declaration by Iran, Türkiye, and Brazil, 2010; Warnaar, 2013). However, the Vienna Group rejected the agreement because it does not address Iran's large stockpile and its further enrichment of uranium to 20 per cent (Davenport, no date).

Although the UNSC issued new sanctions against Iran three weeks after the Tehran Declaration, this agreement can be considered a success for Iran's foreign policy and nuclear negotiations (Warnaar, 2013). It also can be considered a result of the sanctions' success in influencing Iran's nuclear behaviour by being cooperative and transparent with the IAEA. In response to the UK's sanctions on Iranian financial institutions, Iran decided to cut diplomatic ties with the UK, which led to an attack on the British Embassy in Tehran in 2011 (ibid.). Nevertheless, talks with Iran continued, and the last meeting was held in 2011 in Türkiye (Tabrizi and Santini, 2012). Ashton said in January 2011 that the Istanbul meeting failed because of Iran's insistence on two preconditions: lifting all economic sanctions and recognising its right to enrichment.

In October 2011, she sent a letter to Iran's chief negotiator, Saeed Jalili, inviting him to productive negotiations based on mutual trust to address international concerns over Iran's nuclear programme (ibid.). In November 2011, the IAEA released a report describing the military dimensions of Iran's nuclear programme. Consequently, the EU expanded its restrictive measures to include banning the import of oil and gas from Iran since this was the most important source of revenue for the country (Official Journal of the EU, 2012a).

In January 2012, the UNSC passed a resolution prohibiting all countries from purchasing Iranian oil beginning in July of that year, as well as preventing countries from assisting tankers carrying oil from Iran (Davenport, no date). In September 2012, the IAEA's Board of Governors adopted resolution GOV/2012/50, which asked Iran for full compliance related to possible military dimensions of its nuclear programme (IAEA, 2013). In October 2012, Jalili responded to Ashton's letter, and, thus, nuclear negotiations with the P5+1 resumed in April in Istanbul. The negotiations were 'positive', as the two sides agreed on a framework for further negotiation (ibid.).

Nuclear negotiations continued later in Baghdad, Moscow, and Istanbul and focused on the technical level before moving to the political level. Regarding the military dimensions of Iran's nuclear programme, the IAEA reported in November that Iran had produced enriched UF<sub>6</sub> to 20 per cent of U-235, and not 5 per cent of U-235 as Iran stated, as well as increased the number of centrifuges at Natanz and Fordow plants to nearly 2,800 (IAEA, 2012). The West understood that Iran's domestic politics played a crucial role in pushing negotiations forward. Therefore, they wanted to give some 'concessions' for the government in Tehran to sell to Iranian citizens. (Kassenova, 2013). The concession was related to accepting Iran's right to enrich uranium on Iranian territory while ensuring that Iran would not, under any circumstances, seek to develop nuclear weapons.

Negotiations resumed in April 2013 in Kazakhstan, which hosted two rounds of negotiations that contributed to the resumption of negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran (ibid.). The P5+1 further increased the package of inducements for Iran beyond those offered in 2012 (Davenport, no date). The talks were positive and contributed to the final agreement in 2015, as Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said: "We are proud that the results of those two rounds of talks in Almaty served as a foundation for the JCPOA adopted two years later" (Orazgaliyeva, 2015). In June 2013, the IAEA stated in a report on safeguards implementation in Iran that the Agency could not conclude that all nuclear material in Iran is for peaceful activities because Iran did not cooperate sufficiently with the Agency to provide credible assurances about the absence of undeclared nuclear material (IAEA, 2013).

On June 14, 2013, Rouhani was elected president of Iran. Two months later, he called for real negotiations with the P5+1 based on a new proposal presented by the new foreign minister, Javad Zarif. The US Secretary of State John Kerry described the proposal as “very different in the vision” (Davenport, no date). Parallel to this, Iran appointed a new envoy to the IAEA, Reza Najafi. Following this, productive and serious negotiations were conducted that resulted in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on July 14, 2015, (UNSCR, 2015). The deal included constraints on Iran’s nuclear programme (uranium enrichment) in return for the gradual lifting of economic sanctions based on IAEA reports as well as Iran’s international obligations (ibid.).

### **3.7. Iranian presidential elections**

From the Islamic Revolution in 1979 until 2021, Iran has held thirteen presidential elections, and they were usually held every four years on a Friday in mid-June.

#### **3.7.1. The president’s authorities in the Iranian constitution**

Despite the direct election of the president by the Iranians, it ranks at the second level according to the constitution after the Office of Leadership (Iranian constitution, Art. 113). The Assembly of Experts directly elects Khamenei, and he, together with the Parliament, appoints the Guardian Council, while the latter, alongside the Ministry of Interior, vet the candidates for the parliament and presidential elections. The president is considered the head of the executive authority, but in some matters that are directly related to the Office of the Leadership, his power is limited according to the Constitution. This is one of the dilemmas of decision-making in Iran, as it is inherently restricted by a hybrid regime of theocracy and democracy. Hence, this weakens democracy in favour of theocracy; that is, the elected president must share, or to some extent, accept, decisions made by an appointed person.

The Iranian constitution stipulated the provisions of the presidency in Chapter IX, ‘The Executive Power,’ through Articles [113–132] concerning the election of the president, his power, and his responsibilities. More precisely, Article [114] sets the president’s term of office at four years through direct voting, and he can only be re-elected for two terms successively, but there are no restrictions if he wants to run for presidential elections in the future. In Article [115], the president’s qualifications for candidature are subjected to “Iranian origin; Iranian nationality; administrative capacity and resourcefulness; a good record; trustworthiness and piety; convinced belief in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official Madhhab of the country” (Article. 115). The official religion and madhhab were mentioned in Article [12]: “The official religion of Iran is Islam and the Twelver Ja’farî school in Usul al-Dîn and fiqh, and this principle will remain eternally immutable, meaning the Shia” (ibid.).

Article [117] explains the presidential elections. The president has to secure the absolute majority through direct and secret voting. The elections go to the second round with the two candidates who gained the most votes if no candidate secured the majority in the first round. Yet, for some reason, if some of the candidates who received the most votes withdraw from the race, the second round is run with the two candidates who received the greatest number of votes among the candidates (*ibid.*). The election of a president takes place under the supervision of the Guardian Council (Art. 99). The president's position in the Iranian regime is integrated with that of the ministers, as they have a leading role in the executive authority. Therefore, in more detail, section 2 of Chapter 6 stipulated their responsibilities, duties, and process of appointment in Articles (133-142).

Among the duties of the President of the Republic is to sign treaties, protocols, contracts, and agreements with other governments, in addition to representing the government in international organisations after the approval of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Art. 125). Yet, not all treaties and agreements are allowed to be concluded. Article [153] interpreted some of the imposed restrictions in terms of forbidden treaties, defined as “any form of agreement resulting in foreign control over the natural resources, economy, army, or culture of the country, as well as other aspects of the national life, is forbidden” (*ibid.*).

In this context, it can be understood why Iran insisted on its right to enrich uranium during the nuclear negotiations. Acceptance of non-enrichment conflicts with the constitution because it means external control over its natural resources as well as its submission to foreign dominance and oppression, as stipulated in Articles (2, c); 8; 43, and; 152. On the other hand, Iran is a member of the NPT regime. Hence, under the treaty, it has the right to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes subject to IAEA safeguards.

### 3.7.2. The presidential elections of 2009

In the context of the 2009 presidential election, economic and political determinants served dual functions. Management of the economy during Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005–2009) differed from the liberal reforms pursued by Khatami (Abdolmohammadi and Cama, 2015). On the one hand, when Khatami supported Westernisation and opened the Iranian economy to foreign investment, Ahmadinejad strengthened the role of the welfare state in support of the lower and rural classes (*ibid.*). Ahmadinejad presented a revised plan for the subsidy programme, but the strategy was unclear: when the fourth plan was partially implemented, the fifth plan never moved beyond a drought (Parsi, 2011).

### 3.7.2.1. The context

The Iranian economy was suffering from serious problems ahead of the election, particularly in 2008, as a result of the effects of economic sanctions, mismanagement, and corruption. Therefore, the winner would face serious challenges. For example, in 2008 inflation was 25.4 per cent, and the GDP growth was 0.3 per cent, compared to 14.8 per cent and 4.3 per cent respectively in 2004 (The World Bank, 2021b); the Iranian currency exchange rate to the US dollar (LCU per US \$, period average) increased to 9.428 per cent in 2008, compared to 8.613 in 2004 (The World Bank, 2021c); Iran ranked 141 among 190 countries concerning corruption (Transparency International, 2021). The political determinant has also played a key role in mobilising reformists and moderates when they united against conservatives for the sake of supporting political reform to advance human rights and civic discourse. Most Iranians voted driven by the consequences of social freedom crackdowns during Ahmadinejad's first government (Addis, 2009). For conservatives, this determinant did not receive much attention because they believed in religious principles more than political beliefs, in addition to their oppositional stance against the West (Mir Hosseini, 2002; Fazili, 2010). Only four of the nearly 500 candidates were approved by the Ministry of Interior and Guardian Council. The two main candidates who received the most votes were Ahmadinejad and Mousavi.

### 3.7.2.2. The campaigns

The four candidates had six debates from June 2–8 at the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) station. The debate between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi was the most significant one because Ahmadinejad criticised Mousavi's wife (Addis, 2009). Mousavi attacked Ahmadinejad over his foreign policy and asked him to 'return to rationality'. Mousavi stressed the importance of recognition of change and its management, and he tried to cover many issues to be reviewed if elected. All candidates promised to keep Iran's nuclear policy unchanged with no significant change, as they acknowledged that such matters would be decided by Khamenei. Mousavi and Karroubi criticised Ahmadinejad's approach, which had isolated Iran because of extremist discourses such as his stance on the Holocaust and anti-Western speeches (Reuters, 2009a). Ahmadinejad pledged to keep Iranian nuclear policy unchanged and said repeatedly that Iran's nuclear programme was for peaceful purposes. Before the June 2009 presidential elections, the IAEA reported that Iran had increased its centrifuges to 7.200, indicating its capability to develop enough enriched uranium for nuclear weapons. In a debate with Mousavi, Ahmadinejad expressed that his government had taken positive steps to reduce the tension with the West concerning the nuclear programme, but he was not fully satisfied with them:

We adopted the previous government in the name of removing tension; it reached a point where our nuclear installations were totally shut down. There

were two contracts imposed on our people then. In the Additional Protocol cases, the IAEA is free to inspect any part of Iran at any time they wish to. Nothing worse than this could be imposed on a nation (Szrom, Faley, and Francis, 2009).

In his return, Mousavi did not mention the nuclear issue directly in the debate, but he criticised the failure of Ahmadinejad's foreign policy at large. Mousavi promised to change Iran's foreign policy and promote the nation's interests by negotiating with President Barack Obama. Mousavi was also not convinced about the nuclear negotiations from 2003 to 2005. In an interview with the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*, he expressed his position clearly on the nuclear issue by saying:

Our nuclear policy is transparent, and we have opened our facilities to UN inspectors. However, we will not abandon the great achievements of Iranian scientists. I, too, will not suspend uranium enrichment. However, I will attempt to avoid unnecessary tension. We have a right to enrich uranium. (*Der Spiegel*, 2009).

### 3.7.2.3. The results of the elections and beyond

On June 12, 2009, the Iranians went to the polls. Many observers, including Iranians, were optimistic because initial indications indicated that the turnout in this election would be high and that many voters who boycotted the previous presidential elections in 2005 would participate this time and support Mousavi regarding the 'Green Revolution' (Addis, 2009; Tezcür, 2012). The results were officially released by the Ministry of Interior and certified quickly by the Guardian Council that the winner was the incumbent president Ahmadinejad. Notwithstanding, Mousavi not only claimed that the elections had been rigged, but in a clear statement, he rejected the results and called on his supporters and fellow clerics to reject them (Tezcür, 2012). The day after the result, on June 13, a mass protest took place in many Iranian cities, chanting "Where is my vote?" and day by day, anger was growing. Mousavi joined the protesters on June 15 in a massive rally in Tehran under the so-called 'Green Movement' (ibid.). The movement represented students and intelligentsia as well as some supporters of the middle and upper classes. Yet, 60 per cent of the Iranians in the lower classes of society did not support the movement (Kozhanov, 2018). Over time, the movement became out of control due to the huge number of protesters, especially when they showed their unity on the 15th of June when more than 200,000 protesters gathered in Azadi 'Freedom' Square (Sundquist, 2013). Khamenei, in turn, called on the judiciary during Friday prayer on June 26 to punish protesters severely. He justified this by saying that it would insulate and terrorise other people, which is prohibited in Islam (ibid.).

### **3.8. Conclusion**

This chapter sheds light on the foundations of imposing economic sanctions. The chapter reviewed Iran's domestic politics, including the main Iranian political factions post-Islamic Revolution of 1979: conservatives, reformists, and moderates. The chapter also provided a historical overview of the Iranian nuclear programme under the rule of reformists and conservatives. The chapter explained the mechanisms by which the UN, the US, and the EU imposed economic sanctions in general and against Iran's nuclear programme. In addition, the chapter summarised the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the EU-3 from 2003 to 2005 and with the P5+1 from 2006 to 2013. Finally, the chapter provided a brief context for conducting presidential elections in 2009 and the framing of nuclear policies. This paves the way for the study by showing the difference between the conservatives and reformists in terms of their beliefs that support the analysis regarding Rouhani and Ghalibaf's conceptions of Iran's identity and interests in constructing explanations, responses and choices of Iran's nuclear policy if elected. It also illustrated the importance of election campaigns in electing certain candidates who used language (texts, speeches, interviews) in announcing policies that converge with voters' priorities.

## IRAN'S ECONOMIC INDICATORS BEFORE AND DURING THE IMPOSITION OF ECONOMIC SANCTIONS

### 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter covered the chronological development of Iran's nuclear programme, especially from 2003 until 2013, including international sanctions and the nuclear negotiations with the E3 and P5+1. Now, in this chapter, I will shed light on some economic indicators that might be affected by economic sanctions and other factors due to the vulnerability of Iran's economy to resisting economic sanctions, especially in the energy sector. The chapter argues that these indicators were increasingly affected when the economic sanctions were in place. To illustrate that, the chapter reviews the structure of the Iranian economy, i.e., sectors, nature, and resources. It also investigates statistics from reliable resources about such indicators to show the difference between them before and during the imposition of sanctions.

The chapter includes an overview of the Iranian economy; the importance of Iran's energy sector to the economy; and some statistics about some of the social and economic indicators that have been negatively affected mainly through the period of economic sanctions, such as inflation, foreign direct investment (FDI), Iran imports, GDP growth, dollar to IRR currency rates, food inflation, unemployment, Iran's corruption index, and so forth. I do this to provide scientific facts on the effects of SIMCA sanctions as an independent variable on the above indicators as dependent variables. This is fundamental to the analysis because analysing the texts of Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan in chapters 7, 8, and 9 shows unclarity and sometimes false understandings of the reality of how sanctions affected Iran's economy. Hence, according to them, there is no potential relationship between sanctions' effects and shaping Iran's future nuclear choices based on nuclear negotiations to lift the sanctions.

### 4.2. Iranian economy: An overview

The Iranian economy developed significantly during the twentieth century and beyond in terms of productivity level, structure variety, and global effective role compared to a long period of marginal influence in world markets (Esfahani and Pesaran, 2009). Iran has large proven natural gas and crude oil reserves, which are ranked second and fourth in the world, respectively. Therefore, the Iranian economy is mainly characterised by the hydrocarbon sector along with agriculture, industry, and financial services (The World Bank, 2021a). Apart from oil, Iran



possesses many other natural resources such as natural gas, coal, lead, zinc, sulphur, manganese, chromium, copper, and iron ore (OPEC, 2021).

Iran's economy faced many difficulties during growth, but the biggest loss for the Iranian economy was the consequences of the Iraq-Iran war from 1980 to 1988, with a total loss of over \$500 billion because 60 to 70 per cent of income was spent during the war (Shariati and Ghaffari, 2019; Ghahroudi and Chong, 2020).

The main actors controlling the Iranian economy are the government's state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the Bonyads (revolutionary institutions), and the private sector (bazaars). After the Islamic Revolution, the government-owned most of the Iranian companies and institutions, such as television and radio stations, banks, transportation and communication companies, the energy sector, major mineral resources, and many other large enterprises that control over 70 per cent of the sector's value-added, which accounts for 15 per cent of GDP (Alizadeh, 2003). The SOEs negatively affected the economy because they: (i) curbed the growth of the private sector as they were exempt from some taxes and tariffs; (ii) contributed to increasing inflation as they have full access to government subsidies; (iii) were largely incapable of job creation, therefore, they have not contributed to reducing unemployment, and; (iv) the absence of governmental oversight on their financial system led to the growth of corruption (ibid.).

The Bonyads are "parastatal institutions, which were created after the revolution, to safeguard the ideological orientation of the Islamic State" (Alizadeh, 2003, p. 273). They are the legal body that seized and nationalised the assets of the former royal family and exiled elites after the revolution of 1979. They control a large part of the economy that plays a significant role in creating jobs in sectors such as agriculture, industry, and services (ibid.). The Bonyad's role in employment may have dire consequences related to a biased affiliation and loyalty to the clergy rather than democracy and good governance, and this bias can be expressed in political participation, i.e., general elections. The ineffective performance of the Bonyads led to a high cost and a deterioration of the economy due to a lack of experience, large subsidies, and an independent financial system (Crane, Lal, and Martini, 2008). Despite the heavy toll of the sanctions on Iran, the economic sanctions have contributed somewhat positively to strengthening the central role of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Iranian society by supporting its charitable institutions such as the Bonyads (ibid.).

As long as economic sanctions prevented the flow of foreign investment into Iran, the IRGC expanded its investments in the oil and gas sector (Jalilvand, 2017). It took advantage of President Ahmadinejad's position on economic reform, as he was against a major role for the private sector in Iran because he believed that privatisation meant Westernising Iran (Heuty,

2012). Economic reform is one of the Iranian economy's vulnerabilities as it requires cooperation between all factors. Rafsanjani and Khatami adopted some economic reform policies recommended by the IMF regarding privatisation and deregulation (Habib, 2008).

Ahmadinejad's economic policies from 2005 to 2013 conflicted with the two former presidents as he publicly opposed the economic reforms imposed from 1990 to 2005 and attacked government officials who were involved in the privatisation process (ibid.). Ahmadinejad's economic policies were based on some ideological principles, such as his belief in the substantial role of government in economic activities and that the government should spend revenues from oil exports on development projects, especially in rural areas. He was not interested in fiscal conservatism, and he neglected the monetary role of the bank owned by the state (Habib, 2008).

The third key actor in the Iranian economy is the private sector, which comprises bazaars, small businesses, and industrialists. Bazaars generally exist in cities: they are not only trading centres for transport and retail but also political and social centres. Bazaars consist of merchants, artisans, and workers who are organised hierarchically, and they are known to be defenders of Iranian economic, political, and social traditions. In this context, one can realise the role of the bazaars, along with other societal institutions, in supporting the Islamic Revolution's principles (Farazmand, 1995).

The second group in the private sector is industrialists who have developed new businesses after leaving bazaars. This group operates in the financial services and manufacturing sectors (Crane, Lal, and Martini, 2008). The third group is small-scale businesses, consisting primarily of small businesses or sole proprietorships. They are not rich people and often depend on family assistance to start their small businesses. Unlike the bazaars, they suffer from corruption and strict monitoring by the government. Furthermore, they are deprived of favourable treatment from the state-owned banks because they do not have relations with politicians (ibid.). It is worth noting that the Iranian economy consists of three main sectors: agriculture, services, and industry.

The agricultural sector's contribution to the economy is measured by its value added to the GDP. Iran's average value during the period from 2000 to 2013 was 7.33 per cent, with a minimum of 5.45 per cent in 2011 and a maximum of 9.75 per cent in 2013 (Global Economy, 2021). More than 30 per cent of the population, that is, 23 million Iranians live in rural areas, and depend on agriculture, including forestry and fisheries, as their source of income (FAO, 2016). Approximately 70 per cent of the cultivated land in Iran is devoted to cereals, i.e., wheat, rice, barley, and corn (ibid.). Iran's population was 79.922 million according to a survey conducted

in 2016 (Statistical Centre of Iran, 2020). Iran's population in 2020 was estimated at 86,547 million (International Monetary Fund, 2023). The Iranian services sector is another supportive sector of Iran's GDP. It consists of transportation, construction, travel, financial services, and insurance (Ghodsi et al., 2018). The services sector contributed to the GDP by 64 per cent in 2005 and 57 per cent in 2012 (ibid.).

The industrial sector in Iran is the most significant sector for government revenues, as it mainly consists of manufacturing, especially the oil and gas industry. The energy sector contributes significantly to the Iranian budget (Jalilvand, 2017). Its share of the GDP was 25 per cent in 2005 and 32 per cent in 2012 (Ghodsi et al., 2018). Fluctuations in global oil and gas prices and sanctions have led Iran to invest on a large scale in non-oil exports, especially in the petrochemical industries, in order to contribute to economic growth, and this, in turn, requires attractive policies for foreign investment and encouragement of local investors (Maitha and Abdoljabbar, 2015). Iranian petrochemical products have proven a positive contribution to the growth of the economy based on the volume of exports (ibid.).

The Fourth Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2005–2009) during Khatami's second term indicated that revenues from oil exports in hard currency would be used to finance the government budget deficit, investments, and support other sectors in order to achieve the feasible activities that were anticipated in the plan. Therefore, it announced that the government would establish a 'Foreign Currency Reserve Account of Oil Income' beginning in March 2005 (Iran Fourth Plan, 2004). The plan reflects the government's reformist viewpoint on the economy in Chapter 1, Article 6; that is, it emphasises economic reform by strengthening the privatisation programme and encouraging the role of the non-governmental sector in the national economy by adopting policies such as 'deregulation' and 'divestiture' of management (ibid.). The government also committed itself in the plan to reducing the liabilities of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) and other Iranian banks by paying their debts annually to keep inflation under control, improve the banking system, and boost economic growth (ibid.).

Differently, the Fifth Five-Year Economic, Social, and Cultural Development Plan of Iran (2009–2015) was launched during Ahmadinejad's presidency with a focus on economic wealth and redistribution opportunities (Iran Data Portal, 2009). Ahmadinejad criticised the economic reform that was implemented under Khatami and Rafsanjani, considering that their policies, especially privatisation and price liberalisation, were the main cause of corruption and economic injustice. He argued that their policies allowed some politicians and businessmen to control the economy and thus unfairly gain great benefits (Habibi, 2015). Ahmadinejad's economic performance was ineffective, and he made decisions based on his economic principles, meaning

he did not consult the economists close to him when they advised him of the negative consequences that could arise from excessive liquidity and inflation (ibid.). He was thinking traditionally, as he believed that people had suffered in the past and now deserved to receive subsidies as direct benefits from the income of oil exports, whether in cash payments or through the provision of food and other necessities (ibid.).

### **4.3. The importance of the energy sector to the Iranian economy**

Oil was discovered in Iran in 1908, and extraction began in 1912. This was an important achievement for the country as oil revenues began to play a supportive role in the economy (Hein and Sedighi, 2017). It was a historic moment for Iran when the Shah of Iran, Muzaffar al-Din, signed an agreement with William Knox D'Arcy in 1901 for exploring, developing, and producing oil and gas over an area of 75 per cent of Iran (Mohaddes and Pesaran 2013). It is worth knowing that Iranian oil is characterised by the low cost of extraction, which generates huge sales compared to other kinds of oil in many countries (Amuzegar, 2008). Iran is a founding member of the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). According to OPEC, Iran ranked third at the end of 2021, following Venezuela and Saudi Arabia, in proven crude oil reserves at 208.60 billion barrels, representing 10 per cent of the world's proven oil reserves and up to 13 per cent of reserves held by OPEC (OPEC, 2021).

These statistics reflect how the Iranian oil industry contributes significantly to the growth of the economy since oil revenues are the largest source of Iran's budget (Amuzegar, 2008; Crane, Lal, and Martini, 2008). Iran not only has huge oil reserves but it is also ranked second in 2019 after Russia with proven natural gas reserves of 32 trillion cubic metres (TCM), which represent 17 per cent of global natural gas reserves (Statista, 2019). During Khatami's presidency, to avoid the consequences of a sharp change in prices, Iran started to save some revenues from oil exports through an oil stabilisation fund (OSF), as it gained over \$1 trillion between 2000 and 2011 (Heuty, 2012).

Iran's energy sector has faced some difficulties, preventing it from performing efficiently. For instance, governmental control over the gas and oil industries, high domestic consumption from Iran's almost 84 million inhabitants, and the imposition of economic sanctions have contributed negatively to the absence of investments to improve this sector (Khajehpour, 2013). The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) is a state-owned company responsible for all oil and natural gas projects, but it does not possess advanced technologies to improve and expand the oil and gas industries. Later, Iran set up two separate companies: the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) and the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) (ibid.). After the rise in oil prices, Iran received huge revenues from oil exports, and as a result, GDP growth reached 6 per cent in 2006/07. Iran used these revenues to meet social needs by

sustaining growth and creating jobs (International Monetary Fund, 2007).

Iran's daily oil production was 4.4 million barrels in 2006/07, and revenues contributed 21.2 per cent of GDP compared to non-oil revenues of 8.7 per cent. In 2008–2009, oil revenues for the government budget were 20.9 per cent compared to non-oil revenues of 7.4 per cent (ibid.). Despite continued growth due to high oil prices, the unemployment rate decreased slightly to 9.8 per cent in 2008. Significantly, inflation increased sharply by about a third, from 16 per cent in 2007 to 24.2 per cent in 2008 (International Monetary Fund, 2008). These economic problems intensified the outrage and opposition to Ahmadinejad's economic policies (Habib, 2008). This reflects an increase in domestic consumption despite the rise in oil prices to \$123 linked to tightening restrictions on Iran and the imposition of economic sanctions by the UN, the EU, and the US in March 2008 (ibid.).

These sanctions added 13 new individuals and 12 new companies to the main list due to their assistance with Iran's nuclear and missile programmes. Purposively, the sanctions increased the travel and financial bans, with an emphasis on the partial ban on civilian and military trade as it could be used to circumvent the sanctions and cover sales of technology related to these programmes (United Nations Security Council, 2008). In 2010, due to the economic sanctions, the global economic crisis, and the growth of domestic consumption, Ahmadinejad announced that the energy subsidies would gradually end by 2015 (Heuty, 2012). The government paid cash support of up to 50 per cent of oil export revenues to the poor and middle classes in order to eliminate subsidies within five years (Habib, 2015). Despite the huge gains from oil revenues, Ahmadinejad's policy of providing direct support did not contribute to reducing unemployment, controlling inflation, or reducing poverty (Amuzegar, 2008; Crane, Lal, and Martini, 2008).

The unemployment rate increased to 13.7 per cent in 2010, compared to 10.6 per cent and 12.1 per cent in 2008 and 2009, respectively (The World Bank, 2021b). In the following years, unemployment decreased slightly to 12.5 per cent and 12.3 per cent in 2011 and 2012, respectively (ibid.). Unlike unemployment, the provision of benefits contributed to a decrease in inflation by 10 per cent in 2010 compared to 13.5 per cent in 2009. However, it increased significantly to 26.2 per cent, 27.2 per cent, and 36.6 per cent in 2011, 2012, and 2013, respectively (ibid.). Iranian oil revenues have various contributions to the GDP over time. For example, it was 25.3, 30.1, and 20.1 in 2007, 2008, and 2012 respectively (The World Bank, 2021c).

Iran under Ahmadinejad's presidency depended completely on oil revenues to enrich uranium as well as mitigate the effects of economic sanctions from 2006 to 2008. The starting point for pursuing the nuclear programme was that Iran was relying on energy exports to China and

Russia, in addition to their supportive stances in the UNSC. Iran was also dependent on huge revenues from the EU, which was one of the largest importers of Iranian oil (Amuzegar, 2008).

Yet, this did not last for long when the international community realised that Iran was investing its oil revenues in uranium enrichment. Therefore, the European Union adopted a new package of economic sanctions that banned Iranian banks from the SWIFT international banking system. Moreover, the EU targeted Iranian oil and gas exports as well as people and entities, including the CBI. This step was crucial because the EU was the largest importer of Iranian oil, gas, and petrochemical products, and the oil embargo would certainly affect Iran's revenues.

Recalling the potential connection between Iran's revenues derived from its energy sector and the funding of Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities...as underlined in UNSCR 1929 (2010), the sale, supply or transfer to Iran of further key equipment and technology which could be used in key sectors in the oil and natural gas industry or, in the petrochemical industry, should be prohibited...Member States should prohibit any new investment in the petrochemical sector in Iran. In addition, the purchase, import or transport from Iran of crude oil and petroleum products, as well as of petrochemical products, should be prohibited (Council decision 2012/35/CFSP).

Parallel with the EU's new embargo on Iran's oil and gas exports, the US expanded its economic sanctions to deter entities and countries from "establishing payment mechanisms for the purchase of Iranian oil to circumvent the NDAA sanctions" (Fact Sheet, 2012). The main purpose of these sanctions was to drastically reduce Iran's oil and gas revenues and to affect the Iranian economy. Iran's reliance on oil exports to finance domestic expenditure weakened its management of the economy and made it vulnerable to an economic crisis, such as a price shock, as happened in 2008 (ibid.).

#### **4.4. Economic indicators from 2003 to 2013**

Iran has been sanctioned since 1979 for various reasons. This chapter sheds light on the effect of economic sanctions on Iran regarding its nuclear programme from 2006 to 2013. However, it considers the previous period from 2003 to 2006 before the imposition of economic sanctions to explore changes and fluctuations in the Iranian economy before and during sanctions. Since 2006, the UN, the US, and the EU have targeted Iran through severe economic sanctions by restricting technological materials transfer, oil revenue, investments, financial transactions (SWIFT), and strict restrictions on entities and individuals (Ghasseminejad and Jahan-Parvar, 2020).

The primary purpose of the imposition of economic sanctions on Iran was not to change the regime, but rather to place pressure on Iran to change its nuclear policy and comply with its international obligations regarding the IAEA’s demands and the NPT. That is, to suspend uranium enrichment, resume reprocessing, and improve its nuclear programme (Biersteker et al., 2013). To do so, Iran should pay an economic and political cost. Cost gives economic sanctions credibility and the former is responsible for a good deal, not the ‘object bought’ (Martin, 2010). The effects of economic sanctions can be (i) direct, related to the expected cost that sanctions generate on the target state; (ii) indirect, related to the harm that economic sanctions generate on a target (i.e., increased inflation, decreased unemployment, the higher price of electricity, etc.), and; (iii) unintended effects, related to the harm that was not considered by senders when imposing sanctions (Giumelli and Ivan, 2013).

Inflation in countries that enjoy open economies and ‘trade’ has a relatively lower level because of the strong relationship between openness and inflation within a stable political environment as well as an open economy (Romer, 2003). Severe sanctions against Iran destabilised the market exchange rates, contributed to inflation, affected Iranian trade, minimised FDI, and decreased the value of the Iranian currency (Ghorbani Dastgerdi, Yusof, and Shahbaz, 2018).

For a decade, inflation in Iran has been influenced by economic sanctions. For instance, before imposing sanctions from 2003 to 2006, the inflation average rate was 14.71 per cent, as shown in Figure 1, which shows the rates as 13.037; 24.663; 20.166, and; 14.583 in 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006, respectively. Whilst the average under economic sanctions from 2006 to 2013 was 20.88 per cent, the rates illustrate a sharp fall in 2009 at 4.599 per cent compared to the previous year at 19.422 per cent. This change can be attributed to two factors: first, the presidential elections; and second, the massive public protest of the so-called Green Movement as a result of the election outcome.

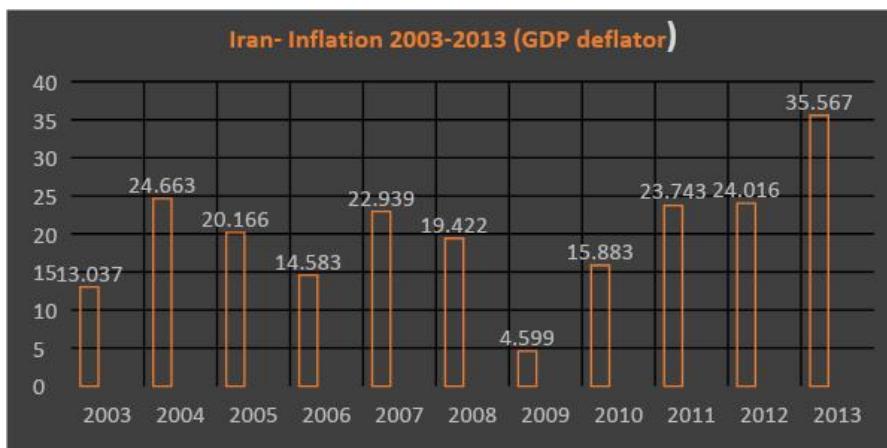


Figure 1: Iran- inflation (deflator) Ratio 2003-2013. Source: (The World Bank, 2021b).

The figure also shows a slight increase in 2011 and 2012 that could be attributed to the significant rise in oil prices due to an increase in demand. Iran's oil exports in 2011 were 2.5 million barrels per day (mbd) to many countries, including the EU in particular (Italy, Spain, and Greece (600.000), China (550.000), Japan (325.000), India (320.000), and South Korea (230.000) (Katzman, 2020). Yet, in 2013, inflation increased to 35.567 per cent, compared to 24.016 per cent in 2012.

Multinational gasoline suppliers, i.e., British Petroleum, Royal Dutch Shell, Glencore, Lukoil, Total, and Vitol, stopped dealing with Iran (Regan, 2011). Furthermore, economic sanctions were strengthened several times by the UN after 2010 as the previous sanctions did not include oil exports and the petroleum industry (Farzanegan, 2011). "This was alongside severe and comprehensive economic sanctions in 2010 during Obama's administration, when Congress passed the (CISADA)" (Cordesman, Gold, and Coughlin-Schulte, 2014, p. 37). Sanctions have significantly affected Iran because it is dependent on petroleum and gas exports, as it has been at most, and this makes the Iranian economy vulnerable to sanctions (ibid.). The Iranian oil revenue shocks after sanctions were imposed on the oil industries had significant impacts on military and security spending while not affecting government social spending, i.e., education, culture, and health (Farzanegan, 2011).

This conclusion may be partly correct because the military aspect is one of the essential components of government spending, and a shock to government revenue could affect it. However, to compensate for this, the government funds military spending from the budgets of other departments such as education, health, transportation, and construction. Oil shocks, therefore, had direct effects on military spending and indirect effects on other social spending. The financial and oil sanctions were devastatingly effective: Iranian oil exports declined to about 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2012, compared to 2.5 million in 2011. Subsequently, in 2012, Iran's economy faced double-digit inflation and a sharp recession (Ghasseminejad and Jahan-Parvar, 2020). In line with this, and to show the role of economic sanctions in affecting Iranian economic growth, another study found a positive relationship between Iran's revenue from exporting petrochemical products and economic growth, that is, an increment in the export of petrochemical products leads to a growing economy, and vice versa, declining exports of petrochemical products affects economic growth (Maitah and Abdoljabbar, 2015).

Figure 2 shows Iranian oil revenues (oil rents from GDP). It is clear that within a decade, Iran had the highest pre-sanctions oil revenues in 2005, at 35.58 per cent of its GDP. whereas the lowest revenue was under sanctions in 2009, at 17.33 per cent. More specifically, from 2006 to 2013, during the period of economic sanctions, oil revenues did not increase despite the increase in oil prices; they dropped by 31.68 per cent and 23.24 per cent, respectively. Economic



sanctions deprived Iran of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) that contributed significantly to the Iranian oil industry, as they attracted 50 per cent of the whole FDI. FDI before 2011 contributed approximately \$4 billion annually to Iran’s economy in ‘greenfield investment’. As a result, Iran’s economy faced deep hardship when the sanctions prevented Iran from accessing global technology, investments, and trade (Devarajan and Mottaghi, 2015).

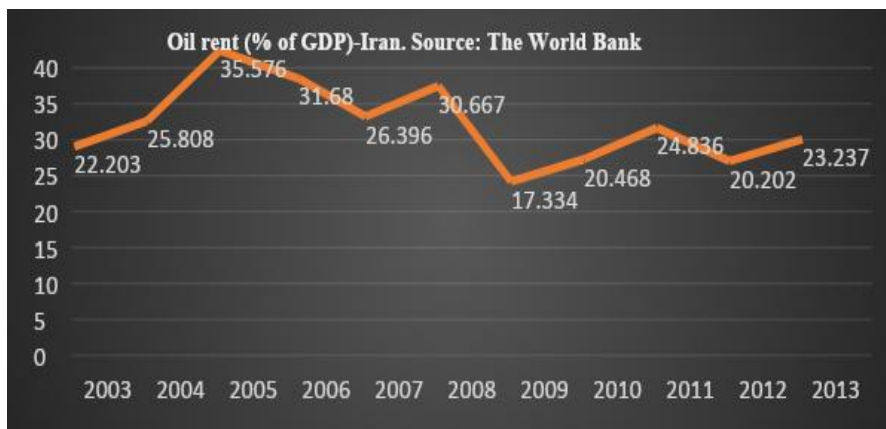


Figure 2: Iran oil rents (% of GDP) 2003-2013. Source: (The World Bank, 2021d).

Figure 3 shows FDI to Iran’s economy in 2005 at \$3412.6 million before imposing economic sanctions, while in 2006, the date of the imposition of sanctions, FDI fell dramatically to 1914.1 million and kept steadily fluctuating until the 2008 global economic crisis. The figure also illustrates that the years 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 witnessed a tangible rise from 2717.8 million, 3773.8 million, 4322.1 million, and 4488.6 million, respectively. However, as a result of tightening economic sanctions in 2012, FDI dropped sharply to 3328.7 million in 2013. Notably, from 2005 to 2009, the first term of Ahmadinejad was the worst for FDI. Yet, from 2010 to 2012, during the second term, there was significant growth. Iran developed its mining industry with assistance from Asian and Russian companies to compensate for the decline in oil and gas revenue.

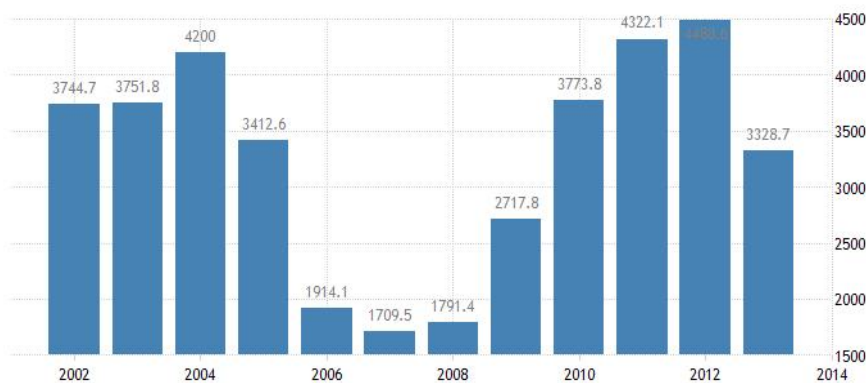


Figure 3: FDI in Iran 2002-2013- \$ million. Source: (Trending Economics, 2021a).

Figure 4 shows a steady revenue GDP of approximately 40.000 IRR billion from 2003 to 2011, whereas in 2012 revenue rose significantly to 140.000 IRR billion and continued to fluctuate until 2014 to achieve another significant growth to 45.000 IRR billion.

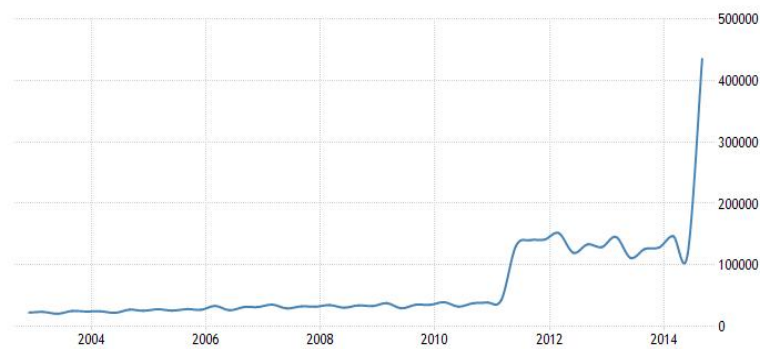


Figure 4: GDP from mining in Iran 2003–2013. Source: (Trending Economics, 2021b).

This might be one of the advantages of imposing economic sanctions; that is, Iran became relatively self-sufficient through the development of its national capabilities. Hence, Iran reduced its external debt, as Figure 5 shows. From 2003 to 2013, the highest external debt was in 2007 at \$28647 million before economic sanctions were imposed, whereas the lowest amount was in 2013 at \$6655 million as a result of restrictions on global trade with Iran. The figure also demonstrates a steep fall in external debt from 2009 at \$19185 million to 2012 at \$7682 million. This can be attributed to the effects of economic sanctions in cutting Iran’s trade with the world, as Figure 6 illustrates.



Figure 5: Iran’s external debt \$ million 2003-2013. Source: (Trending Economics, 2021c).

Iran’s imports, as Figure 6 shows, the largest level was in 2011 at \$27000 million, while the lowest level after strengthened sanctions was in 2013 at \$17000 million. This reveals the importance of the energy sector (oil and gas) in increasing Iran’s budget revenue as well as the effectiveness of financial sanctions. Figure 6 also shows a gradual increase in Iran’s imports

from 2003 at \$8000 million to 2007 at \$14000 million, whereas from 2009 to 2011 sharp fluctuations occurred from \$14000 million to \$26500 million, respectively.



Figure 6: Iran imports 2003-2014-\$ million. Source: (Trendings Economics, 2021d).

Economic sanctions affected Iranian industrial production indirectly; namely, restrictions on transferring money limited access to intermediate goods and raw materials. This, in turn, significantly influenced Iranian industrial production growth (Ezzati and Mehrabadi, 2017). Figure 7 shows a significant fall from 2012 at 10 per cent to 8 per cent in 2013. Economic sanctions likely affected the stability of Iran’s banking systems by cutting the target country’s access to the international financial system as well as affecting the macroeconomic conditions of the target country (Hatipoglu and Peksen, 2018; Majidi and Zarouni, 2016).



Figure 7: Iran’s industrial production 2003-2013. Source: (Trending Economics, 2021e).

Economic sanctions also affected Iranian weapon sales. Figure 8 illustrates that Iran’s weapon sales rose dramatically from 2005 million to 2006 \$75 million during the Ahmadinejad presidency. Arms sales remained steady in 2008, 2009, and 2010 at \$43 million, \$45 million, and \$45 million, respectively. It is worth noting that from 2011 to 2013, a significant fall occurred from \$87 million to \$21 million.

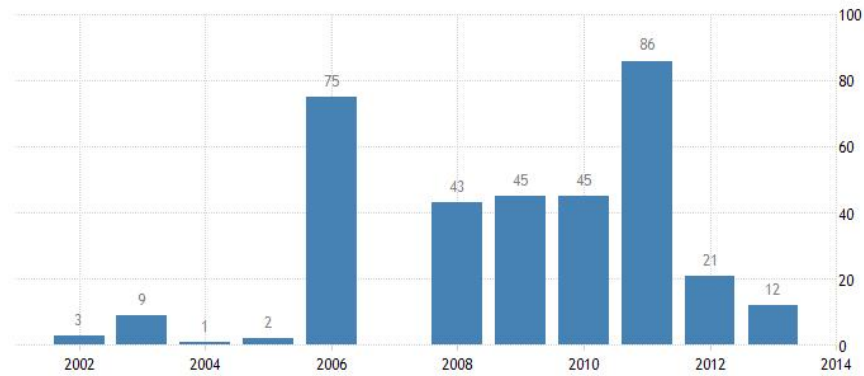


Figure 8: Iran's weapon sales 2002-2013. Source: SIPRI.

It might be safe to claim that the effects of economic sanctions affected Iran's GDP growth, as Figure 9 shows. In 2003, GDP had the highest rate at 8.73 per cent before sanctions, compared to the lowest rate in 2012 at -7.44 per cent during sanctions. In 2007, GDP was 8.15 per cent before falling sharply in 2008 to 0.25 per cent due to the global economic crisis. Economic sanctions had a devastating effect on Iran's GDP growth from 2011 at 2.64 per cent to 2012 at -7.44 per cent. Sanctions from 2011 to 2014 reduced Iran's GDP growth to 17.3 per cent, with the largest drop in 2012 at -7.44 per cent (Gharehgozli, 2017). Studies show that UN sanctions have an average influence of 2.3–3.5 per cent on the target states' real per capita GDP growth. This effect lasts a decade, while inclusiveness sanctions affect most economic activities by 5 per cent. Whereas, the effect of the US sanctions is small and affected GDP growth by 0.7–0.9 per cent and lasted for 7 years (Neuenkirch and Neumeier, 2016).

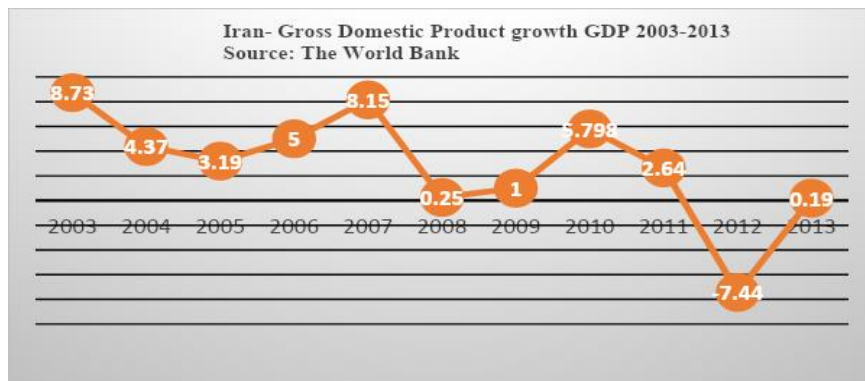


Figure 9: Iran GDP growth 2003-2013. Source: (The World Bank, 2021b).

Figure 10 demonstrates how the Iranian currency (Rial) exchange rate with the US dollar gradually rose during economic sanctions from 9.21 per cent in 2006 to 12.26 per cent in 2012. However, the figure shows a sharp increase from 12.26 per cent in 2012 to double in 2013 at 24.81 per cent as a result of inflation. Economic sanctions are likely to affect the target's

currency and generate a financial crisis that reduces economic growth and wealth (Peksen and Son, 2015).



Figure 10: US \$ to IRR currency exchange rates 2003-2013. Source: (The World Bank, 2021c).

Severe economic sanctions might have an impact on individuals' everyday lives in terms of increasing poverty, especially when the sanctions are imposed by multilateral senders over a long period (Neuenkirch and Neumeier, 2016). Figure 11 illustrates food inflation from 2012 to 2014. It can be noted that the highest levels of food inflation were between October 2012 at 49.8 per cent and October 2013 at 50.8 per cent. This period was shared between the two presidencies of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani. The lowest rate under Ahmadinejad was 26.2 per cent in 2012, and the lowest rate during Rouhani's presidency was 4.2 per cent in 2014, while nuclear negotiations were in a serious phase.

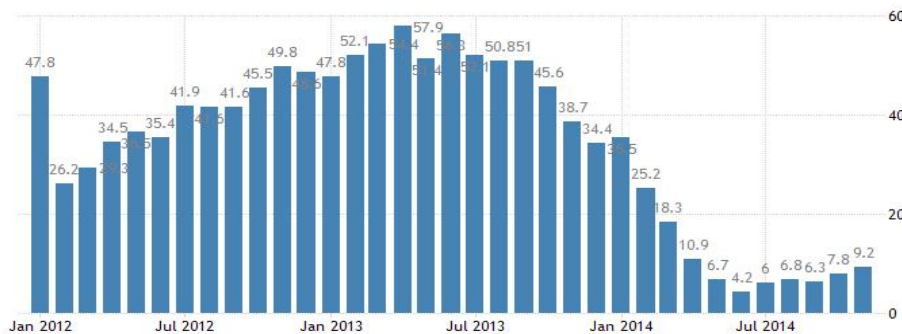


Figure 11. Food inflation 2012-2014. Source: (Trending Economics, 2021f).

Youth unemployment in Iran was affected by economic sanctions, which led to an economic slowdown (Majidi and Zarouni, 2016). Figure 12 demonstrates that the highest rate was in the second half of 2012 at 28.6 per cent, while the lowest rate was in the second half of 2013 at 22.9 per cent. It increased during economic sanctions, particularly in 2012, as a result of a strengthening of the sanctions regime as well as the targeting of the oil and gas sector and the

disconnection of Iran from the international banking system SWIFT (Aghazadeh, 2013). Overall unemployment rates during 2003–2013 are shown in Figure 13.

The highest rate was in 2010 at 13.52 per cent during economic sanctions, while the lowest rate was in 2004 at 10.3 per cent.

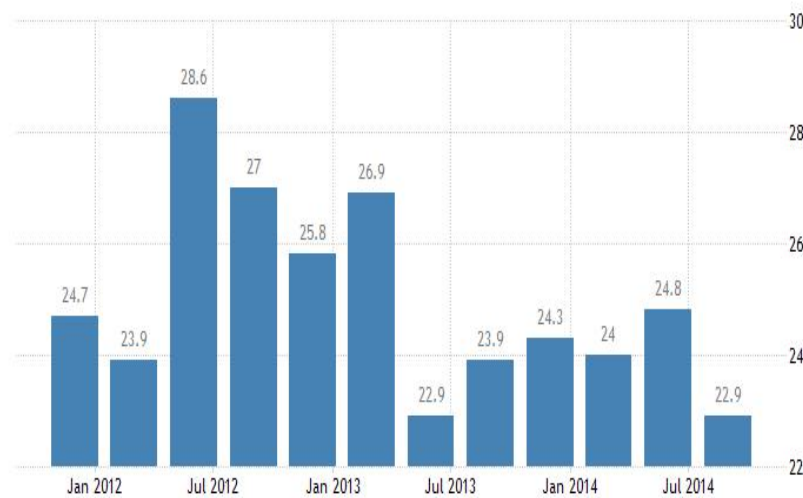


Figure 12: Youth unemployment rates in Iran 2012-2013. Source: (The World Bank, 2021e).

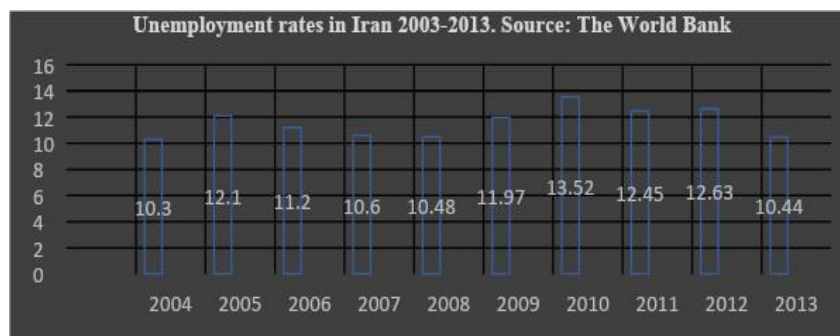


Figure 13: Unemployment rates in Iran 2003-2014. Source: (The World Bank, 2021b).

There is a relationship between unemployment and national politics. Figure 14 shows Iran’s ranking in the ease of doing business among 190 countries from 2008 to 2013. Iran ranked 137th in 2009, which is the best five-year level, while in 2012 and 2013, Iran was ranked 152nd. Strict restrictions on doing business in Iran are more likely to increase unemployment in Iran. Figure 15 illustrates Iran’s corruption rank from 2003 to 2013.

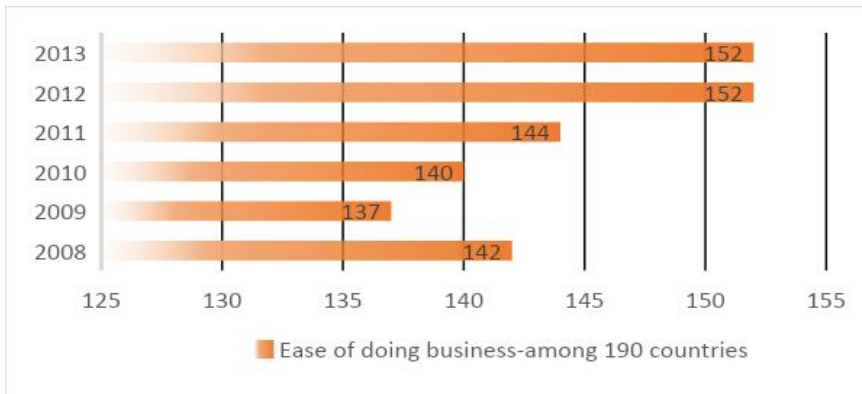


Figure 14: Iran ranking in ease of doing business- among 190 countries 2008-2013. Source: (Trending Economics, 2021g).

Economic sanctions may increase corruption and lead to an increase in smuggling and bribes, and consequently, the black market. Imposing comprehensive economic sanctions may generate a high level of corruption compared to unilateral sanctions; moreover, sanctioned states are more likely to be corrupted than others (Kamali, Mashayekh, and Jandaghi, 2016). Corruption has negative consequences for poverty, political stability, and economic growth (Zamahani, 2016). Figure 15 shows that Iran’s corruption ranking increased between 2003 and 2006, from 78 to 87, 88, and 105, respectively. The highest rank was in 2009 under economic sanctions at 168, while the lowest rank was in 2003 before sanctions at 78. The figure also demonstrates that the highest ranking for Iran was during the period of economic sanctions from 2007 until 2013 at 131, 141, 168, 146, 120, 133, and 144, respectively.



Figure 15: Iran corruption perceptions index (CPI) among 198 countries 2003-2013. Source: (Transparency Organization, 2021).

Iran’s economy experienced major changes during the Obama administration (2009–16), particularly in 2011, which resulted in significant inflation (Wertz and Vaez, 2012). Iran’s exports were reduced by \$104 billion from 2012 to 2014 (Shirazil, Azerbaijani, and Sameti, 2016). Economic sanctions dramatically undermined the middle class, widening the gap between the rich and the poor (Bazoobandi, 2012). The declining economy in terms of

unemployment, social and political instability, and a significant increase in inflation was described as “ worse than that of pre-revolutionary Iran’s economic malaise” (Nader, 2013, p. 10). Economic hardship was the main cause of anxiety for the public and elite, which affected the presidential election along with some other factors (Ansari, 2016).

#### **4.5. Conclusion.**

The chapter has illustrated that the resources of the Iranian economy and the conservatives’ reluctance toward economic openness contributed to preventing reforms to the Iranian economy. The chapter revealed that Iran’s budget revenues rely mainly on the oil and gas sector, and this sector was severely affected by US and EU sanctions in 2011. The chapter also demonstrated the wide-ranging negative effects on inflation, FDI, imports, GDP growth, \$ to IRR currency rates, food inflation, unemployment, and corruption from 2006 to 2013, when Iran was under sanctions. This showed that SIMCA sanctions were effective insofar as they inflicted a heavy cost on Iran’s economy. These statistics also show the reality of the effect of sanctions on Iran that Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan tried to minimise in their texts during the 2013 election, as we will see in chapters 7, 8, and 9.



PART II– CHAPTER 5 –  
CONSTRUCTIVISM AND IRAN’S NUCLEAR CHOICES: IDEATIONAL AND  
MATERIAL ELEMENTS WITHIN ELITE DISCOURSE

### 5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed some material realities of economic and social indicators that changed significantly when sanctions were in place against Iran from 2006 to 2013. This chapter shows that constructivist theory is a fitting theory of actors’ behaviour to address this study’s puzzle and questions. The chapter shows how theories such as realism and liberalism explain the foreign policy of states based merely on material factors and the distribution of power in the international community, rather than through the social construction of meanings. More precisely, social constructivism helps in understanding the reasons behind changes in Iran’s nuclear policy and the role of discourse in presenting material and ideational elements and conceptions of Iran’s identity and interests that affect Iran’s nuclear choices by constructing the effects of sanctions as a salient issue.

This research seeks to explore the potential impact of the effects of economic sanctions and ideational elements (identities and interests) on Iran’s nuclear choices that were explained based on ideas and meanings within the discourses of presidential candidates in the 2013 elections. The chapter shows that the issue salience of the effects of economic sanctions on the economy requires a new flexible nuclear choice had different assessments between Rouhani and Ghalibaf. On the one hand, Rouhani perceives the issue as having high salience driven by Iran’s identity and interests and thus explained that based on some ideas and meanings such as *‘economic harm’*, *‘effects of sanctions’*; *‘nuclear negotiations’*; and *‘constructive interaction’*.

On the other hand, Ghalibaf perceived the issue as having low salience driven by Iran’s identity and interests and, thus, explained that based on some ideas and meanings such as *‘economic harm’*; *‘mismanagement’*; *‘enhancing economic management and resistance and internal cohesion’*. Therefore, the chapter demonstrates the validity of social constructivism in explaining actors’ behaviours by the role of ideational elements in constituting identity and shaping interests and, thus, producing foreign policy including nuclear choices. It also shows to what extent the asymmetric understanding of Rouhani and Ghalibaf based on their beliefs, assumptions, experiences and values may affect their perceptions and assessments of the economic sanctions effects on the economy. These ideas had intersubjective meanings with Khamenei, Shargh and Kayhan.

The chapter also sheds light on social constructivist theory's ontological and epistemological assumptions that reality is socially constructed and material realities per se are not sufficient to produce policies without considering ideational elements regarding identities and interests. Consequently, the chapter shows how discourse analysis is an appropriate method for explaining Iran's nuclear choices narratively. The chapter emphasises the need for social theory in IR in order to explain foreign policy in general and the effects of economic sanctions on domestic policies in particular. It also includes sections on structure and agency, social constructivism, the causality of ideational elements and policy, identities and interests, discourse analysis, the effectiveness of economic sanctions on policy change from a constructivist perspective, dynamic effectiveness of economic sanctions, and the role of issue salience and identity in shaping Iran's interest and producing nuclear choices.

## **5.2. The emergence of constructivism: New room for a social understanding of world politics**

The relevance of constructivism for a causal interpretation of Iran's nuclear choices is established in this study by considering the effects of sanctions (material realities) and ideational elements (beliefs, values assumptions) of actors in influencing nuclear choices through discourse. In the Iranian case, the uncertainty that sanctions (material realities) outcomes alone are able to change policy creates problematic in understanding and explaining. This, in turn, requires determining how ideas and meanings affect their outcomes and the role of identity and national interest in shaping nuclear choices through discourse. Hence, one can see that, in the Iranian case, the outcomes of the effects of sanctions are embedded more in the political and social context than the economic one. In this sense, social constructivism contributes through the role of ideational elements, especially the performance of ideas and meanings on identities and interests to understanding and explaining sanctions effects. Because the most appropriate way to understand international interests is through conceptualising them as a social construction based on constructivist logic (Weldes, 1996).

Realists understand the solutions to crises as being driven by the material interests involved and the way policies change. By contrast, a constructivist approach examines ideational elements that have been marginalised by other theories, such as values, identities, social (inter-subjective) meanings, language, ideas, and agent-structure co-constitution. Therefore, the constructivist approach underpins our understanding of the effects of sanctions on Iran's nuclear choices and nuclear negotiations. This makes the constructivist approach the most suitable school of international relations thought for addressing the thesis' questions. We cannot marginalise or overlook the contribution and dominant role played by realism and liberalism before 1990, even given extended criticism of their relative failure to explain some important political phenomena

(McDonald, 2012; Wendt, 1999). The constructivist theory de facto challenged the assumptions of the neo-realist and neo-liberal debates by emphasising the importance of social structures within IR.

Individuals' roles and interests as pre-given interests can be one of the disputes between constructivism and functionalism. The latter, considering institutions and social practices, see the interests are eventually selected by the environment, as the institutions have to be effective to gain pre-given collective interests. It emphasises the role of the environment in contributing to institutional evolutionary adaptation interests, needs, or purposes (Sterling-Folker, 2000). The core assumption of the fundamental role of environmental circumstances is also adopted by neoliberal institutionalism, that is, the innovation of institutions is based on the ability to gain given collective interests effectively in given environmental circumstances (ibid.). Institutional liberalism promotes beneficial effects on human liberty and security that can result when the world is more peaceful, prosperous, and free. It justifies the use of power in constructing institutions by relying on the conception of social purpose (Keohane, 2012).

As the constructivist Wendt (1992) defended constructivism assumptions on anarchy through his valuable work '*Anarchy is What States Make of It*', the logic of anarchy and the distribution of powers have emerged as the main contestations between constructivists and neorealists. Neorealism attempted to devise a theory of international relations systemically based on international anarchy and the distribution of power. Neorealists, in contrast to constructivists, reject explanations about the central phenomena of IR by referring to the characteristics of states and/or individuals (Shimko, 1992). "Neorealists treat states as self-interested, rational unitary entities whose tendencies toward conflicts and/or cooperation are primarily a function of systemic distributions, and the presence or absence of factors which inhibit or exacerbate the conflictual consequences of anarchy" (ibid., p. 298).

Notably, the role and features of individuals, which are neglected by neorealism, can be considered the core assumption of constructivism, and this supports the necessity of social constructivism to address the thesis' puzzle and questions, as they essentially rely on how individuals such as Rouhani, Ghalibaf, and Khamenei contribute to understanding and explaining the change that occurred to Iran's nuclear choice. Constructivism constituted a significant challenge to realism and liberalism after the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the former USSR. Both theories failed to predict the significant role national identities played at the end of the Cold War. The sudden end of this bipolar era, unpredicted by the dominant theories at the time, could now be explained as a result of the change that occurred due to the transformation of the domestic political system and a significant shift (Price and Smit, 1998). Likewise, Kratochwil (1993) considered the end of the Cold War a

'crucial test' of neorealism's ability to explain that change, which eventually failed (Kratochwil, 1993).

Wendt (1995) criticised neorealism as not adequately structured because it ignored how individualistic metaphors of microeconomics construct the identities and interests of states as they attributed the effects of the structure to the behaviours of states. Constructivists believe that state interests are not exogenous, they are constructed by systematic structures, which leads to a social logic more than micro-economic structuralism (ibid.). Objectivism considers reality exogenous to the 'knower', whereby the mind acts as a processor of input from reality and then meanings are derived from reality's structure; the mind processes "symbolic representations" of reality (Cooper, 1993). Constructivism, on the other hand, considers reality as determined by the 'knower's' experiences. More specifically, constructivism sees the mind as a tool that is used to represent the reality of the knower because external phenomena without a mind 'tool' to perceive them are meaningless (ibid.). According to constructivists, reality is something that each person creates for themselves, and personal experiences shape reality rather than the other way around (Cooper, 1993).

Constructivism developed in IR due to the weaknesses of existing scholarship and critiques of the positivist, rationalist, and institutionalist nature of established theories (Scott, 2000). Constructivists demonstrated a mutual relationship in constructing society between the social structures and people and countered the positivist belief about our ability to independently construct truth claims about the social world since the latter is exogenously given from our interpretation (Fierke, 2005). The difference between agency-centred and structure-based approaches to institutions is due to methodology. Agency-centred institutionalists typically use the tools of historical sociology and/or traditional political science to study state structures and their effects on policy outcomes (Clark, 1998).

To answer questions related to the relationship between knowledge and social reality, Fearon and Wendt classified constructivism into three branches based on their epistemological positions: positivism, interpretivism, and postmodernism. They argue that these three branches answer the following two epistemological questions differently: Whether causal explanations are valid in social enquiry, and if knowledge claims about social life can be justified by anything other than the presumed knower relativism issue the naturalism issue (Fearon and Wendt, 2002). The thesis is interested in the first question regarding causality, that is, the impact of the economic sanctions effects and ideational elements as a cause of change in Iran's nuclear choices. Social constructivism questions materialist accounts of change; therefore, it focuses on how ideational formations can explain change alongside material factors (Blyth, 2002).

### 5.2.1. Agent and structure

Social constructivism provides a better explanation of the relationship between agent and structure on a normative basis. This helps to understand the social interaction that conceptualises the constituent elements of the social world and how ideational elements of ideas, identities and meanings can mutually constitute interests, and then shape policies. Constructivism emphasises 'logics of appropriateness' regarding acts and interests, while the 'Habermasian' variant emphasises 'logics of argument', that is, the role of communicative action carried out between agents and intersubjective values (Kratochwil, 1989; Reus-Smit, 1999; Risse, 2000).

Intersubjectivity implies the "Promise of a connection ("inter") between seemingly autonomous selves ("subjects"), it appears to express a core aspect of sociality. At the same time, the mere availability of the concept marks the existence of such a connection as contingent, as something that cannot always be taken for granted" (Grossberg, 1982, p. 40). Intersubjectivity is a "realistic' way to realise the truth (Brummett, 1976). Brummett stressed the importance of the individual's role in discovering reality, which underpins the thesis' theoretical framework that emphasises the role of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in exploring the reality of Iran's flexible nuclear choice. Intersubjectivity holds that the discovery of reality. "This reality is found through communication between people if humanity is to escape solipsism. Reality is meaning yet meaning is something created and discovered in communication" (ibid., p. 30).

As a matter of subjects and meanings among actors, there has been a key question on how meanings are formed. Scholarship provided two notions; persuasive, subjective rhetoric derived from antiquity, where meanings have specific contexts and are generated only within communicative situations. For instance, discourse, in this case, is about probabilities oriented towards assent; and objective and expository rhetoric derived from the Enlightenment, where meanings are reflections of independently existing circumstances of affairs. In this case, discourse aims to organise instrumentally the use of its objects (Grady and Wells 1985).

Intersubjective quality is inherent socially more than materially. Wendt gave the example that the security dilemma and community are social structures due to their 'intersubjective quality'. In other words, he considered sociality as opposed to materiality as related to 'shared knowledge' (Wendt, 1995). Intersubjective meanings rely essentially on unitary actors more than states "The intersubjective meanings which define state identities and interests, cannot arbitrarily be restricted to those meanings produced only in inter-state relations. After all, states are only analytically, but not in fact, unitary actors" (Weldes, 1996, p. 280).

Doty (1993) analyses foreign policy as a 'social construction'. She raised the question of "how meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects, thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others" (Doty, 1993, p. 298). In other words, Doty emphasises the role of ideas when analysing foreign policymaking; she states that in taking reality seriously, we must consider the examination of spoken and written speeches and statements within broad policy-making contexts and statements in society (ibid.). Because the relationship between the state and the people is centred on constructivist logic, the theoretical constructivist framework gives an adequate account for the thesis to address its questions.

For constructivists, a state's interests are determined in part by system-level norms, which can be seen as international law. Wendt differentiates between state actors and societies but considers them internally related, as he asserts that without society there is no state, as the latter is established by social structures. Wendt stated that we cannot understand the behaviours of state actors without understanding their internal relations with people, as he asserted that "states are people too" (Wendt, 1999, p. 205).

In this sense, Iranian voters who shared particular candidates' beliefs and future policies, especially on economic and nuclear issues, through language during the 2013 election are more able than any other actors to construct the future policies and actions of Iran as a collective actor. As such, one can understand the ways that Rouhani and Ghalibaf constructed their perceptions, and provided expressions of their ideas and meanings on the current and future nuclear choices in relation to understanding Iran's identity and interests considering the effects of sanctions on the economy requires a new (flexible) nuclear choice through issue salience. This can be seen ideally within the international system when constructing Iran's foreign policy, which relies on discursive narratives and ideas. Domestic politics can have a major impact on foreign policies (Fearon, 1998). For instance, Kubalkova (2001a) linked domestic politics with foreign policy where the former influences the latter (Kubalkova, 2001a).

In this context, Wendt (1999) brings more focus to the impacts of the structures of ideas on agents. As a constructivist, he emphasises this interaction more than other scholars. He maintains that the three elements of the social system are as follows: material conditions, interests, and ideas (Wendt, 1999). Wendt would agree with many scholars that 'corporate agency' is a sort of structure that gives people the opportunity to engage in 'institutionalised collective action' (ibid.). As such, Wendt (1995) provided the core differences between neorealist and constructivist structuralism in terms of the origin of structure. Neorealists argue that it is made of a 'distribution of material capabilities', whereas constructivists argue that it is

a product of 'social relationships', as the social structure comprises three components: practices, material resources, and shared knowledge (Wendt, 1995).

On a theoretical level, the positivist approach suggests uncertainty towards a conceived social world where the social world is not completely knowable through the positivist approach, whilst constructivists argue that "the beliefs and preferences of individuals cannot be deduced from preconceived assumptions about human nature but rather they are constructed in a social environment" (Cox, 2001, p. 473). A proper understanding of a phenomenon helps in defining the problem, providing a causal interpretation, and adopting the proper approach to suggest suitable behaviour that fits with the context (Entman, 1993; Payne, 2001). For example, certain phenomena and problems can be explained by constructivist logic, such as democracy challenges, the return of the far right, and so forth. More precisely, social constructivism helps in understanding the reasons behind changes in Iran's nuclear policy that depend essentially on understanding the role of ideational elements of meanings from discursive resources in constructing sanctions' effects.

In this context, constructivism aims to understand the social construction of knowledge through different approaches that shape political choices. Understanding how social constitutions are constructed, such as sovereignty and human rights, is essential to understanding and hypothesising state behaviours and political outcomes in world politics (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001). The fact that human behaviour at all levels of social aggregation is constrained is not in dispute. Nor is it likely that modal responses may exist to some types of structural constraints or situational exigencies. Yet, the social constructivists reject the notion or pretence that their research is the entirety or even the primary component of the social scientific effort (Ruggie, 1998).

This also can be applied to Rouhani and Ghalibaf's discourses; that is, understanding the two different systems of meanings. That includes the effects of sanctions on the economy, solutions to solve Iran's economic problems, nuclear negotiations and eventually, Iran's nuclear programme within their discourses enables us to expect how they would act based on their ideational elements, especially in relation to Iran's nuclear choices. In addition, it provides a broad understanding of what the political results would be in world politics in terms of the inhibition of nuclear weapons, avoiding a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, and the maintenance of peace and security.

If we consider the economic harm that resulted from economic sanctions a crisis, one could adopt Blyth and Hay's views on crises as believing that they are not objective and external events; instead, they have lived experiences where narratives affect the ways of understanding

and exploring the ability of ideas to clarify and address them (Hay, 1999; Blyth, 2002). Notably, some ideas have power more than others. However, ideas by themselves have nothing to do:

Power in ideas focuses on the authority certain ideas enjoy in structuring thought at the expense of other ideas. This power can be seen as structural or institutional. Structural power in ideas results from agents having established hegemony over the production of subject positions and is generally the focus of post-structuralists. Institutional power in ideas is a consequence of institutions imposing constraints on which ideas agents may take into consideration and is mostly the domain of historical institutionalists (Schmidt, 2017, p. 260).

Despite ideas having structural power, they are contingent on some conditions, such as a hegemonic actor, the importance of certain ideas, and powerful institutions that can limit some ideas. This reflects the Iranian case. We can assume that Rouhani has a hegemonic power to form his ideas over sanctions and nuclear programme due to his ideational elements as well as his experience. We can realise that some ideas on economic harm that affected Iranians' everyday lives have the power to dominate the discourse compared to other ideas when political and revolutionary institutions have the power to put constraints on some ideas that may be contrary to the revolution's principles and values related to Iran's nuclear interests for civilian purposes, especially in elections as a significant context. More fully, constructivism describes the relationship between the structure and the actor as mutually constituting. Since intersubjectivity is necessary for structure and actors, Rouhani and Ghalibaf, despite different perceptions, have shared within discourses and texts, their experience and knowledge with the voters about some pressing issues and their approaches to resolving them, such as economic sanctions, economic harm, and Iran's nuclear choices.

### **5.3. Social constructivism: Causality of ideational elements and policy**

Social constructivism has two main schools: conventional and critical. Although there are some differences between them, they share the same theoretical principles. They seek to 'de-naturalise' the social world, which is an empirical matter that can be revealed by those who produce practices and institutions in human actions and social constructions (Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996). In addition, both insist that to understand the meaning of data, they must be 'contextualised', that is, connected to the social environment (Hopf, 1998). According to Cho (2009), the main difference between conventional and critical constructivism is related to identities. Cho argues that in conventional constructivism, identities are frequently seen as explanatory factors for certain security phenomena, but in critical constructivism, the identities



themselves must be explained to make sense of the cultural creations of insecurities. (Cho, 2009).

### 5.3.1. Identities and interests

For Wendt, identity is “a property of international actors that generates motivational and behavioural dispositions” (Wendt, 1999, p. 224). In addition, he added that identity is significant and essential for interests, and therefore fundamental. Concerning the substance of international relations, however, both modern and postmodern constructivists are interested in how knowledgeable practices constitute subjects (Wendt, 1992b). The most essential assumption of social constructivism is that all knowledge is socially constructed, that is, this assumption means that language, meanings and ideas influence human experience, including the production of knowledge and interpretation (Onuf, 2012). In opposition to constructivists, neo-realists and neo-liberals believe that actors have nothing to do with identities and interests because they are given and exogenous (Ruggie, 1998). As the neo-realists and rationalists deny any relationship between social structure and states, the English School and constructivism can be seen as fellow travellers, having shared views at the ‘social vanguard’ of the field (Reus-Smit, 2002).

The norms constitute identities and interests, and actors sometimes work differently with multiple norms of behaviour and deal with different interpretations that may contradict one another (Reus-Smit, 2002). A classic constructivist such as Klotz challenges realist and neorealist understandings of norms and rules as a mere reflection of the structure of the world’s power as she links that to the structure: “Global norms are one component of a more ‘pervasive-constructive’ rather than coercive component of the international system” (Klotz, 1995, p. 461).

The English School emphasises the social aspects of the international system, focusing on how culture constitutes the identities of states as well as social dynamics beyond the institutions that create and contribute to the international order. As the constructivist approach focuses on identities, interests, and ideational factors, international norms are understood as an explanation of both individuals’ and states’ interests. Ideas require agential intervention to be changed and do not change by themselves (Béland, 2009). For Wendt, identities and interests are socially constructed:

A structural theory of the international system makes the following core claims. (1) states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; (2) the key structures in the state’s system are intersubjective rather than material; and (3) state identities and interests are in important part constructed by these social structures, rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics (Wendt, 1994, p. 385).

Wendt differentiated between two levels of identities, the first held by the self and the second held by others. He asserted that identities are built based on inner and outer structures. Furthermore, he discussed identities accordingly as personal or corporate, type, role, and collective identities, which are perhaps the most important ones in the international relations realm (Wendt, 1999). In this sense, constructivism holds, according to Onuf's *The World of Our Making* (1989), that the state is constituted by people and communities together. One can note that Onuf asserts the core of constructivist theory by linking the importance of people's actions in building societies and vice versa. Societies contribute positively to constituting people, namely, their identities, ideas, behaviours, and interests (Onuf, 1989).

Hopf argues that identities are necessary in international politics and domestic society to ensure at least some level of respect and order, as well as a way to guarantee the minimal components for peaceful coexistence between peoples and nations (Hopf, 1998). Ruggie (1998) looked at constructivism from the perspective of human consciousness compared to neo-utilitarianism. In short, he emphasised that constructivism is about human consciousness and its role in international life (ibid.).

The constructivist literature on international relations and foreign policy is diverse epistemologically, but it shares the key ontological assumption that the world is socially constructed when there is a need for understanding and making foreign policy as ideology (identity and norms) are reproduced through human behaviour (Warnaar, 2013). Constructivism has managed to explore three core ontological propositions about the influence of social life in world politics. First, it asserts that normative, ideational structures as well as material structures are important. Second, identities constitute actions and interests; and, third, both agents and structures are mutually constitutive (Price and Smit, 1998).

In this way, constructivism conceptualised the politics of identity as an ongoing competition for dominance over the conception of power, stating that such politics are necessary to create meaning in social groups. Hence, differences will increase the possibility of change. To understand how and why the change happened, constructivists emphasised using a set of tools to capture intersubjective meanings, including discourse analysis, process tracing, genealogy, comparative analysis, interviews, participant observation, and content analysis (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001).

The change that occurred in Iran's nuclear choices in 2015 might have roots in Iran's identity and interests and can be set in parallel with the change in Iran's nuclear discourse as the meanings are not fixed, which has historically been constructed through wider discourses of independence, resistance, and justice (Moshirzadeh, 2007). The vulnerability of Iran's resistance

to sanctions since 2006 along with different conceptions and explanations of Iran's national security, may have led to emerging security concerns that might affect the regime's legitimacy, survival, and the revolution's principles and values. As a result, Iran reconsidered and reshaped its interests concerning the nuclear programme within the elite discourse of the 2013 presidential election.

Hans Morgenthau (1948) defines national interests as "the main signpost that helps political realism find its way through the landscape of international politics" (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 50). On the other side, constructivists claim that identities are responsible for constituting interests, which are determined in part by system-level norms. They see international relations as deeply social: "as a realm of action in which intersubjective rules discursively structure the identities and interests of states and other actors, norms, and institutions" (Reus-Smit, 2002, p. 488). Mearsheimer (1994) is considered the father of offensive realism. He claims that institutions barely have a tangible effect on global peace and stability, not only because institutions per se are unable to sensitively affect the behaviour of states but also because there is merely a reflection of the allocation of power among states (Mearsheimer, 1994).

Constructivism denies that interests and identities are exogenously given or independent variables and it rejects explaining states' behaviour based on anarchy and the distribution of power structure (Wendt, 1992). Thus, the main idea here is that identities are not given; instead, they are constituted by interaction between self and others and shaped by using language that conveys meaning in discourses. A "world in which identities and interests are learned and sustained by intersubjectivity grounded practice, by what states think and do so, is one in which 'anarchy is what states make of it'" (Wendt, 1992b, p. 183).

In more detail, Wendt explains that the most significant factor, which is partly responsible for the formation of material conditions and interests, is shared ideas. Wendt suggested that the absence of ideas means the absence of interests and that, without the latter, there are no meaningful material conditions and, consequently, no reality (Wendt, 1999). Neoliberal institutionalism also limits the causal role of ideational factors by considering them relatively unimportant (Ruggie, 1998). Iran is considered one of the countries with a rich history that has contributed to consolidating its identity and interests over the years.

### 5.3.2. Iran's identity and interests

Because of the normative and revolutionary components of Iran's foreign policy, it requires, from a constructivist perspective, understanding the role of Iranian identity and interests in shaping Iran's foreign policy, including nuclear policy in light of the sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme from 2006 to 2015. This importance comes from the significance of its

identities and interests that shape Iran's foreign policy, which is linked essentially to domestic factors including geographical and geostrategic locations, culture, religion, values, and historical experience (Arshad, 2004). Notably, the Iranian foreign policy shift after the Islamic Revolution in 1979 was driven more by values, domestic policies, and narratives than by material factors (Moshirzadeh, 2007).

In this context, as socially structured, constructivism gives the concept of state identity renewed salience by showing that individuals and society construct state identities and affect state interests and actions (Ilgit and Ozececi-Taner, 2012; Wendt, 1992). Identity is considered an influential concept of foreign policy, yet it has been marginalised by state-centric and rational choice theories. Constructivists refuse to consider actors' identities and interests merely as material conditions but rather claim that they are an interpretation of social norms and ideas (Jackson, 2004).

National identity can be seen as "a salute, a religion, a royal palace, an epic poem, a national anthem, a law, a life of self-sacrifice, a surgical operation, a death in battle, the burning of a witch, a nuclear weapon, the genocide of a people, world war, and global warming are all actualisations of the human mind" (Philip Allott, 1992, p. 1368). Objective elements play a crucial role in constructing an identity that is shared by groups or nations, which essentially includes values, language, symbols, religion, ethnicity, common history, etc., (Smith, 1991). The social identity of actors develops from four basic interests: physical security, ontological security, recognition, and development (Wendt, 1994).

On this basis, and in order to understand the role of Iran's identities in shaping its interests, it is necessary to explore Iran's identity in order to understand its role in constructing Iran's interests and consequently producing policies, including Iran's foreign policy. National pride in Iran is rooted within its unique identity based on cultural and religious aspects that began early with the Persian Empire's era, which introduced some aspects of nationalism including ethnicity, religion, history, culture, and language, as 65 per cent of Iranians speak Persian 'Farsi' with a minority of 35 per cent constitutes of Arabs, Turks, Baloches, Uzbeks, Kurds, and Armenians (Arshad, 2004).

Accordingly, history and culture are related to each other, and Iran sees its historical and cultural achievements as a matter of national pride (Mohammad Nia, 2012). It has been argued that a continuous relationship between the past and the present is crucial for cultural identity, and this continuity requires knowledge of the past, where history and collective memory contribute to shaping the shared past (William, 1993). "Since the late nineteenth century, Iran's modern state-building efforts have deliberately invoked its cultural heritage and imperial lineage as a means of bolstering unity and fostering a sense of national identity" (Maloney, 2017, p. 3).

To approach the cultural and religious components, a distinctive era has shifted the focus from material interests to values and ideological interests. Post-Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran had a wide discussion among scholars over its national identity due to the new mission of the Islamic Revolution of focusing on ethics, norms, values, and ideology rather than material interest (Haghighat, 2010). Considering this shift, human beings are willing to sacrifice and replace their material needs with cultural, ideological, or religious beliefs (Choi, 2015). The foreign policy of Iran is essentially a combination of Islamic ideology and a revolutionary Islamic vision along with Iranian nationalistic concepts and state interests, and that enables Iran to realise its historic ambitions to be dominant and hegemonic in the region (Zimmt, 2018).

As a social practice, language reflects one nation and expresses its historical and interests aspects, therefore, some experts enhance the role of the Persian language, as most Iranians speak it, as the main source of national identity in Iranian discourse that includes manifestos of thoughts and experiences over the years; others enhance the ‘Shi’ite Islam’ heritage, which plays a significant role in constructing the social identity of Iranians (Karimifard, 2012). Another crucial component is the Shi’ite component. It is significant in contributing to Iran’s identity. For example, Shi’ite discourse and the speeches of Imam Khomeini and Khamenei, as well as historical background, are essentially constructed over the resistance against evil and tyranny based on the ‘Karbala’ battle on October 10, 680 [10th of Muḥarram, ah 61]).

Karbala is a place located in Iraq that witnessed an early Islamic conflict over power: “This battle between Hussain (AS) and Yazid ibn Muawaiyah took place in 61 AH. Muslim historians and scholars have always paid their utmost tribute in praising, highlighting, and explaining Hussain’s philosophy and martyrdom” (Arshad, 2004, p. 49). The concept of resistance has developed historically and politically within Iran’s ideology and identity. For example, Iranian discourse contains plenty of narratives about the national pride of the Persian Empire and the Islamic Revolution. They justify that the latter occurred against the West’s oppression and humiliated Iranians for a long time in association with Shah’s era, and this narrative, in turn, crystallised the concept of ‘enemies’ to indicate the West, especially the US. The Iranian identity has not been stable, and it has changed over the years due to several conditions such as history, politics, and societal factors (Mohammad Nia, 2012).

This discursive context considered a basis for Iranian identity and interest imposes a particular revolutionary language on the country’s foreign policy. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a new set of normative discourses affected the political rhetoric of the country’s foreign policy and transformed Iranian identity from a status quo pro-western to a revolutionary anti-western one. These discursive resources shape the country’s foreign policy behaviour and differentiate it from the rest of the world (Mohammad Nia, 2012, p. 31).

Iran's national identity is constructed based on three components: 'Pan-Iranism' which essentially considers Iran's national identity based on the Iranian nation and nationality as the Iranian nation has independent values and dignity; 'Pan-Shiism' which is against nationalism and which enhances Shi'ite heritage as the main component of Iran's national identity that focuses on the past glory and Iran's independence, and; 'Modernism' the impact of a collision with the West, especially after the Islamic Revolution that drove Iran to adopt the discourse of resistance to challenge and counter the Western hegemony where the Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah era are considered a significant period that promotes Iran's modernity (Karimifard, 2012). The national pride continued to express the Persian empire to date when the Shah called himself ShahanShah (King of Kings):

This conception of Iran has deep roots in the Iranian national self-identity and has proven to be remarkably enduring. The inculcation of the exploits of the ancient Persian empire has shaped the worldview of Iranians throughout the modern era—even those who rejected it. Iran's imperial past occupies a central place in daily life, expressed through the enduring allegiance to the solar calendar and the festivals around *No Ruz*, the Zoroastrian New Year, as well as through the abiding reverence for the poetic traditions of Persian culture (Maloney, 2017, p. 4).

As constructivism values the role of the ideational elements of individuals in constructing interests, producing policies, and making decisions, the features and societal conditions, such as norms and values, of a particular society are crucial to understanding, explaining, and even expecting Iran's foreign policy to be constructed socially based on its interests. National interest is important to international politics in terms of (a) those issues of foreign policy prioritising within a shared construction of national interest and (b) because it serves as a 'rhetorical device' through which legitimacy and political support are created (Weldes, 1996). Individuals play a crucial role in constructing its meaning "Because identifying and securing the national interests is, in the modern international system, considered to be quintessentially the business of the state, those individuals who inhabit offices in the state play a special role in constructing the meaning of the 'the national interests' (ibid., p. 281).

Iran's national interest depends largely on three main issues that dominate Iran's foreign policy regionally and globally: the nuclear programme, US-Iran relations, and lasting regional disputes, especially with Saudi Arabia (Barzegar, 2010). Despite the importance of national security regarding the nuclear issue, Iran's regional policies seek economic interests that maintain and expand its international trade, including foreign direct investment, with its neighbours, especially the Gulf States (Maloney, 2017). The nuclear programme as a source of national pride is supported by all Iranians and the National Security Council, which consists of the

supreme leader and the three authorities of legislative, judicial, executive, and military bodies (Barzegar, 2010). This unwavering support for the nuclear programme can be attributed to the well-articulated nuclear discourse based on Iran's identity (Moshirzadeh, 2007). Regarding the nuclear discourse in Iran Moshirzadeh found that there were three main discourses in Iran: independence, justice, and resistance, which constitute its identity (ibid.).

Because rationalists cannot provide a fully consistent explanation of Iran's nuclear policy and its continuities and changes, a discursive approach, in which the constitutive effects of domestic meaning structure Iran's identity and thus its preferences is necessary (Moshirzadeh, 2007). The adequate approach to analysing Iran's foreign policies, including nuclear policy, relies on a discursive context given that identity and interests are related to a social constructivist approach that does not consider identity to be a stable and pre-given concept. Accordingly, discourse gives meaning to the interests and positions of the international system and thus shapes the rationality, identity, and reality of the state and its interactions internationally (ibid.). Friday Sermons as a whole can be considered part of the ideological discourse when it says about the way the concept of nation is understood in general and Iranian national identity in particular because the discourse represents a sample of texts that articulate, especially how certain terms are used (Paul, 1999).

On this basis, one can examine the relationship between lifting economic sanctions and nuclear choices as an issue salience based on the ideational and material elements within elite discourse. Ideas and meanings within a discursive approach that construct particular ideational elements such as Iranian identity, values, and interests work effectively in producing policies, including the nuclear policy. Therefore, this approach enables us to explore how individuals understood Iran's nuclear interests in light of the effects of economic sanctions and mismanagement. These effects have impacted Iran's economy in terms of increasing unemployment, inflation, and decreasing GDP which were explained in the context of (material realities) in chapter 4, and will be also explained combined (ideational elements ) in chapter 7.

Additionally, this helps to understand how Rouhani and Ghalibaf produce policies to resolve economic harm, which will be analysed in chapter 8. More importantly, it helps to understand their different nuclear choices if elected that preserve the interests of national security, economic prosperity, national pride, and Islamic Revolution's principles, which will be analysed in chapter 9.

### 5.3.3. The role of ideas in producing policies

Ideas and meaning construction essentially relies on certain perceptions, assumptions, ideologies and experiences. Ideas perform as causes that contribute to an effect. For example, Risse explained how actors keep trying to “figure out in a collective communicative process (1) whether their assumptions about the world and cause-and-effect relationships in the world are correct (the realm of theoretical discourses); or (2) whether norms of appropriate behaviour can be justified and which norms apply under given circumstances (the realm of practical discourses)” (Risse 2000, p. 7).

In this context, one of the most influential factors in producing policy is the ideational elements. Scholars have considered to a great extent the effective role of ideas, beliefs, and meanings in affecting, orienting, or constructing policies. These ideas gain importance whenever they are embedded within an elite discourse in a certain context that has high value and includes some issues salience. Goldstein and Keohane explained in their analysis that ideas affect policy when they have legal manifestations within institutions in the form of rules and procedures. Ideas, according to her, can also affect trade policy through two roles related to institutions: (i) ideas and beliefs affect policy when they are embedded in institutions; (ii) they affect policy indirectly by affecting policy experts and decision-makers (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993).

Power over ideas has direct and indirect control: “Power over ideas is the capacity of actors to control and dominate the meaning of ideas either directly, by imposing their ideas on others, or indirectly, whether through shaming opponents into conformity or by resisting alternative interpretations” (Schmidt, 2017, p. 259). Presidential candidates in 2013 poised their ideas on significant aspects through discourse for the future as well and they criticised former officials for their poor performance, especially with respect to the economy.

Some institutions could affect the influence of ideas on policy by ‘regulating the permeability’ of the policymaking process and which ideas gain ‘political access’. Civil service regulations somehow play a dual role in facilitating or impeding the entry and influence of ideas into the process of policymaking through the recruitment and promotion of bureaucrats based on their ideas. (Yee, 1996). Ideas may be important precisely based on a game-theoretic approach because ‘predictions’ cannot be generated merely by examining strategic interactions and interests (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). Ideas and interests are jointly interrelated, and all interests encompass beliefs, so ideas can be understood as we conceive them (ibid.). Ideas are core to understanding and explaining world politics that have salient issues, especially for the public. “Social constructivists have sought to understand the full array of roles that ideas play in



world politics, rather than specifying a priori roles based on theoretical presuppositions and then testing for those specified roles, as neo-utilitarians do” (Ruggie, 1998, p. 867).

Generally, most of the expressions of ideas and meanings about Iran’s nuclear programme reflect its identity and interests. Of course, there are some differences in the way of understanding Iran’s interests between Rouhani, Khamenei, and Ghalibaf due to their beliefs and experiences, but that should not be against the principles of the Islamic Revolution that assert resistance to imperial powers, justice in having the right to gain nuclear know-how for peaceful purposes, independence in choosing its policies, and so on. Hence, any future nuclear policy Iran would follow under a certain president should be consistent with Khamenei’s red lines derived from the revolution.

Regarding the nuclear programme, Iran’s interests can be understood through some expressions of ideas and meanings that were expressed by Rouhani and Ghalibaf during the presidential election of 2013 that constitute Iran’s interests, such as economic harm, national security, economic prosperity, national pride, effects of sanctions, mismanagement, and the Islamic Revolution’s principles. Institutions control the entry of ideas into the policymaking process; they also affect the access of policymakers to these ideas (Yee, 1996). More precisely, languages allow or restrict, as well as prioritise and distribute, the ideas that policymakers can think of (ibid.). Yet, this process of influence takes some time to achieve its goals:

Ideas can matter regardless of how a particular set of beliefs comes to influence politics, and the use of those ideas over time implies changes in existing rules and norms. Ideas have a lasting influence on politics through their incorporation into the terms of political debate, but the impact of some set of ideas may be mediated by the operation of institutions in which the ideas are embedded. In general, when institutions intervene, the impact of ideas may be prolonged for decades or even generations. In this sense, ideas can have an impact even when no one genuinely believes in them as principled or causal statements (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993) p. 20).

Languages and discourses have a crucial effect on policies because they provide policymakers with the meanings of their political situations. Language operates at two levels: it defines the range of 'possible utterances', and the range of 'possible actions'. In a broader context, international organisations, through their plots, storytelling, and blueprints produce interpretive meaning within their narrations. Such entities affect the symbolic meaning of actions and the significance of discursive interaction in producing convincing force in the generation of meaning and, hence, of actions (Yee, 1996).

Languages and discourses consisting of vocabularies, rules, symbols, narratives, and the like are necessarily public and therefore intersubjectively constituted and accessed. Discursive language can affect policy as it arises from the role of the intersubjective elements of symbolic language. For example, ideas have constitutive effects insofar as they make social kinds possible; masters and slaves do not exist apart from the shared understandings that constitute their identities as such (ibid.).

In terms of the possibility of type and level of quasi-causal arguments that possible, Ruggie has compared social constructivism to neo-utilitarianism and found a major difference in the issue of ideational causation concerns related to the way can we understand "causation" itself (Ruggie, 1998). He explained that "Some ideational factors simply do not function causally in the same way as brute facts or the agentive role that neo-utilitarianism attributes to interests. As a result, the efficacy of such ideational factors is easily underestimated. The role of aspirations is one instance, the impact of legitimacy is another, and the power of rights a third" (Ruggie, 1998, p. 869).

One can consider the significant role of Iranian institutions in increasing the effectiveness of certain shared notions of 'intersubjectivity' over the nuclear programme. For example, political institutions such as the National Security Council, the Foreign Ministry, Parliament (Majlis), the Assembly of Experts Guardian Council, and so on emphasise independence, constructive interaction, and national pride; educational institutions (schools, universities) express constructive interaction and national pride; and military entities emphasise national security, independence, justice, enemies, and resistance.

These institutions and others, of course, contribute to prolonging ideas and meanings for decades and generations. It can do so by institutionalising them within its social structure, especially those related to the revolution. As Wendt (1998) explained, explanations may take different forms depending on the kinds of questions they answer, considering the differences between causal and constitutive explanations. Causal theories answer questions of the form 'why?' and 'how?'. For instance, why did Gorbachev move to end the Cold War?. It is a question of looking for the causes of things. Constructive questions usually take the form of 'how possible?' or 'what?' 'How was it possible for Stalin, a single individual, to exercise so much power over the Soviet people?' It is a question that requests further information about the conditions or features that increase the likelihood of possibility for both natural and social kinds.

Answering how-possible and what questions adequately must fulfil truth conditions rather than answers to causal questions. Wendt explained the relationship between (X) and (Y):

In providing answers to causal questions, in saying that 'X causes Y', we assume three things: 1) that X and Y exist independent of each other, 2) that X precedes Y in time, and 3) that but for X, Y would not have occurred. The first two conditions should not pose anything more than a conceptual problem for the causal researcher and as such do not generally receive much attention. It is essential that the effort to establish causal connections make sure that X and Y are independently and temporally separated, but having done so the causal researcher's main problem is to satisfy the third (Wendt, 1998, p. 105).

Descriptive language implicitly characterises the relationship between shared ideas and the social kinds they constitute. For instance, when we say that ideas 'describe' the Cold War, it means they do not produce the Cold War, and without certain shared ideas, the Cold War would not have existed; that is, they 'explained' the Cold War. One can consider the assumption that, if shared ideas do not explain and provide further information about the Cold War, policymakers could not end the Cold War by reflecting and changing their ideas. In this case, the Cold War will be seen as something given to the way they think (Wendt, 1998). Although Causality is inherited within narratives, and thus, constructivism, it provides, due to constitutive rules, noncausal appropriate explanatory accounts, when it comes to causality, it sticks to narrative explanatory protocols, not the nomological-deductive (N-D) model valued by naturalistic monism (Ruggie, 1998).

Realists, based on material structural determinants, and constructivists, based on 'normative' ones, for example, have explained the end of the Cold War in rather reductionist and theoretically 'incommensurable' terms. In order to understand causal analysis, we need "much more open and multi-causal questions, which necessitates a turn away from theoretically reductionist explanations. One important feature of a causal assertion is that the person who makes it acknowledges or is considered to suppose, that there are further details to give, and that significantly involves causal analysis in the 'politics of construction' of the social world (Kurki and Suganami, 2012).

In terms of influencing policy outcomes through ideas, Goldstein and Keohane have created a framework consisting of three causal pathways: (i) serving as "road maps," where individuals determine preferences or understand the causal relationship between their goals and alternative political strategies ; (ii) serving as "focal points" where ideas can help individuals select one from several viable outcomes.; and (iii) institutionalization. To do so, Goldstein and Keohane define three types of ideas: world views, principled beliefs, and causal beliefs, that is, beliefs about cause-effect relations (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). "Ideas affect strategic interactions, helping or hindering joint efforts to attain "more efficient" outcomes" (ibid., p. 12). Thinking of

some causal terminology in a wider ‘everyday’ sense—words such as ‘because’, ‘leads to’, ‘produces’, ‘makes’, enables, and ‘constraints’—means a great deal of broader terminology is used in empiricist IR theorising (Kurki, 2006). “Theorists and researchers are, instead, directed towards providing accounts where the complex interaction of norms and material constraints are analysed in a holistic historically attuned manner” (Kurki, 2006, p. 214 ). The causal explanations have political (and ethical) dimensions. This can be understood in two ways: (i) some value-based input in making causal explanations and some other values that lead them are likely to have a political significance, and (ii) produced causal narratives and answers are likely to have political implications or consequences that exceed their essential functions, that is, explaining or extending mysterious outcomes than before the explanations were given (ibid.).

#### 5.3.4. Discourse analysis

The constructivist theory deals with social life essentially as constituted by the understanding that our knowledge is dependent on our language and explanations. Constructivism draws inspiration from Foucauldian arguments about knowledge and power. Language reflects social structure, which might eventually participate in making and shaping the world. For the Foucauldian approach, it follows that discourse cannot be analysed only in the present.

Language is more than naming and interpreting things and phenomena; understanding the language of naming can be captured within a comprehensive understanding of the whole context of the talk and a familiarity with the naming process itself (Considine, 2015). Therefore, understanding meanings requires the practice of following rules based on repeated usage and not the relation between words and the things that they name, for instance, “The need for nuclear weapons to be simultaneously exceptional and non-exceptional, their meaning at once both fixed and mutable” (Considine, 2019, p. 89).

All approaches to discourse focus on the structure of signification. As a theory of knowledge, social constructivism postulates that social interaction and language generate and develop all knowledge. To provide people with knowledge of social reality, discourse practices serve as a background for speakers to distinguish things, providing those features and qualities and connecting them to other themes (Milliken, 1999). People use language as a communication tool to represent their actions, and words can also be used to “perform deeds” (Onuf, 1989). The relationship between language, or speaking in particular, and thinking has received great attention since Wittgenstein (1958). He sees that speaking is more than meanings or verbal expressions; he asserts that language is itself the “vehicle of thought” (Wittgenstein, 1958).

Interestingly, Wittgenstein, in his valuable work *Philosophical Investigations*, raised a question about such a relationship: "Is thinking a kind of speaking? One would like to say it is what distinguishes speech with a thought from talking without thinking" (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 107). One can see how he distinguishes between "speech" and "talking", i.e., speech is a formal set of words and meanings that deliver information related to a large group of people, such as opinions, policies, arguments, solutions, and so on, that require thinking and reflection on the current and future challenges and opportunities. Whereas talking as a daily informal conversation is produced based on reactions and emotions, and of course, it might include those opinions, policies, arguments, and solutions but within a limited and specific scope of interests for individuals or a small group of people.

It can also be understood that "thinking" is a former stage of speaking or an essential "part" of speaking rather than a "kind of speaking" (ibid.). This evokes the role of ideational elements as social constructivism emphasises causality: the role of beliefs, assumptions, and values in affecting policies through our ideas and meanings, which, in turn, construct our identities and shape our interests. Wittgenstein's perspective provided further support for language's use in the form of "speech or discourse" as a valid approach to analysing a valuable "discourse" of the elite that is mostly presented to the public and contains a reflection on "thought" and shared policies that people and policy-makers are interested in (ibid.). This supports the study's argument regarding the understanding of Iranian nuclear choices, which can be properly understood through Iranian narratives (speeches and discourses of the presidential candidates) because they are guided essentially by their ideational elements that express Iran's interests and might help in explaining its behaviours at the international level.

According to Foucault, discourse is, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, is created by multiple sequences of signs as they perform; that is, they can specify particular modalities of existence (Foucault, 1972). While in discursive formation, he asserts that describing between several statements, i.e., a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, multiple statements, concepts, or themes; therefore, one can define a regularity as "an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations, to convenience, that means we are dealing with a discursive formation" (Foucault, 1972, p. 38).

For more social context, Fairclough defines discourse as a practice that signifies and represents the possible world: "Discourses are ways of representing aspects of the world—the processes, relations, and structures of the material world, the 'mental world' of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and so forth, and the social world" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 124). While Laclau and Mouffe (1985) reject the distinction between discursive and "non-discursive practice". Their analysis affirms that every object is constructed as an object of discourse and is not externally given to each

discursive provision of emergence (ibid.). Some post-structuralist scholars have understood organisations, social categories, identities, relationships, and the world of material objects as discursive, stating, that everything has to be within text. Meaning is crucial for a better understanding of issues in international relations. Discourse is a practice that not only represents the actual world but can also signify and represent the possible world, "constructing and constituting" the world in meaning (Fairclough, 1992a).

As constructivism sees the world as socially constructed, it values the importance of discourse in understanding and explaining political phenomena. That is, the discourse articulates and reflects an actor's identities and interests in world politics. As such, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis have become prominent methods within social constructivist logic. For example, Foucauldian discourse analysis suits us when we need to explore the power relations and power effects inherent in discourses. This applies to cultures, and to recognise them within a discourse, discourse analysts need to be cautious of the conceptualisations of power and resistance (Powers, 2007).

Broadly, discourse theory proposes that our speaking and writing in our daily activities are shaped by the structures of power in our society because the latter is defined by struggle and conflict in our discourses (Macdonell, 1986). The theory of discourse also investigates "the way social practices systematically form the identities of subjects and objects by articulating together a series of contingent signifying elements available in a discursive field" (Howarth, Norval, and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 7). Milliken (1999) focuses mainly on the structure of signification. In order to provide people with knowledge of social reality, discourses work as a practice, as a background for speakers to distinguish things, providing those features and qualities and connecting them to other themes (Milliken, 1999). Milliken argues that a discourse analysis in international relations should be based on a group of texts from a variety of sources: "according to the research focus" in order to authorise speakers and writers of a hegemonic discourse or to think and behave within alternative discourses (ibid.).

In the constructivist logic of the impact of ideational elements on identities and interests, Epstein emphasises the role of discourse based on the relationship between language, agency, and identity in three ways: first, the effectiveness of language in speaking and acting; second, social actors first and foremost as speaking actors, which emphasises the importance of speaking in both a modality of their agency and in selected places in the world for them; and third, the behaviour of an actor as regulated by "pre-existing discourses" that contribute to the field of possible actions (Epstein, 2010). Constructivism also emphasises the role of argumentation in producing knowledge. For instance, Habermasian constructivists hold that when actors generally engage in argument, "they try to figure out in a collective communicative

process (1) whether their assumptions about the world and cause-and-effect relationships in the world are correct (the realm of theoretical discourses); or (2) whether norms of appropriate behaviour can be justified and which norms apply under given circumstances (the realm of practical discourses)" (Risse, 2000, p. 7).

Such communicative action is never random; the actor's reason comes from agreed-upon precepts of action to establish collectively acceptable rules of conduct for the situation at hand. As Heller argues, "Contestants enter the discourse with different values, and they all try to justify their values as right and true. They do this by resorting to values higher than those which they want to justify, by proving that the latter is but an interpretation of the higher values, or that they can be related to these values without logical contradiction" (Heller, 1987, p. 239). This kind of communication can be seen publicly. Public discourse as a form of 'argumentative rationality' is essentially connected to the constitutive rather than the regulative role of identities and norms (Risse, 2000).

Constructivism has succeeded in making the social aspect one of the key factors in explaining political phenomena using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is now widely accepted not only as a productive analytical tool but also as a significant unit of political analysis. This is at the heart of the thesis hypothesis that the ideas and meanings within the discourse of Rouhani and Ghalibaf during the electoral campaign in 2013 are the key to understanding and explaining the role of sanctions in affecting Iran's nuclear choices that shaped Iran's nuclear policy after the 2013 elections.

#### 5.3.4.1. Political discourse

Discourse is a process of 'interrelated statements' that by nature contain classifications, notions, and analogies. These intersubjective statements allow the world of politics to be rendered meaningful (Moshirzadeh, 2007). This thesis attempts to dig deeper into the main texts of the discourses of the 2013 presidential candidates. To do so, the thesis adopts a constructivist approach that focuses more on a discursive approach through meanings and ideas. Political discourse involves the texts and speeches of politicians, high-level bureaucrats, and political officers. For instance, presidents, prime ministers, ministers, members of parliament, mayors, deputies, and party members on local, national, and international levels. In addition, candidates for popular elections are those who intend to stand for election and take office (Dijk, 1998). More precisely, Liebes and Ribak (1991) defined political discourse as a very well-prepared linguistic strategy that serves specific goals. Normally, such a strategy involves texts from debates, speeches, and hearings (Liebes and Ribak, 1991).

Speakers use discourse for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways, for example, by blaming others, making excuses, presenting themselves positively, etc. (Gill, 2000). The public and voters to whom a communicative discourse is directed also contribute to the process because “as members of the electorate, their voices are heard in opinion polls, surveys, focus groups, and, of course, in an election where actions speak louder than words” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 310–311).

Political discourse analysis, therefore, should be focused on the relations between the structures of the discourse and the structures of the political context. In addition, metaphors in politics can be used as political means, for example, in attacks on political competitors, to present or suggest policies, or to legitimise the current political power (Dijk, 1998). Dijk also describes political discourse in relation to campaigning politicians:

Campaigning politicians will speak about themselves as candidates, about the elections, about voting for them, and the policies they promise to support when elected. They speak about opponents and political rivals and the bad politics and policies of previous presidents, governments or parliaments. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for speakers of the opposition, dissidents and those who challenge political power. More officially, governments or parliaments also refer to their own policies and political actions in decision-making discourse (Dijk, 1998, p. 25).

Constructivist theory serves to justify the importance of Rouhani and Ghalibaf’s discourses in mobilising people during campaigning, as their discourses are political and constitute meanings in a political context. A well-prepared discourse can form human consensus, which is necessary first for spreading shared ideas and second for empowering these ideas to be dominant through voting. Shared ideas and values constituted the Iranian identity and interests.

#### **5.4. The effectiveness of economic sanctions on policy change from a constructivist perspective**

The effectiveness of economic sanctions has long been a matter of contestation among scholars, and this essentially depends on sanctions to convince or force a particular state to alter or change its policy. The dispute among scholars was widening based on evidence of some failed and successful episodes they had studied.

##### **5.4.1 Dynamics of the effectiveness of economic sanctions**

As the sanctions scholarship has been growing, it has recently shifted the focus to measuring its effectiveness from answering the dominant conventional question, “Do economic sanctions work?” to a more comprehensive and insightful question, “When do economic sanctions work?”.



The latter opened new windows for policymakers and academics to identify what factors may undermine the effectiveness of sanctions and under what conditions economic sanctions work better. Because I have reviewed the effectiveness of sanctions in depth in chapters 2 and 3, I will shed light briefly on some conditions and factors that may decrease or increase their effectiveness to underpin the thesis framework that combines ideational elements and sanctions effectiveness.

But before that, it is useful to mention again some successful episodes of imposing sanctions, including on WMD and proliferation, such as Iraq in 2002, when the IAEA confirmed that Iraq no longer has a nuclear programme or WMD facilities. Authors have proven that economic sanctions against Iraq have succeeded and that the invasion of Iraq is related to "systematic misrepresentation" (Lopez and Cortright, 2004); sanctions outcomes in Libya in 2003: some authors found that the sanctions against proliferation in Libya were effective and extracted a significant concession from Qaddafi's regime to change Libya's WMD policy, announcing in 2003 the end of the programme (Barnum and Fearey, 2016; Lopez and Cortright, 2004); and South Africa, when the sanctions led to the end of the Apartheid regime in 1990 (Brooks, 2002). Also, sanctions against Yugoslavia from 1992 to 1995, as they were vulnerable to the effects on the economy; and against the coup in Haiti from 1994, which ended when Haiti's military coup occurred (*ibid.*).

Although the effects of sanctions (material reality) are considered the cause, according to the authors, they might or might not be the only crucial cause of success. The ideational elements (beliefs, assumptions, understandings, and values) of every actor in every episode in a particular social context might have played a supportive role in achieving success. On the one hand, scholars have studied some factors, such as (i) the sender's goals: When sanctions seek to achieve goals such as compliance, subversion, and deterrence, they fail. However, when sanctions seek to achieve international and domestic symbolism, they succeed (Lindsay, 1986). While Nossal (1989) found that when sanctions serve as punishment, they succeed in achieving the deterrence goal by preventing other states from violating international norms, (ii) third party: a third party can effectively affect the effectiveness of sanctions by subverting the sanctions regime and assisting the target (Eyler, 2009).

(iii) duration: the imposition of sanctions within this factor is costly, and most long cases failed, compared to shorter cases that were more successful (Bolks and Al-Sowayel, 2000); and (iv) the role of international organisations within international cooperation in imposing sanctions: international institutions are crucial to increasing the likelihood of effectiveness because they have tools and laws to compel the member states to comply with international norms and sanctions regimes (Nossal, 1989).

On the other hand, optimistic scholars have studied under which conditions sanctions effectiveness is more likely to occur. Some of these conditions include (i) international cooperation (Bapat et al., 2013; Drezner, 2000; Martin, 1992); a collective action of imposing sanctions through international cooperation is significant if the third party does not play a fundamental role as well as the major sender does not pay a high price; international institutions are necessary for solidifying coalitions among senders; cooperation outside of international institutions is ineffective and leads to tangible worse consequences even more than unilateral efforts; international institutions and severe sanctions are 'positively and robustly' connected and contribute to the success of sanctions. (ii) political stability: leaders are more likely to lose their positions when sanctions are in place (Marinov, 2005). (iii) heavy costs: economic sanctions are more likely to increase the currency crises in the target states; economic sanctions increase the corruption and robbery rate; sanctions are more likely to destabilise the financial stability of targets and have severe effects on economic growth (Hatipoglu and Peksen, 2018; Petrescu, 2016; Peksen and Son, 2015).

(iv) regime type: democratic states are more successful when they impose economic sanctions, and they generate a positive outcome on the target than non-democratic states; comprehensive sanctions against democratic states lead to change policy; democratic states are more vulnerable and have less ability to resist sanctions; the threat of imposing sanctions encourages public protest in the target state; the interaction between government crises and polity is statistically significant (Grauvogel, Licht, and Soest, 2017; Major, 2012; Lektzian and Souva, 2007; Evenett, 2002; Hart, 2000); and (v) issue salience: how states perceive the issue(s) matters in determining the outcomes; A perception from the sender of issue salience would increase the likelihood of sanctions' success, in contrast to the target's perception. There is a strong relationship between the sender's perception of the issue's salience and their obligations to achieve success (Ang and Peksen, 2007).

One can notice that most of these conditions are applied to the Iranian case. For instance, international cooperation especially through imposing sanctions on Iran by international institutions such as the EU and the UN; and heavy costs as explained in chapter 4 which provided data and statistics on economic and social indicators that were sharply affected when sanctions were in place; regime type as Iran a democratic state according to the parliamentary, municipal and presidential periodical elections, especially the later as it contributes to punish or reward the incumbent based on their performance during sanctions as well as election an actor who may engage positively with the sanctions regime; and issue salience as a presidential candidate has perceived and explained in his discourse that the effects of sanctions require a new flexible nuclear choice as a high issue salience driven by Iran's identity and interests.

#### 5.4.2. The issue salience of the effects of sanctions in elite discourse matters in shaping Iran's nuclear choices

Issue salience has become one of the most prominent areas of research in political life, especially among the electorate, public opinion, the general public, political parties, parliaments, and the media (Oppermann and Viehrig, 2011). Issue salience can be defined as "the attention and importance an issue receives in public" (Janusch, 2021, p. 56). In international relations, it can be defined "as the degree of importance or value attached to that issue by the states" (Ang and Peksen, 2007, p. 137).

As we noticed, 'importance' has been mentioned in the above definitions; this may reflect how assessment and measurement of issue salience rely on asymmetric or symmetric perceptions among actors dealing with a particular issue. Individual perceptions of issue salience should interact with the political environment to boost the information levels of citizens because issue salience and the political environment both contribute to political information levels (Hutchings, 2001). The notion of salience is considered a key issue as it refers to the fact that some ideas and meanings of the discourse are more activated than others (Falk, 2014). Issues are not fixed in their effect on the public; they, for instance, vary over time in their salience and their impact on presidential approval; they also affect the public directly regarding the evaluation of the president (Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch, 1995).

Generally, considering discourse, the measurement of issue salience can be done based on two kinds of issue salience: retrospective and contemporaneous. Retrospective salience means that analysts now see a particular issue as salient, while contemporaneous salience means that the actors thought the issue was salient at the time they were resolving it (Epstein and Segal, 2000). It can also be measured based on 'preference': favouring or disfavouring a particular issue (case); 'extent': to what degree they favour or disfavour the issue (case); and 'act': by ranking how they feel about each of several issues (Etzioni, 2016). These measurements can take the form of public opinion polls or media content analyses (Oppermann and Spencer, 2013).

In articulating foreign policy analysis, especially through elite discourse, scholars have studied the issue salience to capture the distinction between high and low salience preferences. Yet, salience might be ignored in foreign policy in two ways: (i) when it is not considered and policymakers try to resolve a long list of problems they see as if they are all of the same import; (ii) when policymakers neglect the fundamental factors and attribute salience to less important ones (Etzioni, 2016).

Linguistically speaking, some authors have linked issue salience with a metaphor when analysing foreign policy, as the latter frames the former because it relates to the realm of cognitive analyses of foreign policy. Issue salience and metaphor in discourse are concerned with the priming of issues in the foreign policymaking environment, as they are a well-established tool of foreign policy analysis and embody cognitive heuristics that help decision-makers and the general public alike to know better about foreign policy problems (Oppermann and Spencer, 2013). In analysing foreign policy, the concept captures a cognitive shortcut for human actors to assess which information they process before making a decision (ibid.). As such, one can realise how the issue salience has become one of the fundamental areas of analysing discourse, particularly those that relate to the interests of people.

Comprehensive sanctions, not smart or selective ones, influence people's daily lives. They have recently joined and become one of the research areas in the above list that have received attention and contributed to increasing the effectiveness of sanctions. The engagement of actors, directly or indirectly, in argumentative communication in order to express their goals, interests, and stances might have some lack of clarity, misunderstanding, or/and different assessment about an issue under dispute might be perceived between two persons, states, or groups differently according to the level of importance to both of them. For example, (a) an issue under dispute (for example, economic sanctions effects on the economy) along with the difference in value attached to 'asymmetric perceptions' of actors can be perceived as having high salience for the actor (b), whereas the same issue can be perceived as having low salience for the actor (c), which implies a determination from the actor (b) to succeed and non-resistance and "compliance" from the actor (c) (Ang and Peksen, 2007). Sustainable sanctions backed by salient issues increase the likelihood of concession if the sanctions are severe and not weak (Whang, 2010).

If the target has reason to believe that the sender is resolute in his current stance, and hence is unlikely to be satisfied with the status quo, the target will generally take this information into consideration and predict that sanctions will be imposed. If it is clear that the sender's interest in the issue at stake is strong and that he has much to gain from concessions, the target can infer that the sender's tough talk is not an empty threat. Thus, sanctions based on salient issues will be more likely to produce policy shifts in the target state (Whang, 2010, p. 564).

Ang and Peksen (2007) found a significant relationship between how states (actors) perceive the issue(s) at dispute matters in forming sanctions outcomes; that is, a high level of perception from the sender of issue salience increases the possibility of sanctions succeeding, while the

target's perception of issue salience does not significantly affect the outcomes of sanctions, and the level of commitment of states to seek positive outcomes in a particular case is subject to perceptions of issue salience. The difference in the level of perception of actors can be attributed to their ideational elements such as values, beliefs, assumptions, and understandings, which in turn construct their identities and thus shape their interests within discourse. As "identities are the basis of interests" (Wendt, 1992, p. 398).

As such, understanding and explaining the Iranian case of a flexible nuclear choice can be done adequately based on discourse analysis of issue salience and ideational elements of actors regarding the imposition of sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme is interesting, as well as the ways in which actors perceived and expressed them. In this context, the departure point can be the Iranian elite, including the presidential candidates for the election of 2013, who perceived asymmetrically the effects of economic sanctions on the economy and the need for a new flexible nuclear choice. The relative weight of values and issues when evaluating plays a crucial role in perceiving a particular issue as having high or low salience for both actors.

Social constructivism plays a key role and provides a solid ground for exploring the salience of issues through discourse analysis as we pursue unpacking the salient issues related to the effects of sanctions and Iran's nuclear choice. The importance of specific issues to the public also varies over time and is closely tied to objective conditions such as unemployment, inflation, international tensions, or racial conflict (Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch, 1995). Decision-makers utilise the salience of foreign policy issues domestically to identify the most important issues for evaluating the potential domestic effects of their decisions (Oppermann and Spencer, 2013).

studying the salience of foreign policy issues at the level of the domestic principles of decision-makers is to probe into the heuristics of decision-makers to assess their domestic pressure and leeway for action. Investigating metaphors at the level of public discourse, in turn, is a means to both discern the metaphors decision-makers have employed to make sense of foreign policy problems and analyze the effects of metaphors in preparing the ground for certain foreign policy choices in the domestic arena (ibid., p. 41).

In the context of the effects of economic sanctions 'material reality,' they have no meaning by themselves unless understood in the social context. The discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf may have been driven by the dynamics of ideational elements that reflected the high or low importance of the issue under dispute. If both have different views and ideas on the main cause of economic harm as well as different approaches to resolving economic problems, this, in turn, leads to producing different approaches to Iran's nuclear choices within the 'logic of appropriateness', as they believe that everyone is behaving appropriately to act. When decision-

makers have their own opinions on international affairs and are considering how to make use of their 'institutional competencies' to impact foreign policy, they will essentially counsel information on particular issues to which they attach the highest salience (Oppermann and Spencer, 2013).

Election campaigns, including speeches and interviews, can be seen as a social context where candidates and voters communicate and discuss preferred policies that are considered a high issue salience, especially for voters. Mutual ideas provide further details and may guide, in some circumstances, a particular candidate to reconsider, revise, reflect, and adopt salient issues that have a high value attached to the new ideas. Ang and Peksen (2007) have identified some serious threats that can be highly salient issues, such as national security or regime stability, as they contribute to successfully gaining outcomes. These threats can be found in Iranian narratives as main interests articulated through the discourses of Khamenei, Rouhani, and Ghalibaf; however, they have been perceived differently concerning sanctions effects and the nuclear programme:

If the issue under dispute is viewed as having high salience, such as a serious threat to territorial integrity, national security, or regime stability, the state will be more willing to incur higher costs to protect its interests. They should be more determined to achieve their foreign policy goals, which will consequently increase their chances of obtaining a successful outcome in the dispute (Ang and Peksen, 2007, p. 138).

The salience of foreign affairs issues domestically is a determinant of domestic constraints on the making of foreign policy, where these constraints will be a more important issue that is highly salient to public opinion, members of parliament, and political parties compared to the low salience of other issues to these actors (Oppermann and Spencer, 2013). Although material resources are significant in explaining political phenomena in world politics, they are inadequate to understand Iran's nuclear choices per se. A combined theoretical framework that brings together material realities with ideational elements within discourse analysis enables us to understand and explain the change in Iran's nuclear policy. This will essentially be achieved by relying on the impact of Iran's identity and interests on affecting ideas and meanings constructed mainly within the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf using a social constructivist approach.

This also helps to understand how Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan, as actors, constructed and shared with voters their particular ideas, values, knowledge, and current and future policies, including nuclear choices and the prospects of economic sanctions. In this

context, one can argue that the assessment of the impacts of the economic sanctions, along with the actors' ideational elements, has shaped Iran's nuclear interests through presidential candidates' discourse during the 2013 election.

The Iranian case requires an approach that provides insights that realist approaches do not provide, especially the social instruction of 'identities and interests'. Therefore, social constructivism provides a causal interpretation to complement realism and adds the 'ideas and meanings' that contribute to shaping foreign policy. Hence, social constructivism suits my work more adequately than other alternative theories, for it can access, through discourse, the relationship between the social structure, material resources, and ideational elements as well as focus on the importance of norms, meanings, and discourse in constituting identity, which ultimately contributes to constructing self-interest and Iran's nuclear choices. Applying a strategic-relational logic explores the effects of economic sanctions that provide a particular ideational context in which particular nuclear choices are preferred over others and where operationalising policies depend on the elected president, who announced particular policies through his texts and discourse.

## **5.5. Conclusion**

The chapter illustrated how social constructivism is a necessary theory to address the research puzzle and questions. The chapter also demonstrated the limits of theories such as realism and liberalism in addressing the research puzzle and questions because they ignore the role of social and domestic structures as well as ideational elements in producing policies and changing states' behaviour. The chapter compared IR theories, highlighting their different assumptions on agent and structure, identities and interests, and the role of domestic politics in foreign policy. It set out constructivist assumptions about the social world and provided a causal interpretation of the importance of ideational elements along with material realities in producing a new nuclear choice. This, as summarised, can be achieved through a causal analysis between social structure and individuals, especially the construction of identities, interests, and policies, including nuclear policy, through expressing particular ideas and meanings within the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf. The chapter also provided insights on whether the effects of economic sanctions on the economy require new flexible nuclear choices as an issue with high or low salience between Rouhani and Ghalibaf, considering the effects of sanctions, mismanagement, economic harm, nuclear negotiations, enhancing economic management, constructive interaction, and resistance and internal cohesion.

## 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the theoretical approach of the study. This chapter now explains the methodology underpinning the research. This research is a qualitative, in-depth case study of Iran based on a social constructive framework to analyse the elite discourse that explains and constructs the effects of economic sanctions and responses to Iran's nuclear choices if elected. First, the chapter outlines the research design, data gathering and analysis, and interviews. Second, it explains the theoretical orientations in relation to the methodology. Finally, the chapter sheds light on ethical issues and methodological problems such as data access, bias, and validity.

## 6.2 Research design

### 6.2.1 Aim of the thesis

This thesis aims to explain the role of discourse in presenting material and ideational elements of Iran's nuclear choices through an examination of elite discourse in the 2013 election and how they construct the effect of sanctions driven by conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. Two different conceptions concerning its economic harm and nuclear choices have emerged in the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf. Therefore, analysing their discourses relies on their conceptions of Iran's identity and interests, which influenced them relatively to construct the discursive elements on the salient issue of the elimination of the effects of sanctions and improving the economy requires a new, flexible nuclear choice.

This thesis explores the effects of the UN, the US, and the EU economic sanctions on Iran from 2006 to 2013, as 2006 is the date of imposing sanctions, while 2013 is the date of Rouhani's election and the beginning of serious negotiations leading to the JCPOA. In chapter 2, the thesis reviews the literature on sanctions, notably on economic sanctions as a tool of foreign policy to change policies and/or behaviours of the target state. This entailed exploring which conditions and factors might determine or increase the likelihood of the effectiveness of economic sanctions are consistent with the Iranian episode. The next step is to identify and analyse the competing discourses of Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan on economic harm, their approaches to resolving economic harm, and their approaches to Iran's nuclear choices. driven by their ideational elements.



Analysing their discourse will be parallel with findings of elite interviews I conducted with experts and academics in the economy, elections, nuclear proliferation, and economic sanctions. The thesis, therefore, relies on a social constructivist approach to do that in order to gain a better understanding of how these issues were constructed in their discourses along with considering the narratives of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Khamenei, and domestic newspapers. This enables us to understand the indirect relationship between the effects of economic sanctions and changes in Iran's nuclear choices. In other words, the effects of economic sanctions may have deepened the economic hardship. Hence, some candidates may have framed this relationship clearly in their discourses and texts to gain electorate support. Economic sanctions have multiple effects on target states, but the central effect in the Iranian case appears to be the framing of Iran's nuclear choices within the texts of the presidential candidate in the 2013 elections, driven by their conceptions of Iran's identity and interests.

The existing literature still has a gap about this role, as it is still ambiguous and difficult to identify and explore the effect of economic sanctions in influencing Iran's nuclear choices. Exploring this role will contribute to the wider scholarship on the success and failure of sanctions in changing nuclear proliferation policy. In other words, the literature has not examined the fundamental role of discourse in presenting material and ideational elements during Iran's presidential elections in creating a new policy different from the nuclear policy adopted by Ahmadinejad from 2005 to 2013. Iran's policy change concerning its nuclear activities occurred over a long time, after imposing gradual economic sanctions on Iran from 2006 to 2015. Exploring the political impact of economic sanctions as a vital factor in nuclear policy change is significant in understanding the probability of economic sanctions' effectiveness in nuclear non-proliferation. Therefore, this thesis examines two propositions:

I. Economic sanctions on Iran's nuclear programme are characterised by SIMCA conditions that have had severe effects on Iran; therefore, Rouhani and Ghalibaf are more likely to frame the economic factor more often than other factors. Yet, according to their different ideational elements and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests, they may adopt different approaches to address the economic problems, either through lifting the sanctions or enhancing management. One of them requires a flexible nuclear choice, while the other does not.

II. The effects of economic sanctions could affect Iran's nuclear choices within the discourses of some presidential candidates, and this could contribute later on to restricting Iran's nuclear programme through nuclear negotiations if a moderate candidate is elected. The difference between the approaches and discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in framing the real effects of the sanctions may be attributed to their ideational elements in terms of their ideological values, experiences, the different political factions to which they belong, and beliefs, especially different conceptions of Iran's identity and interests.

### 6.2.2. Theoretical orientation

This study belongs to qualitative research. Qualitative research tends to deal with the world 'out there' not by using a positivist scientific context, but in specific ways to understand and explain social and political phenomena. The case study approach is used when the case is an object of interest and can be explored and examined in depth (Bryman, 2012). The case study can be defined according to Bennett (2004) as "a well-defined aspect of a historical happening that the investigator selects for analysis, rather than a historical happening itself" (Bennett, 2004, p. 21). It can also be defined as:

Research which has been fed by many different theoretical tributaries, some deriving from social science, stressing social interaction and the social construction of meaning in situ; others, deriving from medical or even criminological models, giving far more emphasis to the 'objective' observer, studying the case (Stark and Torrance, 2005, p. 33).

This thesis cannot achieve its task with a positivist approach. The reason is attributed to positivist methodological criteria that rely mainly on closed physical systems for controlling and falsifying knowledge. The vast bulk of qualitative research approaches tend to focus on a combination of (i) analysing the experiences of groups and individuals; (ii) analysing communications and interactions; and (iii) analysing all types of documents (Flick, 2007). The thesis intends to investigate an in-depth Iranian case study by investigating the political phenomenon of the role of the effects of economic sanctions in affecting Iran's nuclear policy through language, especially the discourse of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in light of Iran's identity and interests that can be relied on in the elite discourse of Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan. This cannot be examined by using positivist approaches because these are: (i) dualist and objectivist, i.e., the researcher should be separate from the research; (ii) it separates the facts from values data 'theory-free', and describes the truth using consistent terms; (iii) it believes that human knowledge of the world is fallible and theory-laden (Smith, 1993).

Bryman (2012) summarises the main principles of positivist approaches, which are in contrast to post-positivism and constructivism: (i) confirmed knowledge and phenomena by the senses, which can only guarantee the knowledge; (ii) it seeks to generate hypotheses of a theory that can be tested and allow an explanation of the laws to be evaluated; (iii) knowledge is achieved by collecting facts that provide the essential basis for laws, and; (iv) it distinguishes between ‘scientific statements’ and ‘normative statements’ and the belief that ‘scientific statements’ are the real scope of the scientist (ibid.). The ontological and epistemological assumptions of positivism are not appropriate for the interpretative analysis of the political phenomenon that this study seeks to explain. Bryman stated, “The study of the social world, therefore, requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order” (Bryman, 2012, p. 27).

The main difference between interpretivism and positivism lies in the types of questions we ask as well as the results we desire to get. Lin (1998) explained these differences based on details of preferences, motivations, and actions:

Both forms of qualitative work look for details about preferences, and motivations. Actions that are not easily made numeric. Positivist work, however, seeks to identify those details with propositions that then can be tested or identified in other cases, while interpretive work seeks to combine those details into systems of belief whose manifestations are specific to a case. While both, in the end, can comment on general principles or relationships, positivist work does so by identifying general patterns, while interpretive work does so by showing how the general pattern looks in practice (Lin, 1998, p. 163).

The methodological orientation of this study, therefore, does not use a positivist approach. Moreover, it does not aim to measure econometrically the effectiveness of the economic sanctions on Iran’s nuclear policy in terms of unemployment, inflation, or GDP growth. Alternatively, it is influenced by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a constructivist logic regarding the role of discourse in presenting material and ideational elements that influenced conceptions of Rouhani and Ghalibaf of identity and interests in shaping Iran’s nuclear choices. The case study strategy has two parts: (i) an empirical inquiry that examines a ‘contemporary phenomenon’ in the context of real life when ‘boundaries’ between phenomenon and context are not clear; and (ii) an inquiry that deals with a ‘technically distinctive situation’ when having many other variables than the data show and benefiting from the theoretical propositions that drive data collection and analysis (Yin, 2003).

Social constructivism assumes that there are multiple realities, not just one; there are no universal laws; there is no absolute truth; the reality is socially constructed; moreover, it seeks to understand more than explain, and it believes that people's values are subjective. It claims that the political world is socially constructed and that the world is what we make (Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1999). Knowledge, behaviours, identities, interests, and language exist in social contexts, and people in these contexts interact and negotiate. Constructivism offers a model of analysis based on 'imbrications' among social facts, in which imbrications are considered an element of the explanation along with causal elements and variables (Wendt, 1999). It also emphasises that all knowledge develops based on social interaction and language use. It attributes states' behaviour mainly to its ontological assumption that interests and identities are endogenously given and rely on interaction and learning processes and institutions, and thus are dependent variables. On this basis, a social constructivist approach underpins the thesis to address its puzzle and questions.

### **6.2.3. Qualitative approach**

Most of this thesis' data is qualitative. The collected data essentially consists of words, such as spoken statements, interviews, discourses, and written documents. A comparative or quantitative study would be too general given the specific focus on the Iranian case and would not be able to explore and identify in detail the relationship between economic sanctions and nuclear choices. The study's methodology is appropriate, and the research questions are accurately related to the outcomes of the economic sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation. The study considers Iran's nuclear choices as the dependent variable (DV); economic sanctions and Iran's identity and interests as the independent variable (IV), while presidential elections, elite discourse, and actors' ideational elements are the intervening variables (IV).

#### **6.2.3.1. Research parameters**

Economic sanctions can be imposed for different reasons, such as human rights, democratisation, and the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical (NBC) weapons. They are often imposed in response to violations of international norms. Iran has been sanctioned several times since 1979 until the present for several reasons, including the nuclear programme. This thesis investigates the imposed economic sanctions against Iran due to nuclear proliferation from 2006 to 2013. This study is neither interested in conducting an empirical analysis of the presidential elections of 2013 nor conducting an econometric analysis of the effect of economics on the Iranian economy, unemployment, inflation, GDP, or other economic factors. Furthermore, it does not analyse all Iranian newspapers or all texts of other candidates in the 2013 presidential elections.

### 6.2.3.2. Methods and data collection

The following methods are necessary for achieving the task of this thesis. It helps in addressing the main and sub-questions of this study. The research required data on the effectiveness of economic sanctions against nuclear proliferation, economic harms, and the stances of moderates and conservatives towards the nuclear programme. This included data on the discourses and texts of Rouhani and his main opponent Ghalibaf. These data are accessible and collected from various sources. Therefore, alongside documentary data, interviews are the other main method of this study.

#### Documentary data

Many types of useful and necessary documentary data have been collected to address the main and sub-questions of the thesis. Data can be classified into three main categories: (i) electoral materials, including discourses and texts of Rouhani, Ghalibaf, and Khamenei, and newspaper texts of Shargh, Kayhan and the electorate's views; (ii) statistical data, including think-tank reports and working papers, and national and international opinion polls on Iranian public opinion; (iii) data from elite semi-structured interviews; and (iv) data on the effects of economic sanctions, which include international and Iranian official websites with statistical data on the economy, i.e., GDP, unemployment, and inflation, in relation to the effects of economic sanctions, and any other beneficial recourses.

In order to support the first proposition explained above, data was collected from the texts of Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan during the election campaigns about the effects of sanctions on the Iranian economy to identify the main cause of Iran's economic harm. To support the second proposition, data was collected on Rouhani and Ghalibaf's approaches to resolving Iran's economic harm and their approaches to Iran's nuclear choices considering Iran's identity and interests. These data show how the two candidates have framed the relationship between the effects of economic sanctions, nuclear programmes, and economic harm and how they propose to resolve such problems, in particular with respect to negotiations on the nuclear issue or through improving the management of the economy.

#### Interviews

A set of semi-structured interviews was conducted with experts, analysts, academics, politicians, and people in the realm of policymaking. The main purpose of these interviews was to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the extent to which economic sanctions affected Iran's nuclear policy. More specifically, the interviews aim to explore how the participants: (i) evaluated the effects of economic sanctions on Iran, particularly on the economy, in terms of unemployment,

GDP, and inflation; (ii) the real causes of the economic harm in Iran from 2006 to 2013; (iii) how Rouhani and Ghalibaf produced within their texts the relationship between the effects of the economic sanctions and economic harms, and; (iv) to what extent the beliefs and understanding of Rouhani and Ghalibaf of Iran's interests regarding the effects of economic sanctions and its nuclear choices (as they belong to moderates and conservatives respectively) contributed to the framing of Iran's nuclear choices through their texts differently.

### Interviews sample

Interviews were conducted with 15 elite participants. They were carefully selected based on their related positions, interests, and disciplines. The interviews were conducted with participants from the fields of economic sanctions, nuclear proliferation, and Iran. Participants were identified based on their contribution to the topic in terms of their published papers, books, and articles, as well as their experience. All participants were interviewed individually and voluntarily without financial reward or reimbursement. It would be difficult to have probabilistic sampling and comprehensive interviews with people relevant to the effectiveness of economic sanctions on Iran in affecting its nuclear choices because of the limitations of the thesis scope and the multiple sub-objectives of this thesis. Alternatively, non-probabilistic methods were used to obtain an interview sample. Snowball sampling was a useful approach. Ethical approval for interviews was granted by the University of York Economics, Law, Management, Politics, and Sociology (ELMPS) Ethics Committee.

### Interviews' structure

The interviews were qualitative without a fixed format and contained exploratory, open-ended questions drawing on the backgrounds of the participants. Participants were asked to respond to questions on different themes, such as the effects of economic sanctions on Iran, Iran's nuclear choices, policymaking, and the discourses and texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf during the election. Because of COVID-19, all interviews were conducted remotely via the online platform Zoom, and audio recordings were made with participant approval. The data were recorded and transcribed in the English language. In electronic form, all notes and transcriptions were kept as password-protected files on the University of York server. The interview transcripts were transferred to the university server and accessed remotely while keeping a secure backup. Data will not be kept beyond the standard five years after the completion of the study.

### Elite discourse during elections

In 2013, the moderate candidate, Rouhani, won the elections after eight years of conservative rule from 2005 to 2013, when economic sanctions over the nuclear programme were in place.

Iran changed its nuclear policy in 2015 when it reached a nuclear deal according to the JCPOA with the P5+1. Rouhani's promises and announced policies concerning the economy and the nuclear programme might have contributed to his election. I have collected and analysed 95 texts from Rouhani beginning on April 11, 2013, Ghalibaf on April 23, 2013, Khamenei on February 16, 2013, Shargh on April 11, 2013, and Kayhan on May 22, 2013, and during the presidential election campaigns until June 14, 2013. I chose Rouhani and Ghalibaf as the two candidates who received higher votes. I also chose Khamenei's discourse as the supreme leader due to the nature of the Iranian narratives and discourse that is constrained by Iran's identity and interests that can be derived from the principles of the Islamic revolution embedded within Khamenei's discourse. In addition, and to explore elite discourse broadly in society, the two main domestic newspapers of Shargh and Kayhan have been chosen neutrally in terms of their ideological affiliation when Shargh is classified as a moderate, Kayhan is conservative. These data were gathered from the internet, including mainstream media, official websites, reports, and videos.

#### 6.2.3.3. Data analysis

This thesis codes, organises, and analyses discourse based on significant themes that this study is seeking to explore along with the findings of the interviews. I analysed systematically 15 elite semi-structured interviews, considering any potential biases that may emerge in terms of confirmation bias that relies on analysing the data in a way to support my hypothesis. To avoid that, I have considered all data, including those that counter my hypothesis and arguments. I also avoided wording the questions in a way that led the participants to answer them in a desired manner. I was also aware of any potential biases that may emerge from participants, such as habituation, social acceptability, friendliness, and sponsor biases. To avoid that, I paraphrased the questions very well in an open-ended manner to gain different answers and valid data. I was aware of ethical considerations. Therefore, I conducted the interviews by following the required procedures of keeping any potential harm to a minimum, sending information sheets and consent forms, stating confidentiality, voluntary participation, and guaranteeing anonymity.

All data has been transcribed into English on the University of York servers. I analysed the interviews: starting by going through the transcripts to have the first impressions through identifying shared patterns; and annotating the transcribed data by labelling the core terms, meanings, and phrases to distinguish between different opinions and answers; after that, I aligned the emerged themes with the data through conceptualising the data by creating several codes to have categories that relevant to the themes I outlined in the analysis; in this stage, I labelled and combined categories to establish my data; after reaching this stage, I analysed and summarised the data neutrally by differentiate between the categories in terms of their

importance and support to the analysis, and finally; I wrote the findings of the interviews in (Ch 7) and incorporated them with the discourse analysis explaining how these findings support the study aims and objectives.

This study is concerned with meanings from Rouhani and Ghalibaf in their discourses considering Iran's identity and interests and other resources that framed themes within their discourses and texts. This study seeks to explore themes, such as (i) the importance of the economic factor to both candidates and voters; (ii) how Rouhani and Ghalibaf framed the relationship between the effect of economic sanctions and economic harm; (iii) the main causes of Iran's economic harm according to Rouhani and Ghalibaf; (iv) what approaches the candidates would follow to improve the economy; and (v) ways of reshaping Iranian interests through new approaches to Iran's nuclear choices if elected. I reviewed hundreds of texts belonging to Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan, and I selected and analysed only the ones that related to and presented the themes mentioned above to answer the research questions.

To analyse the data, I used the same strategy I followed to analyse the interviews. To organise and code the data in a way to gain solid, relevant, and valid results, I used the Nvivo software. I categorised the analysed data into three main categories. First, the priority of the economy, and the way that Rouhani and Ghalibaf framed the effects of sanctions with the economic harm; second, what were their approaches to solving the economic problems, and finally; what were their approaches to Iran's nuclear choices that may or may not relate to the effects of sanctions.

#### [6.2.3.4. Constructing knowledge through discourse](#)

Discourse theory offers new ways to examine: (i) the relationship between social constructions and political agency; (ii) the role of interests and identities in explaining social action; (iii) the combination of meaning and practices; and (iv) the features of historical and social change (Glynos et al., 2009). Epistemic discourse analysis is the study of the way knowledge is expressed and distributed. Structural discourse analysis perhaps characterises a cognitive element when examining the representations and underlying mental processes or methods of knowledge representations that influence the (trans)formation of mental models and the shared understandings in a society (Dijk, 2010). Since discourse is a system of meaningful practises that construct the identities of subjects and objects, it can be described as "concrete systems of social relations and practices that are intrinsically political, as their formation is an act of radical institution, which involves the construction of antagonisms and the drawing of political" (Glynos et al., 2009, p. 4).



Discourse analysis aims to examine the outcomes in relation to specific sentences and strategies and what is included and excluded in terms of the aspects of reality and options for political behaviour by particular “representations of reality” (Holzscheiter, 2014). On the other hand, critical discourse analysis differs slightly from discourse analysis. The notion of ‘critique’, which is inherent in CDA’s programme, is also understood very differently. Fairclough distinguishes three aspects of the constructive effects of discourse: first, it contributes to the construction of “social identities” and “subject position”.

Second, it is useful in constructing social relationships between people, and; third, it contributes to the construction of a system of knowledge and beliefs related to how texts signify the world, including its processes, entities, and relations (Fairclough, 1992a). The three effects are accurately compatible with the functions of language categorised as ‘identity’, ‘relational’, and ‘ideational’ (ibid.). This is crucial as the thesis analyses the discourse of Rouhani and Ghalibaf with great attention to their conceptions of Iran’s identity and interests.

Dijk (2010) claims that knowledge can be defined through the sociocultural terms of epistemic communities and their standards such as observation, inference, and discourse (the source of most shared knowledge). He considered that knowledge standards can be improved by various experts and institutions in various societies or moments in history: scholars and universities, laboratories and academies, and the mass media, as examples. Hence, knowledge for him is not a natural product that ‘grows’ on people; it is a production of thought and learning that is constructed, used, and consumed through interactions between social roles and groups and organisations (Dijk, 2010).

Dijk explained the strong relationship between discourse and knowledge by describing discourse as coherent locally and globally as well as representing knowledge:

In discourse processing, language users need to access their knowledge structures in Long-Term Memory, activate relevant portions of such knowledge, generate inferences, and use these to construe coherent textual representations in real-time, that is, within the few seconds, we have to produce or understand a sentence. At the same time, people participating in a conversation or reading text, acquire new knowledge, which needs to be integrated into what they already know (Dijk, 2010, p. 4).

In this sense, discourse serves to provide novel knowledge in a way to understand the reality of the role of sanctions’ effects as an issue salience in affecting the current nuclear choices by considering Iran’s identity and interests. This can be done by maximising the existing knowledge about sanctions’ consequences on Iran, especially for the majority of the people who

have been suffering from their effects for a long time and have the tool of change through voting for a candidate who responds positively to the sanctions regime.

#### 6.2.3.5. Approach to data analysis

The gathering and analysis of data involve various processes. The positivist research methodologies, such as descriptive and experimental research, differentiate between gathering empirical data and the analytical process, the latter of which begins only when the gathering data phase is completed. In social science, that distinction does not exist, and the analytical process can begin after gathering some initial data for the study. In qualitative research, researchers may face many difficulties in dealing with that because it is quite fast to generate a huge and cumbersome data set from the media, interview transcripts, and documents (Bryman, 2012). Bryman explained that “general approaches like grounded theory (and analytic induction) are often described as iterative—that is, there is a repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis” (Bryman, 2012, p. 566).

The constructivist approach provides insights into how people construct their knowledge based on experiences that determine reality. It also provides a broad context on how identity shapes interests within narratives including nuclear policy change. This has a central importance as a methodology of social constructivism; it can be used to gain an understanding of the role of values, attitudes, social practices, ideas, experiences and beliefs in constructing our social world. Political discourse analysis, therefore, focuses on the relations between the structures of the discourse and the structures of the political context. The purpose is to understand the texts of candidates by investigating the effects of sanctions on Iran’s nuclear choices, and this helps in illustrating the essential factors in data analysis and maintains accuracy during the research data process.

### 6.3. Methodological problems

In order to conduct valid and reliable research, researchers need to be aware of some methodological problems, such as the ability to access the required data, avoid bias, and meet the validity requirements.

#### 6.3.1 Data access

The effects of economic sanctions on Iran in the context of the nuclear programme have always been ambiguous from the Iranian side. Yet they were trying to minimise these effects driven by the pride of the Persian nation and revolutionary principles such as resistance that shaped their identity, especially after the Islamic Revolution. Although Iran has been classified as a democratic country, in reality, it has a black record regarding human rights, specifically

regarding freedom of speech. Therefore, Iranians are somewhat conservative in expressing publicly their views on issues such as sanctions and the nuclear programme because they are considered sensitive.

Furthermore, elite narratives provide a clear understanding of the concealed attitudes of the candidates towards different policies. Most of the required data can be accessed. Yet not all data are in English. I do not speak the Persian language; however, data in Persian such as newspapers, media content, political discourses, and statements, whether spoken or written, were translated into English by a Persian speaker. I have ensured that the translation is professional and accurate. The interviews were conducted in a comfortable and flexible atmosphere since they guaranteed anonymity during and after interviews, which enabled the study to gain the required data to support the endeavours of this thesis. As I expected, the interviews were carried out easily and were conducted remotely because of COVID-19.

### 6.3.2. Bias

Bias can be defined as a ‘systematic error that is expected to occur in a given context of research, whereas ‘error’ is generally taken to mean any difference between an estimated value and the ‘true’ value of a variable or parameter, whether the difference follows a systematic pattern or not’ (Collier and Mahoney, 1996, p. 59). The participants and I may constitute the two components of bias in this study. On the one hand, participants may be biased in two ways: (i) through obstructive behaviour and withholding of information; and (ii) by determining what they feel the researcher wants to hear—the ‘good bunny syndrome’ (Bryman, 2012).

On the other hand, my bias probably related to my beliefs, assumptions, and preconceptions, and to my behaviour and responses during the interviews. I was aware of this, and I dealt with it objectively and neutrally. Moreover, a set of strategies and tactics were followed to avoid any potential bias and prejudice in this study. Strategies for interviewing elites included: (i) the design of the research should be flexible; (ii) guarantee transparency when communicating with the participants; and (iii) keeping good manners with all participants (Harvey, 2010). Some general research strategies included: (i) selecting the proper case study to be examined; (ii) multiple collected data sources such as documentary data, discourse analysis, and elite interviews; and (iii) conducting pilot interviews to refine questions and respond appropriately. I have conducted a pilot study on a smaller scale than the full-scale study. It was important for increasing the quality and efficiency of the main study. It gave solid support to continue with the main study with very minimal adjustments. It also gave similar findings to the main study.

Having “strategies not only helped avoid any potential bias but also checked the accuracy of the data from the elite interviewees. Therefore, various tools are required to avoid the prejudices of

both the researcher and the interviewees” (Liu, 2018, p. 7). The tactics included: (i) a continuous review of the interviews that were already conducted before further interviews to consider the follow-up ‘why and how’ questions and responses; (ii) the length of the interviews; (iii) reviewing the initial results with my supervisors, and (iv) ensuring that coding the data has been done in a way that is compatible with the general standards (ibid.). To avoid potential bias, I chose speeches, texts, and interviews before and during the election campaigns, regarding themes of economic sanctions effects, the main cause of economic harm, and Iran’s future nuclear choices.

### 6.3.3. Validity and reliability

Validity “is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research” (Bryman, 2012, p. 47). Bryman also mentioned several types of validity such as (i) measurement of validity, which concerns the question of whether a devised (X) measure of a (Y) concept does reflect accurately the (Y) concept that is devised to be an indication; (ii) internal or causal validity, essentially to do with the question of whether a causal relationship between several variables ‘holds water’, namely independent variables (X) is responsible for variation in the dependent variables (Y) rather than other variables; (iii) external validity concerns whether the findings of the research can be generalised and expanded to cover further contexts beyond the study scope, and; (iv) ecological validity which concerns of whether social results are useable to people’s everyday life (ibid.).

In this thesis, two types of validity (internal and external) illustrate that the effects of economic sanctions are independent variable (IV) which is responsible for any changes in Iran’s nuclear choices as a dependent variable (DV), where presidential elections, elite discourse, and members’ resources are intervening variables (IV). Data collection and analysis processes derived from political discourse and texts as well as from elite interviews generated internally valid findings. Furthermore, the findings of the economic sanctions’ effects on nuclear proliferation concerning the Iranian case can be generalised in other contexts of the imposition of economic sanctions provided that imposing SIMCA economic sanctions in democratic regimes through election campaigns can play a significant role in policy change.

### 6.4. Ethical issues

Ethical issues in research have long been a topic of contention among scholars. In recent times, this contention has increased significantly. The researchers cannot conduct any research without “risking the opprobrium of the research community” and the rigorous measures that universities, organisations, and institutions to which the researchers belong take (Bryman, 2012).

### 6.4.1. Interviewing ethics

In interviewing for research, anonymity and informed consent are critical issues that affect the reliability and quality of the research. To avoid manipulative and/or false data as well as violate the criteria of scientific research, a set of ethical principles (precautions) must be adopted by researchers and academic institutions. Therefore, most academic societies<sup>14</sup> have adopted ‘codes of ethics’ which means “the ethical rules and principles drafted by professional associations that govern scholarly research in the disciplines” (Creswell, 2014, p. 206). In this context, the University of York has an Economics, Law, Management, Politics and Sociology (ELMPS) ethics committee. Students are required to meet the ethical criteria in their research, including interviews, before beginning their research (Flick, 2007).

These principles ‘precautions’ of which the researcher needs to be aware consist of informed consent, deception, and accuracy, where fabrications, omissions, fraudulent materials, and contrivances are both unethical (Christian, 2005). The interviews were well prepared, as mentioned earlier, regarding strategies, tactics, and ethical principles (precaution) before conducting the interviews and then during the data gathering, analysis, and reporting phases. The middle phase, data gathering, plays a central role in the direction and findings of the research. Creswell (2014) emphasised some necessary procedures to take during the data collection phase, such as participants’ disruption must be kept to a minimum, alongside respect for the place of the interview; ensuring that the participants have gained the rewards; maintaining transparency and avoiding cheating participants; and avoiding gathering harmful data (ibid.).

All these procedures were followed in this study. To gain consistent and coherent results, this study designed an informed consent form in a way that prevented participants from suffering physical or psychological harm. In addition, it explains any concerns that may arise regarding informed consent and anonymity. All details about the form, including their right to know, refuse, and withdraw, were sent to the participants in advance.

### 6.4.2. Ethics in analysis and reporting

The results in this thesis were analysed and reported with a high level of accuracy and professionalism. Any level of intended or unintended misrepresentation was avoided during all phases of the research, including any other problems. Good practice in this research was applied in preparing, analysing, and reporting where the standard was followed. Gathering multiple

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<sup>14</sup> The American Sociological Association Code of Ethics, [www.asanet.org](http://www.asanet.org), and the Statement of Ethical Practices of British Sociological Association, [www.britisoc.co.uk](http://www.britisoc.co.uk).

pieces of data limits the potential for misrepresentation. My obligations as a PhD student require me to be accurate and transparent in presenting the results of this research.

## **6.5. Conclusion**

This chapter demonstrated the methodology for conducting this study. It illustrated the theoretical orientation, research design, and methods of gathering and analysing data that the thesis will follow to explore the role of discourse in presenting material and ideational elements and creating policies of Iran's nuclear choices through the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf. The chapter then revealed that qualitative research, particularly case studies, would be the appropriate approach to addressing research questions. The chapter also explained the importance of elite discourse to clearly understand the system of meanings on themes related to the economy, the main cause of the harm, the proper approaches to solving it, Iran's nuclear choices considering Iran's identity and interests, and the candidates' ideology. The chapter also explained the methodological and ethical issues of conducting reliable and valid research.

PART III – CHAPTER 7–  
DISCURSIVE DATA OF PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES’ DISCOURSE ABOUT  
ECONOMIC HARM

### **7.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter outlined in depth the methodology for conducting a case study on Iran. This chapter is the first of three chapters that analyse the discursive data collected using a social constructivist approach. This chapter examines key texts from the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf about the economy as an issue salience and the main cause of economic harm; the next chapter examines the approaches of Rouhani and Ghalibaf to solving economic harm; and the following chapter examines the approaches and policies of Rouhani and Ghalibaf to Iran’s nuclear choices based on the effects of sanctions and the ideational elements that shaped their conceptions of Iran’s identity and interests. These three chapters (7, 8, and 9) examine texts from the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf that have intersubjective meanings with Khamenei and the newspapers of Shragh and Kayhan and draw conclusions in relation to each chapter’s discursive theme.

The analysis of these chapters will also include a set of semi-structured elite interviews that complement the discursive analysis. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the role of discourse in constructing economic sanctions effects and the ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in responding to the sanctions regime and thus creating Iran’s nuclear choices by analysing wide-ranging speeches and interviews with the above actors in a narrative style. The analysis of the discourse throughout the three chapters will be conducted based on the effectiveness of the sanctions literature, especially the main issue salience of the need for a flexible nuclear choice to eliminate economic harm, and the social constructivism literature of conceptions of Iran’s identity and interests.

On this basis, analysing their discourses narratively requires setting the scene, first, considering the main actors in this analysis: Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and some experts who published or were interviewed by the newspapers of Shargh and Kayhan. The interviews and discourses of the main actors to be analysed were given during the presidential elections of 2013. The thesis focuses on three major themes: (i) the effects of economic sanctions on Iran and actors’ conceptions about the main cause of the economic harm; (ii) responses and policies actors have explained in order to improve the economy relying on their conceptions of Iran’s identity and interests; and, drawing on that, (iii) the future nuclear policies that actors explained and

constructed in their discourses, which they would adopt if elected. These themes that prevail in their discourses reveal some core ideas and meanings such as economic harm, effects of sanctions, mismanagement, nuclear negotiations, enhancing economic management, constructive interaction and resistance, and internal cohesion.

It is also important to consider the effects of economic sanctions on the economy and the need for a new nuclear choice as the main political contestation between Rouhani as a 'protagonist' and Ghalibaf as an 'antagonist'. Other dispute issues that may appear in the scene, along with the main one aforementioned, are the decisions taken when Rouhani was a chief negotiator of Iran's nuclear programme in 2005 concerning uranium enrichment suspension, nuclear negotiations, and the relationship with the West. As such, one can consider the difference in ideational elements of the main actors that constructed their ideas and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests which yielded different approaches to resolving the economic problem and Iran's nuclear choices. The latter can be achieved based on renegotiating the nuclear issue, including the willingness to constrain uranium enrichment as the 'climax' where the dispute 'conflict' among actors reaches the highest point as candidates' discourses are competing during election campaigns.

In other words, drawing on Iran's identity and interests along with his experience in military institutions that contributed significantly to constructing ideas and meanings on national pride and preserving the principles of the Islamic Revolution, Ghalibaf, as a conservative, conceived that some policies, such as acknowledging sanctions effects and renegotiating the nuclear programme, would affect Iran's national pride and the revolution when compromising its honour and dignity to gain some material benefits. On the other side, Rouhani, as a moderate, considers Iran's identity and interests, driven by his experience in diplomacy and academia, which contribute significantly to constructing his ideas and meanings about Iran's national interests and economic prosperity. Rouhani conceived that as the only rational way to improve the economy, help Iran overcome isolation and domestic insecurity, and avoid any potential military attacks. Such announced policies to the public 'voters' that were constructed within discursive practises were crucial to addressing the above contestation and paved the way for the 'conflict' resolution in the form of supporting a particular candidate who adopted a flexible approach to Iran's nuclear choice to become president.

This storytelling will be interesting through the analysis of the discourse within the three chapters. However, despite the importance of chronological order in telling the events in a linear narrative, the analysis may, in very rare places, narrate the events in nonchronological order as it focuses essentially on issues and themes that flow according to the thesis' argument. This may occur due to the 'context' and the type of discourse, including the 'interviews'. In other words,



considering the causality in discourse analysis, a valid analysis has to flow consistently and systematically. As such, the three chapters flow, commencing with the economic harm, the effects of sanctions, and the main cause of the economic harm (ch. 7); approaches to solving the economic problems (ch. 8); and approaches to Iran's nuclear choices (ch. 9).

Additionally, some actors gave, in the early stages of the election campaign, some ideas, conceptions, and assumptions on Iran's future nuclear choices before elaborating on the effects of sanctions on the economy, and this may usually happen when they comment on some statements, events, or meetings meanwhile their discourses, or in some interviews when the audience asks questions that require answers about several themes and issues. For instance, asking questions about Iran's future nuclear choice at the beginning of the election campaigns before economic harm, sanctions, and other policies that the candidates had to answer. It is also because of validity, that is, drawing on different texts from a particular actor that have been expressed in different places at different times.

This chapter shows through a systematic analysis of the elite discourse that the economy, and thus economic harm, was a high issue of salience for the public, Rouhani and Ghalibaf in intersubjective ideas with Khamenei, and the two domestic newspapers during the 2013 election. The chapter also reveals that the effects of sanctions and the ideational elements of the candidates, specifically conceptions of Iran's identity and interests had an important influence on the policies and approaches of the two actors in resolving the economic issue. These approaches were expressed differently by Shargh and Kayhan in two contradictory stances. When Shargh shared and adopted Rouhani's ideas, Kayhan shared and adopted Ghalibaf's ideas. They also sought to persuade voters to participate in the 2013 election but articulated competing discursive frames. This reflected their political affiliations as well as their evaluation of the effects of sanctions on the economy to support their preferred candidates. Where Shargh newspaper is considered reformist, Kayhan is purely conservative.

In forming economic sanctions outcomes, it matters how actors perceive issue salience in the context of sanctions scholarship (Ang and Peksen, 2007). The chapter reveals that Rouhani perceived the effects of economic sanctions on the economy and the need for a new flexible nuclear choice as having high salience, Ghalibaf, in turn, perceived it as having low salience, and both have had intersubjectivity of meanings with Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan. In more detail, two different systems of ideas and meanings have emerged over the main cause of economic harm. For instance, Rouhani considers the effects of the sanctions as the main cause of economic harm, in contrast to Ghalibaf, who considers economic mismanagement as the main cause.

The difference in their conceptions and experiences can be attributed to their conceptual-social orientation, namely, ideational elements (values, assumptions, experiences, and beliefs) and, thus, how they assess the impact of this issue salience on Iran's identity and interests. The chapter shows that all candidates, Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan, agreed on the devastated economic situation in Iran, which dominated the election campaigns as a high issue salience. The contestation about the main cause of economic harm among actors has led voters to question the realistic and rational approach to solving economic problems and related questions about nuclear choices. This enhances the importance of analysing the discourses of presidential candidates during the election, as it reveals the efficacy of the candidates in perceiving, understanding, and assessing complex issues and thus producing policies to deal with them.

The chapter first sheds light on the material resources in the economic context of the presidential elections. Second, it analyses the most important factor that has been expressed as a high issue salience for the candidates. The chapter finally conducts an analysis of the key texts from the discourses of Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan on what was the main cause of economic harm. This chapter answers research sub-question (1) by reviewing the texts from the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf about the economic factor in the election, among other factors, and sub-question (2) about how Rouhani and Ghalibaf frame the main cause of Iran's economic harm based on the difference in their perceptions.

The chapter supports the thesis's argument on the contribution of the material realities of the economic sanctions and ideational elements in influencing actors' perceptions, responses and creating nuclear choice if elected within the above discourses. In order to gain valid findings as well as a clear understanding, I will analyse 97 texts from the above actors within three chapters; therefore, to keep the analysis consistent and precise, I will conduct it relying on (a) the effects of sanctions, especially issue salience; (b) ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in terms of their 'beliefs, assumptions, experiences, and ideologies' and their different 'experiences'.

Throughout the analysis, I will keep the interviewees anonymous; therefore, I will code the interviews I conducted in initial forms as they will appear in the analysis, i.e., (NM; MZ; EL, and so forth). I will also code texts alphabetically, i.e., (Rouhani1, 2013; Ghalibaf3, 2013, Khamenei7, 2013 and so forth). For the purpose of this research and because Iranians speak Persian and follow the Persian calendar, I have translated most of the data from Persian to English. I have also converted the Persian calendar that starts on the 21st of March to a Gregorian calendar. For example, 1392, according to the Persian calendar, equals 2013 AD.

## 7.2. The findings of the interviews

This section illustrates the findings of the interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to gain novel knowledge and collect rich and intensive details about the Iran case. The interviews helped address the research puzzle and questions. The research puzzle: Iran chose a flexible approach to its nuclear programme after the presidential election of 2013. The main question is: How did economic sanctions and Iran's identity and interests affect its nuclear choices through elite discourse in the 2013 election?

More specifically, participants were asked to answer questions on the extent to which the effects of economic sanctions affect the economy as well as the discourses of the presidential candidates; the main causes behind the economic harm in Iran; the importance of linking the effects of sanctions and the economic harm within the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf to influence voters' preferences; the role of ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf and their experiences in constructing different approaches and then producing Iran's nuclear choices. They were also asked if there was a relationship between Rouhani's victory and his approach to Iran's nuclear choice through renegotiating the nuclear issue and the relationship with the West, and Iran's future nuclear choice if Ghalibaf won the elections. The findings are as follows:

- When asked about the role of the effects of economic sanctions in affecting the economy as well as the texts of the presidential candidates, the participants tended to believe that the effects of economic sanctions were severe on Iran's economy, especially on unemployment, GDP, inflation, and currency. The sanctions also contributed to creating social problems such as increasing crimes, drugs, corruption, and smuggling.
- When asked about the main cause behind the economic harm in Iran, the majority of the participants believed that the effects of economic sanctions were the main cause of Iran's economic problems during 2006–2013. Two participants believe that the main reason was the mismanagement of Ahmadinejad's government as well as the nature of the Iranian economy, which is difficult to reform in light of Western values that contradict the principles of the Islamic Revolution.
- Participants responded positively when asked about the importance of linking the effects of sanctions with the economic harm within the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf to influence voters' preferences, especially the role of ideational elements in a way they perceived and understood Iran's identity and interests. They considered a presidential election to be a crucial event when candidates communicate and deliver to the voters their assessments, approaches, and promises.

Participants believe that voters would accept the articulated approach, which considers the effects of sanctions to be the main reasons for economic harm, and thus accept the suggested solution on this basis. Two participants believe that most voters, especially conservatives, would vote in favour of a conservative candidate, no matter how they frame the relationship between the effects of sanctions and economic harm.

- When asked about the relationship between the role of ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in constituting their texts on Iran's nuclear choices, participants emphasised their ideologies, values, and understanding of Iran's interests in affecting the way they produce new texts on Iran's nuclear programme and sanctions, including new policies. When asked about Rouhani's victory, his approach to Iran's nuclear choice through renegotiating the nuclear issue and the relationship with the West, and Iran's future nuclear choice. Participants believe that the texts in which Rouhani revealed a new flexible approach to Iran's nuclear choice based on renegotiating the nuclear programme and organising the relationship with the West have contributed to his victory and reaching the nuclear deal according to the JCPOA agreement.
- On the other hand, participants tended to believe that if Ghalibaf won the elections, he would adopt an inflexible approach to Iran's nuclear choice, and this would be different from the JCPOA agreement in terms of the percentage of uranium enrichment, the kind of lifted sanctions, and Iran's gains as a whole. Three participants believe that regardless of who is the winner, Iran had to compromise its nuclear programme because of the effects of sanctions and other security concerns from Israel attacking its nuclear sites.

### **7.3. Understanding the economic context of the 2013 elections**

The purpose of this section is to show how the severe effects of 'material realities' as a result of economic sanctions and/or mismanagement affected the Iranian economy, the main determinants that influenced the outcomes of the elections, and the presidential candidates. After eight years of being ruled by the neo-conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iranians had to decide in June 2013 whether to continue to support another conservative candidate or go to the opposition camp that was led by the moderate candidate, Rouhani. The decision, though, is not constrained domestically, but the region and the international arena have some determinants that might have contributed to the outcomes of the election.

The domestic determinants can be attributed, first, to the massive protest that took place in Iran from 2009 to 2010 against the results of the 2009 presidential elections, when the Iranian authorities responded harshly to the followers of the Green Movement by arresting and violating the political and civil rights of the people (Abdolmohammadi and Cama, 2015; Ansari, 2016;

Nader, 2013). Influencing the election's results may not only occur as a result of political and security determinants but also due to economic factors (Ansari, 2016).

Iran's economy, as a domestic determinant, was in critical status in 2012 after tightened economic sanctions by the US and the EU in 2011 and 2012 before the eleventh presidential elections (Kozhanov, 2018). It has been suffering from sanctions due to the nuclear programme since 2006, as statistics illustrate. For example, according to the World Bank, in 2012 Iran had critical economic indicators: the unemployment rate was at 12.3 per cent, GDP growth was -3.7 per cent, and inflation (deflation) was at 24.01 per cent while inflation due to consumer prices was 27.25 per cent (The World Bank, 2021b). This economic fluctuation can be attributed to the embargo on Iranian oil by the EU and the US. In 2012, the EU banned the import of Iranian oil and froze Iran's assets to prevent it from continuing uranium enrichment. As a result, Iranian oil production fell sharply from 2.4 million barrels to 1.3 million barrels from January 2012 to March 2013 (Kozhanov, 2018).

Corruption also affected the economy when Iran ranked 133 out of 198 countries on the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) with a score of 28 out of 100 in 2012 (Transparency International, 2021). Understanding the context of the 2013 presidential elections within the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf and the fact that Iran was struggling economically gives a clear indicator that the economy would be the top priority for the upcoming president (Nader, 2013). Regarding regional determinants, the consequences of the massive protests in Türkiye and the Arab Spring in 2011 may have contributed to the electoral process going smoothly with a higher degree of transparency. The Iranian regime was aware of and realised the backfires that may undermine the regime and the revolutionary principles if they rig the results in such a way that might lead to another wave of massive protests similar to the Green Movement 2009–2011 (Ansari, 2016; Tavana, 2013). Unlike the 2009 elections and their aftermath, the 2013 elections went relatively smoothly and peacefully. That is, Khamenei and the public were satisfied with the process and the results. The televised debate that took place from May 31 to June 7 may also have contributed to the voter's evaluation of the candidates (Ansari, 2016).

On May 21, 2013, the Ministry of Interior released the names of the eight candidates approved by the Guardian Council after disqualifying 678 candidates (Tavana, 2013). Two candidates withdrew from the race during the election campaign: Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel from The Society of Devotees of the Islamic Revolution for the sake of conservative candidates and Muhammad-Reza Aref from the Omid Iranian Foundation, who endorsed Rouhani (BBC, 2013). Muhammad Reza Aref and two former presidents have publicly announced their support for Rouhani to increase the possibility of Rouhani's election against the conservative candidates. Those two presidents were President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, after his candidature was

rejected due to his cold relationship with Khamenei, and the reformist President Muhammad Khatami (Dehghan, 2013). It was also because they believed that to improve the economy and attract investments, Iran must get rid of its isolation and have good relations with the world (Litvak and Zimmt, 2018). After completing the qualification process, elections were held among six candidates (Iran Data Portal, 2013a):

(i) The moderate Rouhani from the Moderation and Development Party, who had previously served in many positions. For example, he worked as a secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (1989–2005), a member of the Expediency Discernment Council (1991–), a member of the Assembly of Experts (1999–), and Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator from 2003–2005 (Tavana, 2013). His slogan was: Government of Prudence and Hope.

(ii) Muhammad Baqer Ghalibaf, the conservative candidate from the Population for Progress and Justice Party, has been the main opponent of Rouhani. He had previously served as the head of the Revolutionary Guard’s air force (1996–1999), the national chief of police in 1999, and the mayor of Tehran (2005–2013). Ghalibaf also ran for president in 2005 and came in fourth. His slogan was: Change, Life, people, and A glorious Iran.

(iii) Saeed Jalili, another conservative candidate from the ‘Resistance of Islamic Revolutionary Stability. He joined the Foreign Ministry in 1989 and was later appointed a senior policy advisor in Khamenei’s office in 2001. He served as Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator and Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council since 2007, and he also participated in the Iran-Iraq war.

(iv) Ali Akbar Velayati, from the ‘Front of Followers of the Line of the Imam and the Leader’, was another veteran who had lost part of his leg during the Iran-Iraq war. He served as deputy health minister (1980–1981), Iran’s foreign minister (1981–1997), a member of the Strategic Council on Foreign Relations in 2006, and a member of the Expediency Council.

(v) Mohsen Reza from the ‘Resistance Front of Islamic Iran’. He served as the commander of the Revolutionary Guard Corps (1981–1996) and was the Secretary of the Expediency Council. Rezaei ran for presidential elections in 2005 and 2009 and lost both.

(vi) Muhammad Gharazi, an independent candidate who served as Minister of Petroleum (1981–1985) and Minister of Telecommunications (1985–1997).

The six candidates above held three televised debates on Iranian television: the economic debate on May 31, the cultural debate on June 5, and a debate on security and foreign affairs on June 7 (Tavana, 2013). This study is not interested in analysing the texts of all candidates; instead, it

focuses on the texts of Rouhani and Ghalibaf, as they were the most influential candidates and received the most votes.

On Iranian TV, the cleric Sheikh Rouhani pointed out briefly some issues that he would focus on if elected, he stated, ‘upholding justice across the country and civil rights’ as well as ‘rationality and moderation in policies’ in contrast to a hardliners’ approach (BBC, 2013). He campaigned on a platform of hope and prudence to attract traditional conservative and reformist voters alike (Bozorgmehr and Martinez, 2013). His campaign received high support from many Iranians who had suffered economically, and their country’s reputation also retreated during Ahmadinejad’s presidency from 2005 to 2013 (Naji, 2017). Rouhani also promised to protect freedoms, and even more, he indicated he would free political prisoners and jailed journalists related to the Green Movement movement.

Precisely, Rouhani, in order to influence the reformists’ voters, stated that he would release Karroubi and Mousavi from house arrest. When he ran for office, Rouhani was aware that he would enter a hard confrontation with the establishment’s majority of hardliners, who were highly doubtful of him even though he has been an essential pillar of the regime. Rouhani promised to protect and improve civil rights and restore the dignity of the nation. He faced criticism when he agreed to suspend enriched uranium while he was serving as a chief negotiator of Iran’s nuclear programme from 2003 to 2005 and became known as the diplomat sheikh (ibid.).

Rouhani’s future policies were shaped by his understanding and assessment of Iran’s interests and the fact that he would work on lifting and relieving economic sanctions with respect to Iran’s nuclear programme. This can be achieved by renegotiating the programme with a flexible approach of ‘constructive interaction’ and having all factories in Iran run, not just the ones related to the nuclear programme. Rouhani encouraged voters to vote rationally, either retrospectively, according to past economic performance, or prospectively, according to future promises and strategies. Regarding voting, the Iranian case seems to be both retrospective and prospective. That is, the voters might have voted driven by the severe effects of sanctions on the economy under Ahmadinejad’s performance and for a new, different approach towards Iran’s future nuclear programme because the latter was widely recognised as the cause of the imposition of sanctions, which consequently caused economic harm. (RN; GS; MK; and Mohseni, 2013).

On the other side, the conservative principled Muhammad Baqir Ghalibaf, known as a technocrat, ran for the presidential elections after a successful record of improving the city of Tehran when he was mayor (The Guardian, 2013). Yet, Ghalibaf has a black history of human

rights abuses, as he was criticised for the violence and repression against the student protests in 1999 when he was the commander of the Revolutionary Guards Air Force, and also in 2003, when he was the head of the Police. Not only that but he was also criticised in 2009 due to his response to the Green Movement. Ghalibaf revealed his stance during a private meeting with Basiji students a few weeks before the 2013 presidential election (Centre for Human Rights, 2013). Ghalibaf, in contrast to Rouhani, promised to solve the economic problems by enhancing the management, as he did not confess the significant role of economic sanctions' effects; thus, he promised, regarding the nuclear issue, to adopt an approach of resistance and internal cohesion according to his understanding of Iran's interests.

On June 14, Iranians voted in the eleventh presidential election to elect the seventh president of Iran. The number of eligible voters reached 50.483.192 million, with the actual number of voters being 36.821.538 million, representing 72.94 per cent of the turnout (Iran Data Portal, 2013b). Rouhani won the election in the first round, as the Iranian electoral system requires a candidate to gain over 50 per cent in the first round to avoid going to the second round. Rouhani won 51.71 per cent of the votes, earning 18,613,329 million from the first round. Surprisingly, there was a significant difference in votes—nearly three times—between Rouhani and Ghalibaf. The latter came in second with 16.55 per cent of votes, earning 6,077,292. The ranking of the rest candidates was as follows: Said Jalili, 4.168.946 (11.28%); Mohsen Rezai, 3.884.412 (10.51%); Ali Akbar Velayati, 2.268.753 (6.14%); and Muhammad Gharazi, 446.015 (1.20%) (ISNI, 2013). Public debate on such issues as the effects of economic sanctions and Iran's foreign policy regarding the nuclear programme, especially within elite texts, is restricted, ambivalent, and ambiguous due to the sensitivity of these issues in Iran as well as the nature of the Iranian Political System (BS; NH).

#### **7.4. The issue salience of the economy within Rouhani and Ghalibaf's discourses**

This section aims to explain how the economic factor as an issue salience has been considered, constructed and ranked among other factors within the discourse of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in intersubjective ideas with Khamenei and the newspapers of Shargh and Kayhan.

##### **7.4.1. Introduction**

There is a causal relationship between elections and economics, in particular, the state of the economy concerning recession which directly influences election results because voters normally punish leaders based on their economic performance (Weatherford, 1978). In other words, the growth of per capita outcomes is a more significant predictor of presidential election results than political affiliation (Erikson, 1989). Park (2018) also emphasised the role of



elections in punishing leaders' performance. Economic sanctions effects can, therefore, hurt incumbents during general elections (Park, 2018).

Some impacts of the sanctions on the economy have been mentioned in the discourse such as unemployment, economic harm and inflation. Economic sanctions can severely affect the target state's economy and inflict heavy costs when they are imposed collectively (Martin, 1992; Drury, 1998). This can be applied to the Iranian case as the economy nearly collapsed, as mentioned above in relation to statistics published by the World Bank, especially from 2011 to 2013, during the administration of Ahmadinejad, when the Iranians were seeking rational politicians who could solve Iran's dilemma, in particular, the economy. The role of trade and sanctions in influencing unemployment affects turnout in Iran's presidential elections (Hassanpour, 2017).

The economic factor is considered the most important among political and social factors in shaping election outcomes (Tufte, 1978; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000). That is, parties and incumbents' remaining in office depends on the state of the economy (Park, 2018). A prosperous economy means a higher probability of re-election, while a deteriorated economy means a higher probability of losing (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000). Tufte (1978) explained that elections and economics are robustly related to each other. More precisely, he stated that thinking about elections requires thinking about economics, and vice versa (Tufte, 1978).

#### 7.4.2. Framing the economic factor within Rouhani's texts

This section examines Rouhani's discourse about the main factor that has been considered a salient issue among other factors. It shows how Rouhani's discourse frames the economic factor as the most salient issue to be his priority if elected. The section shows serious economic problems that have been framed within Rouhani's discourse, such as inflation and unemployment, that need to be addressed. Rouhani shared ideas with Khamenei's discourse as well as some texts from the domestic newspaper Shargh. This section begins with key texts from Rouhani, Khamenei, and Shargh; framing economic harm; and framing enemies and moderation.

##### (i) Rouhani's texts:

In his official announcement of the candidature conference, Rouhnaï announced on 11/04/2013, the issues his government would focus on if elected, notably by highlighting the importance of the economy as well as lifting sanctions:

My government is a government of prudence and hope, and its discourse is to save the economy, revive morality, and interact with the world

constructively...Sensitivity is due to regional challenges, sanctions, and economic, social, moral, and management problems (Rouhani 1, 2013).

In an interview with a domestic Tehran Central News, Rouhani on 29/05/2013 explicitly announced that the economy is his top priority, followed by foreign policy to improve Iran's relationships with the entire world:

Our country now has a major economic problem... Incidentally, my most important plan after the issue of the economy and people's livelihoods is to properly organise our foreign relations with the world. We should not think that in today's world, there is a permanent friend or permanent enemy; this is a mistake that makes friendship and enmity mutually beneficial (Rouhani 2, 2013).

Rouhani, on 31/05/2013, in the presidential debate about the economy, referred to statistics to show how the negative consequences of the accumulative problem of the economy were a result of the performance of the former government as well as to show that he wanted to distinguish himself by reminding people about his educational background as a part of his resources:

Employment and lowering the unemployment rate are the most important concerns of the people when there are more than 3 million unemployed in Iranian society and more than 800,000 graduates are ready to work but do not have a job, which shows that this is the most important issue (Rouhani 8, 2013).

(ii) Khamenei's texts:

Khamenei on 27/04/2013 and 16/02/2013, respectively, referred to the economy, foreign policy, and particular characteristics that the new president should have, as well as the importance of focusing on the economy:

They should have the spirit of resistance; they should be astute and wise. I spoke about the importance of dignity, wisdom, and acumen in the arena of foreign policy. The same is true of economic issues. Candidates should adopt a comprehensive and long-term outlook, which is accompanied by proper plans, wisdom, and acumen. I spoke about political and economic courage. Iranians should remove the weak points and fill the gaps. All people should know that making a quantum leap and achieving courage is necessary for making progress. Then, the country will move forward and have stability. Political and economic deeds of valour are closely intertwined, and each of them preserves and strengthens the other (Khamenei 1, 2013).

Khamenei on 16/02/2013, in a meeting with the people of East Azerbaijan, seems to focus on the economy more than any other aspect, as he expects the enemy to put plans in place to affect Iran's economy. Therefore, he calls on officials to be aware of such plans:

Today, officials should focus all their efforts on solving economic problems. I explicitly told the people and the officials that the plot of the enemies against the Iranian nation would be to focus more than anything on our economic issues (Khamenei 2, 2013).

(iii) Shargh's texts:

Hadi Haghshenas, an economic expert, provided in Shargh's newspaper on 27/05/2013 further details about the importance of the economic issue, and unemployment in particular, and why it is important:

The most important challenges facing Iran's economy today are unemployment and inflation. We have seen double-digit unemployment rates in recent years. In some developed countries, we also see double-digit unemployment rates, but the difference is that in Iran, we have a lot of ignored capacities that can be used to reach single-digit numbers, but for various reasons, those capacities are not used. This non-use is partly due to sanctions and partly due to a lack of investment prioritisation. While our neighbours use and benefit from shared oil and gas reserves, Iran is investing elsewhere because its priority is not oil and gas. The continuation of the current trend of inflation and unemployment will lead to some social unrest and social crimes (Shargh 1, 2013).

In the Shargh newspaper, on 28/05/2013, Said Pedram Soltani, the vice president of the Chamber of Commerce set out causes that led to the economic problem in Iran, especially during Ahmadinejad's era:

In the last two governments, due to the lack of meritocracy in the selection of managers, disregard for the opinion of economic experts and incorrect and inefficient implementation of the law on targeted subsidies, has destabilised the economic components affecting the country's economy and diverted the positive direction...inflation rate, which should have been in single digits and was emphasized in the five-year plan, has reached 30.5. In addition, there is the volume of liquidity and false markets, which, according to officials and experts, have been bubbling, but ultimately have caused the devaluation of the national currency, sharp fluctuations in exchange rates, cessation or slowdown

of production cycles and reduced purchasing power...Unemployment, instability of the national currency, high inflation and negative economic growth at the macroeconomic level are the product of factors such as management, disregard for the opinion of economic experts and foreign sanctions that need to be corrected in the opposite direction (Shargh 2, 2013).

#### 7.4.2.1 Analysis

The previous texts from Rouhani's discourses are significant to the analysis and serve to properly address research questions as they demonstrate Rouhani's perception of the economy as a high issue salience for him. Rouhani provided some expressions that explained ideas and meanings based on his perceptions of Iran's identity and interests that had intersubjectivity with Khamenei and Shargh, which provided us with a broad understanding of how the economy is perceived by other actors in society. These expressions are the government of 'prudence and hope'; 'save the economy'; 'organising our foreign relations 'properly'; 'major economic problem'; 'no permanent friends and enemies; and Rouhani's concern about a 'high unemployment rate'. These expressions contribute to understanding two of the main ideas and meanings that have been set earlier in this chapter, namely, '*economic harm*' and '*enemies and moderation*' within the context of the first theme of this analysis.

#### 7.4.2.2. Framing economic harm

The three above actors have repeatedly expressed intersubjective ideas about the importance of resolving economic harm in order to achieve economic prosperity as a high issue salience. Rouhani is a main factor in this analysis, using in his discourse the adjective 'prudence' and the noun 'hope' when describing his government if elected. Rouhani declared that his future government's discourse would be to save the economy, enhance morality, and interact with the world. One can realise from the previous slogan of Rouhani's future government that resolving the economic problem is possible, and the approach should be 'prudent', as the latter includes governing and handling issues based on reasoning. This gives us an early indication that Rouhani is enough confident as well as he has a different approach compared to Ahmadinejad over having the economy in a better status. He also emphasised that he is interested in organising Iran's international relations properly.

Rouhani was aware that this approach to dealing with such issues is sensitive for several reasons due to: (i) regional challenges related to the Arab Spring where some regimes have been changed as well as Iran's involvement in countries such as Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen; economic effects; (ii) Sanctions—one can remarkably realise to what extent Rouhani's understanding of his evaluation of the economic harm was driven by the severe effects of

sanctions because he ranked them in second place and notably before; (iii) social and revolutionary morals; and (iv) mismanagement. By speaking out about such issues, especially the economy, Rouhani was responding to Khamenei's discourse when he said officials should focus on solving economic problems. He also tried to encourage Iranians to participate effectively, as Iranians would not have to participate in the elections of 2013 because of the result of the 2009 presidential election (Kamal, 2013).

One of the participants I interviewed also supported this and mentioned this particular concern: “In 2009 people protested voting irregularities what they saw as voting irregularities and voter fraud” (EL). Another participant explained that this would be a real challenge for Rouhani “*The big challenge that reformists had, was to get people to go out and vote because in 2009 the government cheated people and got imprisoned so why would people go and vote again, overall Rouhani's campaigning around the country was to convince people that 2013 will not be 2009*” (TP). In this regard, Rouhani believes in individuals’ and societal institutions’ abilities to contribute to shaping a new approach to Iran’s nuclear choices if they elect him. Individuals and societal institutions are effective in influencing the international arena based on constituting meanings and ideas within a discursive framing of their texts in line with constructivism (Wendt, 1999; Onuf, 1989; Hopf, 1998; Ruggie, 1998).

Another key point to be told here is that Rouhani assumed that Iranians were aware of the country’s economic problems, and wanted to share this hardship with them as a united nation when speaking about ‘our country’. Rouhani echoed Khamenei’s discourse about the economy, as the latter stressed officials to focus on solving the economic harm. Rouhani described them as a major problem to attract much attention to the case when he put it in the context of reality and not from his perspective, as a pressing issue related to Iranians’ livelihood that requires a comprehensive approach to be resolved. Rouhani's discourse on economics illustrates in different expressions that economic harm is a high issue salience for him. Also for political purposes, he was targeting the youth in this regard; indeed, not only Rouhani but most, if not all, candidates everywhere are trying to announce policies that are convergent with youth to attract them to their campaigns and win their votes. Rouhani declared that unemployment is the ‘most’ important issue.

These high rates contributed negatively to domestic production (Majidi and Zarouni, 2016). Another analyst who wanted to add views on the economic harm is Hadi Haghshenasin in Shargh, who identified the two biggest challenges to Iran’s economy: unemployment and inflation. According to Haghshenasin, the reasons behind the double-digit unemployment rate in Iran are sanctions and the chaos in investment prioritisation. It seems like Hadi wanted to start early, providing ideas and meanings on the relationship between economic harm and sanctions,

which supports the Rouhani perspective; however, I will confine the analysis in this section only to the impotence of the economy for those actors, where the next section will be allocated to the main cause of the economic harm. As an economic expert, Haghshenasin warned that if the current situation of high unemployment and inflation continued, this would affect the social aspect by generating social crimes and social unrest.

This relationship between economic hardship and social unrest is natural and emerges when youth cannot find jobs and when prices are rising dramatically, reducing the purchasing power of people. This relationship between unemployment and social unrest can also be found in an interview with (MK): who stated that sanctions have had severe impacts on production, which eventually led to social problems. *The impact of low production caused by the sanctions could lead to industrial restructuring and an increase in the unemployment rate, which could increase social problems. The economic sanctions themselves affected people's daily lives; in other words, the poor economic environment and the increase in the unemployment rate directly affected the lives of individuals and families in Iran.*" (MK). Not only did Hadi in Shargh provide ideas on the economic problems, but also Said Pedram Soltani in Shargh also provided detailed views on the economy as a result of Ahmadinejad's performance. Following Rouhani's ideas and assessment of the economy, which has mentioned several economic problems, he has focused on unemployment as the first affected sector, as he wants the new government to rebuild.

One can realise the way actors shared ideas and meanings about the seriousness of unemployment, especially among youth. These expressions and views regarding the impacts of sanctions on the economy, if adopted, will lead to the idea of 'economic prosperity'. Soltani also mentioned the role of the liquidity market in causing a devaluation of the currency, a slowdown in production, and a reduction in purchasing power, as the future government has to deal with such problems. There is a relationship between economic sanctions and unemployment, as the latter is considered an indirect result of sanctions alongside inflation, where the sender aims to inflict a heavy cost on a target (Martin, 2010; Giumelli and Ivan, 2013). Soltani also attributed that to three main causes: mismanagement, neglecting economic experts' opinions, and the effects of economic sanctions. Working on these issues requires relying on experts' opinions and using diplomacy to reduce the effects of sanctions.

In addition to the importance of mentioning unemployment to attract youth, Rouhani would focus on solving unemployment in several ways, including alleviating the effects of sanctions due to the heavy burdens that sanctions generated on Iran's economy. The way of perceiving sanctions as a high issue salience contributes to sanctions success (Ang and Peksen, 2007; Bapit et al, 2013). Economic sanctions are likely to contribute to the collapse of the target's currency

and, consequently, cause a financial crisis that affects economic growth (Peksen and Son, 2015). Iran had the highest percentage of people struggling worldwide in 2010, with 55 per cent compared to 12 per cent in 2005, which is nearly four times more (Clifton, 2011).

Assertion of the economic harm and his competence, Rouhani intended to attract the attention of listeners and voters alike by emphasising three points; first, he wanted to show the importance of reorganising Iran's foreign policy with the rest of the world to get rid of the severe isolation that has been imposed on Iran during Ahmadinejad's administration by linking indirectly: the solving of economic harms with economic sanctions to addressing the nuclear issue when saying 'save the economy' (Shanahan, 2015). Second, he wanted to show solidarity by telling Iranians that he already understood, realised, and was aware of their economic circumstances as one of them to attract voters in the poor and middle classes to support him.

During his campaign, especially in the first debate about the economy, Rouhani promised to improve the economy, reduce the unemployment rate, and improve Iran's relations with the international community by lifting sanctions related to Iran's nuclear programme. Rouhani produced his new texts based on the economic states to construct the above texts (Selvik, 2013). Rouhani ranked his priorities by insisting on the economy and foreign policy, which converge with voters' concerns about the economic situation (Mohseni, 2013b). That ranking was because Rouhani believes that the importance of the economy, morality, and interaction with the world is integrated as a chain that achieves security and economic prosperity. Voters generally support a candidate whose policies are consistent with their interests (Kamada and Kojima, 2014).

Third, Rouhani also wanted to say indirectly that improving economic conditions depends greatly on interaction with the world when isolation was imposed on Iran through severe sanctions to force it to renegotiate its nuclear programme. This understanding of Rouhani of Iran's identities and interests eventually led to the nuclear deal with the P5+1 in 2015 (Smeets, 2018). In the presidential economic debate, Rouhani said what Iranians want to hear from a moderate candidate compared to other conservative candidates. He shed light on this serious problem when expressing that unemployment is the greatest concern of the people, as he wanted to create a wide range of shared commonalities with voters. Convergence between the announced policies of candidates and voters' preferred policies, especially economic policy, may influence voters' preferences (Krause, 1997; Kamada and Kojima, 2014). Iranian voters expected Rouhani to improve the economy, develop Iran's relations with the world, continue the nuclear programme, and lift or alleviate sanctions (Mohseni, 2013).

Rouhani's victory might be preferred to Khamenei, as he wanted an ideal candidate to minimise the foreign military threats against Iran's nuclear programme (Sherrill, 2014). In a more precise view, Rouhani's election might have been based on 'economic urgency' as voters expected Rouhani to improve the deteriorated economy (Ansari, 2016). On this basis, one can assume that Rouhani conceived the effects of sanctions as a threat to Iran's interests; therefore, he realised that sanctions must be lifted in order to improve the economy and secure Iran's national interest at large.

#### 7.4.2.3. Framing enemies and moderation

Although Rouhani had served as secretary of the National Security Council and was very close to Khamenei, his discourse about future relationships with international actors, including the US, is moderate and somehow different from Khamenei's discourse. Khamenei called and insisted that Iranian officials focus their efforts on the economy, as he believed that enemies were plotting against Iran's economy and the Iranian nation at large. He made a clear statement that Iran's enemies' threats would focus, in the first place, on Iran's economy. In order to promote the unity of Iranians, Khamenei has always used the term '*enemies*,'. This also gives us an understanding of Khamenei's position in the Iranian regime as well as his assessment of Iran's potential threats, resources, and dimensions as they relate to enemies outside the country and threats to the economy more than political security.

The idea about the role of enemies in affecting the economy is that Rouhani might implicitly share Khamenei's discourse about the enemies' plot. He might have meant by major problem the part that enemies caused, as they could be the sender of sanctions, and it is important to focus on that because the latter kept plotting against Iran. As we will see in the coming sections, the main difference between the approaches of Rouhani and Ghalibaf is related to their ideational elements. The above dispute between Rouhani and Khamenei on using the term 'enemies' is also related to their different ideational elements and how they perceive 'others'. Khamenei is purely revolutionary, which indicates the extent to which he preserves the principles of the Islamic Revolution.

In addition, he is the leader of the revolution; even though he technically stepped back from occupying the top executive position, he is the most powerful person in Iran and has the upper hand in decision-making, especially in foreign policy, based on his authority in the constitution. While Rouhani is a moderate who believes in 'constructive interaction', he also believes that in order to achieve economic prosperity and preserve Iran's national interests, extremism on all sides must be eliminated. As the leader's discourse, Rouhani's discourse on 'prudence' echoed Khamenei's discourse on 'wise' and 'acumen'. One important point to be made here is that Khamenei, as the supreme leader, also known as 'Imam, Faqih' the top religious leader of the



Islamic revolution. Therefore, his discourse is considered a guide and, in some cases, an instruction for politicians in particular.

Notwithstanding, Rouhani, as a diplomat, wanted to introduce this part of his experience if elected, in contrast to Khamenei, and this ascribed to the difference between the two positions in terms of international relations as well as their performances: the President and the Supreme Leader in terms of authorities, duration, and the way of occupying the position according to the Iranian constitution (Iranian constitution, 1989). In his asymmetric perceptions of Khamenei's relationship with the US, Rouhani, in these texts, mentioned the US as one of the countries with which he would like to improve Iran's relations, as he trusts Iranians can expect it to be included. Rouhani wanted to distance himself from Khamenei's texts when reproducing and replacing enemies with 'interact with the world' through organising Iran's foreign relations with the world; nonetheless, Rouhani did not leave it open where it can be a double-edged sword, and to avoid it, he used the adverb 'properly', which can be understood in line with Khamenei's red lines as well as the principles of the Islamic Revolution.

This demonstrates the major role of institutions in constructing and affecting meanings and ideas. As a participant agreed, *"Mr. Rouhani's speeches and the normalisation of relations with the world helped him a lot. It was perhaps a good idea to avoid sanctions and make friendship with the world"* (BA). Another participant emphasised Rouhani's background to affect his narrative moderate policies *"His previous performance was as chief nuclear negotiator when Iran engaged in confidence building with E3. That background distinguished him from other candidates, so they already had a positive record that demonstrated that he could result in a foreign policy issue diplomatically. It seems that people gave some credibility to his narratives over the others"* (AB).

In more detail, Khamenei outlined some characteristics that the new president should have in order to face current issues, including economic ones when mentioning 'wisdom', which is another synonym for prudence. However, on top of that, Khamenei asked them to have a 'spirit of resistance' which can be understood in the contexts of foreign policy as well as economic issues. Several characteristics have been mentioned within Khamenei's texts that indicate that Iran should value its dignity and work systematically based on plans.

This is another expression of *'national pride' in Iran's progress*. Khamenei has also linked political and economic virtues together. He asked Iranians to work against their weaknesses to remove weak points, and thus Iran moved forward and had stability. Rouhani, in his turn, has chosen the adjective prudence in describing his future government. Whereas, the noun hope

gives indications of fields of foreign policy where the most critical issue is the nuclear programme and improving the economy, which has suffered severely from sanctions.

Rouhani, then, to achieve economic prosperity, flew smartly to connect resolving economic problems with the world at large, as he knows that no country can survive in isolation. He also assumed that Iranians realised that Iran's relationship with the world was not perfect and needed reorganisation. Another fact to be told in this context is that being a moderate, Rouhani's perception is that engaging in the international system effectively and building trust with the rest of the world is essential to being part of that system. At the end of this section, one can realise that Rouhani adopted a reformist and moderate stance in his texts, symbols, and policies during the campaign. Rouhani stressed during his campaign the economic harm that needs to be properly resolved as well as the need to find a quick solution to the nuclear issue (Bastani, 2014). Social constructivism emphasises the importance of individuals' ideational elements in constructing an agent's perception socially through interaction with other factors (Onuf, 1989; Fairclough, 1992; Wendt, 1999). Rouhani constructed his ideas and the system of meanings and expressions in the economy as a high issue of salience in a constructive way that emphasises the interrelated connection between language, beliefs, ideas, experiences and intersubjectivity with other actors.

#### 7.4.2.4 Conclusion

This section showed that Rouhani expressed the importance of the economic factor as a high issue salience for him. Some of his ideas and meanings had intersubjectivity with Khamenei and Shargh. This is significant in exploring the extent to which Rouhanai is paying attention to the economic factor, as the Iranian economy is struggling. This section illustrated that Rouhani expressed the economic factor the most among other factors. In his discourse, he revealed that the economy would be his priority. This section showed how the above texts narrated '*economic harm*' and 'enemies and moderation', which have been provided through expressions such as 'save the economy', as the economy was the top priority and considered the major problem caused by enemies or (sanctions' senders), achieving economic prosperity through a 'prudent' approach; 'reorganising Iran's relations' with the entire world to overcome the isolation and sanctions, and this should be 'properly'. The section showed how the ideational elements and experiences of actors have affected their perceptions of using the term 'enemies' with respect to economic harm. The section also showed that unemployment had an impact on the 'social aspect' that might generate crimes and lead to massive demonstrations and public unrest.

### 7.4.3 Framing the economic factor within Ghalibaf's texts

This section examines Ghalibaf's discourse about the main factor that has been considered as a salient issue among other factors. It shows how he frames the economic factor as the most salient issue to be his priority if elected. The section shows serious economic problems that have been framed within Ghalibaf's discourse, such as inflation, liquidity, mismanagement and unemployment, that need to be addressed. Ghalibaf shared ideas with Khamenei's discourse as well as some texts from the domestic newspaper Kayhan. This section begins with key texts from Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan; framing economic harm; and framing enemies.

#### (i) Ghalibaf's texts:

Ghalibaf framed the economic factor with some similarities to Rouhani, especially unemployment. Ghalibaf on 15/05/2013, in a meeting with his supporters, said that the economy is a top priority for him when highlighting economic problems:

A working man is someone who can solve the biggest current challenges of the country, which are employment, inflation, and the critical health situation...Today, according to the changes that occurred in the electoral system and the presence of people with a history in the field of competition, it must be said that if we all look fairly and trust the words of the supreme leader, the issue of dealing with the economic situation will be a priority (Ghalibaf 11, 2013).

Ghalibaf at the same meeting, brought much focus to issues such as unemployment, countering the spread of drugs, and giving further care to deprived people who live in border areas:

The government must bring itself out of political tension. If I succeed in serving the country, I will serve the people with a jihadist spirit within the framework of the law. Employment for unemployed graduates, the fight against drugs, and special attention to the economy of the people, especially in deprived and border areas, will be among my plans for the government. If I get a chance to serve in a government position, I promise my supporters that they will never regret my support (Ghalibaf 2, 2013).

Ghalibaf also on 12/06/2013, stressed the importance of implementing the economic epic after the political epic, as the latter can be achieved through high turnout in the presidential elections of 2013. He urged people not to allow 'inefficient politicians' to win the elections and prevent mismanagement from controlling the country again:

I hope that the political epic will be formed by you, dear nation. I promise you, the people of Iran, that we will cover the economic epic after the political epic

with the help of the youth of society. We should not allow inefficient politicians to auction off Iran's honour on June 15; we should not allow mismanagement and weakness to take opportunities from our youth and nation on this day. June 15 is the beginning of the implementation of the measures taken by Khamenei and the concerns of the people, whose voices have not been heard throughout the country. (Ghalibaf 4, 2013).

(ii) Khamenei's texts:

Khamenei on 27/04/2013, in a meeting with labourers and people who are active in production sectors on the occasion of Labor Day, said:

I spoke about political and economic valour. Economic valour is not only in the hands of the government. Of course, the government's plans can play a role. Valour means creating a jihad-like and enthusiastic event. The people of Iran and officials should pay attention to this... In all plans, the lives of underprivileged classes should receive careful attention. Then, they should formulate plans for them. This is valour. Whether in the process of consumption or production (Khamenei 3, 2013).

Khamenei on 20/03/2013, on the occasion of Nowruz, called the year 2013 the year of "political and economic valour" and guided the officials to focus on economic and political epic:

I call the year 1392<sup>15</sup> the Year of Political and Economic Valour, and I hope that, by Allah's grace, our dear people and our caring government officials will give rise to an economic as well as a political epic, combining the two important areas of politics and economics. On the economic front, it is necessary to pay attention to domestic production, just as had been stressed in last year's slogan. Of course, certain things were done, but promoting domestic production and supporting Iranian labour and capital is a long-term issue (Khamenei 4, 2013).

Khamenei on 21/03/2013 gave further details about the resistance economy on the occasion of Imam Ridha's (a.s.) Shrine:

All of us have a responsibility to make efforts to keep our country impervious and resistant to enemies. This is one of the requirements of the idea of an 'economy of resistance' that I put forward. One fundamental pillar is the resistance of the economy. It must be able to withstand the enemies' machinations. The next president should distance himself from the weaknesses

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<sup>15</sup> 1392 according to the Persian calendar equals 2013 AD.

that exist, weaknesses that might be pointed out by you, me, or others. That is to say, the governments that come to power one after the other should help us move towards improvement and perfection, and gradually we should move towards choosing the best among us. The person who is elected should be committed to the revolution, to our values, to our national interests, to the Islamic Republic, to communal wisdom, and to judicious action. This is how the country should be managed (Khamenei 5, 2013).

Khamenei on 27/04/2013, explained how the Iranian economy can be resistant, he valued some elements as essential to encountering enemies at large:

Economic policies should be based on an economy of resistance. A resistance economy should be the kind of economy whose infrastructure is resistant. It should be able to resist. It should not waver in line with different changes in different corners of the world. These things are necessary. A president who wants to manage this great country and wants to tread this glorious path with the help of the people should have such characteristics (Khamenei 66, 2013).

(iii) Kayhan's texts:

Hossameldin Bromond (a) in Kayhan on 22/05/2013, admitted the existence of economic problems as undeniable, and 'economic salvation,' the term that one candidate kept expressing about it, should be implemented through 'the economy of resistance':

Economic problems in the country today are among the main and legitimate concerns of the people, and no one can ignore the economic problem. The public wants the knots to be untied, inflation to be curbed, and employment to flourish. Economic issues and problems are undeniable. Finally, it should be said that making the economic situation of the country critical to the point that the people are stuck in a stalemate and, on the other hand, inducing that the solution to this problem depends only on the candidates of a certain faction who have called him the saviour of the economy is beyond economic realities. This great claim was followed by media propaganda about "economic salvation". The way of economic salvation is a resistance economy,' and the current economic problems are far from the components of the resistance economy that the leader of the revolution has described based on the economic strategies of the system and in the framework of the Islamic-Iranian model of progress in recent years (Kayhan 1, 2013).

Hossameldin Bromond (b) in Kayhanon 6/06/2013, explained the way that the candidates should deal with the economic issues as the enemy is planning to control the country by

imposing sanctions, and the presidential candidates should counter that through a resistance economy:

When the enemy wants to gain control of the Islamic Republic through economic pressures and sanctions, one of the main concerns of a presidential candidate should be to repel these threats and pressures in the context of Islamic economics and resistance economics. No doubt, moving towards a resistance economy as a translator of Islamic economics in the current context would disarm the West and put pressure on Iran. Earlier this year, Patrick Klausen acknowledged that Iran's move away from the oil economy—the main feature of the resistance economy—would diminish Western efforts to put pressure on Iran. Therefore, esteemed presidential candidates must use the irreplaceable and effective version of the Islamic economy (Kayhan 2, 2013).

#### 7.4.3.1. Analysis

The previous discourses had some expressions on the economy related to *'economic harm'*; and *'enemies'* as the economy is struggling because of several causes, one of them being that the West does not *trust* Iran's nuclear programme, and therefore imposes sanctions. These ideas and meanings relate to Ghalibaf's discourse about economic harm, such as voters who support him *'will not regret'* supporting him; *'words of the supreme leader'*; *'jihadist spirit'*; *'inefficient politicians'*; and *'the leader's measures'*.

#### 7.4.3.2. Framing economic harm

Ghalibaf, despite being antagonistic to Rouhani, has agreed with him and expressed that Iran has several challenges and considers the economy to be a serious one, especially unemployment, followed by inflation and health services. Sanctions might have exacerbated inflation, as well as other factors (EL), provided ideas over the effect of sanctions on inflation *"lower middle and lower socio-economic classes at the same time, in addition to sanctions exacerbated, inflation exacerbated debt for the government, so this is something that contributed to the effects of the sanctions that the Iranian government was doing on its own outside of sanctions"* (EL). Like Rouhani, he also wanted to tell the Iranians that he is a man of work and not to talk, as he presented himself as a person who resolves the above issues with jihadist management. In order to stay consistent with Khamenei, Ghalibaf also reminded people to consider the supreme leader's words of participation after the change in the election system. Similar to Rouhani, Khamenei, and other actors in the Shargh and Kayhan newspapers, Ghalibaf considers the economy a high issue of salience and a priority for his government if elected.

Ghalibaf's assertion on unemployment is because he cannot ignore polls that surveyed unemployment in Iran. For example, Gallup's poll conducted in 2011 revealed that more than 35 per cent of Iranians were underemployed by working part-time while wanting to work full-time (Clifton, 2011). Another survey conducted by Rand in 2011 showed that more than half of Iranian respondents expressed the view that the ideal role of the government in managing the economy is to create jobs (Elson and Nader, 2011). On the other hand, people vote prospectively based on the media with high expectations of a candidate when promising and announcing future policies (Kuklinski and West, 1981; Lockerbie, 1991; Hsieh, Lacy, and Niou, 1998).

We should always consider the impact Khamenei brings to this analysis. Khamenei, as a powerful player in Iran's politics, stated that economic valour is not only related to the government but also means creating jihadist and enthusiastic events. To do so, Khamenei gave some advice to the future president on how to guarantee success through valour beginning with identifying the weaknesses and formulating plans for them. He stressed that, in all plans, the lives of underprivileged classes should receive careful attention.

Ghalibaf responded to Khamenei's discourse about those in need. As a serious problem, Ghalibaf would also focus on the disadvantaged and people who live in border areas. He seems to keep providing subsidies that the government of Ahmadinejad used to give financial support to the poor and middle classes in an attempt to encounter the effects of sanctions and the high rate of unemployment that reached 12.3 per cent in 2012 (Heuty, 2012; Habib, 2015). Ghalibaf promised Iranians that he would be the right choice for them and that they would never regret voting for him. In this part of the analysis, especially regarding Ghalibaf's revolutionary background, terms such as resistance, independence, enemies, and Jihadist spirit will be frequently used by him and, to some extent, by Khamenei.

This also brings an interesting part to the analysis where the two main discourses (Ghalibaf and Rouhani) are competing with each other in terms of different understandings, perceptions, and assessments that construct Iran's identity and thus shape its interests due to the different ideational elements of them. Ghalibaf's experience affected his discourse the same as his actions, according to (MZ), and this may have contributed to Rouhani's victory. *"The majority of Iranians: who want stability, who are close to the regime or within the regime, learned the lesson that they do not need any other revolution.. I think Hassan Rouhani won the election in addition to the fact that, at the end of the day, Mohammed Ghalibaf came from a military background when I was in Iran; he was in charge of the security of Iran, and Iranians remember him in a bad manner in 1999 for example, against the students in Tehran"* (MZ).

To reduce anger, Khamenei also wanted to deliver the message that he truly feels that Iranians are struggling economically and that whoever is elected has to prioritise working on the economy. In this regard, he urged the future government to adopt some measures to be taken, such as “promoting domestic production” and “supporting Iranian labour and capital”. Ghalibaf was clever enough to echo the leader’s measures of focusing on the economy, promoting domestic production, and supporting Iranian labour, as mentioned above. On this basis, one can link the role of sanctions in affecting domestic industrial production in Iran regarding money transfers, which led to limiting access to essential goods and raw materials (Ezzati and Mehrabadi, 2017). Industrial production in Iran had a significant fall from 2012 levels of 10 per cent to (8) per cent in 2013 (Trending Economic, 2021f).

So far, as we have seen, the presidential candidates, domestic newspapers, and Khamenei have valued and considered the importance of the economy as a high issue salience for the government to come and have expressed the most among other factors within the above texts. The economy was the most important factor that was expressed, as was the desired policy for voters in the 2013 presidential election in Iran (Sadjadpour, 2013).

This context motivated the economic voter to significantly contribute to the shaping of governments (Stegmaier, Lewis-Beck, and Brown, 2019). Interestingly, the economic voter is also able to punish incumbents either for their past performance (Fiorina, 1981) or for their future policies and promises (Downs, 1957). The electorate votes retrospectively based on economic conditions in the past; if they were stable and improved, the electorate would support the incumbent party, but if they deteriorated, they would support the opponents (Tuftte, 1978; Abramowitz, 1985; Lanoue, 1994).

In line with that, when voters enjoy high wages and employment, their turnout is lower in elections (Charles and Stephens, 2013); whereas high rates of unemployment encourage voters to vote intensively (Burden and Wichowsky, 2014). This reflects the Iranian case of a high turnout in the presidential elections, up to 72.94 per cent in 2013 (Iran Data Portal, 2013). The economic voter seems to have been the case in the 2013 Iranian presidential election (Etebari, 2013; Isfahani, 2013). Under sanctions, Iranians suffered from an unemployment rate of 15 per cent from 2008–2011, where unemployment among youth witnessed a sharp increase (Majidi and Zarouni, 2016).

On this basis, it is helpful to mention at this stage of the narrative that Ghalibaf considered the economy to be of high issue salience for him. Therefore, he would solve the economic challenge by adhering to Khamenei’s words that related to prioritising disadvantaged people in Iran, as he stressed that officials should deal with this with great attention. Although Ghalibaf has admitted



that Iran's economy is struggling and resolving it would be his priority, he did not mention the reason behind economic harm in the current text. Ghalibaf, based on social structure 'institutions' as a former military officer, presented himself as the strongest person who is competent to address the 'moribund economy' (Sadjadpour, 2013). Ghalibaf, similar to Rouhani, expressed his concerns about the status of the economy, which needs to be addressed urgently and properly to avoid having serious problems that may affect Iran's interests.

#### 7.4.3.3. Framing enemies

In a smart way, considering intersubjectivity, Ghalibaf adopted 'literary' some of Khamenei's ideas in terms of jihadist spirit to form his approach to addressing the country's dilemmas. He focuses on economic and political valour, as the jihadist spirit is beyond the government to include individuals. Jihadist spirit, according to Ghalibaf, will enable him to achieve progress in economic issues including unemployment and inflation. It will also enable him to fight against drugs and improve critical health situations. As a revolutionary and hard-line person, Ghalibaf is not the ideal president who is able to rebuild Iran's relationship with the West as well as resolve the nuclear issue.

This can be seen in BS's words, *"People looking for a change, so I am trying to do an investigative such kind of motivations beyond looking for that, so I mean, for example, change to their attitude to nuclear issue nuclear programme, and if they want to improve the relationship with the West with the USA, this would be easier to moderate discourse within Rouhani than that conservative hard-line Mr Ghalibaf"* (BS). I think BS was right, and this can be derived from literature on social constructivism regarding the role of institutions in affecting actors' ideas and meanings. Although Khamenei did not mention the effects of the international sanctions, it seems he was seeking a type of economy that could stand strong against such effects.

In addition, having a resistant economy means, according to him, that the economy must be stable and not vulnerable to being affected easily by any change in the world. In the shadow of economic sanctions, Khamenei also brought attention to the new strategy that should focus mainly on the so-called 'economy of resistance', which must be adopted by all Iranians to successfully resist enemies' plots. One can notice the extent to which Khamenei was concerned about external threats, either through imposing sanctions or potential military attacks to change the regime, as he kept accusing enemies in every speech of their plans to dominate the Iranian nation. One may bring to the scene that the most striking factor influencing Iran is one related to oil, whether due to low prices or embargoes because Iran is greatly dependent on exporting oil (Cordesman, Gold, and Coughlin-Schulte, 2014).

This is maybe why Ghalibaf made the commitment, 'I promise' that Iranians would not regret having elected him, as he would work hard on the above issue. So far, this is impressive; however, we need more details to explore the way he would address this situation at this stage of analysis. Ghalibaf emphasised that the government must distance itself from political tension. This indicates that he wanted to separate the relationship between affiliation with a particular political faction and working within a government headed by a member of a different political faction. This implies the extent to which Ghalibaf asserted 'internal cohesion', to encounter enemies' plots, the most common description he prefers to use, in particular when talking about Iran's foreign policy, as we will see in chapter 9. Conservatives consider internal and external challenges to be in line with Khamenei's discourse, where internal unity is crucial when making policies (Gheissari and Nasr, 2005).

In order to keep Iran safe by having a new government that would follow the leader's measures to resist the enemies, Ghalibaf provided some expressions of 'national pride' when he insisted that voters should not vote for inefficient politicians to harm Iran's honour and should not vote again for mismanagement and weakness. One can assume that Ghalibaf means reformists and moderates, as they are keen to open up the country to be involved in the international system as a reliable and trusted actor, as well as reforming the economy gradually based on the West's standards. In addition, he declared that June 15, the day of the election, would be the time to put Khamenei's measures into action. Ghalibaf represented Khamenei's discourse when using 'political epic' and 'economic epic', the same terms that have been used by Khamenei, and ended his discourse with a promise to the voters to solve the economic problems after the elections. Khamenei, as the head of the establishment in Iran and the revolution leader, stresses that the future president should run the country based on Jihadist management as a main principle of the revolution that Iran achieved.

One can realise how institutions work effectively to affect ideas and meanings (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). To give an example, I would quickly evoke the main difference between Rouhani as a moderate and Ghalibaf as a revolutionary: when Rouhani's experience was mainly in diplomacy, his perceptions, assumptions, and beliefs in considering 'others' were constituted based on realist, moderate and rational views. While Ghalibaf's experience was mainly in the military, his perceptions and beliefs in considering 'others' were constituted based on the full adoption of the Islamic revolution's principles of resisting the West and considering them based on extremist views as enemies and thus extremist views. This can be seen within Onuf's words, as the texts are a reflection of beliefs, ideas, and norms and seek to shape new meanings and the real world (Onuf, 1989).

To remind officials of Iran's identity, Khamenei wanted the next president to consider the idea of 'resistance' as one principle of the revolution to a large extent despite his focus on the economy. He told them about the importance of setting out a proper plan that relies on policies of resistance when considering infrastructure, as it has to be resistant. In response to that, Ghalibaf announced that he would run the country based on a jihadist spirit, which is one key principle of the revolution. Khamenei stressed that "the person who is elected should be committed to the revolution, to our values, and our national interests". Accordingly, Ghalibaf perceived Iran's national interests should be achieved through the revolution's principles, especially the notions of 'resistance' and 'jihadism'.

In response to that, Ghalibaf announced that he would run the country based on a jihadist spirit, which is one key principle of the revolution. Khamenei stressed that "The person who is elected should be committed to the revolution, to our values, to our national interests". Accordingly, Ghalibaf perceived Iran's national interests should be achieved through the revolution's principles, especially the notions of 'resistance' and 'jihadism'. The election, however, was a challenge and a hard test for the regime. Conducting and achieving successful presidential elections in 2013 at a time when other countries in the region were having revolutions, the 'Arab Spring', can be considered a 'national pride' despite the 'enemies' plot. Generally, whenever the turnout is low, legitimacy is at risk and might lead to regime erosion. This is what Khamenei was trying to avoid by encouraging people to intensify their turnout in the election, which is essential to supporting the legitimacy of the regime, as he doubted that the participation percentage would be small due to the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election. There were doubts expressed by people and Green Movement leaders that the government had rigged the results (Fisk, 2011; Tezcür, 2012).

The high participation in the election of 2013 might have been a double-sword; on the one hand, it might have assisted the regime by claiming that people trusted it to conduct such elections transparently, as well as a signal that the democracy in the country is periodical and growing despite the dark file of human rights abuse. On the other hand, it might have contributed to the victory of Rouhani, especially regarding his approach to resolving the economy on the basis of lifting the sanctions. Young voters under 30 constitute nearly 33 per cent of all voters; they were living with their parents, thus partly feeling the economic pain as they shift the suffering to their parents (Isfahani, 2013).

An analyst had intersubjective meanings with Khamenei and Ghalibaf over the importance of resolving the economic problems. Hossameldin Bromond (a) in Kayhan considered the economic harm to be a high issue salience. Also, he called for implementing a resistance economy based on the leader's measures, especially the ideas of 'economic salvation', the term

that was adopted by some internal and external people. Bromond claimed that all measures available to improve the economy are not close to Khamenei's strategy of a resistance economy. He accused reformists and moderates of negative performance due to the current economic problems and ironically denied that the moderates claimed that there was only one candidate who could resolve them. They meant Rouhani, as he belongs to the pragmatic conservative (moderate) who is close to the reformists and had an alliance with them in the election because there are political and ideological commonalities with them as they adopt different approaches to managing the economy in terms of reforms and openness towards the West (Tarock, 2002; Fazili, 2010).

For political purposes and in order to affect voters' preferences, Bromond (b) tried to manipulate readers and voters by linking the call for 'economic salvation' with the mainstream media in the West in a way to minimise the number of supporters of a candidate who repeatedly expressed the importance of improving the Iranian economy through negotiating Iran's nuclear programme. More expressions on '*enemies*' were given in Kayhan, as Bromond was irritated that the presidential candidates should encounter external pressure through a resistance economy because the enemy is planning to control the country by imposing sanctions.

The resistance economy is considered one of the fundamental components of the broad strategy of resistance and one of the rooted principles of the Islamic Revolution (Hunter, 2010). This strategy assists greatly in making Iran an oil-free economy and is a good way to resist Western pressure on Iran. Until this phase, there has been agreement among all the agents above about the importance of the economy a high issue salience. Not only for the candidates but also for the Iranian voters, especially the eldest voters, the economy was a top priority.

The economic factor may have been the main driver of the results of a poll conducted on July 3, 2012, about Iranians' opinions on stopping uranium enrichment, which revealed that 60 per cent of the respondents expressed that they would support stopping uranium enrichment (Esfandiari, 2012). Yet, the elite, especially the politicians and figures who were running in the presidential elections in 2013, expressed different views on enrichment. The approaches set out by the two candidates to address economic harm were expressed within their texts (Isfahani, 2013). Khamenei urged officials and the future president to focus on the economy. Presidential candidates promised that the economy would be their priority, and experts in the domestic newspaper warned that the current situation should not continue. However, we are on the edge of a profound contestation about the assessment of the main cause of the economic harm that will break the above agreement.

#### 7.4.3.4. Conclusion

This section illustrated that Ghalibaf's ideas and meanings on the economy were intersubjective with the discourses of Khamenei and Kayhan. Ghalibaf paid great attention to the economic factor as a high issue salience among other factors because of Iran's economy. Unemployment was the main indicator that he focused on. The sections provided some expressions about ideas and meanings, such as '*economic harm*'; and '*enemies*', that were presented in the discourses of Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Shargh. Ghalibaf's ideas and meanings are essentially based on his ideational elements that constructed Iran's identity and shaped its interests. These expressions that reflected the aforementioned ideas and meanings are 'jihadist spirit'; 'resistance economy' which can be implemented through the leader's measures'; 'prioritising Iran's interests'; 'avoiding controversy'; and reformists and moderates are 'insufficient politicians'. As Ghalibaf served in the military, this institution had an influential impact on his beliefs, assumptions, understanding and explanation.

#### 7.5. The main cause of economic harm within Rouhani's and Ghalibaf's texts

This section continues to illustrate the main cause of the economic harm within the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf and how they framed it.

##### 7.5.1. Introduction

The section provides the analysis with some expressions that reflect some ideas and meanings about 'mismanagement' and 'the effects of sanctions'. On this basis, it is also helpful to anticipate the proper plans for resolving the economic harm that has been expressed by Rouhani and Ghalibaf based on the main cause of the economic harm in Iran. Rouhani and Ghalibaf belong to two different political and ideological factions. In addition, they have two different experiences, which indicates a major difference in their perceptions, which will be seen in the analysis based on their assessment of the sanctions' effects and the difference in their conceptual elements. This section demonstrates how the above actors perceived the relationship between economic harm and the need for a flexible nuclear choice relating to the effects of sanctions as a high or low issue salience. This is crucial because it provides a deep understanding of how the effects of economic sanctions may influence their future policies and approaches concerning economic sanctions and Iran's nuclear choices. This section consists of two sub-sections: the main cause of economic harm in Rouhani's texts is economic sanctions, and the main cause of economic harm in Ghalibaf's texts is mismanagement.

### 7.5.2. The main cause of economic harm within Rouhani's texts is economic sanctions

To distinguish between the assessments and perceptions of Rouhani and Ghalibaf regarding the main cause of economic harm, this section examines Rouhani's discourse about the main cause of economic harm. It shows that Rouhani considered the effects of sanctions to be the main cause of Iran's economic harm. It also shows that he considers that other problems in the country are essentially related to the sanctions. Rouhani shared ideas with some texts from the domestic newspaper Shargh. This section begins with key texts from Rouhani, Khamenei, and Shargh; framing economic harm; the effects of economic sanctions; criticism of Ahmadinejad's governments; the oil embargo; and Banking sanctions: Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications 'SWIFT'.

#### (i) Rouhani's texts:

Rouhani on 29/05/2013 in an interview was responding to a question about the effect of the sanctions on banking transactions:

Our dear compatriot said that they have a banking problem. They do not know that even Iranians inside the country who want to have relations with foreign countries have banking problems in the fields of trade, travel, and student affairs. This banking problem is one of the consequences of the sanctions debate. I would like to say that the government's plan of prudence and hope is a government of *constructive interaction* with the world and not confrontation, and instead of this confrontation, the government's plan of prudence and hope believes that isolation will not make sense with all countries that have mutual respect and mutual and common interests in mind. With the first signs of trust, we can talk, move and improve our relations with the world for better relations (Rouhani 2, 2013).

Rouhani on 27/05/2013 wanted to present his experience and academic background as a fundamental part of his membership when he stressed the importance of identifying the causes of a problem first before finding a proper solution. In an interview, Rouhani criticised Ahmadinejad's foreign policy related to the imposition of economic sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme:

In order to understand the causes and reasons for the occurrence and continuation of this situation, the factors and actions that caused it must be identified. The link between foreign policy and domestic policy has caused the country's vital and fateful decisions to become rhetorical, imaginative, and populist. The ninth and tenth governments, after imperfect and late awareness of the consequences of sanctions against the country, have chosen a step-by-step strategy to exit the

nuclear crisis, which has not had a positive result so far, and in each round of negotiations. (Rouhani 9, 2013).

In an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, Rouhani, on 13/06/2013, gave some remarks on the relationship between Iran and the US, in particular during Obama's administration:

Sanctions adopted and implemented against Iran during the Obama administration are unprecedented in the history of bilateral relations between Iran and the US. If sincerity can be measured and intention can be read, sanctions and daily threats are the criteria for this measurement and reading. In my view, Obama's policy towards Iran cannot lead to the improvement of troubled bilateral relations as long as the US's mischievous treatment of Iran continues to dictate the course. (Rouhani 12, 2013).

Rouhani, on 04/06/2013 in an interview with Al-Monitor, provided his views on the necessity of having all factories in the country working and not only Natanz:

It's very beautiful if a centrifuge revolves, but only on the condition that the country is also revolving. We do not accept that one factory in Natanz works, but hundreds of other factories do not, due to sanctions preventing the provision of materials and parts (Rouhani 17, 2013).

Rouhani stated on 07/06/2013 in the third presidential debate on "Domestic and Foreign Policy" that the main cause of all troubles in Iran comes from passing Iran's nuclear issue from the Board of Governors of the IAEA to the United Nations Security Council UNSC:

All our troubles are because not everyone tried to prevent the case from going to the Security Council. No one was to blame. Today, we must all try to get the case that was brutally taken to the Security Council back to the Governors' Council (Rouhani 18, 2013).

Rouhani on 28/05/2013 criticised the policies of the previous government, particularly foreign policy, in an *ironic utterance*. He has mocked Iranian officials who said that the UNSC resolution concerning Iran's nuclear programme was just a piece of paper. He said:

Officials who once chanted that Security Council resolutions were no more than scraps of paper have now learned that Security Council resolutions and international sanctions are more than scraps of paper... Coincidentally, the same officials today consider international sanctions to be the main source of the country's current economic problems. We are currently in such a situation, and we are paying a heavy price for the mismanagement of the ninth and tenth governments in all matters, including the issue of the country's nuclear programme and the imposition of international sanctions (Rouhani 19, 2013).

(ii) Khamenei's texts:

Khamenei explained on 20/03/2013, that Iranians are struggling economically, and economic weakness relates to laxity and negligence that helped the enemy to succeed:

On the economic front, of course, the people were under pressure, and certain problems were caused. In particular, there were certain flaws inside the country. There were certain cases of negligence and laxity that aided the enemy in his plans (Khamenei 7, 2013).

Khamenei on 21/03/2013, was eager to have some credibility as he admitted, to some extent, the effects of sanctions on Iran. He revealed the dependence on oil, as this gives the enemy effective measures to cripple Iran:

Yes, the sanctions have not been inconsequential. If they are happy about this, let them be happy. After all, the sanctions have had an effect, which is because of an essential flaw that we are suffering from. The flaw that our economy is suffering from is that it is dependent on oil. We need to distance our economy from oil. Our governments should include this among their basic plans. Seventeen, eighteen years ago, I told the government of that time and its officials that they should act in a way that we could shut down our oil wells whenever we wanted to. The so-called "technocrats" smiled in disbelief, as if to say, "Is that even possible?" Yes, it is possible. It is necessary to follow up on the issue, take action and make plans. When the economic plans of a country are built on a particular base, the enemies of that country will target that base. Yes, the sanctions have had an effect, but not the effect that the enemies wanted. (Khamenei 8, 2013).

Khamenei on 21/03/2013, ranked dependence on oil as a significant factor that deepened Iranian economic weakness before mismanagement, where the previous government did not perform on a scientific basis:

Our economic weaknesses - which led to harsh conditions for certain groups of people - include dependence on oil, disregarding large-scale economic policies of the country, and adopting policies and decisions on a day-to-day basis. Government officials in the country - the incumbent officials and officials who will be elected through this year's presidential elections - should pay attention to this point (Khamenei 9, 2013).

Khamenei on 21/03/2013 disclosed the Americans' efforts in convincing and forcing some countries to not buy Iran's oil and not deal with its banking system:



The Americans sent special agents to prevent Iran from selling oil and transferring money to the country. America chose certain outstanding and experienced agents to travel to different countries and even speak to the heads of certain companies to encourage them to stop oil-related transactions with the Islamic Republic. These agents were tasked with punishing those who had financial relationships or oil-related transactions with the Islamic Republic. They started this work with full intensity at the beginning of the year 1391, particularly in Mordad. They expected that Iran would stop its growing scientific activities and give in to America's bullying as a result of those well-planned moves, which were being pursued very seriously (Khamenei 10, 2013).

Khamenei also, on 4/06/2013, defended the achievements that have been made by different governments, and he also stressed the importance of building on that and not denying them:

Over many years, thousands of fundamental infrastructure-related projects have been carried out in the country under different administrations. There has been scientific progress. There has been industrial progress. There was progress in areas relating to infrastructure. Very important things have been planned and implemented in different areas. They should not disregard these things. We cannot afford to deny all this work under the pretext that we have economic problems, that we have the problem of rising prices and inflation. Yes, we have economic problems and inflation. In Allah's favour, the person who will be voted into office will be able to resolve these problems and remove these obstacles (Khamenei 11, 2013).

(iii) Shargh's texts:

In an interview with Shargh, Seyed Muhammad Hossein Adeli, the former governor of the Central Bank, on 01/06/2013, provided views on the foreign policy strategy of the ninth and tenth governments and the "severity" of the sanctions:

There is a great deal of caution in publicly announcing the extent of the damage caused by sanctions. So, there are two things to keep in mind when it comes to costs. The first is that the sanctions have imposed a lot of costs... The second point is that we must find a way to get out of this vicious circle. A relationship in which, on the one hand, there is threat and sanctions and increasing pressure and depletion of power, and, on the other hand, enduring pressure and resisting it cannot be sustainable... The current oppressive sanctions against our country have been the most severe sanctions imposed on a country (Shargh 3, 2013).

Ishaq Jahangiri, Former Minister of Industry and Mines, provided his assessment of the biggest challenges for the next government and the effects of sanctions on 10/6/2013:

In the past year, the economic development of the country, on the one hand, and consequently the household economy, on the other, were endangered by several factors. the stagnation of production activities and barriers to imports of goods under the influence of sanctions, followed by currency problems and interbank restrictions at the international level; sharply increased inflation... The sanctions also reduced oil revenues, budget deficits, and the country's monetary base. A look at this set of problems shows that the country's economy is on the brink of collapse and will certainly lead to higher inflation for the country if the current trend continues. Foreign policies, which are crucial for the country's economy, must be reviewed. The growing disconnection with the world, which is becoming more and more widespread, is crippling for the country's economy (Shargh 4, 2013).

Ahmad Mir Motahari, an Iranian expert in the economy on 11/04/2013. provided his views on the effects of the sanctions, particularly the banking system:

During the sanctions period, we faced declining oil revenues, declining development budgets, and massive government debt, especially to the banking system, contractors, and the central bank. The pace of investment has slowed, and the economic growth rate has also declined (Shargh 5, 2013).

#### 7.5.2.1. Analysis

In the two previous sections regarding the importance of improving the economy to the candidates and the agreement on the critical status of the economy, the analysis flows in this section to understand the assessment of Rouhani about the main cause of the economic harm. This section shows that Rouhani's discourse illustrates his main idea that the effects of economic sanctions are the main cause of economic harm. On this basis, he expressed the 'countries' that Rouhani would work together to organise and have good relations with: 'Rouhani's views on the most impactful sanctions' effects; 'Obama's administration', 'all troubles'; 'passing the nuclear file from the Governors' broad to the UNSC'; 'banking problems'; 'isolation'; imperfect government; 'US sanctions'; and 'hundreds of factories do not work'.

#### 7.5.2.2. Framing the effects of economic sanctions

The effectiveness of economic sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme has received much attention from scholars as well as in Iran's domestic debate. Domestically, there was an agreement about the economic harm. However, to some extent, not all Iranians, for reasons regarding Iran's identity and national pride in not giving up on Western powers, including the US, have considered sanctions the main cause. This paves the way for an interesting debate and competing discourses about moving forward and backwards. The focus will be on Rouhani's

main idea about the effects of sanctions, and this will also be on the basis of his expressions according to his understanding and explaining these effects, considering his conceptions of Iran's identity and interests to show the difference with Ghalibaf in the next section.

Because Iran suffered from the effects of sanctions, Rouhani wanted to present himself as the proper president for the upcoming era. He, in contrast to Khamenei and Ghalibaf, has adopted the stance that economic sanctions are the main cause of not only the economic harm but also all of Iran's troubles. He insisted that the effects of sanctions as a result of passing the nuclear file to the UNSC are the main cause of Iran's troubles. In response to a question about the main reason, one participant stated that the sanctions on Iran were effective: *"I would say first sanctions led to significant impacts of let's say 60 per cent and then the economic mismanagement, domestic and bad domestic economic environment because of the government policy 40 per cent. The people who are opposed to the Islamic regime often have their arguments politicised and they try to reduce the role of sanctions by trying to blame the government for everything which is not in my opinion true"* (NH).

Khamenei's discourse has considered reasons that led to economic weakness, such as Iran largely relying on oil and managing the economy based on 'day-to-day' policies where the government did not rely on strategic policies. In addition, Khamenei mentioned the achievements that Iran has made in various sectors, which should not be neglected by any presidential candidates under the pretext that Iran has economic problems. These aspects include thousands of projects about infrastructure, scientific progress, and industrial progress. In a shy agreement with Rouhani, Khamenei admitted implicitly that there are some economic problems, such as inflation and high prices, and he was confident that the newly elected president would be able to resolve them. Khamenei, as if expressing the outcomes of sanctions, does not want to say explicitly that, at least, sanctions are one cause of that.

Rouhani was responding to Khamenei indirectly by saying that the day-to-day decisions and short-term policies regarding the economy may have contributed to the economic harm, but the main cause, according to him, is related to the effects of sanctions. Rouhani also wanted to connect the social and political aspects of the devastated economy, as sanctions are able to go beyond the economy and affect society in terms of corruption and crimes. Increased social problems in Iran can be ascribed to sanctions as a participant explained *"Economic sanctions have had a significant impact on all aspects of the lives of the Iranian people. Economically, it has severely reduced domestic production. Iran is a country that relies heavily on oil and does not have much expertise in production, and most of its goods are supplied from outside Iran. GDP is extremely low despite government claims. These conditions have had a great impact on the exchange rate...The unemployment rate is high and that is why the crime rate has risen."*

*People are unhappy due to unfavourable conditions as well as the exchange rate, and the tendency to migrate has increased sharply. In general, sanctions have a significant effect on public dissatisfaction.”* (BA). When a country has economic problems that affect society by increasing crimes, smuggling, and corruption, it loses its alliance with the international community because of misusing trust.

### 7.5.2.3. Criticism of Ahmadinejad's governments

In election campaigns, candidates often blame incumbents for their performance, especially in the economic field as well as foreign policy. They try to convince voters that they, or their parties, are no longer trustworthy to lead the government. On this basis, Rouhani is not an exception. He blamed Ahmadinejad for shifting his populist discourse that can be consumed domestically to the international arena when he talked about relations with the US and the West, the Holocaust, and mopping Israel off the map. Not only Rouhani, in fact, has criticised him but also Mosavi and Karubi, the two former presidential candidates in 2009 (Reuters, 2009b). It is a matter of ideational elements in perceiving Iran's interests. One can realise that moderates and reformists share the same perspective that this extremist discourse is not productive and will never enable Iran to achieve its interests, including the possession of a peaceful nuclear programme. A participant shed the above opinion with Rouhani about the failed performance of Ahmadinejad: *“Ahmadinejad was a populist he vastly contributed to the problem of inflation in Iran because he handed out money literally to almost everyone if you may recall he had a system of cash payments that were introduced after there was a subsidy reform but he also just handed out a lot of money to many people”* (BS).

This extremist discourse has affected Iran's interests and contributed negatively to growing its enemies. It can be understood as if Rouhani wants to say: Do not mix between domestic speeches and formal discourse. Let us have two different levels of discourses: domestically, where we can express moderately our adherence to the principles of the Islamic revolution, national pride, and inevitable Iran's national interests; and internationally, where we can spread, express explicitly, and defend the nuclear programme within the framework of law along with sharing values with other nations to achieve our interests. To some extent, this is politically acceptable, but not on Islamic grounds. It is misleading: Rouhani is a cleric, a person who should not be manipulative but honest by having a clear and united discourse or stance over Iran's foreign policy, either in domestic or international arenas.

Rouhani blames Ahmadinejad as a neo-conservative directly when using the adjective 'populists' by referring to the problems that emerged during his presidency and, for political purposes, he did not mention all conservatives because he has a strong relationship with

Rafsanjani who belongs to the conservatives. Therefore, he did not want to make his criticism broad and explicit to avoid losing some conservatives' support and thus ultimately losing the elections. Rouhani wanted to attract people's attention to the following stage of his critique of Ahmadinejad, in which he considers himself an expert in nuclear negotiations. He accused Ahmadinejad's government of being imperfect as he realised the consequences of sanctions lately because his government had chosen an invalid strategy of 'step-by-step strategy' to get out of the nuclear dilemma.

As Ahmadinejad neglected the experts, he was behaving randomly without strategic plans, and this point of view was supported by a participant who said: "*Ahmadinejad had controversial policies were that he was a populist man and he would go to various provinces and he would just randomly spend government money, putting it into context in an unplanned manner.*" (NH). This strategy, according to Rouhani, was not productive. Additionally, Rouhani also used the adjective 'imperfect' in the context of sanctions effects to describe Ahmadinejad's government's failure, in particular, to reduce Iran's dependence on oil.

In order to explain mistakes that Ahmadinejad has made due to his populist discourse, Rouhani distinguished between two levels of policies: domestic policy, where Iranian people can express their feelings and beliefs about issues such as the nuclear programme and the relationship with the US and the West within a domestic domain, and foreign policy, where the officials express the formal discourse of the country that is driven by Islamic culture as well as the principles of the revolution, which need to be consistent with the international community to avoid being isolated. Therefore, he wanted to make a clear boundary between formal and informal discourses where necessary, particularly when it comes to Iran's interests. Language in text's form is an interaction of meanings between people in a specific place and the world of states and institutions, where they can contribute in some cases to shaping a new approach in foreign policy that emphasises the validity of the constructivist theory in the international arena (Wendt, 1994, 1999; Hopf, 1998). Not only Ahmadinejad's performance has been criticised, but even Rouhani himself faced some criticism due to the decision to suspend uranium in 2005. This indicates the Iranians' unwavering support of the programme as a matter of national pride, especially after the progress Iran has made by Iranian scholars.

The suspension of uranium enrichment in 2005 under Rouhani's leadership has been one of the main criticisms Rouhani ever had during the presidential election campaign. Therefore, Rouhani wanted to defend his performance as a chief nuclear negotiator from 2003 to 2005 with the E3 by showing that he led the nuclear negotiations with the international community for three years without having the nuclear issue referred to the UNSC. Most importantly, he emphasised his role in preventing Iran from being attacked by the Americans in 2003, after the Bush

administration placed Iran in the group 'Axis of Evil' after the 9/11 attacks and following the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq based on claims of having WMD.

Rouhani did not give up; he kept criticising officials who minimised the consequences of passing Iran's nuclear file to the UNSC, as they described the resolution of the imposition of sanctions on Iran as just a piece of paper. Rouhani, after the heavy effects of sanctions that affected Iranians in all aspects, stated *ironically*: now they have considered that the UNSC resolutions are more than a piece of paper, and the economic sanctions are the "*main source of the country's current economic problems*". Rouhani wanted to prove his qualifications by investing the moment to prove that he was doing the right thing when he kept Iran's nuclear file away from the UNSC.

Throughout his discourses, Rouhani keeps comparing the UNSC and the Board of Governors to show the difference between their consequences on Iran, which implies which approach was proper when dealing with the nuclear issue: the one who took it to the UNSC and then imposed comprehensive sanctions on Iran, or the approach Rouhani implemented, which negotiated the nuclear issue smartly and prevented Iran from sanctions and war by suspended temporarily uranium enrichment. Then, Rouhani flew by stating that Iran is paying a heavy price as a result of Ahmadinejad's mismanagement in all matters. Precisely, Rouhani mentioned the effects of international sanctions in this context. This reflects a clear knowledge of the severe effects of sanctions and assesses Ahmadinejad's approach as vulnerable and invalid. By doing that, Rouhani wanted to have a sort of consensus that enabled him to accept the fact that economic sanctions are the main cause of the harm, which means the resolution essentially has to consider them.

Rouhani continued to tell people that he followed a systematic approach to solving problems, expressing that causes and reasons needed to be identified first to understand them and then to find proper solutions for the current situation. He wanted to remind people about his experience and academic background as a fundamental part of his ideational elements when he talked about the proper way of dealing with crises and problems (AB; GS). Helping people find out the real causes of problems being raised might ease the task for them when they find them out by themselves. People with more knowledge can construct and shape new meanings (Wendt, 1999).

Rouhani can be considered, within this group, as having good knowledge since he holds a PhD, a president of a think tank, and has a religious education. He is known as a cleric, but more generally, he is also called a Diplomatic Sheikh. In an attempt to inspire voters, Rouhani wanted to present his knowledge in the field of economic sanctions compared to the limited knowledge of other candidates and also by introducing himself as an expert in dealing with sanctions and

Iran's nuclear programme. It is worth noticing also the consequences of multilateral and unilateral sanctions in either changing the target's behaviours or inflicting a heavy cost. Multilateral sanctions can be more effective when imposed under the auspices of international institutions (Eckert, 2009; Nossal, 1999; Martin, 1992).

Smartly, Rouhani, in line with Iran's interests and Khamenei's red lines, announced that it is good to see centrifuges working, but the most beautiful thing would be if all factories in Iran worked as well. It is a conditional phrase, meaning that he would accept continuing enrichment peacefully if other factories were working at the same time, which implies gaining a compromise. A deep look at this statement is particularly useful in anticipating Rouhani's approach to Iran's nuclear choice, which will be analysed in depth in chapter 9-. This is the way Rouhani understood Iran's nuclear interests as well as its identity; that is, Iran will never abandon its nuclear rights as a matter of national pride, and yet, this will be within the NPT regime in terms of its compliance with the IAEA's verification measures. This implies his stance that the current situation concerning the sanctions and Iran's nuclear choice must be changed. He was even more firm when announcing that "we do not accept" that one factory in Natanz works while hundreds of others do not as a result of sanctions that prevent them from importing materials and parts. Rouhani tends to raise Iranians' awareness of the current economic situation, which requires a creative solution. He was precise and clear when linking industrial and social problems with sanctions.

#### 7.5.2.4. Oil embargo

Sometimes, oil can be a curse. It is a critical situation that officials have attempted to address since Iran has lost substantial oil revenues due to restrictions on its oil exports (Shirazi, Azerbaijani, and Sameti, 2016). This makes sense in light of the unanticipatedly abrupt increases in price, the oil embargo, and the gradual reformation, particularly for a revolutionary economy. As senders targeted the most vulnerable sector of the Iranian economy, the oil embargo substantially worsened the country's economic situation. In light of the consequences and to avoid criticism, Rouhani was clever enough to publicly confess the effects of sanctions after Khamenei's discourse in a way that remained consistent with the establishment and Khamenei's red lines. Rouhani mentioned the sanctions that significantly affected the economy in terms of the embargo on Iran's oil in 2009 (Eckert, 2009). Reducing oil exports can be considered the most damaging to Iran's economy, according to (GS) "*I do think the economic sanctions that were most damaging to Iran and which cost the greatest concern by the Iranian government were the sanctions on Iran and oil exports.*"

Khamenei confessed the effects of the economic sanctions on Iran, but he underestimated these effects, calling them ‘*minor effects*’ and ‘not as the enemies wanted’. These effects, according to him, do not reflect the effectiveness of sanctions on Iran but the flaws in the economy. This justification responded to the American media as they announced that finally, Khamenei has admitted the effects of sanctions. Khamenei represented this within his texts by saying, ‘They said’, and his response to that was, “If they are happy about my confession, okay, let them be happy”. Despite Khamenei's confession that the sanctions have had a marginal effect on Iran's economy, he explained that was not due to the effectiveness of sanctions but because of the nature of the economy itself when mentioning Iran's oil export-dependent economy.

Khamenei blamed the officials, as they did not put plans in place to reduce Iran's dependence on oil as he asked them to do so 17-18 years ago. This blame was, in particular, on the pragmatic conservatives and reformists. He specifically said “seventeen, eighteen years ago”, which includes Rafsanjani's presidency from 1989 to 1997 and Khatami's presidency from 1997 to 2005. However, he did not blame his government when he was president of Iran from 1981 to 1989, when the Americans' sanctions, especially the embargo, were intensified on Iran in the wake of the American hostage crisis of 1979–81. Another analyst has joined the floor: Ishaq Jahangiri, the former minister of industry and mines, gave, in Shargh, an assessment of the effects of the sanctions on the economy. He admitted largely that sanctions, as an effective factor, have impacted the development plan in Iran. The sanctions, according to him, have influenced the economy in terms of slowing production, restricting imported goods, a low rate of the currency, being disconnected from the global banking system, high inflation, low oil revenue, and budget deficits. These effects, indeed, are crippling, and one can realise that these outcomes were described by a former minister of industry and mines.

Jahangiri knew all aspects that had been affected by sanctions according to his position; therefore, notably, he concluded that the country is on the edge of collapse with the continuation of inflation unless this situation is resolved. Jahangiri asserted that foreign policies are essential for the economy and should be reviewed. Jahangiri mentioned in particular the SWIFT system when expressing that the disconnection with the world is ‘crippling’ the economy. These impacts also are raised by a participant who emphasised the effectiveness of sanctions on Iran: “*Sanctions became intense between 2011 and 2012 nevertheless they played an important role in creating economic hardship in reducing Iran's oil revenues and opportunity to export and import as a result let to there'd be historical data for economic growth that lead it to a slowdown in economic growth even negative economic growth in some of those years and despite the fact that*” (NH).



This gives support to Rouhani's stance as it delivers his new approach towards the main cause of the economic harm and hence sets out plans to resolve it. Rouhani wanted to dig deeper into this debate, he announced that the American sanctions, in particular during Obama's administrations from 2009 to 2013, were the most severe sanctions in the history of the Iranian–American relationship because the US has imposed unilateral sanctions on Iran several times since 1979 after the Islamic Revolution. Rouhani distinguished between the adoption and implementation of sanctions. There is a difference, in terms of achieving the purpose of sanctions, between threatening to impose sanctions and implementing them (Morgan, Bapat, and Kobayashi, 2014; Pape, 1997).

Rouhani clarified that improving the Iran-US relationship and judging the seriousness of Obama's administration would be based on actions such as imposing sanctions as well as the daily threats by Americans. Yet, Rouhani's text might be a source of confusion, i.e., which term of Obama had the most influential impact on Iran. This may sound like a contribution to the sanctions scholarship in terms of the effectiveness of sanctions because Obama led two administrations, and it is essential to know which one Rouhani meant in order to explore what types of sanctions were imposed and were more effective than others. The two Obama administrations lasted for eight years from 2009 to 2017, and the time that is consistent with Rouhani's discourses from 2009 to 2013, when the US imposed numerous sanctions both unilaterally and multilaterally, in particular against the nuclear programme.

The answer to this question, of course, would be helpful not only to find out the most effective sanctions that have been imposed either unilaterally or multilaterally but also what determine the vulnerable Iranian sectors that sanctions can severely affect. Mostly, Rouhani's expression on the severity of US sanctions can be ascribed to the oil embargo that was implemented essentially by the EU and the US. Iran in 2011 and 2012, especially during the wide oil embargo by the US and the EU, lost about 55 per cent of its revenues (Amuzegar, 2008). A similar opinion came from a participant in response to a question about the role of US sanctions in affecting Iran's economy "*The Obama administration was very successful in terms of reducing Iran's export of oil which is an essential element of the government's budget. So, I think without the economic sanctions I don't think the mismanagement and corruption what had diminished Iran's oil exports*" (GS).

Another participant agreed with the idea that Obama had an influential impact on international cooperation by imposing sanctions against Iran. "*I mean, obviously, the sanctions did have an impact, particularly after the Europeans stopped purchasing your Iranian oil. In addition, it was the cooperation of most of the world on sanctions when Obama was president, frankly, that*

*led to their effectiveness. The sanctions had a very clear goal, namely to achieve a nuclear agreement, which they subsequently did” (BS).*

Khamenei flew on the US, disclosing information that it was involved when the Americans were fuelled by hostility by sending officials and managers of companies to some countries to convince and/or punish them if they would not embargo Iran’s oil as well as cut any financial transactions with it. Generally, Iranian discourse has been filled with hostility towards the US since 1979 (Jessen, 2017). This required some views as a matter of foreign policy; therefore, Rouhani, responding to Khamenei's discourse on the involvement of the US in lobbying countries against Iranian oil, expressed that trust is the first step that enables Iran to talk and move forward in good relations with the rest of the world based on reciprocal respect as well as shared interests.

Due to the effects of sanctions, along with Rouhani’s ideational elements and his experience as a diplomat, Rouhani would not disregard the US if elected. This is attributed to the effective role of the US in the international arena as well as his moderate beliefs on the need to have good relations with other nations on the basis of respect and equality. It is also a matter of experience. Rouhani’s previous job as a diplomat contributed to constituting his ideas in a way that shaped Iran’s identity and nuclear interest as a participant, emphasised: *“I think my impression is that his previous performance as a chief nuclear negotiator and on being the head of the Supreme National Security Council, especially from 2003 to 2005 when Iran engaged the confidence building with E3 and so that background really distinguishes him from other candidates so they had a positive record that demonstrated that he could result in a foreign policy issue diplomatically.” (AB).*

The above expressions from Khamenei ascribed to the sanctions as the US is one of the main senders as well as to the inherited hostility between them. Khamenei did not mention the EU in the same way he talked about the US. It is worth noting that Americans intensified sanctions before the 2013 presidential elections. The US believes that a wide range of embargoes on Iran’s oil would prevent it from fulfilling its people’s demands, and this may trigger them against the regime as a whole, or at least against electing a conservative candidate. The widespread poverty in Iranian society has widened recently (Bazoobandi, 2012).

Evoking revolutionary terms, Khamenei stated that Iran will not give up on and will fight America’s bullying, and Iran will, with confidence, continue its development and scientific achievements. To emphasise Iran’s national pride and to engrave the term ‘enemies’ in the Iranians’ heads, Khamenei always uses and reminds Iranians about this in his discourses. Khamenei always claims that the Iranian nation has been targeted by enemies because Iran has a

dignified history and a great revolution that enhances three discourses of justice, independence, and resistance (Moshirzadeh, 2007).

Rouhani had intersubjectivity with Ahmad Mir Motahari, the economic expert in Shargh about the effects of sanctions. Motahari mentioned the most negative effects of sanctions on Iran, especially those related to domestic production when Iranian factories do not work. The outcomes of that can be a decline in economic growth, a lack of investments, growing government debt, and a deficit in the budget as a result of the oil embargo and the banking system SWIFT. It is important to share a people's rational values that represent all Iranians who are in the same situation of suffering from sanctions (BS; MH; NH). The decline in economic growth and a lack of investments regardless of domestic or foreign alongside a deficit in the government's budget are due to the decline of revenues from oil.

#### 7.5.2.5. Banking sanctions: Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications 'SWIFT'

Perceiving the consequences of sanctions on Iran's interests, Rouhani continued to construct the effects of sanctions, especially within banking systems. The SWIFT banking system was one of the financial sanctions against Iran that disconnected it from dealing with the international banking system (Aghazadeh, 2013). Rouhani's approach, in line with most domestic and international reliable resources, reflects an assessment that the effects of economic sanctions have had more significant effects on the economy, including banking problems, than other factors (Farzanegan and Hayo, 2019). Rouhani, in an interview, received questions from inside and outside Iran about his approaches and plans if elected. He answered questions from outside Iran related to difficulties that Iranians outside Iran were facing when transferring money to Iran, especially banking problems as a result of sanctions. The oil embargo and SWIFT sanctions are interrelated and they had a profound impact on Iran as a participant dais: *"It was only around 2010 or so that you start to see these really more robust sanctions put into place by the UN, the United States and also in the European Union that put much more strict restrictions on Iran's access to the international financial system obviously big cuts to Iranian oil exports as a result of the EU embargo US"* (NM).

Typically, presidential candidates are keen to meet with supporters in different forms; interviews are considered a significant event where a candidate meets in person and answers questions about several issues. These interviews are mostly recorded; therefore, they can be found on the internet at any time. Rouhani wanted to use this platform to deliver his policies, achievements, and promises, especially with respect to the economy. Seemingly, he wanted to convince people that he knew the extent of these kinds of sanctions, as they have negatively influenced all Iranians and are also applied to Iranians inside Iran. In this context, Rouhani

wanted to take advantage of being seen by a huge number of people on national TV to present his moderate approach, as he wanted to encourage them to vote for him to be able to resolve the current situation constructively.

Rouhani had intersubjectivity with Shargh on the severity of sanctions' impacts on Iran that resulted in major harm. Seyed Muhammad Hossein Adeli, the former governor of the Central Bank, stated clearly that sanctions have inflicted heavy costs on the economy. He also admitted the severe effects of sanctions on Iran. Nonetheless, he made that statement in a manipulative way when expressing the sensitivity of such issues and using a 'great deal of caution' when discussing the impact caused by sanctions that need a solution to get out of this situation. Adeli concluded that *"if the current situation of imposing sanctions and increasing pressure continues, the ability to resist cannot be sustainable"*, as he described the current sanctions on Iran as the most severe sanctions compared to all other sanctioned countries. It is worth noticing that Adeli was the former governor of the Central Bank, and he was more aware than others of the consequences of disconnecting Iran from SWIFT. That was a serious issue for Iran in order to exchange currencies as well as to receive its financial transactions for oil export *"The sanctions that to me were the greatest political threat to the Iranian government were limits on their oil exports including financial limits on their ability to acquire hard currency in exchange for oil exports. Those were almost entirely due to international economic sanctions rather than mismanagement and corruption"* (GS).

The financial sanctions had tangible impacts on Iran's system banking when disconnecting Iran from the SWIFT system in 2012 (Draca et al., 2018). What has been expressed explicitly by the candidates, too, is that the main cause is the banking system and the effects of financial sanctions that made Iran banned from the SWIFT network (Ghasseminejad and Jahan-Parvar, 2020). Economic sanctions on Iran have increased corruption, bribery, and smuggling (Kamali, Mashayekh, and Jandaghi, 2016). It is Iran's identity and national pride, Khamenei was keen not to give up as resistance is a fundamental principle of the revolution. Hence, he announced that Iranians are struggling, and he continued to explain that economic weakness today relates to laxity and negligence, as the main causes of Iran's economic weakness were laxity and negligence, which helped the 'enemy' to achieve its goal.

Bravely, Rouhani wanted to affirm his assessment and stance concerning the main cause of economic harm as he responded to Khamenei's stance when the latter blamed the 'negligence' and 'laxity' in causing the economic harm. Rouhani again, wanted to be clear that he admitted sanctions as the main cause, especially when most officials have admitted the heavy effects of sanctions on Iran's economy are striking. Rouhani's approach has been explained within these new texts that have contributed to actively constituting his ideas and meanings driven by his

ideational elements that support attitudes, convictions, beliefs, and perspectives, as the president's position has power and influence in foreign policy to some extent despite the final word being for Khamenei (Iranian constitution, 1979 and 1989).

#### 7.5.2.6. Conclusion

This section revealed Rouhani's stance on the main cause of economic harm in Iran. Rouhani considers international sanctions to be the main cause when announcing his stance within his new texts. This section also showed that Rouhani kept defending his performance when acting as former Iran's chief nuclear negotiator. In line with that, Rouhani also expressed the difference between the UNSC and the Board of Governors when assessing the effects of economic sanctions regarding Iran's nuclear file. As we have seen, Rouhani gave explanations on the main idea of sanctions effects that are based on intersubjective meanings from some texts of Khamenei and Shargh. Rouhani's texts were convergent with Shargh's texts about the sanctions as the main cause of economic harm.

To clarify his idea, Rouhani expressed about 'countries' are the US and the EU in particular as they are the main senders of sanctions; 'all troubles' are due to referring Iran's nuclear programme from the Board of Governors to the UNSC and resulting in imposing sanctions including economic, social, and security issues; 'Obama's administration', the second term when imposing an embargo on Iran's oil; 'imperfect government' when Ahmadinejad's government failed in particular to reduce Iran's dependence on oil; Sanctions affected Iran severely such as embargo on Iran's oil and the financial sanctions when disconnecting Iran from the SWIFT; the main cause is related to the effects of sanctions; Isolation; US sanctions; and and 'hundreds factories do not work'. Rouhani responded indirectly to Khamenei's texts when the latter blamed the 'negligence' and 'laxity' in causing the economic harm, as this was not the real cause, but the heavy effects of sanctions. Rouhani blamed the effects of sanctions as the main cause of the economic harm, not the mismanagement; therefore, his conception to improve the economy relies on lifting sanctions. The majority of participants agreed with this claim, as they considered mismanagement to be a minor or secondary factor that led to the harm compared to the effects of sanctions as the main cause.

#### 7.5.3. The main cause of economic harm within Ghalibaf's texts is mismanagement

This section examines Ghalibaf's discourse about the main cause of economic harm. It shows that he did not consider the effects of sanctions to be the main cause of Iran's economic harm, instead, he considered mismanagement. It also shows that Ghalibaf criticised those who consider that other problems in the country are essentially related to the sanctions. Ghalibaf shared ideas with Khamenei and some texts from the domestic newspaper Kayhan. This section

begins with key texts from Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan; Mismanagement; criticising Ahmadinejad's governments and previous governments; vulnerable economy; and wrong and harmful policies.

(i) Ghalibaf's texts:

This section aims to explore Ghalibaf's assessment of the main cause of economic harm based on his framing of the economic factor. Ghalibaf on 23/04/2013, regarding 'mismanagement' and 'sanctions' effects provided views in an interview with Tasnim News Agency, Ghalibaf said:

I consider this to be completely wrong and giving the wrong address. To say that economic problems are solved only when the issue of sanctions is resolved. This is to accept that all our current economic problems are due to sanctions and foreign policy issues. This is what some people are saying inside now to hide their negative role and mismanagement in shaping the current economic situation... Some attribute today's problems to sanctions to downplay their role in mismanagement. Sanctions were once torn to shreds... However, a review of the economic policymaking process of the past few years reveals that a series of wrong economic policies, such as the arbitrary injection of money into society, increasing liquidity, strange growth of imports, and unbalanced monetary and fiscal policies have caused vulnerability (Ghalibaf 6, 2013).

In the same interview, Ghalibaf reiterated Khamenei's stance that the flaw came from the nature of the Iranian economy and not from the effects of sanctions. This is the weakness that, according to him, the enemy took advantage of and imposed sanctions based on:

It was our economy that the enemy used and focused on to bring us to our knees. However, if we were vigilant and repelled our vulnerabilities instead of weakening the foundations of our economy, the enemy could no longer take advantage of our weaknesses (Ghalibaf 7, 2013).

Ghalibaf stated on 11/06/ 2013, in a meeting with his supporters in Isfahan, that the real cause of the economic problem in Iran is mismanagement. He also explained that by giving examples of creating jobs before the imposition of sanctions. Iran was facing a decrease of 300,000 jobs, even though it achieved \$600 billion in revenues, particularly from exporting oil. He expressed that sanctions were only related to the past two years (2011, 2012), and therefore they were not the cause of economic problems. Ghalibaf also on 27/04/2013 said:

Today, the mismanagement of our country has caused problems. If we see the east of Isfahan struggling with a lack of water, this is not due to a lack of water. There has been strong management of the water in the region, and unfortunately, this weak management has not only existed in this sector but also in all areas of the

country. In 2006, there were 25 million and 800 thousand people, while 600 billion dollars entered the country. Unfortunately, despite the inflow of money into the country, we have witnessed a decrease of 300,000 jobs in the country. The sanctions are related to the last two years, so most of them are related to mismanagement. People are waiting for a profound change in the country, and this change means a change in the material and spiritual dimensions of life. On June 15, the most important point to consider is that we must end such management (Ghalibaf 15, 2013).

Ghalibaf on 15/05/2013 emphasised the consequences of mismanagement at first and then the political dispute that led to economic harm and eventually weakened the whole country. Ghalibaf said:

Continuing to pay subsidies and considering production subsidies in rural areas will be among my other plans in the government... Islamic Iran has a very high capacity and capability... What has weakened the country today is the weakness in management, tension, and political disputes, and one of the priorities of my work is to get the government out of political conflicts (Ghalibaf 3, 2013).

(ii) Khamenei's texts:

The supreme leader in a speech at Imam Ridha's (a.s.) Shrine, on 21/03/2013, mentioned the great work that had been done on infrastructure despite the sanctions. He mentioned mismanagement and admitted indirectly the negative effects of sanctions, explaining some measures that could be taken to reduce the effect of sanctions:

The Americans sometimes sent us letters and messages telling us they were our friends... But despite these false claims, in practice, they imposed harsh sanctions from the beginning of the year 1391—sanctions on oil and sanctions on banking and monetary transactions between the Islamic Republic and other countries. A massive amount of work was done. If we had built this infrastructure earlier, the sanctions that were imposed by the enemies would have failed to produce the few negative effects that they did (Khamenei 12, 2013).

Khamenei in a speech to Labourers and Producers on 27/04/2013, warned about the harmful policies of 'mismanagement' that contributed to economic harm:

Adopting a routine outlook on economic issues is harmful. Changing economic policies constantly is harmful, and relying on inexpert opinions in all sectors, particularly economic sectors, is harmful. Economic policies should be based on an economy of resistance (Khamenei 13, 2013).

Khamenei on the same occasion, on 27/04/2013, admitted that imposing economic sanctions has led to popular dissatisfaction with the regime, but he believes that if some measures had been taken, the effect of sanctions on people would have been reduced:

The enemy tried to make the people leave the arena by imposing sanctions and exerting different kinds of economic pressure. They say that they are not the enemies of the people... Most pressures are exerted to make people unhappy, make them experience hardships, and put them under pressure. They are doing this so that they may trigger the people against the Islamic Republic. The goal is to exert pressure on the people. If this great economic movement, this economic leap and these proper plans receive great attention in the legislative, executive, and other sectors, then the effect of all these pressures will be countered. The people of Iran and officials should frustrate the enemy with their firm determination (Khamenei 14, 2013).

(iii) Kayhan's texts:

Muhammad Nahavandian on 23/05/2013, explained that Iran's economy is suffering due to management problems and not because of sanctions:

At first, this group considered the sanctions ineffective and considered Iran's economy completely separate, but now we see the same group blaming all the country's economic problems on the sanctions... In this situation, that is not the case, and many of our problems are due to our management problems. Unfortunately, the officials of the National Productivity Festival have been looking for economic statistics for the last three months of 1990. But so far this has not been done, which shows the low level of transparency in the Iranian economy. This has caused our country to miss many of its economic goals. We should try to institutionalise productivity and its appropriate culture in different economic sectors of the country, and if we expect the next generation of the country to be moral, we must establish the country's economy away from monopolies and with high transparency (Kayhan 3, 2013).

The Minister of Economy and Finance, Seyed Shamsuddin Hosseini, on 27/05/2013, stated that financial sanctions against Iran have crippled the economy, and Iran needs a new 'comprehensive plan':

The analysis of Iran's economic environment should be done considering the sanctions process... In the last year and a half, financial sanctions on banks, insurance companies, money transfers, and precious metals have joined the Central Bank sanctions list of companies, money transfers, and precious metals have joined the Central Bank sanctions... The wave of sanctions has increased and has



been crippling... We are in an economic war, and a comprehensive plan must be drawn up, not only on a case-by-case basis but also within the framework of macro-policies, including fiscal, monetary, commercial, and industrial policies (Kayhan 4, 2013).

#### 7.5.3.1. Analysis

This section shows that Ghalibaf adopted a different stance compared to Rouhani about the main cause of economic harm in Iran. The section illustrates that he considered mismanagement and wrong economic policies to be the main causes of economic harm, not sanctions effects. Ghalibaf's above discourses provide the idea of 'mismanagement' as the main cause of economic harm. Also, provide some expressions that describe his main idea such as 'some people'; 'it is our economy that the enemy used to focus on'; 'problems'; 'today'; 'material and spiritual change'; the 'last two years'; and the 'weakness in management'.

#### 7.5.3.2. Framing mismanagement

For several reasons, as mentioned above by one of the participants, conservatives usually tend to blame their government rather than the sanctions for economic problems. Ghalibaf, as a conservative, also followed this approach and attacked officials and governments, saying that their economic management has led to serious economic problems. Mismanagement might be one of the causes that led to economic harm, but not the main one, as Iranians felt the effects of sanctions on their daily lives were significant (Carbtree, 2013). A participant supports this view that mismanagement might had a minor impact on the economy compared to sanctions effects: *"That is very clear that sanctions had the major role in Iran's economic difficulties but they're not the only source of economic problems they're also internal factors some economic policies such as mismanagement they were all sort of had of role in Iran's economic problems"* (AB).

Another participant also said that the mismanagement will not have full responsibility for the harm as it can be a secondary factor: *"If the government has mismanagement and corruption, it is partially responsible for those outcomes and the gridlock that happens inside the government"* (EL). In fact, most of the participants agreed that mismanagement can be an internal factor and have minor effects that might have caused part of the problem. However, one participant had different views. He ranked mismanagement the first cause of the harm when sanctions are the third *"Among those 3 main causes or reasons for the economic crisis in Iran, I mean mismanagement as a whole, inside or outside, corruption, and the effects of the economic sanctions, which one will have the highest impact? I would say mismanagement number one because Iran is very strong economically, so that is the reason why I put mismanagement, and I would say that this includes corruption and then the sanctions"* (MZ). In this context,

mismanagement can be framed through three sub-sections: Criticising Ahmadinejad's governments and previous governments; the vulnerable economy; and wrong and harmful policies.

### 7.5.3.3. Criticising Ahmadinejad's governments and previous governments

Ghalibaf responded to some Iranians who always repeated that solving the sanctions issue is key to resolving the other economic problems in the country. He did not agree with their statements, considering they were completely 'wrong'. To put this differently, it means that there is a large group of Iranians, including figures influenced by Ghalibaf's texts, stating that Iran's economic problems have resulted from sanctions and Iran's foreign policy. In his turn, Ghalibaf accused some of those people, not sanctions, as they were involved in this situation of their mismanagement when they were heads of governments and in top positions. He was also attacking Ahmadinejad's ear in the context of economic mismanagement, especially when the oil prices went very high and he spent them through failed policies.

Yet, despite the fact that Ghalibaf was trying to emphasise the role of mismanagement in causing harm, a participant agreed partially with him about these policies, but he confessed that this harm cannot be a result of mismanagement alone, mentioning the severe sanctions between 2010 and 2013: *"Ahmadinejad's government closed the national planning office. He spent the government revenue as a way to get reelected, so he toured smaller cities and villages and asked people what they wanted. Anyhow, this was just tremendous mismanagement of the economy, a tremendous amount of corruption, and on top of that sanctions, but you cannot, if we take a look at the 2010 to 2013 period when financial sanctions of the sanctions committee/committee, you cannot have a contraction of the economy at 25 to 30 per cent just because of mismanagement and corruption"* (TP).

In order to convince voters, Ghalibaf wanted to provide examples and evidence that the current hard situation is due to a long mismanagement and because of the sanctions. He explained further that, to hide their role in mismanagement, they ascribe Iran's problems to the international sanctions as an exogenous factor. In a smart way, and in order not to lose support from any political faction in the elections, Ghalibaf used 'some people' without mentioning a particular political faction because this can be attributed to who is being accused and is responsible for the current economic harm, whether he meant conservatives, in particular, Ahmadinejad's era of 2005–2013, or reformists, in particular, Khatami's era from 1997–2005, or pragmatic-conservatives, in particular, Rafsanjani's era from 1989–1997.

On this basis, as a conservative, Ghalibaf was mostly meant by 'some people,' the pragmatic conservatives and reformists who governed the country from 1989 to 2005. He considered

Khamenei's assessment when mentioning the great work of the past few years, namely Ahmadinejad's era from 2005 to 2013. Ghalibaf accused their approaches of working to connect the Iranian economy with the international system, driven by liberal policies that contradict the Islamic economy as Western values. Rafsanjani and Khatami adopted economic reform policies in order to reconstruct the Iranian economy through privatisation and deregulation (Habibi, 2008). However, a participant had a different view that it was Ahmadinejad's mismanagement "*Ahmadinejad really was economically illiterate and not qualified to be the chief executive of the country the people that he appointed were not very good and he squandered a tremendous amount of money in his first term*" (BS).

Ghalibaf rejects considering sanctions as the main cause of the economic harm, and instead, he blames wrong economic policies that have been taken in the 'past years' during Ahmadinejad's presidency and before, such as increased liquidity, a significant increase in imports, and unbalanced monetary and financial policies. Ghalibaf attributed the economic harm to wrong policies without clarifying them clearly, as some of them were vulnerable to sanctions, especially in relation to lost high oil revenues (Amuzegar, 2008; Crane, Lal, and Martini, 2008). A participant supports a combination of causes that might have led to the harm "*The Ahmadinejad period and there was in my opinion a combination of domestic economic policies and sanctions and that led to the economic hardship*" (NH). Ghalibaf wanted to dominate and control the production process of expressions and meanings to deliver his main idea as well as to contribute, from his place as a presidential candidate backed by a huge experience to mismanagement debate rather than sanctions debate.

#### 7.5.3.4. Vulnerable economy

Ghalibaf stressed that the main cause of the current situation in Iran is the nature of the Iranian economy, which has not been reformed through successive governments. This can be attributed to the revolution where the regime was sensitive toward economic reform "*The new political system rejected any reform to that system, so the political economic system in Iran now runs for 40 years without serious reform, or there is no real economic structure, and there are no bank policy reforms or procedures, no financial policies, and no clear transparency with the national community in the international financial system*" (MZ). He continued that the enemy took this leap to impose sanctions to bring the Iranians to their knees. Ghalibaf assessed that if we were more vigilant and realised this at an early stage, the enemy would not be able to take advantage of our economic vulnerability. Ghalibaf wanted to echo Khamenei's discourse about the nature of the economy, which helped 'enemies' harm the economy more than sanctions. According to them, the main problem with the economy relies on oil, and this is the most vulnerable aspect of the economy as it contributes to the government budget by up to 50 per cent.

During the sanctions, Iran can focus on petrochemical products, mining, tourism, and reducing Iran's dependence on exporting oil by following a smart management approach (Heuty, 2012). There is a positive relationship between the increments in Iran's petrochemical products and economic growth (Maitah and Abdoljabbar, 2015). According to Khamenei, preventing Iran from doing financial transactions with the world was also effective through the SWIFT system, as Iran's banking system was unable to create alternatives or at least reduce the effects to a minimum. Similar to Rouhani, Ghalibaf wanted to emphasise the Iranians' unity as well as put himself in the same situation when he said 'it is our economy' that the enemy used to focus on.

In the context of poor resistance to the economy, the 'enemies targeted the weakest aspect of Iran's economy. Khamenei wanted to declare that the Americans' approach when dealing with Iran showed the Americans' double standards. He distinguished between their talking and their practice, as they claimed in letters to Iranian officials that they are friends of Iran, but their actions are completely different when they resort to imposing severe sanctions. In particular, he mentioned the sanctions imposed by the Americans in 2012 before the presidential elections of 2013 to decrease Iranian turnout and thus affect the legitimacy of the regime.

These sanctions targeted Iran's oil and disconnected Iran from conducting financial transactions with the rest of the world (Ghasseminejad and Jahan-Parvar, 2020). However, Khamenei wanted to encourage these efforts and show Iran's ability to achieve great work, which was demonstrated in many aspects during the sanctions. Due to several reasons, a participant explained that Iranians were assuming that the participation in the elections in 2013 would be low: *"People are less likely to turn out for elections due to the failure to deliver on their promises and poor economic conditions, and last year's parliamentary elections had the lowest turnout"* (BA).

Khamenei was aware of the US's goal of imposition of sanctions and stated that enemies were trying to impose sanctions and place pressure on Iranians in order to decrease the turnout rate in the elections, where this pressure makes people unhappy and creates uncomfortable conditions. Khamenei's concern may be about the plots that the enemy was making against the Iranian nation at that time to achieve two goals: in the short term, (i) to influence Iranians to not participate in the elections to put the legitimacy of the regime at risk. This can be essentially on the basis of the 2009 election outcomes because results of fraud. As the participant said, this also emphasises that the Green Movement had a positive role in making the 2013 elections more transparent *"A big thing that was in the minds of people was the 2009 Green Movement demonstrations which I was there for where people came out to protest against what they saw as voting irregularities and voter fraud I mean again perceptions of that existing and that led to course repression and created problems for Iranian activists and citizens"* (EL).

(ii) to trigger Iranians to stand against the regime at large. Another participant also agreed that the results of the 2009 elections led to the results of the 2013 elections, and Khamenei's acceptance of the result: *"I think that is another aspect of what was going on in the election but clearly, if you look at the results he [Rouhani] did well and you also might want to link this back to 2009 and the Green Movement ...Khamenei decided this was okay because it is obviously in 2009 he took a very different approach to the elections and so he kind of made the decision that he was going to let this proceed and play out and was okay with the outcome"* (NM). Iran's social conditions are related to its economic ones, and a great many of them are the result of inflation and inequality in the distribution of incomes (Mohsenia and Jouzaryanb, 2016). Khamenei seems to blame mismanagement as well as justify that if we strengthened these aspects earlier, the minor effects of the sanctions they have imposed would fail.

Ghalibaf responded to that and widened the scope of Iran's enemies. He used the term 'enemy' in his discourse more broadly than Khamenei, he wanted to include not only the Americans but also all of the international community through the sanctions regime –senders– are enemies. As the thesis has explained earlier that was based on his ideational elements and understanding of Iran's identity and interests. Given this, one can realise that sanctions have been effective on Iran and have inflicted a heavy cost on the Iranian economy because Khamenei and Ghalibaf have used the conjunction 'if' to serve as a 'condition', which implies that the economy is suffering. What we can extract from their texts is this: Iran's economy was vulnerable to international sanctions, and many of its policies were wrong; thus, sanctions have been effective. But if the economy was working well and proper policies were implemented before imposing sanctions, sanctions would have no effect. Khamenei added that if these great economic movements and good plans received a proper response in the legislative, executive, and other sectors, then there would be no effect of all these pressures.

A participant expressed that senders tend to impose sanctions on the vulnerable aspects of the economy in order to gain positive results *"It is worth remembering that sanctions like really any former pressure tend to work best on things that are vulnerable and the Iranian economy was already pretty vulnerable to economic coercion because of its fragile state"* (RN). This provides evidence that the sanctions on Iran had tangible effects, but, according to Khamenei, if the economy was established on a solid foundation, these effects would never affect the economy. He invoked the spirit of officials and people to work hard to frustrate the enemy's goals. The comprehensive sanctions affected ordinary people more than the regime, as it was able to deal with the massive demonstrations of the Green Movement. In addition, the parliamentary election in 2012 indicated the support that Khamenei has enjoyed, in particular, compared to

Ahmadinejad's supporters, when the former has publicly criticised the latter (Fulton and Taleblu, 2012; Kamal, 2013; Borszik, 2016).

Ghalibaf also shared ideas with the Minister of Economy and Finance, Seyed Shamsuddin Hosseini, in Kayhan who provided some types of sanctions that crippled the economy in the last year and a half, namely, 2011-2012, such as financial sanctions on banks, insurance companies, money transfers, and sanctions on the central bank. He stated that sanctions have become ever harsher and have affected Iran. Moreover, he described the imposition of sanctions on Iran as an economic war; therefore, Iran should have a holistic long-term plan considering fiscal and monetary aspects as well as industry. Ghalibaf used a similar expression to Hoseeini's one related to 'last year and a half' when he said: sanctions are related to the last two years.

Ghalibaf reproduced Khamenei's texts in his style, as Khamenei was concerned about the consequences when sanctions make people unhappy and thus generate huge pressure on them, which may trigger them to stand up against the regime in particular. Ghalibaf wanted to take responsibility for raising awareness among Iranians, as Khamenei said: "The people of Iran and the officials of the country should frustrate the enemies' plots". Ghalibaf emphasised the importance of reflecting on these ideas that constitute his stance in media reports and articles. Media is an effective tool for disseminating language, news, political discourse, and information (Fairclough, 1995). Ghalibaf echoed Khamenei's discourse about the enemies' polt and what the enemy is doing to put pressure on them through imposing sanctions, as well as the harmful policies that Iran used to follow that imposed heavy costs on the economy and caused social, political, and security problems.

#### 7.5.3.5. Wrong and harmful economic policies

Khamenei's discourse has explained what kind of 'harmful' policies led to economic harm in Iran. These harmful policies are: dealing with the economy based on a routine view; having unstable economic policies under constant change; neglecting the experts in all fields; and finally, his solution is that the economy should be built on an economy of resistance. Indeed, these mentioned policies exist in most countries' economies without causing similar harm to that inflicted on the Iranian economy. Khamenei seems to be contradictory; when he considered domestic policies to be the main cause of Iran's economic harm, he gave a solution that reflected the effects of sanctions when expressing that the economy should be established based on resistance, which the latter requires mainly as various efforts that countries are working on to encounter an external threat rather than internal ones.

Based on Khamenei's discourse on the harmful policies, Ghalibaf summarised and ranked the problems that have weakened the whole of Iran as follows: (i) weakness of management; (ii)

tension; and (iii) political dispute. Ghalibaf did not mention sanctions or relations with the world in order to resolve economic harm; instead, he focused on domestic policies in terms of separating the government from political conflicts among Iranian factions. Ghalibaf wanted to support Khamenei's views on harmful policies, not sanctions, along with adhering to his understanding and assessment of the role of mismanagement in affecting the economy. For instance, he gave an example of mismanagement when he mentioned a water problem in Isfahan. Ghalibaf wanted to prove his assessment of the marginal effects of sanctions and blame mismanagement as the main cause of the economic harm.

He gave the example that when Iran's population was 25 million, Iran was earning \$600 billion due to the increase in oil prices from 2005 to 2013 (OPEC, 2022). This view has been mentioned by a participant who emphasised the role of mismanagement along with sanctions on the oil revenues during these eight years *"I think 8 years more oil revenues than Iran have from 1950 to 2006. So when you take a look at all of that oil revenue those years under Ahmadinejad they had even greater because we are talking about oil prices that went over 150"* (TB). Ghalibaf explained that in light of this amount of money, and the fact that there were no sanctions, Iran was struggling to create 300,000 jobs. He precisely illustrated that within the past few years, governments followed a series of wrong macro and micro economic policies, such as arbitrary injection, increasing liquidity, and unbalanced monetary and fiscal policies. All these policies, according to him, have caused vulnerability and not sanctions.

One participant has supported Ghalibaf's views on 'increasing liquidity', as Ahmadinejad was paying cash money to people *"The incompetence of the Ahmadinejad administration in almost all this governance, apart from repression. Ahmadinejad was a populist; he vastly contributed to the problem of inflation in Iran because he handed out money literally to almost everyone. If you may recall, he had a system of cash payments that were introduced after there was a subsidy reform, but he also just handed out a lot of money to many people"* (BS). Another participant agreed with (BS) about the disqualification of Ahmadinejad, especially paying cash money to people instead of listening to experts *"During the Ahmadinejad government it was very much of a populist government and I was living in Iran at the time and one of the Ahmadinejad ways of gaining support during his two terms as president between 2005 and 2013 was this populist policy of redistributing income from higher socioeconomic classes to lower socioeconomic classes in more above cash transfers to people at subsidies and so this allowed president Ahmadinejad to gain support from a segment of the population"* (EL).

Broadly, Ghalibaf put Muhammad Nahavandian's words in the context of seeking 'change' that Iranians are keen to achieve in years to come. Nahavandian is the chairman of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, who emphasised that the next generation of Iran should build mainly on

‘transparency’ and anti-monopolies. Nahavandian gave an example of that when he declared that the ‘National Productivity Festival’ was struggling to get some data about the economy because of the lack of transparency within the economic domain. One can ask why the Iranian authorities hide some sensitive data from the public. Generally, it might be understood concerning the regime’s efforts to show fake data to minimise the effect of sanctions.

Ghalibaf in intersubjective meanings with Nahavandian’s texts emphasised spiritual values when using terms of ‘material and spiritual’ change that included desired features and policies, which can be understood as productivity, anti-monopoly, and transparency in the context of Iran’s future economy and management at large. Ghalibaf also stressed Nahavandian’s idea of accusation and made a clear statement accusation when he accused a group of people who attributed Iran’s problems to sanctions, which is not true. Nahavandian stressed that the main cause of these problems is mismanagement. Ghalibaf’s stance reflected his ideational elements and shared ideas with Kayhan and Khamenei. Rouhani and Ghalibaf share similar values, beliefs, experiences, ideologies, and firm affiliations to the Islamic Revolution because they belong to the conservatives who consider the US and the West to a greater extent, as enemies, and they should not admit that they can defeat Iran even through sanctions. Therefore, they were trying to blame mismanagement rather than international sanctions.

#### 7.5.3.6. Conclusion

This section revealed Ghalibaf’s stance on the main cause of economic harm in Iran. Ghalibaf considered that mismanagement was the main cause of Iran’s economic harm, not the sanctions. His ideas and explanations were essentially based on his conceptions of Iran’s identity and interests. In order to deliver his main idea about the mismanagement, he provided some expressions such as ‘some people’ as he meant the pragmatic conservatives and reformists who governed the country from 1989 to 2005 and were trying to westernise the economy; ‘it is our economy that the enemy used to focus on today by imposing sanctions; the ‘last two years’ as Iran’s economy relies on exporting the oil and faced oil embargoes 2011–2012; ‘problems’ means other kinds of problems that the sanctions cause such as social, political, and security problems; ‘material and spiritual change’ that included desired features and policies, which can be understood as productivity, anti-monopoly, and transparency in the context of Iran’s future economy and management at large; and ‘weakness in management’ related to dealing with the economy based on a routine view, unstable economic policies and constant change, and ignoring qualified people. Although Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan have blamed mismanagement as the main cause of the economic harm, the majority of participants did not agree with this claim, as they considered mismanagement to be a minor or secondary factor that led to the harm compared to the effects of sanctions as the main cause.



## 7.6. Chapter conclusion

The chapter showed that the economy was a high-priority issue salience for Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh, Kayhan, and the voters. Although the chapter showed that they agreed upon the priority of the economy as a high issue salience, it also showed that the difference in their ideational elements and the ways of understanding and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests led to two different constructions of the main cause of the economic harm. When Rouhani constructed the effects of the economic sanctions as the main cause, Ghalibaf constructed mismanagement to be the main cause. The chapter provided an overview of the economic context of the presidential election in 2013. The chapter also showed that some of the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf had intersubjective meanings with Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan. Rouhani and Shargh had the same understanding of the relationship between economic sanctions and economic harm. Whereas Ghalibaf had a different understanding with Khamenei and Kayhan that there is no relationship between economic sanctions and economic harm and that it is a matter of mismanagement.

ANALYSING THE APPROACHES OF ROUHANI AND GHALIBAF TO SOLVE THE  
ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

**8.1. Introduction**

The previous chapter analysed discourses for Rouhani and Ghalibaf on the economic factor and demonstrated that it was the most important among other factors and was of high issue salience for Rouhani and Ghalibaf. The chapter also showed that they framed the main cause of the economic harm differently, and that was essentially according to their different ideational elements and their understanding of Iran's identity and interests. This chapter analyses the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf that competed in the election campaigns to frame the proper approach to resolving economic harm. This chapter argues that the two different approaches suggested by Rouhani and Ghalibaf rely on two different ideas that constitute the core of their approaches: renegotiating the nuclear programme to lift the sanctions suggested by Rouhani; and: enhancing economic management as suggested by Ghalibaf. I will show in this chapter the extent to which Rouhani considered the nuclear negotiations an issue of high salience, whereas Ghalibaf considered them an issue of low salience and instead considered enhancing the management an issue of high salience. This chapter includes two sections: Rouhani's approach to solving the economic problems by lifting sanctions, and Ghalibaf's approach to solving the economic issue and achieving Iran's economic prosperity by enhancing economic efficiency.

**8.2. Rouhani's approach towards solving Iran's economic problem through lifting sanctions**

This section aims to analyse Rouhani's discourse to explore his approach to solving the economic problem. It examines his discourses that had intersubjective meanings with the discourse of Khamenei and some texts from Shargh. It also shows that lifting the sanctions through nuclear negotiations is a high issue salience for him to address economic problems. The section shows that Rouhani's main idea as well as a high issue salience has been influenced by his ideational elements and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. The section begins with key texts from Rouhani, Khamenei, and Shargh and then the analysis of themes such as lifting sanctions, negotiation process, negotiations with the US, and fruitful negotiations from Rouhani's perspective.

(i) Rouhani's texts:

In an attempt to express his idea of resolving Iran's economic harm and achieving economic prosperity, In an interview with Tehran Central News on 29/05/2013, Rouhani stated on 29/05/2013 that economic prosperity is possible to achieve. He also expressed the importance of saving the country from the current situation:

Expensiveness can be easily dealt with. Unemployment can also be dealt with. Let me make a very simple point. That is, with a correct change in an economic issue, we can solve unemployment. We can overcome unemployment with economic prosperity...The country's factories are operating at 20 per cent to 40 per cent of their active capacity. We must bring all production centres to 100 per cent full operation, which is possible... In the shadow of sanctions, we have put them on the path to a final settlement, step by step. This is possible. We must save the country's economy from the current situation (Rouhani 4, 2013).

Rouhani on 13/06/2013 expressed that Iranians do not *deserve* all these economic problems as well as losing dignity at the international level. He stated that he wanted to become president to "save the country from the oppressive sanctions":

We did not deserve all this suffering, inflation, unemployment, and insults in the international arena... We have entered this field to achieve national goals, save the country from oppressive sanctions, and establish our relations with the world based on constructive interaction (Rouhani 13, 2013).

Rouhani in the same interview on 29/05/2013, Rouhani said that he wanted to lift the sanctions if elected, as he considers them against the interests of the Iranians, especially the new sanctions '*embargo*' related to the nuclear issue, which is different from the embargo that Iran faced during the war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988:

It is said that if I become president, I will lift the sanctions. The fact is that it is part of the sanctions. We have been familiar with and faced this embargo for a long time, especially during the eight years of holy defence. We were able to defend the country, and we were able to get through the embargo, but in recent years there have been two problems. The first problem is that the discussion of sanctions in the Security Council has started; this is unprecedented; that is, our previous sanctions were not UN sanctions, and the second point is that we have always created a gap between the EU and the US. Now, this distance was sometimes very strategic, and sometimes it was tactical, but anyway, there was a gap in practice, and we did the same in the nuclear case (Rouhani 5, 2013).

The lifting of sanctions may be a negotiating tactic, but our ultimate goal must be to lift the sanctions because it is not in the interest of our people. In which negotiations and how to raise the issue of lifting sanctions is a negotiation tactic... We need to change some of our methods, our tone, and our literature. While we are critical of the international order, that does not mean confrontation with the world (Rouhani 6, 2013).

Rouhani on 5/06/2013, in the presidential debate on cultural policy, valued the role of tourism in reducing the unemployment rate. He explained that banking and financial sanctions affect the tourist sector in Iran:

Currently, Iran has about 3.5 million unemployed people. If only 10 million tourists enter the country, the employment problem in the country will be solved... In the tourism industry, infrastructure such as hotels and transportation should be considered...A foreign investor should also be considered. Of course, the only problem that will exist in this regard is the banking and financial issues due to the sanctions that we are facing, so the government that comes to power must have a proper plan to solve this problem (Rouhani 20, 2013).

In an interview criticising Ahmadinejad's foreign policy, Rouhani on 27/05/2013 emphasised the importance of negotiations with the US, which contradicted Ghalibaf's approach to solving economic problems and underestimated the serious results that might emerge from negotiating with the US. Rouhani said:

Negotiations and dialogue with the US should not be avoided. In the first steps, negotiation should be seen as a platform to prevent the escalation of pressure and stop the current sanctions process, and in the next steps, the atmosphere should be adjusted until the complete lifting of sanctions (Rouhani 10, 2013).

Rouhani on 13/06/2013 expressed his willingness to negotiate with the US to lift sanctions in a convergent manner and raise some conditions to reach positive results. In an interview with the Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, on 13/06/2013, he said:

Serious, balanced, and time-bound negotiations aimed at resolving clearly defined questions and concerns on both sides can play an effective role in resolving this artificially manufactured crisis. The P5+1 can be one channel for such negotiations, provided that they are prepared to be a vehicle for understanding and resolution of the issue rather than a tool for procrastination and political blackmail (Rouhani 14, 2013).

(ii) Khamenei's texts:

In a meeting with Labourers and Producers, Khamenei on 27/04/2013, criticised the imposition of sanctions on Iranians and admitted that the purpose of imposing these sanctions was to make Iranians 'unhappy' and place huge pressure on them. He said:

The enemy tried to make the people leave the arena by imposing sanctions and exerting different kinds of economic pressure. They say that they are not enemies of the people. They lie easily and shamelessly. Most pressures are exerted to make people unhappy, make them experience hardships, and put them under pressure (Khamenei 15, 2013).

On 16/02/2013 in a meeting with the people of East Azerbaijan, Khamenei stated that Iranians are seeking a good economy but not at the expense of their dignity. He also revealed the real purpose of the Americans' request for negotiation:

The Iranian nation is looking for economic blossoming, economic progress, and complete prosperity. But it does not want to achieve this goal by being humiliated by the enemy... The second point is that they have raised the issue of negotiations. Their purpose is not to solve the problems. Their purpose is to create hype. They want to say to Muslim nations This was the Islamic Republic, with all that intense determination and resistance. But finally, it had to negotiate with us... We did not suffer a loss as a result of resisting. Resistance revives the inner strength of a nation. It makes it active. The sanctions that they impose will be helpful to the Iranian nation (Khamenei 16, 2013).

In the eyes of the Americans and powers that seek dominance, the true meaning of negotiations is accepting what they say at the negotiating table... This kind of negotiation does not serve any purpose. It will not reach any results... What kind of negotiation is it when their goal is this [making Iran surrender]? Iran will not give up its rights (Khamenei 17, 2013).

Khamenei on 21/03/2013, in a speech at Imam Ridha's (a.s.) Shrine, Khamenei laid out the enemy's tools to prevent Iran from making any progress. He began with sanctions, threats, and keeping Iranian managers busy with minor issues:

The enemies who do not want to see the Iranian nation make comprehensive progress are pursuing two main goals. One of their goals is to create as many obstacles in the way of our nation as they can to prevent the Iranian nation from achieving progress and development. They try to achieve this goal through sanctions and threats, keeping our managers busy with minor issues and diverting the attention

of the great Iranian nation and outstanding personalities of the country to issues that are not on the list of our priorities (Khamenei 18, 2013)

### (iii) Shargh's texts:

Shargh published several articles about the economic situation and the most effective way to improve it. For example, Ahmad Mir Motahari, an economic expert, attributed, on 22/05/2013, the economic problems in Iran to sanctions and wrong economic policies.

The government's record shows that it has not been successful in tackling and resolving economic issues...Now the most important challenge for the country is stagflation. On the one hand, we are facing a decrease in employment and, on the other, an increase in prices. Looking at this situation, we find that some were in the hands of the government for some reason and others were not. Issues related to foreign sanctions are beyond the control of the government, but issues such as self-imposed sanctions as a result of the government's economic policies are among the components at the disposal of the government (Shargh 6, 2013).

On 12/06/ 2013, Mohsen Bahrami Arz Aqdas, Chairman of the Trade Commission of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, expressed optimism about the new president's ability to "flourish the domestic economy." He also explained the positive results of lifting sanctions:

The elected president, by participating in international politics and making the right decisions, can also flourish the domestic economy and thus create an economic epic, which can only be created with the support of the nation. The President, who has the maximum participation of the people, can easily reduce the existing tensions, improve Iran's relations with the countries of the region and the EU, and reduce oil and banking sanctions to a minimum with the three measures of dignity, wisdom, and practicality. With the lifting of sanctions, oil exports will return to normal, employment and public incomes will improve, businesses will flourish, inflation will fall, and all economic and livelihood problems of the people will be minimised (Shargh 7, 2013).

#### 8.2.1. Analysis

The above texts of Rouhani are essentially constructed based on the idea of lifting sanctions as a proper approach to resolving economic harm and achieving prosperity. To deliver his main idea, Rouhani used some expressions and explanations such as 'We must save the country's economy from the current situation; 'lift some of the sanctions, but not all'; 'We have entered this field to achieve national goals; save the country from oppressive sanctions'; next government has a 'proper plan' to solve this problem; using the pronoun 'we' in several places to show solidarity

with people who have been suffering from sanctions; and ‘adjusting the atmosphere’. Understanding such expressions and linking them to his main idea is crucial for the analysis because it gives evidence from a figure inside Iran about the effects of sanctions. Hence, it enables us to expect his approach to deal with the economic problems, which ultimately helps in supporting the thesis’ argument about the role of sanctions and ideational elements of agents in affecting Iran’s nuclear choices.

### 8.2.2. Framing the lifting sanctions

To give Iranians hope, as his slogan says, Rouhani focused on the economic issue by explaining to people that it is easy to solve overpricing and unemployment and that this is possible. He attributed this possibility to a ‘correct change in the economy’. Rouhani linked the increase in prices and the high rate of unemployment to the factories’ active capacity in the country, which is, due to sanctions, between 20 and 40 per cent. As a result of sanctions, inflation is responsible for affecting the value of the Iranian currency and has led to increasing prices (Dastgerdi, Yusof, and Shahbaz, 2018). Rouhani asserted that ‘we must’ increase the capacity of factories to 100 per cent, and again, he said, ‘This is possible’. One can assume that Rouhani’s possibility is related to lifting sanctions as a cause because he linked the reason behind preventing factories from working with sanctions, and this can be solved.

Rouhani was eager to reinforce the importance of lifting sanctions to achieve the goal of enabling factories to operate at full capacity. He used, again, the phrase *this is possible* and finally committed it when saying, ‘We must save the country’s economy from the current situation’. A participant assumed that Rouhani built his calling for hope in different ways as he succeeded in gaining some hope: *“It appears to me that Rouhani’s promises that I am going to get this out from under the sanctions that are going to help our economy a lot were an important factor in the elections. I think he builds up; I mean, it was not only that. I think there are probably other ways in which he built up a lot of hope, but I think he got a lot of hope, and part of that hope had to do with getting out of under sanctions and having a more normal relationship with the rest of the world”* (MB).

In the third presidential debate on cultural policy on Iranian government TV, Rouhani was aware of the importance of this opportunity to deliver a speech for the entire Iranian nation at once. Mass media reaches a large number of people and has the potential to change attitudes and views on many issues (Petty, Priester, and Briol, 2002). He called for investment to improve the tourism sector and thus contribute to decreasing unemployment as well as relieving the pressure of sanctions. Iran is rich in historical and tourist sights, diverse heritage, and a distinctive

location that attracts tourists to visit it. By mentioning this, Rouhani was trying to focus on the neglected aspects that can contribute to improving the economy.

Tourism in Iran has always been a controversial issue from two viewpoints: some consider it an important sector that needs to be developed to contribute to the country's revenues, while others see it as a form of globalisation that undermines Islamic values and society's traditions (Seyfi, 2018). For credibility and persuasion, Rouhani embedded within his discourse some statistics to prove his academic qualifications in dealing with problems; this indeed was a response to Khamenei, who asked the future president to rely on scholars and academics when making decisions. Rouhani stressed the role of tourism in contributing to the economy as he evaluated it; for example, if 10 million tourists visited Iran annually, this would help resolve the employment problem. However, Rouhani brought to the discussion the effects of sanctions again, mentioning that the main problem in this regard is the banking and financial issues due to the sanctions. Rouhani has always associated most of the problems in Iran, especially the economic ones, with sanctions, and he stated that the *'government that is to come must have a proper plan to solve this problem'*. Sanctions had serious impacts that affected the economy, especially inflation and unemployment. As a participant said: *"Absolutely, sanctions had an effect and caused great damage to the Iranian economy, including by helping to fuel inflation and unemployment, so, for now, it's worth kind of stepping back; they would not have worked on an economy that was more robust and less dependent."* (RN).

Rouhani has repeatedly used the pronoun 'we' to show solidarity with people to gain their respect and also their support, especially on the eve of the presidential election. Rouhani used the pronoun 'we' to express values of solidarity, shared ideas, nationalism, national pride, present, and future with people when saying, "We did not deserve all this suffering, inflation, unemployment, and insults in the international arena.". Rouhani was not focusing only on economic problems; he also focused on morals and Iran's dignity in the international area, and this reflected his beliefs as a cleric, not only as a politician. Rouhani stressed Iran's identity and national pride when mentioning Iran's status in the international community as a result of the extremist foreign policy of Ahmadinejad.

#### 8.2.2.1 Negotiation process

Because the sanctions are the main cause of economic harm, according to Rouhani, they will be the key factor in contributing to the solution. Therefore, Rouhani approached this problem by suggesting his main idea, as the latter is a result of thoughts about the material realities of the effects of sanctions, beliefs, and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. Rouhani sought to distinguish himself from other candidates by providing solutions to this problem, not only criticism. This was evident when he began by telling Iranians what the main problems were that



needed to be solved. He was also trying, for several reasons, to give Iranians hope by continuing to express 'this is possible'. One can notice that because Rouhani was concerned about participation in the elections due to the 2009 election outcomes, he was assuring the Iranians that these challenges could be overcome with a different approach compared to Ahmadinejad.

It seems Rouhani is not only a politician but also has a wide knowledge of using convincing and hedging language. This can be seen when he constitutes a balanced text when his utterances include a commitment: "We must" and "With optimism, this is possible". These two expressions may reflect Rouhani's government slogan, 'prudence and hope'. As 'we must' means it is necessary and urgent to get rid of this serious situation, Rouhani's approach to achieving this must be 'prudent' by having different tools and means that can be helpful, and it has to be different than Ahmadinejad's approach as well as Ghalibaf's announced approach. Optimism means to have a new perspective as well as determination. It also means 'hope' which is crucial for stepping forward by believing in Iran's identity that frames its capabilities. Rouhani is aware of the consequences of breaking boundaries with voters, as he kept using the pronoun "we" more than Ghalibaf when justifying the reasons behind his candidature, as he wanted to 'achieve national goals' and "save the country from 'oppressive' sanctions".

Generally, all candidates want to achieve national goals, but that might be different according to their understanding of Iran's national interests, yet sanctions may or may not be included as a priority in Ghalibaf's agendas. It is important to notice the significant role of Rouhani's ideational elements in constituting his understanding of Iran's interests that drove him to link that achieving 'national goals' requires getting rid of the 'oppressive sanctions' as the latter represented the material realities in the form of severe effects. According to a participant, the sanctions were effective against Iran, and without them, Iran would not have given any concessions. *"I think the sanctions were extremely effective as a bargaining instrument. They were not intended to cause a political revolution in Iran, nor were they intended to destroy the Iranian economy to the point where Iran had to capitulate to US demands. I think it is also true that without the economic sanctions, Iran would not have agreed to any limits on its nuclear programme at all."* (GS).

What is interesting about this approach is that Rouhani's text shared the same idea with Shargh about the effective solution to improve the economy when the latter used some expressions such as "flourishing the economy", "reducing existing tensions and improving Iran's relations" "reducing banking problems and sanctions" based on "dignity, wisdom, and expediency", and eventually "with the lifting of sanctions", based on negotiation. This approach will contribute to decreasing unemployment and inflation, increasing oil revenues, and minimising overall the "livelihood problems of the people." Considering the sanctions as a cause for affecting Iran's

economy in many aspects, to achieve economic prosperity, sanctions must be lifted. Imposing sanctions on Iran has affected the Iranian economy severely (Bazoobandi, 2012).

On this basis, one can realise that 'nuclear negotiations' are a necessity, and that is why Rouhani stressed the significance of renegotiating the nuclear issue to lift sanctions. He presented himself as a qualified candidate who linked his record to the possibility of lifting sanctions. Rouhani expressed clearly that he would lift some of the sanctions, but not those related to other outstanding issues if elected. Iran has been sanctioned for a long time concerning the nuclear issue and other issues related to its missile programme as well as its regional behaviour, especially after the Arab uprising of 2011, and even before that, back to 1979, related to the American hostage crisis, and afterwards (Carswell, 1981).

The lifting of sanctions was the ultimate goal of Rouhani to improve the economy, despite a tactical stance in negotiations during Ahmadinejad's presidency. Iran used negotiations as a tool to demonstrate its cooperation and commitment to the international community even without having a real will to reach an agreement that may restrict its nuclear programme (Cowell and Fathi, 2009). Rouhani at some point admitted that the negotiations have been used as a tactic during Ahmadinejad's government, but he stressed that at the end of the day, sanctions have to be lifted, which means the negotiations must be serious and strategic. To explain the difference between the two embargoes Iran faced, Rouhani reminded Iranians of the difference between them: (i) a unilateral embargo from 1979 that Iran was familiar with and was able to manage; and (ii) a multilateral international embargo related to the nuclear issue that was difficult to resist, particularly from 2011, when the latter was more effective than the former.

The effectiveness of the embargo lies essentially in the number of senders. International cooperation has been considered one of the crucial conditions that increase the likelihood of success (Waltz, 1988; Paul, 1996). There was agreement among scholars as well as the participants about the severity of the sanctions after 2010, especially the oil embargo. A participant considered the oil embargo as effective sanctions on Iran: *"It was only around 2010 or so that you start to see these more robust sanctions put into place at the UN, the United States, and also in the European Union that put much more strict restrictions on Iran's access to the international financial system and big cuts to Iranian oil exports as a result of the EU embargo"* (NM).

As Rouhani expresses 'saving the economy', this might be a broad expression that may include ordinary problems that economists face and maybe other problems. In this context, Rouhani shared with analyst Ahmad Mir Motahari, the economic expert in Shargh, that sanctions are

more harmful than the economic problems of unemployment and overpricing when he referred to the current situation. However, these problems cannot be separated from sanctions as well. Sanctions intensified unemployment and inflation. Motahari's text revealed that the main cause of the economic problem was foreign sanctions. Motahari expressed the severe consequences of imposing sanctions, such as "stagflation, declining oil revenues, massive government debt, and a declining economic growth rate". Rouhan, in his discourses, focused on the poor and middle classes as well as the youth.

Rouhani was also smart enough to focus on the livelihoods of low-income Iranians, who were affected by inflation and decreasing purchasing power. Most Iranians, 85 per cent according to a Gallup survey in 2013, expressed that sanctions have hurt their livelihood; 50 per cent said "sanctions hurt their livelihood a great deal", while 35 per cent said their livelihood had been somewhat hurt (Loschky, 2013). As such, and relying on this analysis of Rouhani's discourses so far, one can expect the future approach that Iran will follow regarding the nuclear programme if Rouhani is elected. As we have seen, the nuclear negotiations are key to Rouhani, but he as well as Khamenei distinguish between the negotiations with the US and the rest of the international community. Due to the key role of the US in the negotiation process, the following sub-section focuses on the US.

#### 8.2.2.2. Negotiating with the U.S.

As a potential president who should behave properly in the context of international relations, Rouhani did that to distance his texts from describing the West and the US as 'enemies', at least publicly. The term is used repeatedly by Khamenei and Ghalibaf supreme leaders. It is helpful to mention it whenever it appears in the analysis to connect it with the wider context of their discourse. Rouhani, in doing so, perceived that the new relationship between Iran and the rest of the world must be built on *constructive attraction*, and this is a result of his ideational elements as a moderate in terms of his beliefs, values, and views of the real world to interact with the rest of the world. Shared values, ideas, and views that converge with the national interest can shape the foreign policy of Iran (Moshirzadeh, 2007).

Khamenei is sometimes pathetic; that is, he does not want to confess the severe effects of sanctions driven by Iran's identity, but sometimes he finds himself obliged to mention the impacts of sanctions to indirectly inform the international community and human organisations about the consequences of the comprehensive sanctions on Iranians. Khamenei admitted to some extent indirectly that the new sanctions made people feel unsatisfied and frustrated, particularly after 2011, when the EU embargoed Iranian oil (Crabtree, 2013). He stated that imposing sanctions is exerting pressure to make Iranians unhappy and leaving them suffering

from various hardships that are mostly caused by sanctions. According to some scholars, inflicting high costs on a sanctioned state is considered a success of sanctions even without changing its behaviour (Baldwin, 1985; HSEO, 2007; Martin, 1992).

As a result of international sanctions against the nuclear programme, especially the oil embargo and the ninth round of American sanctions, Obama's administration targeted the currency and financial institutions, consequently leading to increased inflation and unemployment during Obama's administration. Yet, the US's ultimate goal in imposing sanctions was neither to change the regime nor to destabilise the economy, but, according to a participant, to constrain Iran's nuclear programme. *"The purpose of the economic sanctions from an American standpoint was to create bargaining leverage to trade sanctions relief or constraints on Iran's nuclear programme. And of course, that is exactly how the negotiations for the JCPOA played out. In the negotiations, Iran demanded sanctions relief because they wanted to mitigate the economic, social, and political cost of the sanctions, and in return, the US and the other P5 + 1 negotiators demanded limits on Iran's nuclear activities."* (GS).

A Gallup poll in 2013 revealed that happiness and well-being are important to a normal life, and the survey showed that 58 per cent of Iranians felt a lot of worries, 54 per cent felt sadness, and 54 per cent felt anger (Crabtree, 2012). Moreover, as a result of sanctions, another survey conducted by Gallup revealed that Iranians' well-being was low and had one of the highest rates in the Middle East at 31 per cent suffering (Younis, 2013). A participant agreed with that, considering sanctions became more severe, especially around 2011 *"Starting around 2010, that is when you start to see big indicators of the economic downturn in terms of GDP growth going down, inflation going up, unemployment going up, and so on. For me, that is the best indication of the power of the sanctions' effects because you see this very strong temporal connection between the sanctions becoming more powerful and the downturn in Iran, and of course, that is the economic climate when Rouhani ran for the presidency"* (NM).

Rouhani is aware that lifting sanctions requires willingness and approval to negotiate the nuclear programme, not only from him but also from the majority of Iranians. As he stated in a different place, as much as Iranians support the negotiation team, they have gained substantial outcomes. However, some candidates were not keen to do so. Rouhani knows that this task is not easy, and it is also not impossible, as he has been engaging in such a process before. Khamenei's perception of the West and the US as enemies of the Iranian nation influences most Iranians, especially the conservatives (Mir Hosseini, 2002; Fazili, 2010; Sohrabi, 2006). In this context, as a complex mission, especially due to the lack of trust among all parties during Ghalibaf's era, Rouhani has to win the elections, convince Khamenei, Iranians, and domestic

dynamic entities, including the IRGC, as well as gain international guarantees for keeping the nuclear programme running for peaceful purposes, as this reflects Khamenei's red lines.

Rouhani built his optimism on Khamenei's remarks that he was not against the negotiations, but this has to be within acceptable standards and not based on the US's perspective. Khamenei expressed that negotiations can be conducted with dignity and that they can achieve real results without humiliating one of the parties. In the context of JCPOA negotiations, Khamenei does not trust the US, and even after Rouhani's victory, he wanted to give these negotiations another chance. A participant explained, "*The supreme leader did not fully trust the US in terms of negotiations with the JCPOA, and I think the supreme leader, unlike the American president, had the luxury of saying to President Rouhani, Let's test the waters again and see how these negotiations come to fruition, and then if they do not work out, he could, of course, blame President Rouhani for that outcome and distances himself from what he's done on occasions.*" (EL). Achieving economic prosperity is what the Iranians have been looking for, and this can be achieved through balanced negotiations, as Rouhani suggested. This gave Rouhani additional confidence to announce his approach to solving economic issues, which relies mainly on renegotiating the nuclear issue (Borszik, 2016).

Rouhani took the opportunity to explicitly announce his approach after Khamenei's discourse that: (i) sanctions were the main issue preventing the "Iranian nation from making comprehensive progress", including improvements in the tourism sector; and (ii) the 'enemy' was trying to keep Iranian managers busy with minor issues. Khamenei ranked the sanctions at first as a tool used by the enemy to stop Iran from making developments. In addition, the plan should focus first on the priorities and major issues instead of focusing on routine or minor issues, as focusing on the latter prevents Iran from being able to deal with the real challenges and severe effects that impact the Iranians' livelihood. In responding to that, Rouhani described the plan that will deal with this as having to be 'proper' which can be understood as a plan that must consider the importance of getting rid of sanctions in a decent and balanced way that keeps Iran's nuclear rights.

In his discourse, Khamenei distinguished between 'accepting' and 'negotiating', that is, to negotiate does not mean to accept entirely, perhaps under pressure, what the other side wants. Khamenei's concerns over falling into a negotiation trap to help others create a 'hype'. Yet Khamenei always keeps the door open for negotiations. As Khamenei expressed in previous texts, the real goal of America in calling for negotiations is to show other nations that Iran was pretending it was not influenced by Americans' threats, and now they have agreed to negotiate, and also because of the Americans' style in negotiations, as they want Iran to accept all their conditions. Khamenei stressed that Iran would not accept this style of negotiation, and as a

result, the Americans would say to the world: Iranians do not want to negotiate the nuclear programme. This, in turn, serves the Americans once Iran seeks negotiations without a clear understanding of this and a good plan. In his turn, Rouhani responded to Khamenei's discourse on the negotiations and stressed first 'adjusting the atmosphere' that requires an internal consensus for going back to the negotiation table.

#### 8.2.2.3. Fruitful negotiations from Rouhani's perspective

Considering the long nuclear negotiations, especially during Ahmadinejad's era, without making progress or gaining substantial outcomes, including the way that Khamenei understood Iran's identity and national pride, he sometimes took a strict stance about the negotiations, in particular with the US. In a contradictory stance to Khamenei, who described such negotiations as useless and not yielding any valuable results because the US and the West wanted Iran to give up its right to nuclear technology, Rouhani stressed the importance of negotiating with the US to lift sanctions. He understood this, according to the effects of sanctions as well as his understanding of Iran's interests, and adopted a middle stance, that is, Iran will not develop nuclear weapons as this is a sin and against Islamic doctrine and will cooperate with the IAEA, but Iran will never, under any circumstances, give up its nuclear right to benefit from nuclear technology for civilian purposes.

Rouhani believes that the key to improving the economy is the lifting of sanctions, and this requires Iran to renegotiate the nuclear issue with a new approach that differs from the Ahmadinejad government's approach from 2006 to 2013. Therefore, he proposed a new approach to negotiation that should include changes 'in our methods, our tone, and our literature,' as he expressed. A presidential candidate has to express and act as one of the people; he also has to have similar rational values and attitudes and be aware of their circumstances, suffering, and interests (Kamada and Kojima, 2014). In his plan to reduce reliance on oil, as explained previously through Khamenei's texts, he emphasised the need to find alternative resources so that Iran could rely on different resources. Here, Rouhani sheds light on tourism as a neglected sector.

Notwithstanding, Rouhani, in an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper, explained his understanding of the fruitful negotiations. He continued to express that "in the next step, the atmosphere should be adjusted until the completion of the lifting of sanctions". He wanted to control the discussion around negotiation as he considered himself an expert in this field since he served as Iran's chief negotiator from 2003 to 2005 (Osborne and Morrison, 2013). As a result, Rouhani identified three characteristics that may contribute to productive negotiations and, thus, reached valuable results: "serious, balanced, and time-bound negotiations aimed at resolving

clearly defined questions and concerns on both sides”. Rouhani emphasised the effective role that the current nuclear negotiations between the P5+1 and Iran can play in reaching a deal if the parties are serious and focus on solving the issue rather than using it for ‘procrastination and political blackmail’.

Rouhani developed the meaning of negotiation in his new texts based on Khamenei’s texts that used it negatively and pessimistically, whereas Rouhani optimistically produced them in a balanced stance to preserve Iran’s nuclear rights for civilian purposes, as Khamenei insisted in his red lines, and to lift sanctions to solve Iran’s economic problems. Aside from his experience in setting out a productive framework to achieve Iran’s interests, Iran’s identity is also inherent in Rouhani’s above text when he mentioned that the negotiations must be ‘balanced’ as a matter of national pride, and this is built on Khamenei’s texts that the American’s style in negotiating with Iran is not productive and bumptious, and consequently, Iran will not engage with such negotiations.

Rouhani wanted to take advantage of the presidential election to deliver his new approach to solving Iran’s economic problems by lifting sanctions through nuclear negotiations. The elections are a proper context to share ideas, ideological values, policies, and influence between candidates’ speeches and voter preferences. The context influences or reconstitutes people’s discourses (Fairclough, 1992a). For Rouhani and, of course, other candidates, the presidential election is a significant context for gaining much power, if elected, and consequently implementing specific approaches that were announced in his campaign.

### 8.2.3. Conclusion

This section showed Rouhani’s main idea of nuclear negotiations to lift the sanctions to solve the economic problem. As we have seen, Rouhani’s main idea had intersubjective ideas with Khamenei to some extent and Shargh. He criticised Ahmadinejad’s approach to managing Iran’s nuclear programme, especially the negotiations. The section also revealed that Rouhani considered the nuclear negotiations to resolve the economic harm a high issue salience, and this was essentially constituted based on the sanctions effects as well as his ideational elements that constructed his understanding of Iran's interests. This section also illustrated Rouhani’s fruitful approach to renegotiating the nuclear programme in order to lift sanctions, as it must be conducted within the context of serious, balanced, and time-bound negotiations. In his discourses, Rouhani used some expressions and explanations to formulate his main idea, such as 'saving the economy' from oppressive sanctions more than normal problems and challenges; repeatedly using the pronoun ‘we’ to show solidarity with people and the Iranian nation; ‘adjusting the atmosphere’ to lift sanctions based on changing ‘tone and literature’ as he

identified three features that might contribute to productive negotiations: 'serious, balanced, and time-bound negotiations'; and the 'proper plan' that considers the importance of getting rid of sanctions in a decent and balanced way that keeps Iran's nuclear rights.

### **8.3. Ghalibaf's approach towards solving Iran's economic problem: enhancing economic efficiency**

This section aims to analyse Ghalibaf's discourse to explore his approach to solving the economic problem. It analyses his discourses that had intersubjective meanings with the discourse of Khamenei and the text from Kayhan. The section shows that lifting the sanctions through nuclear negotiations is a low issue salience for him. Alternatively, the section illustrates that Ghalibaf considers enhancing economic efficiency as a main idea as well as a high issue salience that has been influenced by his ideational elements and perceptions of Iran's identity and interests. The section begins with key texts from Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan and then the analysis of related themes such as enhancing economic management and effective economic policies.

#### **(i) Ghalibaf's texts:**

Ghalibaf on 23/4/2013, made it clear that solving Iran's economic problem requires 'rational and intelligent policies' not negotiating the issue on the nuclear programme:

People who link current problems to sanctions are those who, by simplifying the issue, tie everything to a nuclear issue. This is a kind of democratisation. Solving today's economic problems is possible through the adoption of a set of rational and intelligent economic policies, in which foreign policy and the nuclear issue are linked (Ghalibaf 8, 2013).

In the presidential debate regarding economic policy, Ghalibaf on 31/05/2013 mentioned several measures that they would implement, if elected, without mentioning sanctions' effects. He said:

We have all explained the cause of the cost, but now we have to discuss ways to solve this problem. My government's first task will be to stabilise the currency in the market to solve this problem. Fix the prices of basic goods, especially for the agricultural industry... Reforming monetary and fiscal policies in the money market and controlling the increase in liquidity are issues that people will trust if they happen. We need people's trust today... We have a two-year plan to solve problems such as unemployment, increase people's purchasing power, and improve their living conditions. Within the first six months, our effort is to bring about a serious shift in economic management and currency stability and move towards controlling inflation (Ghalibaf 16, 2013).



Ghalibaf in the same debate, provided his approach based on mismanagement considering reducing inflation, controlling the liquidity...etc., without mentioning renegotiating the nuclear programme to lift international sanctions:

The reality is that the issue should be viewed in a way that provides employment opportunities in short and medium-term programmes. Financing and preventing the reduction of inflation, especially in the current situation in factories, are tasks that can be prioritised in the short term and done in line with a medium-term plan... On the one hand, inflation has arisen, and we cannot control liquidity... Reducing government spending, strengthening the private sector, and directing liquidity, which is on the production side, are issues that need to be addressed. We have a two-year plan for the prosperity of work. In the production debate, I prioritise the share of production and collect income without tax. We should not change our decisions every week and every month. (Ghalibaf 17, 2013).

Ghalibaf on 12/06/2013 also focused on religion's role and the implementation of the leadership's approach to contribute to the progress of society as a whole. He also said that a 'jihadist spirit' is required to overcome disputes and individualism. In addition, he stressed that Iran needs to fight 'discrimination, poverty, and corruption:

Following the leadership, we must show the efficiency of religion in the best way, and today we are at a time when progress in the country is a necessity according to the decade of progress and justice, and we must implement it... We should act in a way that the leadership does not have to worry about, and the executive branch should proceed in line with measures, vision documents, and communication policies... Today, the country needs a jihadist spirit, and in the jihadist spirit, there is no room for disputes and fights. In the jihadist spirit, there is a spirit of work, effort, and love, and nothing else should be considered except the concerns of the people... Much effort has been made by previous governments, but whatever has been done has not been enough. We need an effort that can eradicate discrimination, poverty, and corruption. A job that can cover unemployment, inflation, and especially culture (Ghalibaf 5, 2013).

(ii) Khamenei's texts:

Khamenei on 16/02/2013, in a meeting with the people of East Azerbaijan, gave his views on how the US wanted to negotiate with Iran. He explained that negotiation is not an effective way to resolve economic harm as an alternative to enhancing management. He considered calls for negotiation as just a ruse and argued that the US wanted Iranians to keep thinking that negotiations would lead to the lifting of sanctions. He said:

They pretend in their propaganda that if Iran sits at the negotiating table and negotiates with America, sanctions will be lifted. This is a lie too. Their goal is to make the people of Iran eager to negotiate with America by promising to lift sanctions. They think that the people of Iran are exhausted by the sanctions and are frustrated. They think that everything is a mess and that they can tell us: "Well, come and negotiate with us so that we lift the sanctions." They think this will motivate the entire Iranian nation to ask them to negotiate... This is also one of their irrational and deceptive statements, and it is a tool for bullying. First, as I said, when they ask us to negotiate with them, they do not mean fair and rational negotiations. Negotiations mean that we should accept what they say and surrender so that they lift the sanctions (Khamenei 20, 2013).

Khamenei in the same meeting considered negotiation, as he explained above, as a tool for humiliating Iranians and stated that Iran wants to achieve economic prosperity with its 'capabilities, courage, advancements, and the capabilities of the youth', and he made a statement that "*sanctions exert pressures on the people and bother them*":

The Iranian nation will think of some ways to counter what the enemy wants to do. The Iranian nation is looking for economic blossoming, economic progress, and complete prosperity. But it does not want to achieve this goal by being humiliated by the enemy. It wants to achieve this goal with its capabilities, courage, advancements, and the capabilities of the youth. It does not want to achieve this with anything else. There is no doubt that sanctions exert pressure on people and bother them (Khamenei 21, 2013).

Khamenei on 21/03/2013 set out the policies he judged to have led to economic weakness. He reminded the potential president to pay great attention to the economy by having a coherent plan and policies:

We identified our weaknesses... Government officials of the country—both the incumbent officials and officials who will be elected through this year's presidential elections—should pay attention to this point. Our country should have clear and well-planned large-scale economic policies, policies that will not change as a result of different events (Khamenei 22, 2013).

Khamenei on 27/04/2013, gave views on how presidential candidates should deal with economic issues. He asked them to have a comprehensive plan and to be wise and deep when dealing with issues. He also asked them to avoid taking a routine and daily outlook on the economy because of constant changes and depending on inexpert opinions. Khamenei provided

the solution for the economic issue; instead of negotiating to lift the sanctions, he wanted the officials to implement economic resistance:

The same is true of economic issues. Candidates should adopt a comprehensive and long-term outlook that is accompanied by proper plans, wisdom, and acumen. And they should look at things and enter the arena with a proper calculation... Adopting a routine outlook on economic issues is harmful. Constantly changing economic policies is harmful. Relying on inexperienced opinions in all sectors, particularly in economic sectors, is harmful. Trusting the imposed economic theories of the West and East is harmful. Economic policies should be based on an economy of resistance. A resistant economy should be the kind of economy whose infrastructure is resistant. It should be able to resist. It should not waver in line with different changes in different corners of the world. These things are necessary (Khamenei19, 2013).

(iii) Kayhan's texts:

Kayhan on 22/5/2013, published an article under the title: Important Approaches of the 11th Government in the Economy, that gave a solution to mitigate economic harm by committing to financial discipline to control liquidity, prices, and inflation:

The first economic priority of the future government is to commit to financial discipline, in other words, there is no budget deficit; because increasing the budget deficit and not adhering to fiscal discipline increases the amount of liquidity and inflation, a third economic priority is the role of the market in setting prices, and the government should eliminate multiple prices and price discrimination that cause rents despite the lack of different elasticity in different markets (Kayhan 8, 2013).

Kayhan published several articles regarding the proper approach to improving the economy in line with Iran's dignity and the Islamic Revolution's principles... An analysis drawn from Mahmoud Bahmani, on 27/05/2013, described the wrong policies that had led to inflation. He attributes the causes of inflation to demand pressure, increasing costs, wages, and liquidity. Nevertheless, he admitted that the sanctions against Iran were effective:

We may still feel the effects of last year's inflation for the next few months, but we are gradually moving towards lower inflation. In general, we will do our best to reduce the inflation rate... We need liquidity to be controlled in the country, but liquidity seeking in society has doubled, and this is due to the change of financial resources from the reference currency to the exchange rate and the dollar as the centre of exchange... Part of inflation is due to demand pressure, increasing costs, and rising wages. Also, these issues reduce

production in the supply of goods, which itself is the cause of inflation (Kayhan 5, 2013).

Under the title ‘Overcoming the imposed challenge in the economy’, Hossameldin Bromond, on 6/06/2013, stated that the economic issue in Iran had received the most attention within presidential election candidates’ discourses. He described the sanctions as a tactic to inflict economic harm to influence “macro-political issues” without linking that to the economic problem directly:

The reason why economic issues are the priority of the candidates goes back to an undeniable fact, and that is tangible problems such as inflation, employment, unemployment, and devaluation which are now rightly demanded of the public, especially the poor, as supporters...If the enemies of the Islamic Republic tried to impose economic problems as a challenge to influence macro-political issues, including the June 15 elections, it has to be a tactic of sanctions that have been implemented in all the past months... The issue of the economy is intertwined with the areas of politics and culture, and it affects them. In Islamic society, we must move coherently and uniformly towards the implementation of pure Islamic teachings. The economy cannot be distinguished from politics or culture (Kayhan 6, 2013).

Bromond in the same article, accused the sanctioning countries of imposing an *economic war* on the Iranian economy and pointed out the new president’s responsibility to have deep knowledge of how to deal with this situation by providing solutions:

What we hear these days from some presidential candidates expressing economic problems instead of presenting a real plan or proposing a solution to economic problems... Indisputable evidence shows that in the current context, the enemy’s strategy in facing the Islamic Republic is a full-blown economic war, and it goes without saying that in this breathtaking and dangerous confrontation, a prescription must be made that turns threats into opportunities... Hence, the great responsibility and mission of the presidential candidates are to have a deep knowledge of the opponent’s movements and endeavours in the field of economic warfare and to offer the best and safest solution on the other hand (Kayhan 7, 2013).

Under the title, Western Observers 3 Nothing Loose (Daily Note), Muhammad Imani in Kayhan on 8/06/2013, clarified, that if the goal of securing national interests is to adopt a resistance discourse, Iran needs to pay great attention to *piety, courage, and perseverance*. He also introduced some measures to improve the economy but did not mention the lifting of sanctions:

If the destination of security and national interests is to pass through the discourse of resistance and struggle, the index of piety, courage, and perseverance must be valued more than ever... If we talk about prudence and hard work, caring for those around us, fighting economic corruption, solving the challenge of inflation, avoiding marginalisation, and not paying ransom to enemies and privilege seekers, each of which is an important indicator, all these characteristics can be praised (Kayhan 9, 2013).

### 8.3.1. Analysis

In this section, I will analyse Ghalibaf's discourses to explore his approach to resolving economic harm. Ghalibaf's main idea is enhancing economic management. He delivered it through some expressions such as 'efforts need to be taken' and whether the lifting of sanctions would be one of them; 'economic policies'; 'people who linked everything to the effects of sanctions'; 'policies must be avoided not to make the leadership worried'; and Iran needs a 'jihadist spirit'.

### 8.3.2. Framing enhancing economic management

In this section, contrary to Rouhani, we will see Ghalibaf pushing towards his main idea of enhancing management as an issue salience that constructs an effective solution to overcome economic harm. One can predict that he would suggest that, based on his assessment, mismanagement is the main cause resulting in severe harm, and thus, he perceived lifting sanctions is a low salient issue. Not only Ghalibaf believes in this, but also Khamenei and Kayhan. In his discourse, Ghalibaf was asking for people's trust, as this is a broad appeal that can be interpreted regarding the participation in the elections as different from the 2009 elections.

The presidential election was a good opportunity for Rouhani and Ghalibaf to run the country according to their different approaches. These approaches were essentially based on their religious, revolutionary, and ideological beliefs; therefore, intensive participation based on voters' trust, as Ghalibaf requested, will enable him to win, especially as he is facing some difficulties because he belongs to the conservatives, where Ahmadinejad has governed for two terms with serious problems in the economy and international arena.

#### 8.3.2.1. Effective economic policies

Ghalibaf was debating on enhancing management through some effective policies in order to improve the economy. He was approaching that in the context of the weakness of the economy rather than the effectiveness of sanctions in contrast to Rouhani. On this basis, the approach he

would adopt is essentially similar to what was included within Khamenei's texts when he stated the Iranians have identified the weakness in the economy and stressed that Iran must have "clear and well-planned large-scale economic policies, policies that will not change as a result of different events". Khamenei emphasised that to draw officials' attention not to follow policies that have been followed in the past and were harmful. These policies include a routine outlook in dealing with the economy, permanently changing economic policies, and ignoring experts.

A participant agreed with Khamenei that such policies have indeed led to the weakening of the economy and resulted in serious outcomes: "*So, on the other hand, I would say we also have to be cognizant of government policies that also contribute to Iran's economic problems, so again, the mismanagement and these populist redistributive policies that exacerbated inflation, increased public spending, and increased budget deficits inside Iran really contributed to exacerbating or worsening the effects of the sanctions on top of the corruption, of course, as I mentioned.*" (EL). Another participant shared the same views on Ahmadinejad's management that led to the deteriorating the economy "*In the Ahmadinejad period, there was, in my opinion, a combination of domestic economic policies and sanctions that led to economic hardship because Ahmadinejad was consolidating his power. He came from a background in the Revolutionary Guards, and in that period, he was appointing many ministries and replacing key managers with people affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards. He removed managers, and many experts with deep expertise in both technical operations and the management and marketing of Iran's oil were replaced.*" (NH). As we have seen in the two interviews, sanctions have been associated with mismanagement as a main cause of economic harm.

These policies according to him, all officials have to adhere to them both the incumbent and the new president. To consolidate his approach, Ghalibaf responded to Khamenei regarding some considerations and new policies that officials and presidential candidates have to be aware of when making policies. These policies can be recognised when Ghalibaf criticises oil dependence, disregarding long-term economic plans, and relying on the very short-term when making decisions. Ghalibaf revealed that these measures would not be implemented anymore within his broad approach to solving Iran's economic problems. This is somehow in contradiction with Khamenei, who mentioned that the dependence on oil led to the weakness of the economy, as Iran faced a large oil embargo that reduced government revenue significantly (Borszik, 2016; Smeets, 2018).

Ghalibaf announced that his government's tasks if elected would begin with stabilising the currency, controlling the prices of basic goods, reforming economic policies, and others, as he considered these measures helpful in restoring people's trust. A currency crisis could be one of the consequences of the imposition of economic sanctions by affecting the GDP and increasing

inflation in the sanctioned country (Peksen and Son, 2015). A participant provided views on the main reason behind the currency crisis in Iran, which depends on oil revenues: *“Sanctions from 2011 to 2013 targeted Iran's oil exports as well as its financial relations. So, because oil exports constitute nearly 80 per cent of Iran's foreign exchange revenues, they directly affected exchange supplies into the housing market, and that also affected the national currency, so the national currency lost nearly 60 per cent of its value over just one year.”* (AB). Another participant has elaborated that this currency crisis led to inflation and, hence, unemployment *“I think you had more of a multilateral effort in this capacity that led to substantial currency devaluation. I think at one point you were looking at something in between 30 and 40 per cent of currency devaluation, which of course creates and exacerbates inflation inside the country because people have less purchasing power, contributes to unemployment, and contributes to a slowdown in GDP growth, which we saw at the time.”* (EL).

Ghalibaf did not stop and continued responding to Khamenei's discourse as he focused on solving economic problems that related to people's daily lives more than companies or large economic institutions, such as liquidity, purchasing power, currency, and prices. Economic sanctions have a great deal of responsibility for currency crises in sanctioned countries (Borszik, 2016). Broadly, Ghalibaf responded to Kayhan by allocating the first months of his government to control inflation as Mahmoud Bahmani, the governor of Iran's central bank, expressed that inflation's effects from last year (2012) could last for the next few months of 2013. Ghalibaf expressed that “we cannot control liquidity” because inflation was rising. However, he also announced that he would reform some economic policies, including controlling the increase in liquidity.

Liquidity in Iran has doubled because of changes in financial resources that relate to the currency, exchange rates, and the role of the dollar. It also increased significantly, affecting Iranians' purchasing power and increasing prices (Habibi, 2015). Bahmani also provided an analysis of the importance of the economic factor in the elections as a result of the serious problems that Iran's economy faced in the shadow of sanctions as he described them as economic challenges that the ‘enemy’ tried to make hard for Iranians. He concluded that the economic problem is a combination of political and cultural factors.

To stress his approach, Ghalibaf agreed with Khamenei's discourse about the uselessness of the negotiations as a tool to solve the problem. Khamenei assessed the negotiation process with America as a tool by which the latter used to bully Iranians because they wanted Iranians to accept their conditions and, thus, give significant concessions regarding the nuclear issue. Khamenei also criticised the enemy's propaganda and claimed that if the Iranians negotiate on

the nuclear issue then sanctions will be lifted, something he described as a lie. Despite that, he admitted that sanctions bothered Iranians and put pressure on them (Habibi, 2015).

Ghalibaf echoed Khamenei's approach that negotiations are not the proper tool, and therefore, he insisted that solving Iran's economic problems can only be done through rational and intelligent policies, not by negotiation, which is partly true concerning the importance of having such policies, but this is manipulative because he would not admit to any extent the role of sanctions' effects on Iran's economy. Khamenei again invoked Iran's history of 'national pride' when saying that Iranians want to achieve economic prosperity through their "own capabilities, courage, advancement, and youth", not by anything else that makes Iran appear humiliated in the face of the enemy.

Yet, Ghalibaf admitted implicitly the effect of sanctions when he mentioned in a conditional context that if the Iranians were vigilant, "the enemy could no longer take advantage of our weakness". This means that they were not vigilant and they were not prepared to encounter what the 'enemy' had done by imposing sanctions, and the sanctions have affected Iran and forced him indirectly to express that. However, Ghalibaf continued in his discourse, in a manipulative way, to tell the voters that Iran's problems today are not related to international sanctions, as those who connect everything to the nuclear programme, and thus negotiations, were not right, and that is not the proper solution. Instead, he provided his solution to Iran's problem, which is to build on implementing rational and intelligent economic policies. Rationality and intelligence might be questionable as a participant provided views that if Ghalibaf won the elections he would appoint most of the government from a revolutionary background where they are not rational: "*Ghalibaf was more of an opportunist than a hardliner. So, the problem is that the sort of people that he would have surrounded himself with, I think, would have been mostly IRGC veterans like himself.*" (BS).

Ghalibaf continued to respond to Khamenei's discourse, as he accused reformists and moderates as groups or factions who adopted the renegotiations of the nuclear programme as a key tool to lift sanctions and hence solve Iran's economic problems. Reformists and moderates adopted an approach to solving Iran's problems based on engagement in serious negotiations with the West (Tarock, 2002; Fazili, 2010). The reality is that these sanctions have been imposed on the government to force or convince Iran to constrain its uranium enrichment. International sanctions against Iran are a combination of smart and comprehensive sanctions; while the former attempts to avoid inflicting pressure on ordinary people as much as possible, the latter's effects overshoot the governmental institutions, specific groups, and nominated individuals to hurt ordinary people. Selected sanctions have become more common and accepted than comprehensive sanctions, even if they are sometimes less successful because they are designed



to target certain groups, specific individuals, and regime members more than innocent people (Drury, 2006).

Khamenei was clear that presidential candidates should develop a holistic and long-term plan based on wisdom and acumen. Ghalibaf responded to that by expressing that we as Iranians have to follow the leadership's advice and religious teachings, where the latter must be implemented properly in Iranian life. He also made a clear statement when he said "We should act in a way that the leadership does not have to worry about". Khamenei wanted them to approach the economic issue based on a resistance economy, which meant the economy must be strong enough to resist sanctions, which is something hard to implement in reality (Miller, 2014).

A participant agreed with this, as Iranians pretend that they are strong and able to resist sanctions as they have a resistance economy; however, they wanted to relieve sanctions effects: *"I think that the impact of the international sanctions as a bargaining instrument was very successful, and in particular, in the negotiations, that is all the Iranian negotiators talked about in public. Of course, Iranians said we are strong, you cannot bully us, and we are not afraid of the sanctions as we have a resistant economy, of course, that is what they said in public, but in private, the only thing the Iranians talked about was sanctions relief; that is what they wanted. That is what their demand was in the negotiations for the JCPOA."* (GS).

Ghalibaf described the resistance economy broadly in the context of the jihadist spirit. He said that today's country needs a jihadist spirit. This is significant to the argument because identifying the main purpose behind using today, in '2013', within Ghalibaf's text helps in understanding the system of meanings for the effects of economic sanctions as a cause, where the adoption of a jihadist spirit, as a result, demonstrates the effectiveness of sanctions on Iran through Ghalibaf's texts, the claim he refutes and denies.

Kayhan determined the mission of the presidential candidates is to have "deep knowledge of the opponent's movement in economic warfare' because the country is in an economic war". Ghalibaf responded to that by using the same phrase 'jihadist spirit,' which means in his words, "in the jihadist spirit, there is no room for disputes and fights; there is a spirit of work, effort, and love". Ghalibaf reproduced in his style what Khamenei called a discourse of resistance and struggle in the context of the jihadist spirit as well. He emphasised the importance of this spirit of work. Khamenei laid out the work needed if the candidates decided to adopt the "discourse of resistance and struggle," a phrase that has been paraphrased to describe the spirit of jihadists.

It mentioned hard work, looking after the vulnerable people around us, eliminating corruption in the economy, fighting inflation, giving all people the same rights, and not making any concessions to the enemy. Ghalibaf also mentioned some efforts that Iran needs to make to solve problems of discrimination, poverty, and corruption because Ahmadinejad's government did not manage the economy properly, especially in terms of liquidity and inflation. (BS) agreed with this view about the responsibility of Ahmadinejad for increasing inflation: *"Ahmadinejad was a populist; he vastly contributed to the problem of inflation in Iran because he handed out money literally to almost everyone. If you may recall, he had a system of cash payments that was introduced after there was a subsidy reform, but he also just handed out a lot of money to many people. Also, as you know, oil was at a very high price for most of his time in office. He had a lot of money to throw around"*.

Kayhan suggested some priorities that the government should implement policies in the economic field to avoid a budget deficit because this leads to an increase in liquidity and inflation. In addition, the future government has to control prices as the latter causes rents despite the lack of different elasticity in different markets. Ghalibaf put that in a way to distinguish his approach from Rouhani's one. Therefore, he announced that he has a two-year plan to solve unemployment, increase people's purchasing power, and improve their living conditions. Specifically, Ghalibaf allocated the first six months of his presidency if elected, to make a tangible change in economic management. One can see that Ghalibaf paid a great deal of attention to the policies that he would take to resolve the economic harm without paying great attention to the effects of sanctions on these problems.

### 8.3.3. Conclusion

This section analysed Ghalibaf's discourse to explore his approach to resolving Iran's economic harm. Ghalibaf's approach focused on enhancing economic efficiency to improve the economy through the adoption of some effective policies as a high issue and not through negotiations with the West and the US as a low issue salience. This was essentially constituted based on his ideational elements that constructed his understanding and perceptions of Iran's identity and interests. This section also revealed that Ghalibaf's text had intersubjectivity with Khamenei and Kayhan. The section also showed that Ghalibaf's plan would 'follow Khamenei's guidance' to avoid oil dependence by disregarding long-term economic plans and relying on the very short term when making decisions.

The chapter showed that Ghalibaf was meant by his expressions of 'people who linked everything to the effects of sanctions' by the reformists and moderates; 'the efforts' that the government should implement include financial policies to avoid a budget deficit, and the future

government has to control prices and commit to financial discipline; and the 'jihadist spirit' includes hard work, looking after the vulnerable, fighting corruption and inflation, equality, and resisting the enemy.

#### **8.4. Chapter conclusion**

This chapter analysed the discourse of Rouhani, Ghalibaf and Khamenei along with texts from Shargh, and Kayhan to explain the approaches adopted by Rouhani and Ghalibaf to address the economic problem. The chapter showed that these approaches have been constructed in their discourses based on sanctions effects and different conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. The chapter revealed that resolving the economic problem according to Rouhani depends on his main idea of renegotiating the nuclear programme to lift the sanctions as a high issue salience since he considered sanctions effects as the main cause, while Ghalibaf delivered his main idea of enhancing economic management in terms of increasing production and controlling liquidity to improve the economy's conditions as a high salience issue since he considered economic mismanagement as the main cause. Ghalibaf denied, in particular, the relationship between sanctions' effects and economic harm. This chapter paves the way for the argument to flow into the next chapter concerning Iran's nuclear choices because it gives the foundation, in particular, for Rouhani's new approach that connected the discursive construction of sanctions' impacts on nuclear choices through nuclear negotiations to restrict Iran's nuclear programme.

## ANALYSING ROUHANI AND GHALIBAF'S APPROACHES TO IRAN'S NUCLEAR CHOICES

### 9.1. Introduction

The previous two chapters analysed the construction of the economic factor and the main causes of economic harm within the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf, as well as the approaches that they would adopt if elected to address the economic problems, respectively. The previous chapter concluded that Rouhani would adopt renegotiating the nuclear programme to lift most of the sanctions, whereas Ghalibaf would adopt enhanced economic management and would not seek to renegotiate the nuclear programme to lift the sanctions, as he questioned the negotiations' style.

This chapter continues the analysis of the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf by examining how their discourses constructed Iran's nuclear choices. It connects it to the major analytical conclusion of the study: that the effects of economic sanctions and intersubjective understandings of Iran's identity and interests have influenced the understanding and explanations of Rouhani and Ghalibaf about the main cause of the harm and appropriate nuclear choices in response to the effects of sanctions, as Figure 16 shows.

These nuclear choices reflect and implement the two different perceptions of Rouhani and Ghalibaf on the need for a new flexible nuclear choice in order to address economic harm and improve the economy as a salient issue, with high importance for Rouhani and low importance for Ghalibaf. This shows the role of issue salience in contributing to the sanctions outcomes. Salience is a key issue that shows that some discursive ideas and meanings are more activated and important than others (Falk, 2014).

Driven by the conclusions of chapters 7 and 8, this chapter shows that Rouhani's approach to nuclear choices, if elected, is based on his main idea of 'constructive interaction' and would be flexible, focusing on lifting sanctions through nuclear negotiations that restrict Iran's uranium enrichment. In contrast, Ghalibaf's nuclear approach, if elected, is based on his main idea of 'resistance and internal cohesion' and would be inflexible, relying on different tools disconnected from lifting sanctions through nuclear negotiations.

This chapter includes two sections: first, the discourse on Rouhani's flexible approach to Iran's foreign policy and future nuclear choices, followed by the analysis of Ghalibaf's inflexible approach to Iran's foreign policy and future nuclear choices. More specifically, the chapter examines discourses on Iran's nuclear rights, Iran's future relationships with the US and the West, nuclear negotiations, rationality and moderation, resistance, and internal cohesion. The chapter helps to understand their stances on civilian nuclear technology and/or nuclear weapons in relation to the nuclear non-proliferation regime. This can be done by exploring their responses to the sanctions regime that lead to a flexible or inflexible approach through their willingness to negotiate the programme and cooperate with the IAEA in the future in monitoring Iran's nuclear sites and implementing safeguards measures.



Figure 16: The role of economic sanctions, ideational elements, and mismanagement in shaping Iran's nuclear choices in the elections of 2013 through elite discourse

## 9.2. Rouhani's approach towards Iran's foreign policy and future nuclear choices

This section illustrates Rouhani's new approach to Iran's nuclear choice, which is based on a holistic strategy of constructive interaction as a flexible approach. It shows how Rouhani's discourse constructs perceptions of the flexible nuclear choice that would help Iran preserve its interests. The section shows that Rouhani's discourse has perceived the need for a new flexible nuclear choice for the elimination of the effects of the sanctions as a high issue salience. On this basis, he shared ideas with Khamenei's discourse as well as some texts from the domestic newspaper of Shargh. The section shows that Rouhani's approach is a flexible nuclear choice and is a result of his beliefs, values, and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. This section begins with key texts from Rouhani, Khamenei, and Shargh; framing constructive interaction; Iran's nuclear rights; Iran's future relationship with the US and the West; nuclear negotiations; and more rationality and moderation.

### (i) Rouhani's texts:

Rouhani wanted to begin his new approach to *constructive interaction* by having good relations with 35 countries on the IAEA's Board of Governors to gain their support for reaching an agreement that guarantees Iran's nuclear rights as well as breaking the sanctions. Rouhani on 20/04/2013 said:

If the West is looking for confidence in Iran's nuclear activities, there is no other way but to negotiate, and that is the best way to achieve our rights and break the sanctions... In the world of foreign policy, we must seek recruitment 35 countries on the Board of Governors must be recruited to achieve our goals... I believe that we should choose a path that leads us to our goal. One of the opportunities for Americans is in the P5 + 1 scene. Negotiations are a good place if they want to talk about the nuclear issue (Rouhani 20, 2013).

In an interview on 27/05/2013, criticising Ahmadinejad's foreign policy, especially his approach towards dealing with the economic sanctions, Rouhani tried to prepare Iranians for a new nuclear choice when clarifying the new stance of Khamenei, which revealed that he was not opposed to negotiating the nuclear issue with the US. Rouhani said:

The ninth and tenth governments, after imperfect and late awareness of the consequences of sanctions against the country, have chosen a step-by-step strategy to exit the nuclear crisis, which has not had a positive result so far... For the past three decades, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran has not been permitted to negotiate and pave the way for a renewed relationship with the US. The Supreme Leader's recent remarks that he does not oppose negotiations with the US while maintaining red lines have provided new ground for defending the Iranian nation's rights in a direct diplomatic confrontation with the US (Rouhani 11, 2013).

In an interview with Tehran Central News, Rouhani on 29/05/2013 announced his new approach to the international community, in particular the US. This approach is built on constructive interaction with the world and full cooperation with the IAEA regarding its nuclear programme. Rouhani said:

The principle of nuclear technology is part of our country's development plans, is within the framework of international regulations, and has continued. The only part that caused some problems for the country was the enrichment part, under the pretext that the Americans first and the Westerners later made that excuse, and then the IAEA followed it. We got into trouble...All our nuclear activities are under the IAEA, and we sign all international regulations. We have done and are implementing, that is, from the NPT to the safeguards regulation, and we are committed to implementing. All our nuclear activities are under the supervision of the IAEA, so our work is legal. It is one of the necessities of our development plan, but we must be able to solve the problems we have in this field through serious negotiation... The government's plan of prudence and hope is to seek constructive interaction with the world and not confrontation...With the first signs of trust, we can talk and move, improving our relations with the world (Rouhani 7, 2013).

Rouhani on 04/06/2013. In an interview with Iran Labour News Agency (ILNA), Rouhani stated that, with respect to the nuclear programme, he would seek a national consensus. He also gave a guarantee that, if elected, his government would support renegotiating the nuclear issue and maintaining nuclear technology for peaceful purposes:

In the nuclear case, I will seek national consensus, and the government will support the negotiating team to gain national consensus because it is a very sensitive issue and a matter of national interest, and we are trying to develop nuclear technology. We should try to maintain nuclear technology, reduce costs in foreign policy, and be able to overcome the problems created by our enemies under the pretext of nuclear. We are looking to improve the situation of workers; production must flourish in the country. Today, the biggest danger that threatens the country's workers is the closure of factories and production workshops and the operation of 20 per cent of industries in the country, which means disaster (Rouhani 21, 2013).

His views in the third presidential debate on 'Domestic and Foreign Policy' Rouhani, on 07/06/2013, stressed the importance of bringing the Iranian nuclear issue back to the IAEA Board of Governors, which requires new and serious rounds of nuclear negotiations. He also stated that if elected, he would follow an approach of rationality and moderation:



For foreign policy, we need rationality and moderation, and we must avoid extremism. In foreign policy, we must protect the national interests and security of the country... Of course, I emphasise that in foreign policy, important policies everywhere have been approved by the Supreme Leader and his guidance. In fact, a large part of it has been under the personal guidance of the Supreme Leader (Rouhani 23, 2013).

In an interview with al-Sharq al-Awsat, on 13/06/2013, Rouhani focused on how to open a new chapter in the relationship between Iran and the US. Rouhani reaffirmed that the new nuclear choice he would adopt requires “*restoring*” international confidence as well as “*national consensus*”. Rouhani also criticised many policies that led to Iranians’ suffering. Rouhani said:

Iran has nothing to hide. However, to proceed towards settling the Iranian nuclear file, we need to reach a national consensus and achieve rapprochement and understanding on an international level. This can only happen through dialogue. It seems that extremists on both sides are determined to maintain the state of hostility and hatred between the two states, but logic says that there should be a change of direction to turn a new page in this unstable relationship and minimise the state of hostility and mistrust between the two countries. Iran has an exclusively peaceful nuclear programme, which under international law is lawful and indisputable (Rouhani 15, 2013).

If elected, I will reverse this trend by restoring international confidence and exposing the ulterior motives of Iran’s critics. Nuclear weapons have no role in Iran’s national security doctrines, and therefore Iran has nothing to conceal... Iran should articulate its positions and policies more coherently and appreciably, and the US and its allies should abandon their deception of manufacturing new enemies and portray Iran and its exclusively peaceful nuclear programme as a threat. In my view, many policies and practices that have been undertaken by the present government need to be revisited and revised to make the lives of our people more prosperous, happy, and dignified... I have been an outspoken critic of those policies that have adversely affected the economic, social, and political aspects of the lives of the Iranian people inside and outside of the country (Rouhani 16, 2013).

(ii) Khamenei’s texts:

Khamenei on 21/03/2013 wanted to confirm that all Iranian negotiations concerning the nuclear issue were conducted with his approval and that officials maintained his red lines. Then he provided detailed statements over the red lines, insisting that the international community must accept Iran’s peaceful nuclear rights of enrichment, Khamenei said:

Their propaganda techniques are that they sometimes start rumours that certain people have negotiated with the Americans on behalf of the leader... So far,

nobody has negotiated with them on behalf of the leader. Over the years, in a few cases, certain people in different administrations have negotiated with them over certain temporary issues, and I was not opposed. However, this was done by different administrations, not by the leader. Of course, even those people had a responsibility to observe the leader's red lines, and today the same responsibility still exists, and they should observe the red lines. The Americans do not want the nuclear conflict to be resolved; otherwise, if they wanted these negotiations to reach a solution, the solution would be very close by and easy to reach. In the nuclear issue, Iran only wants the world to recognise its right to enrichment, which is Iran's natural right. Countries that are claiming to be after a solution should admit that the Iranian nation has a right to domestic nuclear enrichment for peaceful purposes. The majority of the countries in the world are on the Islamic Republic's side, and they support our demand because it is a legitimate demand (Khamenei 23, 2013).

Khamenei also wanted the US to accept Iran's nuclear rights to enrichment for peaceful purposes. He suggested the international community trust Iran's nuclear activities, and Iran must implement its IAEA safeguards and verification measures. Khamenei on 21/03/2013, stated that:

If the Americans wanted to resolve the issue, this would be a very simple solution: they could recognise the Iranian nation's right to enrichment and, to address those concerns, they could enforce the regulations of the IAEA. We were never opposed to the supervision and regulations of the IAEA. Whenever we are close to a solution, the Americans cause a problem to prevent reaching a solution. My interpretation is that their goal is to keep the issue unresolved so that they have a pretext for exerting pressure on us. And as they said, the purpose of the pressure is to cripple the Iranian nation... The second point is that Americans constantly send us messages, telling us that they are sincere in their offers of rational negotiation. They claim that they sincerely want to have rational negotiations with Iran—that is to say, they claim that they do not want imposition. In response, I would say that we have told you many times that we are not after nuclear weapons, and you say that you do not believe us. Why would we believe your statements, then? (Khamenei 24, 2013).

Khamenei explicitly wanted to highlight the double standards of the West, especially the US, when raising their commitment to *nuclear non-proliferation*. Khamenei, on 16/02/2013, gave an example of how they support Israel, which has nuclear weapons, compared to Iraq, which invaded under the pretext of having weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and found nothing. He also reaffirmed that Iran does not pursue nuclear weapons:

They say that they are committed to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Their pretext for attacking Iraq 11 years ago was that the regime of Saddam Hussein wanted to build nuclear weapons in Iraq. Of course, they went there and did not find anything. It became clear that it was a lie. They say that they are committed to the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This is while they support an evil government—the Zionist government—that has nuclear weapons and threatens to use them. That is what they say, and this is how they act... A few days ago, the President of America delivered a speech about the nuclear issue with Iran. He spoke as if the conflict between Iran and America was over Iran's decision to build nuclear weapons. He said that they would do everything in their power to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons. If we wanted to build nuclear weapons, how would you stop us? If Iran had decided to build nuclear weapons, America would not be able to stop it in any way. We do not want to build nuclear weapons, and this is not because this will upset America but because of our beliefs. We believe that building nuclear weapons is a crime against humanity, and they should not be built. Besides, we believe that the existing nuclear weapons should be destroyed. If we did not have this belief and if we decided to build nuclear weapons, no power could stop us, just as they could not stop other countries. They could not do this in India, Pakistan, or North Korea (Khamenei 25, 2013).

Khamenei on 16/02/2013 wanted to give an example of irrational American officials by comparing their *words and actions*. For example, American officials stated that they wanted to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons. While the real aim of the United States, according to Khamenei, is to prevent Iran from obtaining its natural right to uranium enrichment, Khamenei said:

The Americans claim, "We will not let Iran build nuclear weapons." This is deceptive talk. Is this an issue with nuclear weapons? Regarding Iran, the issue is not related to nuclear weapons. The issue is that you want to deprive Iran of its natural and inalienable right to enrich uranium and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes through its domestic capacities. Of course, you cannot do this either, and the Iranian nation will not renounce its rights. I would tell you that American politicians are irrational people. They expect other countries to give in to their unreasonable demands and their bullying. The Islamic Republic of Iran has many things to say. It has logical reasons. It has power and authority. For this reason, the Islamic Republic does not give in to irrational statements and actions. The sign of their irrationality is the contradiction between their words and actions. Their words are not in line with their actions. A reasonable person makes a convincing comment and then

sticks by it. They say a certain thing and make a certain claim, but they do exactly the opposite of what they have claimed or said (Khamenei 26, 2013).

(iii) Shargh's texts:

Professor Mohammad Javad Haghshenas, at the meeting of the Association of International Relations, expressed his views on the *diplomacy of the next president*. Shargh newspaper on 22/05/ 2013 reported remarks on the importance of declaring the presidential candidates' views on economic sanctions as well as the nuclear issue:

Foreign policy has a special place, so the candidates in this election should announce their position to the people in the fields of sanctions, Iran's nuclear programme, regional issues, and relations with countries such as the US and the EU... In the years of the ninth and tenth governments, five resolutions were issued that affected the situation in Iran and had important effects. Issues such as sanctions against Iran, especially oil export sanctions and banking sanctions, which unfortunately have had a devastating effect on the country, should be discussed, as well as how to deal with these issues. They also need to look at the relationship with the international system, specifically the US, and express their views. The next president should act to promote Iran's international status and prestige in the future (Shargh 9, 2013).

Haghshenas at the same meeting, also expressed his views, in particular on the relationship between Iran and the international system during Ahmadinejad's era. Haghshenas asked them to reconsider the relationship with the international community and the US with a realistic approach. Haghshenas said:

During the ninth and tenth governments, we did not have a proper understanding of the international system, and we did not see the world as a system. Therefore, our literature with the world is the literature of action and reaction... The literature that has been used so far to understand the world is mixed Marxist literature based on materialism...Understanding the evolution of the international system is also one of the points that have been neglected in our foreign policy...The 11th government is moving towards realism (Shargh 10, 2013).

Shargh newspaper published several articles on Ahmadinejad's management and what is needed from the next government. Seyed Mohammad Hossein Adeli, the former governor of the Central Bank, in an interview with Shargh on 1/06/2013, criticised Ahmadinejad's government and suggested what the next government should do. Adeli suggested that the current approach at

the international level must be changed in a way that gets rid of sanctions and breaks out of the ‘vicious circle’. He said:

In my opinion, it is very unfortunate that the livelihood of the people and the high cost of living are still the most important challenges for the country. The new president must pursue a set of economic, political, and international policies to respond appropriately to this important and rightful demand of the people. In the international arena, the continuation of current policies and actions does not seem to be going in a different direction. If we do not consider the current situation to be favourable, then a new plan must be devised to redefine the way we deal with the world’s issues and actors and to be able to provide the security and national interests of the country better and at a lower cost. Policies should be pursued that reduce or eliminate the shadow of economic and military threats and allow the use of national capabilities. It seems that the country has never been in such a situation. In the nuclear debate, today’s nuclear issue seems to be different from 10 years ago. The situation is different. Understanding the differences in the current situation can lead to new ways out of the impasse (Shargh 8, 2013).

### 9.2.1. Analysis

After selecting the key texts from Rouhani’s discourse on the relationship between sanctions and nuclear choices as a high issue salience, this section examines the texts by identifying how this relationship was constructed in the discourse based on sanctions effects and Rouhani’s understanding of Iran’s identity and interests by making connections across the texts of Rouhani, Khamenei, and Shargh. Rouhani used some expressions within his discourse to explain his main idea, such as ‘national consensus’; ‘restoring international confidence’; ‘uranium enrichment’; ‘nuclear negotiations’; ‘imperfect government’; ‘recruitment of 35 countries’; ‘Iran’s national interests’; and ‘important policies in foreign policy’.

#### 9.2.1.1. Framing constructive interaction approach

In this section, I will continue analysing Rouhani’s interesting discourse in the last part of the study about Iran’s nuclear choices. Rouhani, driven by wide experience, especially in diplomacy, along with many previous positions that enabled him to be very close to Khamenei, wanted to lead Iran towards the real status it deserves through having new moderate and rational policies, including the nuclear policy. Drawing on his background, beliefs, and perceptions of Iran’s identity and interests, Rouhani reached the conclusion that the only way to eliminate economic harm, preserve Iran’s national interest, overcome isolation, and restore Iran’s status in the world is by adopting a new approach to interacting with the world constructively, including the West and the US. Rouhani understood that Iran would pay a heavy price if it kept following the same

nuclear policy by remaining under severe sanctions for a long; therefore, he perceived this salient issue with high importance related to Iran's stability. If the issue under dispute is viewed as having high salience, such as a serious threat to national security or regime stability, the state will be more willing to afford higher costs to protect its interests which increases its possibilities of achieving a successful outcome (Ang and Peksen, 2007).

A constructive interaction approach is not only about the nuclear issue but also about the role that Iran played in the region regarding the Arab Spring in 2011, where Iran intervened in some Arabic countries that had revolutions against their regimes, such as Syria, Yemen, and Iraq. Yet, the main focus here is on the nuclear issue and the new policy that Rouhani would adopt for Iran's nuclear choice if elected. As explained earlier, constructive interaction was the main idea of Rouhani that dominated his discourse, which contributed to creating a flexible nuclear policy by explaining Iran's nuclear rights and the legitimacy of the nuclear programme, the future relationship with the world, including the US and the West, nuclear negotiations, and advocating for more rationality and moderation.

#### 9.2.1.2. Iran's nuclear rights

Rouhani, based on solid ground, defended Iran's nuclear rights for civilian purposes as enacted and guaranteed by the NPT, as Iran is a member of the treaty. This is the departure point for Iranians to defend their nuclear programme by connecting it to international law and the non-proliferation regime. In theory, this is an easy task for Rouhani due to his educational background in law as well as his experience as a former diplomat who led Iran's nuclear negotiation team from 2003 to 2005. In doing so, Rouhani was considering Iran's nuclear interests by responding to Khamenei's red lines regarding the nuclear negotiations, as he was calling for nuclear technology for Iran's development plan.

One should consider the impacts of the policies of the ninth and tenth governments led by Ahmadinejad internationally and domestically in terms of isolating Iran, as well as the huge political division among factions, especially beyond the Green Movement. That is why Rouhani stressed the importance of national consensus in his approach to the nuclear issue. Rouhani also stated that he would support the nuclear negotiations team because he considers this a sensitive issue in Iran. Rouhani reaffirmed Iran's nuclear rights for peaceful purposes and said that the ambiguity of the current situation had caused a disaster for Iran's economy, where the factories were operating at only 20 per cent.

According to his understanding, he considered this a serious threat to Iran at the time he was looking to improve the situation of workers and Iran at large. Rouhani for the first time used the term 'enemies' to describe countries that kept imposing sanctions on Iran under the pretext of

the nuclear issue. One can put that in the context of domestic consumption as he was campaigning, and for some factions, he must show some solidarity with Khamenei's discourse to gain conservatives' votes. Rouhani distanced his discourse from using the enemy, as he belongs to the moderates and has a more flexible approach towards the West and the US compared to conservatives (Rabasa et al., 2004; Mir Hosseini, 2002; Fazili, 2010).

It is interesting to see how Rouhani responded to Khamenei's term 'enemies, pretext'. Rouhani did not use the term as much as Khamenei and Ghalibaf, but he put that in a way to explain the future of the nuclear programme when using 'enemies, pretext' in the context of Iran's nuclear rights and international sanctions. Khamenei interpreted that the Americans did not want to resolve the nuclear issue to keep it a 'pretext' to keep imposing sanctions, thus exerting huge pressure on Iranians. He said that Iran wants the world to recognise its nuclear rights. Iran has taken a resistant stance over its nuclear rights of enrichment and that forced the US to accept, as a participant revealed, *"Iran has been told by interlocutors intermediaries secretly that the US was willing to accept Iran's enrichment programme and that the US was not going to insist on total annihilation of the enrichment programme the US would accept some limited enrichment. That is what the Omanis, for example, were saying to Iran."* (GS).

One can consider that, as a fair demand, Iran has the right to develop a nuclear programme for civilian purposes to contribute to optimising many aspects of society. This is a national interest that Rouhani understood in such a way that it would be difficult to find a solution for Iran's nuclear programme based on the current tools, negotiation team, and disputes among Iranians, as some of them support Iran having nuclear weapons. Therefore, he wanted to preserve Iran's interests by approaching the nuclear issue differently than Ahmadinejad had done and Ghalibaf would do. Through going to the roots, Rouhani explained that with the continuation of this situation, 20 per cent of Iran's factories will keep operating, and this is a 'disaster'. Rouhani, according to his perception of this salient issue, wanted to link the effects of sanctions that can be seen in factories as a result of sanctions to economic harm.

Connecting these ideas together to reach the stance that Rouhani smartly wanted to deliver explicitly that is convergent with Khamenei about this particular issue when describing others' actions as a 'pretext' for keeping sanctions imposed on Iran even if Iran is willing to negotiate its nuclear programme. He wanted to tell the world that the main goal of the 'enemies' imposing sanctions was not because of the nuclear programme but because they wanted to keep Iran under pressure and trigger Iranians against the regime. Because the nuclear issue is sensitive in Iran and he did not want to take the risk of adopting a new flexible nuclear choice individually, Rouhani wanted to finalise this story to be directed by the whole Iranian people and not only his

government, which is something related to Iran's identity that continued during its history of resisting and defending its status and interests by the Iranian nation.

On this basis, Rouhani linked the 'national consensus' with the support of the negotiation team because the situation was catastrophic economically and there was a dispute among Iranians towards nuclear negotiation, and even some of them supported Iran having nuclear weapons. As one of the Iranians who wanted to contribute to Iran's nuclear technology, Rouhani wanted to go straight to the heart of the issue, as he expressed that the most controversial part of the nuclear programme was enrichment, which was used, according to him, as a pretext by the Americans and Westerners. During Ahmadinejad's era, he increased enrichment capabilities in a challenging step for the West when he was looking for new supporters such as China and Russia (McDowall, 2008).

Insightfully, Rouhani framed the problems with the process of uranium enrichment under Ahmadinejad's presidency in terms of mistrust and a lack of cooperation with the international community. He again emphasised Khamenei's reaffirmation of Iran's nuclear rights and use of nuclear technology for civilian purposes. This stance was supported in 2011 by 98 per cent of Iranians who believed that having nuclear energy was a national right (Elson, 2011). Rouhani's nuclear choice is in line with poll results on Iranians' views on the importance of maintaining the peaceful nature of the programme through transparent cooperation with the IAEA and is also in line with their optimism about the nuclear negotiations.

Smartly, Rouhani has repeatedly denied this pretext, in convergence with Khamenei, and continued clarifying that Iran has signed the safeguards' regulations and that all of Iran's nuclear activities are conducted under the supervision of the IAEA. However, Iran under Ahmadinejad's era did not cooperate with the IAEA, as the latter issued reports confirming the poor cooperation (IAEA, 2006). Khamenei assessed the US and the West's claims related to Iran's attempts to develop nuclear weapons by expressing that the real purpose of the US and the West is to "deprive Iran of its natural and inalienable right to enrich uranium". Although the nuclear programme is considered a source of national pride and, according to Khamenei, the Iranian nation will not accept abandoning its nuclear rights, the enrichment process has been a matter of dispute among Iranians.

A poll conducted on July 3, 2012, on Iranian opinion on stopping uranium enrichment, showed that 60 per cent of the respondents expressed support for halting uranium enrichment (Esfandiari, 2012). Yet, Iranian views on the possibility of avoiding sanctions concerning enrichment have also changed over time. A poll conducted from May 10 until June 23, 2013, by the University of Tehran on Iranian views on 'Iran's presidential election of 2013 and Rouhani's



victory' revealed that the support for avoiding sanctions without suspending the nuclear programme and enrichment had increased. In May, it was 31 per cent, and in June, it was 48 per cent. The percentage of Iranian views on the possibility of Iran avoiding sanctions if it only suspends its nuclear programme and stops enrichment has decreased. In May, it was 59 per cent, and in June, it was 36 per cent (Mohseni, 2013). This suggests that the promises and texts of the candidates played an important role in changing Iranian views in June compared to May, that is, during the election campaign from 25 May to June 12, 2013, when candidates' speeches and texts framed their perspectives on economic sanctions effects, economic harm, enrichment, negotiations, and Iran's future nuclear choices (ibid.).

Rouhani, based on his evaluation, ended up saying that this issue needs to be solved through serious negotiation, as he was declaring that constructive interaction would be his new approach to Iran's foreign policy, including the nuclear one. Constructive interaction was an essential phrase that Rouhani expressed repeatedly when it came to Iran's new approach to acting with the entire world (Jafari, Hosseini, and Emamjomehzadeh, 2018). Building upon the current negotiations, Rouhani considered the nuclear negotiations under the JCPOA a good place to solve Iran's nuclear issue (AKbarzadeh and Barry, 2016). Nearly two in three Iranians have shared Rouhani's view. Indeed, many Iranians were optimistic about the nuclear negotiations that took place between Iran and the P5+1. Gallup conducted a survey in 2013 that revealed Iranians' hope of reaching an agreement over the nuclear programme. Iranians split: 13 per cent were very hopeful; 45 per cent were somewhat hopeful; 15 per cent were not very hopeful; 12 per cent were not at all hopeful; they were not aware of negotiations and did not know or refused 7 per cent and 8 per cent, respectively (Younis, 2013).

Rouhani wanted to put all tools on the table when he emphasised the importance of trust to achieve good relations with the world, including the US (Hadzikadunic, 2014). Consider that Rouhani knows that the world is doubting Iran's nuclear programme and believes that it is seeking to develop nuclear weapons in the end; therefore, he appreciates the importance of 'trust' to begin productive progress in Iran's relationship with the world. As long as Iran's nuclear programme is operating under the IAEA and Iran, according to Rouhani, is fully committed to the NPT. To provide a high level of credibility and in order to convince voters, Rouhani responded to Khamenei and Shargh, relying on statistics and methodological foundations reached through reliable results from polls and surveys. This would contribute significantly to his perception of Iran's future nuclear choices and the effects of imposing comprehensive sanctions that target vulnerable sectors of the population, such as the poor and middle classes and women. Sanctions have affected Iran's economy differently according to classes (Elson and Nader, 2011).

A Rand survey conducted in 2011 found that 56 per cent of poor respondents said that sanctions have affected Iran's economy negatively, whereas 17 per cent said that sanctions have affected Iran's economy positively. 23 per cent answered that sanctions have had neither a negative nor a positive effect. The same survey revealed that 42 per cent of respondents (mostly middle-class) answered that sanctions have an impact; 24 per cent said a positive impact; and 31 per cent said sanctions have had neither a positive nor a negative impact (Elson and Nader, 2011). Iranian views on sanctions also differ according to gender and whether they feel comfortable with the survey, as Iranians are hesitant to provide their views on the effects of sanctions. That is when anonymity is guaranteed, Iranians are more likely to take part in surveys and express their real views on the effects of sanctions and Iran's nuclear programme, which is considered a sensitive issue. The same survey found that the percentage of women who said sanctions have had a negative impact was 48 per cent, more than men, whereas the men's percentage was 42 per cent (ibid.).

Providing views in public on Iran's nuclear programme and the effects of sanctions are among the most sensitive issues in Iran that can endanger respondents and Iranians alike. Yet, when Iranians feel safe with interviewers by ensuring their anonymity, they are more likely to express their real feelings and views about the issues (Elson and Nader, 2011). It is also interesting to find that when respondents felt comfortable with the survey, they were more likely to express that sanctions have had a negative impact, 48 per cent compared to 27 per cent when they felt completely uncomfortable) (ibid.). This supports the idea that gaining a clear sense of the impact of sanctions through public opinion surveys can be limited due to some restrictions.

So far, most polls conducted on the effects of sanctions on Iranians support Ruhani's views. For instance, sanctions that have been imposed on Iran concerning the nuclear programme have changed Iranians' views on the nuclear programme (Elson and Nader, 2011). Gallup has conducted two surveys of Iranian views on the nuclear programme. Interestingly, the proportion of respondents who supported the development of nuclear power for military use has decreased. The survey conducted in May and June 2013 showed that 34 per cent approved, while 41 per cent disapproved (Younis, 2013). In contrast, in a survey from December 2011 to January 2012, 40 per cent of respondents approved of their country developing nuclear power for military use, while 35 per cent disapproved (Loschky, 2013). However, the two surveys have shown a slight difference in Iranians' approval for the development of nuclear power for non-military use: 56 per cent in 2013 and 57 per cent in 2012 (Younis, 2013; Loschky, 2013).

The steadiness of the change in Iranians' views on developing nuclear power for military use between 2011 and 2013 might be attributed to the effects of strengthened sanctions. (Ghasseminejad and Jahan-Parvar, 2020; Heuty, 2012). Khamenei emphasised Iran's dignity

and its right to have peaceful nuclear technology, whereas the Americans and the Europeans attempted to prevent Iran from exercising its nuclear rights, as explained in the background chapter. This could be attributed to Iran's nuclear choice that was adopted under Ahmadinejad when he stopped cooperating with the IAEA, which led to conceiving Iran's nuclear sites, especially centrifuges and uranium enrichment, suspiciously.

Rouhani reiterated Khamenei's discourse about how important nuclear technology is to Iran when Khamenei reaffirmed Iran's inalienable stance to acquire nuclear technology for civilian purposes since Iran has rational reasons for doing so and the power and authority to do so. Rouhani, in order to proceed with solving the nuclear issue, stressed that the international community has to trust Iran's nuclear activities, which will be fully under the supervision of the IAEA, which is something Rouhani has always called for. Rouhani echoed what Khamenei has described the US and Western officials as irrational because their words and actions were contradictory, regarding calling for negotiations and imposing sanctions, by saying if the West is looking for confidence in Iran's nuclear activities, it can be gained through negotiations. As we have seen, Rouhani fully supports Iran's nuclear rights for civilian purposes and not for producing nuclear weapons, as this is completely legal and is conducted according to the NPT.

#### 9.2.1.3. Iran's future relationships with the US and the West

After reaffirming Iran's nuclear rights for civilian purposes, it is time to reapproach other actors in the international system, as they are essential to achieving Iran's interests. Rouhani's discourse is constructed based on his perceptions of risks in case Iran kept the current nuclear policy without change. He also constructed his discourse about such relations in relation to texts from Khamenei and Shargh.

Rouhani, in an interview with al-Sharq al-Awsat, focused on Iran's foreign policy, particularly the nuclear issue, and how he can implement a new nuclear policy. Rouhani gave two conditions that must be met to have a positive change in Iran's nuclear policy: (i) reaching a national consensus; and (ii) persuading the international community to understand the Iranian demands for civilian nuclear technology for development plans. A participant elaborated on the relationship between Rouhani's discourse, sanctions, relations with the West, and lifting sanctions. *"He campaigned on a platform to fix Iran's economy, and obviously the sanctions were part of the economic problems that Iran was facing, and he also campaigned on wanting to have a more engaging approach to diplomacy with the West, and that is all tied up in the issue of sanctions, and if you look at what the supreme leader's statements about the JCPOA are being negotiated, I mean, explicitly, the point of this is to lift the sanctions."* (NM).

Rouhani knows, according to his deep experience in foreign policy, that he will not be able to achieve productive results through negotiations without considering these two issues. Therefore, to achieve success, he needed to combine these demands in a way that was compatible with the local and international environments. Domestically, this appeared to be a sort of challenge for him; that is, it is not easy to convince conservatives (people and MPs) to support him in his new nuclear choice, as they will deal with it as a matter of national pride, and giving concessions may affect Iran's glory and identity.

This prompted Rouhani to express his approach explicitly, especially when giving interviews with international media. He reaffirmed in an interview with al-Sharq al-Awsat that the new nuclear choice that he would adopt is to restore international confidence in Iran's nuclear programme by proving the peaceful nature of the programme, as Iran's national security doctrine does not accept the possession of nuclear weapons. The election of a seasoned politician as president could help reach a nuclear deal, following Khamenei's permission (Alem and Salvin, 2013). To admit the effective role of the US in the nuclear negotiations, Rouhani criticised the relationship between Iran and the US, describing it as a state of hostility as he attributed this to extremists on both sides. A participant agreed that Rouhani was trying to bridge the gap between Iran and the West especially the US in order to lift sanctions *"He worked to dial down the hostile antagonistic rhetoric and discourse of the United States to the international community to engage in constructive engagements and diplomacy with the West and with the international community to alleviate those. Political diplomatic and socio-economic pressures and I think all part of it, of course, is very much economic Iran was feeling the economic pains of the sanctions."* (EL).

He criticised many of the policies taken by Ahmadinejad's government because of their effects on Iranian society, economy, and politics (ibid.). The international community needs to trust Iran's nuclear sites and activities to engage in serious negotiations (Mazzucelli, 2007; IAEA, 2006/53). Rouhani also mentioned the policies of the Ahmadinejad government that required revision. Khamenei declared that Iran does not seek to build nuclear weapons, not because it upsets the US but because Iranian beliefs are against building nuclear weapons. This is in line with his views and fatwas in 2004, 2005, 2010, and 2012 (Sirjani, 2013). As a matter of independence as a core principle of the Islamic revolution, Khamenei gave the example that if Iran desired to have nuclear weapons, no one could stop it as they could not stop "India, Pakistan, and North Korea".

To reach a national consensus, Rouhani wanted to enhance and reaffirm the Iranian interpretation of Islamic beliefs towards nuclear weapons, saying that they are forbidden in Islam as a core principle, despite some Iranians supporting their country having nuclear

weapons. At the international level, Rouhani would also focus on exposing the West's "double standards" on nuclear issues in the region concerning the Iraqi and Israeli nuclear programmes. However, Rouhani had to deal with the West to reach an agreement; therefore, his texts were calling for enhancing Iran's relationship with the West (Chhabra, 2013).

There is no doubt that some Iranian officials shared Rouhani's stance on the need for a new flexible nuclear policy because of the effects of sanctions on the economy. Seyed Mohammad Hossein Adeli, the former governor of the Central Bank, admitted that Iran is in a difficult situation because it has never been in one like this before. He also provided views on how to get out of the vicious circle, arguing that the current policies would not make any difference. His evaluation of some domestic and international policies is that they "need to be revisited and revised"—those related to Iran's nuclear choices and economic sanctions—because these policies can make the lives of our people more prosperous, happy, and dignified, as he described them.

Adeli called on the future government to adopt new policies to achieve security and national interests at a low cost. More importantly, he put such policies in the context of reducing economic and military threats to Iran. He also acknowledged that discussion of or expression about economic sanctions in public is, to an important extent, not permitted, especially about the negative effects of sanctions on the economy. Adeli said that the nuclear issue was different than in 2003 in terms of Iran's uranium enrichment technology and expertise, making it easier for the next government to negotiate on the programme.

Adeli also shared with Rouhani that reaching a deal that preserves Iran's nuclear rights is not against Iran's identity and interests. He perceives the damage that resulted from the sanctions as a serious threat to Iranian interests. Indeed, this explanation supports the salience of the issue in Rouhani's discourse about the need for a new nuclear policy to eliminate economic harm. Issue salience is more likely to increase the success of sanctions in terms of threat and imposition (Bapat et al., 2013).

It is important to recognise these policies to know what kind of policies Rouhani wanted to implement, and it is also crucial to explore the effect of economic sanctions on creating a flexible Iran's nuclear choices as an issue salience was discursively constructed through the presidential candidates' speeches during the election campaigns. Yet, the impact and salience of issues are not fixed and vary over time (Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch, 1995). For example, discursive construction on sanctions effects in Iran has increasingly spread after 2011, that is, they became more activated in discourse as a result of strengthening the sanction regime of the oil embargo compared to its salience before 2010. This can be a clear message to the Iranian

regime that sanctions will be intensified and remain until Iran changes its nuclear policy. This may increase the success of sanctions outcomes when the target perceives and calculates the heavy costs that it will afford if it keeps the issue under dispute unresolved.

In part, the candidates framed different future nuclear choices for Iran based on their experiences, ideational elements, political norms, and their framing of the relationship between sanctions, economic harm, and nuclear choices. These features played a crucial role in leading to the voters' preference to elect Rouhani; nearly 89 per cent of voters voted for him based on his features, six per cent to prevent other candidates, and five per cent said both (Mohseni, 2013). Voters' expectations of Rouhani were resolving the economic problem, alleviating the sanctions, continuing with the nuclear programme, and improving Iran's relationships with the world (ibid.). This might have affected voters' preferences as Rouhani's stance aligns with the outcomes of Iranian public opinion polls that disapproved of acquiring nuclear weapons and insisted on having a civilian nuclear programme. Iranians' demands have changed and become more pragmatic and centrist, both at the domestic and international levels (ibid.).

A convergence between Rouhani's policies and the voters can be seen when Morteza Talaei, the head of Ghalibaf's election campaign members, attributed Ghalibaf's loss of the election to the sudden huge support for Rouhani a few days before the election and explained the reason behind that: Rouhani had detailed plans that focused on nuclear issues, sanctions, and foreign policy compared to Ghalibaf (Pouria Mahrovian, BBC, 2017). This can also be attributed to Rouhani's perception of the salience of the effect of the sanctions issue as having low salience for him, which implies a determination to succeed (Ang and Peksen, 2007). This view is supported by a poll about 'Iranian Public Opinion and Rouhani Presidency' conducted by Tehran University from May 10 to June 23, 2013, which revealed that Rouhani gained a significant rise in the days before the election from June 10 to June 14 due to the prominence of foreign policy and sanctions (Mohseni, 2013). As we have seen so far, Rouhani's new approach to Iran's nuclear choice is built on the basis of keeping Iran's nuclear programme only for civilian purposes and having a constructive approach with the international community.

#### 9.2.1.4. Nuclear negotiations

In this section, I will analyse Rouhani's texts related to his stance on re-negotiating the nuclear programme to lift sanctions broadly, given the criteria and conditions he proposed for successful outcomes. Rouhani, regarding Iran's nuclear choices, criticised the Ahmadinejad government's performance by describing it as *imperfect* and claiming that Ahmadinejad's step-by-step strategy to resolve the nuclear crisis was not successful in shielding Iran from the severe effects of sanctions that have been imposed after passing the nuclear file to the UNSC.

Rouhani described Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy as unsuccessful, which might have been because of sanctions or because the nuclear programme had not progressed as it should under Ahmadinejad's presidency. In this context, Rouhani emphasised Khamenei's speech, in which Khamenei stated that he does not oppose direct negotiations with the US. It is a supportive statement, namely, gaining the green light from Khamenei to negotiate the nuclear issue. Although Rouhani was the candidate who publicly spoke about Iran's nuclear programme the most, including the new nuclear policy he would adopt if elected. However, he left some parts of his strategy untold. Discourse analysis allows us to conclude that Rouhani's nuclear choice relies on moderation (Monshipouri, 2013). This matches his ideational elements, Iran's interests, and his religious and political background.

Rouhani wanted to distinguish himself as moderate and qualified compared to Ghalibaf, especially about Iran's nuclear programme. In other words, reaching an agreement with the international community on this basis will, of course, require serious negotiations, including direct negotiations with the US, and thus, most of the sanctions related to the nuclear programme could be lifted according to that agreement, which would, in turn, bring economic prosperity, as Rouhani repeatedly stated (Monshipouri, 2013; Zarif, 2014; Giles, 2015). Rouhani was more confident in reaching a nuclear agreement as permission to negotiate with the US had been authorised by the leader, considering the effective role of the US in influencing other parties, such as the EU.

One can judge this nuclear policy by considering the JCPOA agreement that Iran reached with the P5+1 in 2015, less than two years after Rouhani's election, through serious negotiations (JCPOA, 2015). Rouhani believed that if Iran's foreign policy, particularly its nuclear choices, were reshaped based on rationality, in contrast to the idealist approach adopted by Ahmadinejad that dominated Iran's foreign policy for eight years, Iran could achieve its ultimate goal of lifting sanctions through serious negotiations. Rouhani was trying to adopt a balanced approach that would result in what he understood as a rational foreign policy (Divsalar and Barzegar, 2017; Maloney, 2015). Iran has been negotiating the nuclear programme since 2003 but did not reach an agreement with the international community until 2013, when Rouhani delivered these statements. The Board of Governors has the upper hand in the IAEA in terms of voting against or with Iran; therefore, Iran must seek the support of more than 35 countries, as Rouhani said.

This was part of Rouhani's holistic foreign policy, which adopts moderation and constructive interaction with the entire world, including the region. Rouhani was campaigning on a platform of 'sweeping change' as a way to restore faith in the election, especially in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election (International Crisis Group, 2013). Rouhani's approach revealed in the discourse focused on seeking global acknowledgement of Iran's nuclear rights for civilian

purposes, which meant: (i) being consistent with Khamenei's red lines and achieving Iran's development plan; and (ii) promoting Iranian openness with the world and restoring trust as the way to lift sanctions (Hadzikadunic, 2014). This approach was framed as much more likely to achieve stability and economic prosperity since the sanctions were imposed on Iran to force it to comply with restrictions on its nuclear programme.

Khamenei adopted a balanced stance between Iran's nuclear rights and obligations; that is, he asked the Americans to recognise Iran's nuclear rights, and in turn, Iran would accept and cooperate to implement IAEA regulations. In the first phase of the nuclear negotiations, the EU and the US tried to prevent Iran from exercising its right to uranium enrichment for peaceful purposes (Osborne and Morrison, 2013). In reaction to that, Iran's stance on having a peaceful technology was robust and non-negotiable (Meier, 2013; Jessen, 2017). Khamenei also denied that Iran had opposed IAEA supervision as the US does not trust Iran's nuclear activities, despite Khamenei's statements that Iran does not seek nuclear weapons. On religious and ideological grounds, Khamenei has always stated that nuclear weapons are against Iran's beliefs, as Islam forbids the possession of such types of weapons.

Iran signed the NPT in 1968, and Parliament ratified it in 1970. Moreover, Iran signed the Additional Protocol (AP) in 2003. However, at this point, Iran had not demonstrated its full commitment to IAEA verification and safeguards measures, and the relationship between Iran and the IAEA was in ebb and flow. Rouhani meant the path that can help Iran achieve its goal: the adoption of a comprehensive strategy based primarily on an approach of constructive interaction that includes moderate policies, serious and rational negotiations, and full compliance with the IAEA's demands. Making this balanced argument about Iran's nuclear rights and obligations was framed as likely to persuade the 35 countries on the Board of Governors to support Iran because this approach was logical and rational. The 35 states on the Board of Governors that Rouhani mentioned being recruited are crucial when it comes to voting on Iran's case to gain support for peaceful nuclear technology.

#### 9.2.1.5. Towards more rationality and moderation

This level of analysis supports the thesis' argument for identifying Rouhani's nuclear approach. I use the term 'rationality' as he described his approach and not because I intend to examine his approach within a broad context of 'rationalism'. Rouhani emphasised in a consistent manner, which reflects his ideational elements as a moderate, that in the field of foreign policy, we need *rationality and moderation* and must avoid extremism. Rouhani expressed the importance of moderation, either inside the country or the whole world, in building good relationships (Selvik, 2013; Sadjadpour, 2013).



He does not present himself as a conservative or a reformist; instead, he always introduces himself as a moderate (Selvik, 2013). The rationality and moderation that Rouhani was calling for are essential for improving the economy. One can consider a moderate and rational approach to appointing people based on their competence rather than their political affiliation. In doing so, Rouhani has always expressed that, if elected, he would benefit from and re-recruit economic experts and academics who were neglected during Ahmadinejad's era. This is a new approach that Rouhani seeks to follow, if elected, in contrast to Ahmadinejad's extreme approach to foreign policy for eight years, especially regarding the nuclear issue and international sanctions. In response to Haghshenas in Shargh, which asked candidates to express their views on foreign policy, especially sanctions and Iran's nuclear programme, Rouhani also focused on the importance of protecting Iran's national interests and security in the country. Haghshenas stated that the most effective sanctions on Iran during Ahmadinejad's presidency were those imposed in 2011 by the US and EU to embargo Iranian oil.

It is worth noticing how Rouhani understood Iran's national interests, as he felt they were in danger. The dangerous factor that he was always talking about was the effects of sanctions on the economy and how they may be expanded to affect society as a whole in terms of frustration, crimes, demonstrations, and eventually threaten the regime and the stability of the country; therefore, he looks at sanctions as the most threat to Iran, and compromising the nuclear programme is the most effective way to eliminate them.

Haghshenas also mentioned a misunderstanding of the international system, as the Iranian officials' strategy was based on actions and reactions, and this approach contradicts the basic definition of foreign policy. The latter can be defined as a "series of decisions made by a group of people who can be labelled decision-makers" (White and Clarke, 1989, p. 12). The foreign policy outputs are subject to factors that operate outside the foreign policy system in such a way that they serve as crucial inputs (*ibid.*). Haghshenas called for a greater understanding of the international system and expressed that the next president should adopt a realistic approach in which decisions are made within the state by recognised mechanisms rather than in response to an outside motive. He expected the next president would follow a realistic approach to foreign policy, as practical knowledge and diplomacy are needed.

Adopting rationality and moderation would be in line with the international system as a whole rather than sticking only to domestic standards. It is important to distinguish between the two levels of domestic and international analysis to know the validity of the approach in gaining benefits, especially with the lifting of sanctions, as the latter requires serious negotiations. Decision-makers, having a clear and specific objective, are inclined to behave and pursue an action based on an assessment of the consequences related to gain and loss (White and Clarke,

1989). Rouhani's top priority within Iran's national interests is to have much more support from countries that admit Iran's right to enrichment, where realism, according to Haghshenas, is supposed to be the proper approach for Iran's foreign policy by the future president.

Rouhani provided interesting perceptions of foreign policy. He stated that the most important policies in the field of foreign policy have been approved by Khamenei and his guidance. Rouhani wanted to tell people about the suspension of uranium enrichment under his leadership and that he was driven by Khamenei's approval, saying "In foreign policy, important policies everywhere have been approved by Khamenei and his guidance". In fact, a large part of it has been the personal guidance of Khamenei". The justification of his performance and gaining Khamenei's support is essential for him to apply his new approach, as he needs the conservatives' support, similar to Ahmadinejad, to become president (Kamrava, 2010; Jones and Steinfeld, 2009).

Rouhani rejected the critique of his nuclear stance during the negotiations by suspending enrichment. He faced that during the election campaign by serving as Iran's chief nuclear negotiator from 2003 to 2005. That is, he wanted to say that all nuclear decisions, including negotiations and cooperation with the IAEA, were taken with Khamenei's approval. Not only that, but he also stated in the third presidential debate over his performance that war could possibly be taken if Iran did not negotiate its nuclear programme. He expressed:

The fact that it was mentioned that there were problems with the construction or reform of foreign policy in the government It is good to look at Mr ElBaradei's recent book, "The Age of Deception, in which he says that the war was behind the gates of Iran. Other books have been written on the subject, including one by Jack Straw, in which he said that 'war was certain, and I declared it a stupid war, and because of that, I was fired' (Presidential Debates, 2013).

A participant linked the decision of temporary suspension to Rouhani's understanding of Iran's interest in avoiding sanctions and maybe more *"If you look at Rouhani's background and some of the things he said, he was involved in the nuclear negotiations back in early 2003, 2004 and 2005, when there were moderately successful negotiations that at least temporarily could suspend Iran's enrichment programme, and you know he said that it was successful because for a while he managed to kind of avoid sanctions or go beyond being placed on Iran, which is an indication that he does not think it is a good thing for Iran to be sanctioned and obviously."* (NM).

Khamenei wanted to make it clear both domestically and internationally when reasserting that his power was unchallengeable or ignorable. According to the Iranian constitution, the Supreme Leader has broader political and religious rights (Iranian constitution: 57). For example, he was responding to rumours spread by the US that some Iranian officials were negotiating on his behalf. He denied that and said: “So far, no one has negotiated with them on behalf of the leader”, and those who have negotiated in different administrations in the past were based on his approval as long as they were maintaining the leader’s red lines.

It would be interesting to explore Khamenei's red lines regarding the nuclear issue because this gives us an account of how Rouhani and Ghalibaf, in the second section, have understood Khamenei’s stance and constituted their approaches, where one can find a big difference between them. Regarding Khamenei’s red lines concerning nuclear negotiations, one can frame them in two crucial points: (i) negotiating the nuclear issue based on preserving Iran's dignity, and (ii) adhering to Iran’s right to enrich uranium for civilian purposes. Thus, as long as officials maintain these two basic conditions, the leader will not be opposed to negotiations. For Rouhani, engaging with the international community is subject to (i) constructive engagement, which doubles the benefits; and (ii) maintaining Iran's dignity; that is, the relationships should be based on mutual respect (Ditto, 2013).

Khamenei wanted to give additional ground to Iran’s foreign policy, especially on the nuclear issue, for the future president when he stated that he was not against any approach that could achieve Iran’s national interests as long as it is underpinned by the two aforementioned conditions. Considering the connections between Iran’s foreign and domestic policies and the effects of economic sanctions on causing severe economic harm in Iran, the effects of sanctions have been expressed explicitly as severe effects within the texts of Rouhani and Shargh and implicitly within the texts of Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan.

One can notice how Khamenei kept in mind the influence of the Green Movement’s massive demonstrations on the regime and Iran at large when the demonstrators were driven by economic and political reasons; therefore, he wanted to restore the balance domestically by having an acceptable president domestically and internationally. Therefore, Khamenei realised that the nuclear issue had been used by Iran’s enemies as a pretext to keep Iran under pressure, and thus, he was looking for a president who could prevent Iran from experiencing a severe economic and political crisis at a time when the regime’s legitimacy was at risk (Abdolmohammadi and Cama, 2015).

This is also one of Iran’s interests that Khamenei was keen to preserve, even though the new president may come from a different political faction. For him, there is a difference between

preserving Iran's interests and conservatives' interests, in the context of election outcomes' as he chose Iran's interests, that is, avoiding massive demonstrations and thus may regime change in case the results were rigged. A participant agreed with that and linked the election outcomes with regime stability *"I guess the other factor that you would have to take into account is if the election had come out differently and you had a conservative president, how would Khamenei interpret that? because one argument you can make is that he interpreted the election of Rouhani partly as a reflection of the will of the Iranian people, showing they did want change, they did want the sanctions to be lifted, and so he is calculating what he should be doing in order to maintain domestic stability and regime stability at large."* (GS).

It is also crucial that the new president be accepted domestically and internationally to reduce the IRGC's authority, preserve the regime's legitimacy, reinstate a cleric president, and protect Iran's nuclear programme from external attacks (Sherrill, 2014; Kazemzadeh, 2017; AB; BA). According to a 2012 Pew Research Centre poll, Iranians' views on the political role of religious figures found that: Most Iranians prefer a government or a political system that religious figures are part of. About two-thirds 66 per cent said religious figures should have at least some influence, 19 per cent said they should have a little influence, and 11 per cent said they should have no influence (Pew Research Centre, 2012).

Rouhani wanted to reaffirm the importance of the leader's role in Iran's foreign policy, specifically on sensitive issues such as the nuclear programme. The significance of unpacking these meanings is to explore to what extent the effects of sanctions have affected Iran's nuclear choices within Rouhani's texts, and this, of course, reveals the heavy cost of sanctions' effects on Iran that must be considered and expressed by presidential candidates. Heavy costs mostly contribute positively to increasing the likelihood of sanctions success (Drury, 1999; Martin, 1992). Rouhani provided his views explicitly and defended his main perception of the role of sanctions and the need for a future flexible nuclear choice to eliminate sanctions effects. Rouhani decided to adopt a flexible approach, including the restriction of uranium enrichment because he realised that the senders were determined to change Iran's nuclear behaviour. If a sender has a strong interest in the issue at stake to gain concessions, the target can realise that the sender's firm talk is serious; hence, sanctions based on salient issues will be more likely to affect or change the policy of the target (Whang, 2010).

Rouhani was confident in delivering that based on his evaluation of Iran's foreign policy, including the nuclear issue, especially during Ahmadinejad's era, underpinned by his experience gained from several positions he occupied related to Iran's nuclear programme as well as his close relationship with Khamenei. Voters are also interested in the salience of certain issues within candidates' discourse. For example, the importance of specific issues to the public also

varies over time and is closely tied to objective conditions such as unemployment, inflation, international tensions, or racial conflict (Edwards, Mitchell, and Welch, 1995).

At this final stage of the analysis, Rouhani concludes the story as he advocates for his perception of the issue salience of the need for a flexible nuclear choice. He was assessing and working on that before making the final decision. Issue salience captures a cognitive shortcut for human actors to evaluate the information they are working on before making a decision (Oppermann and Spencer, 2013). Drawing on his discourse throughout the three chapters, one can recognise his approach to constructive interaction regarding Iran's nuclear choice, if elected, as follows: (i) providing clear views over Iran's future nuclear choice, economic sanctions, and its relationship with the world, specifically with the US (Zarif, 2014).

Although explicitly expressing views on the nuclear issue and economic sanctions is quite restricted in the Iranian media and among the Iranian elite, Rouhani was the presidential candidate who provided the most views about the negative effects of economic sanctions and Iran's future nuclear choices. A participant agreed with this by emphasising the role of Rouhani's discourse about the above idea and his victory *"There was some public belief in his narratives that sanctions really link these economic problems and that the solution to Iran's economic problems lies in more rational and moderate foreign policy and nuclear policy, which leads to the resolution or settlement of the nuclear issue, and alternates are moving up the sanctions so well. They portrayed his narrative, and they voted for him based on that."* (AB).

(ii) maintaining Khamenei's red lines, which means upholding Iran's nuclear right for domestic enrichment for civilian purposes and never, under any circumstances, tolerating or accepting constraints or prohibiting Iran's natural nuclear rights. Iranian officials, during negotiations, rejected a proposal presented by the EU and the US because it did not mention their nuclear rights (Meier, 2013; Miller, 2018; Jessen, 2017); (iii) the necessity for direct negotiations with the US after the leader's permission to do so based on dignity and wisdom that Rouhani considered a 'new ground for defending the Iranian nation'; Notably, Iran, after hard negotiations, achieved its goal when the US acknowledged Iran's right to enrichment (Van Ham, 2011); (iv) expansion of the range of countries supporting Iran's nuclear rights; (v) transparent cooperation with the IAEA that includes the implementation of safeguards and verification measures; and (vi) building up internal consensus among different political factions and Iranians at large about this approach, as this related to supporting the negotiation team. These are the tools and measures that Rouhani would implement in order to have a flexible approach. A new flexible approach to Iran's future nuclear choices that is compatible with what he saw as Iran's national interest to eliminate sanctions effects (Kazemzadeh, 2017; BS; Shanahan, 2015).

It is important to note that the firm adheres to Iran's identity and interests, as it is a real form of national pride in Iran's history and heritage, going back a long time to its glorious empire. Despite the shift that the Islamic Revolution has made towards focusing on ideological beliefs more than material interests, Iranians are still proud of the history of Iran, and they are working hard to preserve its interests and status. Yet, the assessment and understanding of its interests may vary from one political faction to another or even from one person to another. This difference can be attributed to the importance of values, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences in affecting ideas and, hence, creating policies in discourse. On this basis, one can see the role of discourse in presenting the material realities of sanctions effects and Rouhani's ideational elements of the values of Iran's identity and interests, thus creating nuclear policy. It is clear that discourse is a battle of ideas between different approaches that are used actively to make a change through supporting ideas and attitudes in a way that shapes the world around them (Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1999; Liebes and Ribak, 1991). On this basis, we have seen how Rouhani constitutes a moderate ground for his flexible nuclear approach that will preserve Iran's national interests.

#### 9.2.1.6. Conclusion

This section revealed the importance of discourse in presenting material and Rouhani's conceptions of Iran's identity and interests and, thus, creating a flexible nuclear policy to be adopted if elected. The section analysed Rouhani's discourse about his approach to Iran's foreign policy, including nuclear choices. Rouhani's discourse shared ideas with Khamenei and Shargh. The section showed the manner in which Rouhani defended his perception of the salient issue that dominated his discourse throughout the elections. The issue salience that Rouhani perceived as of high importance was the elimination of the effects of sanctions, and improving the economy requires a new flexible nuclear choice as necessary to preserve Iran's interests. The section explained the reasons behind Rouhani's adoption of constructive interaction.

The section illustrated the difference in ideational elements and values of Iran's identity and interests, which are the crucial drivers that drove Rouhani to announce Iran's future nuclear choices based on constructive interaction as a flexible approach compared to Ahmadinejad and Ghalibaf. This flexibility encompasses transparent cooperation with the IAEA through serious, balanced, and time-bound negotiations and the willingness to restrict uranium enrichment in order to lift sanctions. As we have seen, Rouhani maintains Iran's nuclear rights for civilian purposes and not for producing nuclear weapons. He also stressed the importance of defending

Iran's nuclear programme properly as established for peaceful purposes, as he believes that lifting the sanctions is the key to improving the economy.

Rouhan's discourse on the main idea of constructive interaction was expressed through some expressions and explanations such as 'national consensus' as he linked it with the support of the negotiation team because the situation is catastrophic and enhancing the Iranian interpretation of Islamic beliefs towards nuclear weapons as they are forbidden in Islam;' international confidence'; which related to mutual trust: Iran needs to trust the US and Western officials to move forward with good relations, and they also need to trust Iran's activities through transparent cooperation with the IAEA, which can be achieved through negotiations. 'Uranium enrichment' related to the process of enrichment under Ahmadinejad's presidency in terms of mistrust and a lack of cooperation with the international community; 'imperfect government'; related to Ahmadinejad's nuclear policy as unsuccessful and failing to shield Iran from the severe effects of sanctions; 'recruitment of 35 countries' through making a balanced argument about Iran's nuclear rights and obligations to support Iran's peaceful nuclear technology; 'Iran's national interests'; and 'important policies in foreign policy'; those relating to Iran's nuclear choices, Iran's nuclear rights, negotiations, and economic sanctions.

### **9.3. Ghalibaf's approach towards Iran's foreign policy and future nuclear choices**

In this section, I will analyse Ghalibaf's discourse on constructing Iran's nuclear choice. Ghalibaf shared ideas with Khamenei's discourse as well as some texts from the domestic media of Kayhan. The section shows how Ghalibaf's perception has disconnected improving the economy from having a flexible nuclear choice as he announced a strict and extremist approach as a result of his beliefs, values, and experience in understanding Iran's identity and interests.

Ghalibaf expressed his firm approach in parallel to Khamenei's stance and the Islamic Revolution's principles, especially in terms of the relationship with the US and the West on the nuclear issue. Ghalibaf's views and statements on the nuclear issue are less than those of Rouhani, and this may be attributed to the way that conservatives deal with sensitive issues such as sanctions and the nuclear programme. This is also applied to Kayhan, who had less engagement when approaching and publishing articles on the nuclear issue as well as the negative effects of sanctions, compared to Shargh. Overall, both have expressed their views in fewer texts and a more general context compared to Rouhani and Shargh. This section begins with key texts from Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan; Iran's nuclear rights; nuclear negotiations; criticising Iran's nuclear policy; and more resistance and internal cohesion.

(i) Ghalibaf's texts:

In an interview with Tasnim News Agency on 23/4/2013 about Iranian foreign policy, Ghalibaf provided his views on Iran's nuclear issue. This is the richest interview on Ghalibaf's views on the nuclear issue. In this interview, he distinguished between strategic and tactical levels and also expressed clearly his stance on both levels and the approach he would apply if elected. He said:

On the nuclear issue, we must distinguish between the level of strategy and the level of tactics. The system's movement strategy on the nuclear issue is clear: resistance to secure interests within the framework of legal rights. The foreign policy apparatus, as the executor of this framework, must move towards the realisation of these goals through a set of behaviours and actions... My view is that at the tactical level, we moved in a period towards a passive approach that resulted from trust in the West, which did not work out and the other side did not fulfil its obligations. This experience showed us that the other side is not very reliable, interprets Iran's good opinion as weak, and seeks to impose its will without fulfilling its obligations... The reaction of our public opinion and political environment to this experience was to move towards a resistance approach to achieve the goals that have been pursued over the past eight years, which has resulted in a fuel and enrichment cycle of up to 20 per cent, which is a great achievement. Therefore, I believe that the strategy of resistance to the nuclear issue has been a solid and intelligent approach, but our main weakness has been at the tactical level. The slogan of idealism and commitment in the nuclear case struck us. I believe we will need effective nuclear diplomacy in the years to come. I believe that at the tactical level, there was a misinterpretation or at least an incomplete interpretation of the concept of resistance and idealism (Ghalibaf 9, 2013).

Ghalibaf believes that negotiations are neither the solution to Iran's problems nor a 'taboo'. He believes that successful negotiations mean that the US respects Iran and adopts equal and balanced negotiations. Yet he adopted Khamenei's stance, whereas the latter was not optimistic about such negotiations. He tried to soften his stance towards nuclear negotiations to gain more support. Which may seem, to some extent, similar to Rouhani's stance. Ghalibaf said:

Negotiation is always on the agenda as a way to achieve national goals, ideals, and interests and should not be rejected or sanctified. The success of the negotiations also depends on the Americans agreeing to talk to the Islamic Republic of Iran on an equal and balanced basis, not from the top position. Mr.



Agha says that we are not optimistic because Americans have a superior spirit and always try to negotiate regardless of the situation and the interests and priorities of the other side. This is something that the Islamic Republic of Iran does not accept. But we have no problem with principled, equal, and path-breaking negotiation... I said that negotiation is neither taboo nor the solution to all problems. Negotiation is a tool to achieve goals, and its success depends on the positions of the parties. If we do not enter negotiations from a strong position, then we have helped the opponent achieve his goals (Ghalibaf 10, 2013).

In an interview with Iran News TV, Ghalibaf on 1/06/2013 iterated Khamenei's stance on sanctions effects, saying they are effective to some extent but not as much as enemies expected:

I believe that the sanctions are effective, but not so much that they affect decisions based on our country's honour and pride. I believe that the effect of sanctions on what happens inside or outside the country is different. The effects of sanctions on the situation inside the country are much less than those of mismanagement and weak management. But this is not the case abroad. If we take the right measures internally to implement our economic policies, the effect of sanctions will be reduced. I believe that Iran should know its true nuclear energy like other countries and use it in different sectors such as medicine, agriculture, and energy production. Anyway, the issue of nuclear energy has many fateful applications. It is vital. Naturally, we also use this capacity and potential based on the rules of the agency (Ghalibaf 14 , 2013).

Ghalibaf on 23/04/2013, stated about the chaos that resulted in Iran's foreign policy by adopting policies such as realism, rationality, or idealism separately when he stated that he would pursue a realistic idealism policy:

In some periods, there has been a tendency to ignore the ideals and macro principles that guide foreign policy in the name of rationality and realism. The natural result of both tendencies has been turmoil in our foreign policy, which has made it difficult to achieve the system's goals and national interests. In the current situation, this duality can be seen. I believe that some approaches are purely idealistic, claiming more and more slogans without paying attention to the practical requirements of a successful foreign policy.

There are some in our diplomatic apparatus, from the past to the present, who believe that to have a successful foreign policy, we must be realistic and de-idealize our foreign policy... We see that this is not in line with the approach of the Islamic Revolution and the discourse of the Imam and the Leader of the Revolution. Imam's view is realistic idealism and rationality mixed with

idealism. We believe that what the Islamic Revolution needs is a foreign policy based on realistic idealism (Ghalibaf 11, 2013).

Ghalibaf emphasised the internal cohesion and the resistance strategy regarding the nuclear issue to secure Iran's nuclear rights. He stated:

The principled and sensible strategy in the resistance's nuclear programme is to secure our nuclear rights, but the advancement of this policy and its practical realisation must be done in a reasonable and intelligent framework. On the one hand, the success of the intelligent resistance strategy requires consensus and internal unity, strengthening the national economy to reduce the impact of pressures. On the other hand, foreign policy is the avoidance of emotional behaviours and resounding but low-key words that allow the enemy to propagate and blackmail us instead of creating opportunities for us. I interpret this framework as intelligent resistance. Intelligent resistance is standing up for our interests rationally.

This resistance has both internal and external contexts, the most important of which is the realisation of internal cohesion and the strengthening of our economic power, as well as the external dimension... Here, our resistance is for the other side to become frustrated with the pressure on Iran and to enter into balanced negotiations. Otherwise, there is not much hope for negotiation. Our resistance will continue until the enemy despairs at the pressure. In this situation, instead of clinging and being optimistic about negotiations, we must go inside and strengthen our economy (Ghalibaf 12, 2013).

In the third presidential debate on foreign and domestic policies, Ghalibaf stressed on 7/06/2013, that internal cohesion is the base in all aspects. Thus, as long as internal cohesion increases, Iran will become stronger in diplomacy. Ghalibaf asserted that during its history, Iran had not given up its 'honour' to achieve material or economic gains. Ghalibaf said:

In the field of foreign policy, I believe that internal cohesion is the basis of work. In the economic sphere, too, there must be solidarity, whether we want to resist, negotiate, or compete. Here, the basis and substance of the debate is power. Therefore, the greater our national power, the stronger we are. In the field of diplomacy, of course, if diplomacy can increase our national power, we must use these opportunities properly. We must also know that our nation has never shown in history that it has sacrificed its honour for anything, neither economic nor material. Foreign policy must guarantee our national interests, national security, and national, religious, and revolutionary identities. This is the mission of the country's foreign policy and diplomatic apparatus.

Foreign policy, like the rest of the economic, cultural, and domestic spheres, should not move beyond macro-politics. (Ghalibaf 18 , 2013).

(ii) Khamenei's texts:

Khamenei provided his stance on the nuclear issue on 21/03/2013. He stated clearly that Iran wants the US and the West to *recognise* its nuclear rights to enrichment. He also rejected the way that US officials negotiated with Iran and was therefore not optimistic about this type of negotiation. Khamenei said:

The Americans do not want the nuclear conflict to be resolved; otherwise, if they wanted these negotiations to reach a solution, the solution would be very close by and easy to reach...They could recognise the Iranian nation's right to enrichment. Based on our experiences and careful analysis of the existing conditions, our interpretation is that the Americans do not want the nuclear negotiations to end. I am not optimistic about such negotiations. Why? Because our past experiences show that in the logic of the American gentleman, negotiation does not mean sitting down together to try to reach a rational solution. This is not what they mean by negotiation.

What they mean is that we should sit down together and talk so that Iran accepts their views... For this reason, we have always announced that this is not a negotiation. This is an imposition, and Iran will not give in to it. I am not optimistic about these statements, but I am not opposed to either... Whenever we are close to a solution, the Americans cause a problem to prevent reaching a solution. My assumption and interpretation are that their goal is to keep the issue unresolved so that they have a pretext for exerting pressure on us. And as they said, the purpose of the pressure is to cripple the Iranian nation. Of course, much to the dismay of the enemy, the Iranian nation will not be crippled (Khamenei 27, 2013).

Khamenei questioned the sincere will of the Americans to conduct rational negotiations. Yet, before conducting negotiations, Khamenei wanted to reach fruitful results by emphasising in more detail that Iran does not seek to develop nuclear weapons. Khamenei said:

The second point is that Americans constantly send us messages, telling us that they are sincere in their offers of rational negotiation. They claim that they sincerely want to have rational negotiations with Iran—that is to say, they claim that they do not want imposition. In response, I would say that we have told you many times that we are not after nuclear weapons, and you say that you do not believe us. Why would we believe your statements, then? When you are not prepared to accept a rational and sincere statement, why would we

accept your statements, which have been disproved many times? Our interpretation is that offers of negotiation are an American tactic to mislead public opinion around the world and our country. You should prove that this is not the case. Can you prove this? Go ahead and prove it if you can (Khamenei 28, 2013).

Khamenei on 21/03/2013, gave an example of how the Iranians—particularly officials—could adopt a strategy to counter the *enemy's plans*. In more detail, he explained that in the case of Iran's nuclear programme, when Iran enriched uranium by national capacities, up to 20 per cent for civilian purposes:

It is necessary to predict the enemy's plans and move a few steps ahead of him. In certain cases, we acted on the enemy's plans and moved a few steps ahead of him. In certain cases, we acted this way and witnessed the resulting success. One example is the issue of producing 20 per cent enriched fuel for the research reactor in Tehran, which produces the important radiopharmaceuticals that our country needs. This small power plant required twenty per cent enriched fuel... At that time, we could not produce 20 per cent enriched uranium and had to import it from abroad. Our enemies started to think that they should seize the opportunity.

They decided to use this national need to force the Islamic Republic to give in to their imposition and hegemony. They tried to use this need to impose their demands on us. Before the conditions became critical, our youth and scientists managed to produce 20 per cent enriched fuel, which they turned into fuel rods that were needed at the power plant. Our opponents could not guess that we would be able to do what we did... While they expected that the Islamic Republic would beg them for twenty per cent enriched fuel, the Islamic Republic announced that it had produced twenty per cent enriched uranium inside the country and that it did not need the enemies. For this reason, we achieved victory (Khamenei 29, 2013).

Khamenei also, on 27/04/2013, wanted to clarify his stance on the problems and hardships that officials could create, as he always asked them to facilitate people's lives through a balanced approach combining idealism, relying on Allah, and a *rational, sensible, and realistic outlook*. Khamenei stated:

I have always supported presidents and administrations in past years. I have always stressed that they should not impose unnecessary expenses on the people, create problems for the people, and make them distressed and nervous. Of course, they should not make false and hollow promises. They should not

make irrational claims either. They should move forward by relying on Allah the Exalted and adopting a rational, sensible, and realistic outlook (Khamenei 30, 2013).

Khamenei, on 4/06/2013, wanted to remind Iranians, including officials, of the Imam's views on foreign policy. He stressed the resistance against interventionist and domineering policies. He tried to present Iran as a state that seeks to play a positive role in the world. He said:

As far as foreign policy is concerned, the principles of the Imam require that we put up a resistance against interventionist and domineering policies, that we establish brotherly relations with other Muslim nations, that we develop relations with all countries except the ones that have drawn their swords against the Iranian nation and are being hostile, that we fight Zionism, that we resist liberating Palestine, that we help oppressed people throughout the world, and that we put up a resistance against oppressors (Khamenei 31, 2013).

Based on the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election, Khamenei, on 6/05/2013, wanted to emphasise the importance of the emergence of Iranians on the scene as being equal to the existence of Iran itself. Khamenei wanted to redefine the meaning of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as it is not confined to him but to all Iranians who are striving to achieve their great objectives. Khamenei stated:

The importance of the presidency is clear. The Constitution and the current legal system in the country have provided the executive branch and the president with many resources and a large budget so that they can tread the path of achieving ideals. In the Islamic Republic, if the people are not present on the scene, the Islamic Republic means nothing. The Islamic Republic does not consist of a few officials like me. The Islamic Republic means the widespread presence of the people of Iran and their movement towards ideals and great practical goals. This is the meaning of the Islamic Republic (Khamenei 32, 2013).

Criticising the US dealing with Iran's nuclear file, Khamenei on 16/02/2013, exposed the US' contradiction when they offered to negotiate with Iran to resolve issues, especially the nuclear issue, they, in practice, imposed sanctions on Iran. He believes that the real aim of the US was to prevent Iran from enjoying its natural nuclear rights, and he ended up describing them as irrational politicians. Khamenei provided conceptions of Iran's identity and interests:

They say [Americans] they want to resolve their issues with Iran. This is what they say. But in practice, they resort to imposing sanctions and broadcasting negative propaganda. They publish inappropriate and false things about the

Islamic Republic and the people of Iran... The Americans claim, 'We will not let Iran build nuclear weapons'. This is deceptive talk. Is this an issue of nuclear weapons? Regarding Iran, the issue is not related to nuclear weapons. The issue is that you want to deny Iran its natural and inalienable right to enrich uranium and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes through its domestic capacities. Of course, you cannot do this either, and the Iranian nation will not renounce its right... American politicians make irrational statements. Irrational means are thuggish. It means somebody who speaks nonsense. This is a fact that we have become aware of through our involvement in different global issues. We understand who our opposing side is and how he should be confronted (Khamenei 33, 2013).

Khamenei, on 16/02/2013, based on his experience with the US, gave the interpretation that the real aim of the Americans is not to conduct rational negotiations, solve Iran's nuclear issue, and consequently lift the sanctions, but to encourage Iranians to support the nuclear negotiations, and they also want to trigger the Iranians against the regime. Khamenei stated:

They [the Americans] pretend in their propaganda that if Iran sits at the negotiating table and negotiates with America, sanctions will be lifted. This is a lie too. Their goal is to make the people of Iran eager to negotiate with America by promising to lift sanctions. They think that the people of Iran are exhausted by the sanctions and are frustrated. They think that everything is a mess and that they can tell us. Well, come and negotiate with us so that we can lift the sanctions. They think this will cause the entire Iranian nation to ask them to negotiate.

This is also one of their irrational and deceptive statements, and it is a tool for bullying. First, as I said, when they ask us to negotiate with them, they do not mean fair and rational negotiations. Negotiations mean that we should accept what they say and surrender so that they lift the sanctions... Another problem is that the sanctions will not be lifted through negotiations. I would tell you that the purpose of sanctions is something else. The purpose of sanctions is to exhaust the people of Iran and separate them from the Islamic Republic. Even if negotiations are conducted and our people stay present on the scene and stand up for their rights, sanctions will continue (Khamenei 34, 2013).

Khamenei again stressed the importance of the Iranian people in supporting Iran, as it relies on them. He also expressed on 16/02/2013 that the Iranian nation is brave and will not be surrounded by enemies by relying on its power and capabilities. Khamenei stated:

They [the Americans] say, ‘The Islamic Republic relies on the people. If we manage to separate the people from the Islamic Republic, the power to resist will be taken away from the Islamic Republic. This is how the opposing side thinks. Well, this idea has two parts. The first part, that the Islamic Republic relies on the people, is accurate. There is no source of support for the Islamic Republic except the people. The people are the fortifications that protect the country and the Islamic Revolution. The second part, that they thought they could bring the people to their knees by imposing sanctions and bullying them on international, commercial, and other such issues, is false. If they think that they can take away this source of support from the Islamic Republic, they are wrong. Weak nations surrender to the enemy when he exerts pressure, and they bow and show regret before him. But a brave nation, like the Iranian nation, tries to use its capabilities as soon as it sees that the enemy is exerting pressure, and it tries to pass through the danger zone (Khamenei 35, 2013).

(iii) Kayhan’s texts:

In response to Rouhani’s statements regarding his performance during 2003-2005 in avoiding war against Iran as well as keeping Iran’s nuclear file in the Board of Governors, Kayhan explained on 29/05/2013, under the title “What honour are you talking about?” as she explained the development of Iran’s nuclear programme in terms of the number of centrifuges that increased from 25 during Khatami’s presidency to 11,000 during Ahmadinejad’s presidency from 2005 to 2013:

This is how they are. In the same nuclear case, when we went along with them, we retreated. It was an experience for us, of course, but it is a fact. On the day we retreated, they came forward... The retreats made them more arrogant and more credible. One day, our officials were convinced to allow us to have 25 centrifuges in the country. They said it is not possible; they were convinced that we have five; again, they said it is not possible. Our officials were convinced that we would have three centrifuges, but again, they said it was not possible. We heard the report today. We have 11,000 centrifuges. If we were to continue those setbacks and those flexibilities, today the progress of the nucleus, which had no news -- I would like to say -- this scientific vitality in the country will be damaged. This scientific vitality that has been created in the country in the last few years, this scientific movement of these young people, these initiatives, inventions, and various developments in various fields are also being damaged (Kayhan 10, 2013).

Hossameldin Bromond, under the title ‘Compromise Sequence’, in Kayhan on 26/05/2013 asserted that Iran has dignity and will never compromise with the enemy to solve its economic problems. He also explained the Western game of imposing sanctions that target the nuclear programme and then accusing Iran of circumventing the sanctions. They resort again to accusing Iran of violating human rights:

The problem with the opponent's analysis is that he has not been able to conclude that the Iranian people distinguish between economic problems and the dignity and promotion of the country. This version, which solves the current economic problems by compromising with the enemy, is a deceptive version that people remember and have not forgotten that whenever they smile, the enemy comes forward more rudely, and the historical memory of people attests to this claim. The game of the Westerners is well known to Iran and the people of this country. Under the pretext of a peaceful nuclear programme, they impose sanctions on Iran, and then, under the pretext of our country's violation of sanctions, they accuse the Islamic Republic of violating human rights. This is while the hands of Westerners are involved in this ridiculous story (Kayhan 11, 2013).

### 9.3.1. Analysis

As we have seen from the above texts, in contrast to Rouhani, Ghalibaf adopts a different approach to Iran's nuclear choices. In this part of the story, Galibaf will tell us his perception of the new nuclear policy he prefers to adopt if elected. To explain his main idea of resistance and internal cohesion, he provided some expressions and explanations such as the ‘tactical level’; ‘resistance nuclear strategy’; ‘strategic decisions’ related to Iran's honour and pride; the ‘goals that Iran could help the other parties achieve’; ‘intelligent strategy’ about the nuclear issue; ‘balanced negotiations’; ‘failed policies’; and ‘economic benefits’.

#### 9.3.1.1. Framing resistance and internal cohesion approach

This section illustrates Ghalibaf's approach to Iran's foreign policy and its nuclear choices. In a different approach to Rouhani on Iran's foreign policy and future nuclear choices, Ghalibaf's discourse has perceived the issue of the need for a new flexible nuclear choice for the elimination of the effects of the sanctions is of low salience; instead, he considered enhancing the management as an effective solution for the elimination of the effects of sanctions as high issue salience, and consequently, he announced his approach to Iran's nuclear policy relies on resistance and internal cohesion.



### 9.3.1.2. Iran's nuclear rights

In an interview and at the insistence of the audience, Ghalibaf found himself forced to express his opinions, approach, and policies about several issues, including Iran's nuclear rights, nuclear weapons, and the future of nuclear energy. Iranians wanted to know more about how he would handle these issues. Despite his desire to follow the leader's stance and avoid diverging from it, Ghalibaf did not want to conceal his opinions on the nuclear programme and international sanctions. Yet, Ghalibaf explained that there are two levels regarding Iran's nuclear programme: the strategic level, where Iranians adopt a policy to preserve Iran's legal rights to have nuclear technology for civilian purposes, and the tactical level, which requires achieving the strategic level by adopting short-term procedures that address immediate issues.

On this basis, Ghalibaf assessed that the tactical level, which has been applied for some time, has failed to achieve Iran's national interests because the West has not been committed and reliable. This conclusion provides us with an important point: in contrast to Rouhani, Ghalibaf's ideational elements, especially his beliefs and values, have affected his perception and understanding of how to preserve Iran's national interests. For him, Iran's national interests have not been achieved through negotiations to preserve Iran's nuclear rights, and this may mean, due to his understanding, considering another different approach. Rouhani, on the other side, as we have seen, considered the negotiations to be the best tool to achieve Iran's nuclear rights. As such, one can realise the difference between Rouhani and Ghalibaf in terms of their political experiences. That is, one has considered diplomacy and nuclear negotiations as significant instruments even if they do not work sometimes, and the other has considered the outcomes as judgment of the negotiation process as a whole.

Yet, Ghalibaf was ambiguous; he left it open and did not name certain governments to blame can assume that he was criticising Khatami's nuclear era from 2003 to 2005 or Ahmadinejad's era from 2006 to 2013. Knowing who he was blaming is crucial to the analysis because it allows us to connect the most effective kind of sanctions imposed since 2006 as well as enables us to assess the two different negotiation teams that negotiated the nuclear programme under two different presidencies.

On this basis, one can understand what Ghalibaf meant in the two eras of Khatami and Ahmadinejad, where he, in particular, announced his approach to Iran's nuclear choice in a challenging way, saying that Iran would adopt a resistance approach to pursue preserving the nuclear interests that it had been achieving during Ahmadinejad's era from 2005 to 2013, when Iran succeeded in enriching uranium up to 20 per cent for peaceful purposes by national capacities. Even though sanctions have negatively affected Iran and have contributed to some

extent to the election of Rouhani in 2013, and consequently, reaching the JCPOA agreement in 2015, it is clear that Iran will not adopt a reversal path of its peaceful nuclear programme (Prosser, 2017). As a conservative, Ghalibaf, even if he wanted to be less conservative for candidature purposes, faced pressure from the conservative voters that resulted in the adoption of this approach in line with his professional background as a Revolutionary Guards Commander.

As a result, one can question whether Ghalibaf wants to adopt a different nuclear choice from them, and if so, would that be at the tactical or strategic level? It is also significant to determine methods that have been used improperly and thus failed, on the tactical level, to reach positive results in order to anticipate what and how he could make them effective. The nuclear issue had been at the core of Iran's foreign policy during the presidencies of Muhammad Khatami and Mahmood Ahmadinejad (2003–2013). It was under two slightly different approaches in which they adopted the same stance on Iran's nuclear rights for peaceful purposes through various mechanisms and tactics. Therefore, Ghalibaf was keen to present his commitment to Khamenei's red lines at the strategic level of preserving Iran's nuclear rights, but he was not satisfied with the tactical level of diplomacy and negotiations. From 2003 to 2013, Iran adopted several tools at the tactical level to achieve its nuclear goals, such as negotiations with the West, direct and undeclared meetings with the US and the EU, and, in parallel, building and strengthening alliances with Russia and China and playing a vital role in the region, especially after the Arab Spring.

Ghalibaf criticised diplomacy and the negotiations in a way that appeared to adhere to Khamenei's stance, who provided his assessment of the nuclear issue, especially the nuclear negotiations, which were considered at the tactical level. He explained why Iran has not reached an agreement on its nuclear programme. According to him, the reason behind that was the style of nuclear negotiations that have been held at the tactical level with the US in particular. Khamenei accused the US of being irrational, and thus, the negotiations were neither rational nor fruitful. This is because the US wanted the negotiations to be conducted according to its standards, which Iran has rejected. The polarity of the two sides' agendas significantly contributed to the deadlock of the nuclear negotiations. When the US wanted to stop Iran's nuclear programme, Iran firmly insisted on developing a peaceful nuclear programme (Warnaar, 2013).

Iran has been struggling with the nuclear issue since the public disclosure of secret facilities and activities by Mujahideen Khalq in 2003, as well as the CIA's reports (Takeyh, 2003; Smith, 2003). During 2003–2013, several meetings and nuclear negotiations were conducted under two

different approaches: Khatami's approach by Rouhani (2003–2005) with the E3 and Ahmadinejad's approach by Saed Jalili (2006–2013) with the P5+1.

From 2003 to 2005, as a chief negotiator and for several reasons, Rouhani agreed to temporarily suspend the enrichment. To not lose the elections, as this story has been used against him, he tried to defend his previous position by calling people in the presidential debate to read the books of Jack Straw and Muhammad ElBaradei, in which they revealed that a war against Iran was certain. Again, it is the way that Rohani understood Iran's national interest of preventing Iran from being attacked or invaded, similar to what happened to Iraq and Afghanistan if the suspension of the uranium would be a preventer. Over time, Iran's fears of an American invasion have faded. The situation became less risky, in particular, during Jalili's tenure as Iran's chief nuclear negotiator from 2006 to 2013. Yet, the two different approaches can be judged based on the tactical level, namely the negotiation team's capacities. For example, Rouhani, during the negotiations from 2003 to 2005, was speaking in English and was open-minded and willing to reach an agreement, while Jalili was speaking in Persian and was an unserious and somewhat aggressive negotiator.

Despite the hard negotiations, Khamenei stated that the solution is close and could be easily reached if the US recognised Iran's nuclear rights to enrichment. Although Khamenei was not optimistic about such negotiations, he expressed explicitly that he was not opposed to them. Khamenei's assessment of the US stance is that they did not want the nuclear issue to be resolved because they wanted to keep Iran under maximum pressure and ultimately cripple Iran, as Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State in the Obama administration, described the purpose of the sanctions against Iran (Reid, 2009). Khamenei is also in the same boat as Ghalibaf; that is, they are dealing with the recognition of Iran's rights to enrich uranium as a matter of identity and interests. As Khamenei has announced, this is an inevitable right of the Iranian nation, as well as a matter of national pride, when he talked about national scientists who led the programme and were able to enrich uranium up to 20%.

Khamenei also declared that Iran does not seek to develop nuclear weapons; indeed, he has always stated that. Despite that, he was wondering why the US did not believe Iran when, at the same time, Iran was required to believe the US call for rational negotiations. In practice, according to Khamenei, they were irrational negotiations, which led to the issue remaining unresolved. This can be seen as several agreements failing, including the Brussels Agreement in 2004 and the Tehran Declaration in 2010 (Warner, 2013; Davenport, no date). Khamenei emphasised that offering negotiations by the US is a tactic to tell the world that Iran does not want to negotiate its nuclear programme. Khamenei provided us with ideas that contribute to identifying those Iranian officials (negotiators) who have always made mistakes when accepting

such kinds of negotiations due to the US negotiation style and its hostility towards Iran in terms of imposing sanctions in parallel with calling for rational negotiations.

Khamenei indirectly determined the principles of the resistance approach that Ghalibaf expressed about it and wanted to adopt if elected. This included: (i) defending Iran's nuclear rights to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes; (ii) the enrichment process should be achieved through domestic capabilities rather than importing enriched uranium from abroad; (iii) supporting Iran's stance on the nuclear file requires the ability to engage in the global arena; and (iv) keeping an open door for rational negotiations, especially with the US, to deflect international pressure that may emerge if Iran rejects negotiations on its nuclear programme. It may also reject the negotiations and increase the possibility of an Israeli attack against its nuclear facilities, a situation that Iran was trying to avoid (Sherrill, 2014). Not only that but in a narrower context, Khamenei was unwilling to accept a velvet revolution that could empower the reformists and thus open Iran to Western values (ibid.).

Firmly, Ghalibaf admitted that this approach was effective and resulted in enriching uranium at 20 per cent, and he described it as a solid and intelligent approach as a matter of national pride that, according to him, is better than trusting and committing to the US and the West. This led to a heated discussion within the regime about appropriate decisions on Iran's commitments to international obligations, in particular the NPT, and safeguards measures in terms of remaining adherent or accelerating and thus withdrawing from the NPT (Tabatabai, 2020). Ghalibaf emphasised in an interview with Iran News TV Khamenei's stance on sanctions' effects, saying they are effective to some extent "but not so much that it affects the decisions based on our country's honour and our country's pride". He also stated that the effects of sanctions inside Iran are less than the effects of mismanagement.

In the same interview, Ghalibaf insisted on Iran's having nuclear rights like other countries, and it should have them in "different aspects" as Iran uses this technology considering the IAEA's rules. He said that to stress Khamenei's stance when he affirmed that the Americans want to "deny Iran its natural and inalienable right to enrich uranium and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes". It seems like Ghalibaf is surrounded by the idea of Iran's national pride, which affected his discourse as he tried to minimise the effects of sanctions on the Iranian nation as there was no tangible damage, which means the Iranian nation will never be defeated.

As we have seen, Ghalibaf did not pay great attention to sanctions and negotiations. The reason may lie within Khamenei's statement when he said "sanctions will not be lifted through negotiations" and they would continue as the main purpose of the imposition of sanctions is to keep Iran under pressure. Ghalibaf did not want to confess that the sanctions are severe and able

to affect strategic decisions related to Iran's honour and pride. Khamenei connected Iran's nuclear rights, the imposition of sanctions, negotiations, and the Iranian nation's pride in sticking with its rights, including the nuclear one "to enrich uranium and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes through using its domestic capacities", "The Iranian nation will not renounce its nuclear right".

Khamenei also clarified the primary purpose of imposing sanctions: "The purpose of sanctions is to exhaust the people of Iran and separate them from the Islamic Republic". He stressed the Iranians' stance and acknowledgement of the goals that Americans in particular are seeking. In this context, it may be what Ghalibaf meant by the decisions that sanctions will not affect based on our country's honour and pride: (i) maintaining their nuclear rights even if the sanctions continue to generate harm as this issue is related to the Iranian nation's honour, and most importantly, (ii) sanctions will not affect Iranians decisions to stand up against the regime and trigger them to split from the regime that reflects the Islamic Revolution's principles. This is what Ghalibaf always meant by 'internal cohesion'. Based on these two strategic decisions, Ghalibaf seems to diminish the priority of re-negotiating the nuclear programme as long as the Iranians' honour prevents them from giving up Iran's nuclear rights under the pressure of sanctions, and they will not stand up against the regime even if the effects of sanctions are grave as they value the revolution's principles, especially resistance.

#### 9.3.1.3. Nuclear negotiations

In response to Khamenei about the nuclear negotiations, Ghalibaf tried to appear as willing to conduct nuclear negotiations if elected, but in reality, and in many places, he described these negotiations as useless and a tool used by the nation's enemies to keep imposing pressure on Iran. Ghalibaf was concerned about Iran's stance during nuclear negotiations with the US. He sometimes tried to show some flexibility when presenting himself, if elected, as a president who would talk and negotiate since the president, compared to the leader, is in an executive position, and thus, he is required to implement government policies domestically and internationally according to the constitution (Iranian Constitution, Art. 113). Ghalibaf was irritated that Khamenei was not optimistic about such imbalanced negotiations, as the US often underestimated Iran in negotiations. Yet, Ghalibaf tried to be neutral regarding the negotiations, saying they were neither a taboo nor a solution to all problems. This is consistent with his previous text that lifting sanctions is not an effective solution to all of Iran's problems. He also stated the importance of negotiations as a tool to achieve Iran's interests and objectives, as they have always been on the agenda; however, they should be conducted on an equal basis.

To support Khamenei's discourse about negotiations, the most critical situation that Ghalibaf was concerned about was when Iran entered negotiations from a weak stance because this would help other parties achieve their goals. Therefore, Khamenei stressed to officials that they should consider the US goals of calling Iran to negotiate. First, when Iran refuses to negotiate the nuclear issue according to US standards, they keep imposing sanctions to make the Iranians struggle and therefore trigger them against the regime, ultimately crippling Iran. This can be understood consistently with sanctions scholarship, as sanctions, to some extent, are considered effective in changing behaviours and punishing targets more than changing a regime (Wllenstein, 1968; HESO, 2007).

For example, effective sanctions that were in place against Iraq for a long time to change the regime eventually failed (Simbar, 2006). Second, when Iran negotiated the nuclear issue and was close to reaching an agreement, the US took the trouble to keep the issue unresolved, especially over the recognition of Iran's nuclear rights.

It is worth noticing the sensitivity that Khamenei showed in negotiating with the US in particular. He disclosed what he considered the real US purpose in negotiations. He accused them of lying when they linked the lifting of sanctions with negotiations and said that such statements were deceptive. Khamenei also disclosed that the real goal of the US was to affect Iranians' tendency to support Iran's nuclear negotiations with the international community. He shared with Iranians his assessment of the sanctions, as he believes that sanctions would not be lifted even if Iran accepted a negotiation process to constrain its nuclear programme. In other words, Khamenei believes that sanctions aim to place huge and lasting pressure on the Iranians.

Smartly, in a diplomatic context, Khamenei announced in different places that he would not be against nuclear negotiations as long as the negotiations were fair without preconditions, rational, and trustworthy. From this, one can consider Khamenei's discourse as a constituent and guide for Ghalibaf's discourse; specifically, this can be seen when Ghalibaf affirmed 'balanced negotiations' and 'intelligent resistance'. This reflects the negotiation style he preferred to be part of the holistic strategy of resistance. It also reflects the negotiations that have been described by Khamenei as fair, rational, and, most importantly, not dominated by the US, and thus, it would be a successful strategy to achieve Iranian nuclear rights. As we have seen, Khamenei and Ghalibaf were more interested in the negotiation style than, sometimes, what the outcomes would be. That is, they were 'allergic' to engaging in a process in which they may feel contempt through bargaining for Iran's honour through material benefits. They wanted to preserve Iran's identity and dignity, especially when dealing with 'enemies' according to them, as much as they cared about how other nations would describe them if they entered negotiations from an insulted side.

Khamenei called this type of negotiation that keeps forcing Iran to accept the US's views an imposition rather than a negotiation. Khamenei insisted that Iran would not accept such negotiations. This is in line with the principles of the revolution in terms of dignity and resistance, as he concluded that the real purpose of Americans is to keep Iran under pressure to cripple it where Iran would not be crippled. His understanding of imposition is completely against the principle of resistance to which the Islamic Revolution, the Imam, and the leader have always been committed. The imposition of sanctions by the US and the West can also be understood in a hostile phrase formulated in the “discourse of the enemy”, which is mainly used by the conservatives after the Islamic Revolution and expresses Shah’s era relationships with the West and the US (Nia, 2011).

Despite the similar stance, considering context matters, for example, Ghalibaf’s discourse to a high extent represented Khamenei’s discourse, but there was a variation in the style between them in terms of their positions: while Khamenei, as the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution, has always challenged the US and described it as an enemy, Ghalibaf, as a presidential candidate, tried to be less hostile and adopted a neutral stance on the nuclear negotiations and beyond, expressing that re-establishing the relationship with the US is possible if the US respects Iran and understands its interests. This is manipulation. Ghalibaf, for political purposes, announced that according to the context. Ghalibaf, based on his discourse, has never missed describing the US as an enemy.

Despite the inherited hostile relationship between Iran and the US, in particular, since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, anti-Americanism seems to have somewhat diminished. A survey conducted by Rand in December 2009 revealed that there is a significant segment of up to 39 per cent of Iranians who are supportive of the re-establishment of the relationship with the US, whereas 45 per cent are opposed and 11 per cent are somewhat opposed. Respondents varied according to gender, educational level, and class: of male respondents, 49 per cent were supportive, and female respondents voiced opposition to the reestablishment at 53 per cent. In terms of education level, 50 per cent of respondents supported the reestablishment, whereas 30 per cent were opposed, and 17 per cent were neither supported nor opposed. In terms of class, the upper class showed enthusiasm for reestablishment up to 71 per cent, while 25 per cent were opposed. On the other hand, the middle, working, and poor classes expressed a lower percentage: the middle, working, and poor classes were supportive at 35 per cent, 40 per cent, and 42 per cent, respectively (Eliso and Nader, 2011). This can be understood in the context of sanctions effects. Although Iranians, and of course other nations, are keen to preserve their identity and their country pride, at the end of the day, they want to live in dignity, in good circumstances,

and with a prosperous economy, rather than just having a tone of challenge and extremism, especially against the US.

#### 9.3.1.4. Criticising Iran's foreign policy

Interestingly, Ghalibaf wanted to distinguish his future approach to Iran's foreign policy, including the nuclear policy, from other approaches that have been applied by the previous presidents, Khatami and Ahmadinejad: the reformists and the neo-conservatives. Iran's nuclear policy was the dominant issue and has been shaped differently based on the beliefs of the president's faction, that is, the difference between material interests and ideology (Kazemzadeh, 2017). According to Ghalibaf, these approaches that were constructed based on rationality, realism, and idealism were not effective. He believed that applying any of these approaches separately would not lead to a successful foreign policy. This criticism can also be extended to include Rouhani, as a moderate, who was criticised because of his ignorance of some of the revolution's values when behaving rationally and pursuing Iran's national interests.

For political advantages, Ghalibaf tended to link realism with Khatami's era (1997–2005) and idealism with Ahmadinejad's era (2006–2013). In his turn, Ghalibaf, in a manipulative way, tried to gain voters' support from the two prominent factions (reformists and conservatives) by reshaping Iran's national interests differently. Ghalibaf presents a third way that constitutes a combination of the two previous approaches to realistic idealism. In doing so, Ghalibaf did not want to appear purely realistic in ignoring the revolution's beliefs; similarly, he did not want to be seen as purely idealistic in ignoring the sake of Iranians having a better life that requires him, if elected, to engage in the international arena. Anyway, this is, to some extent, a mismatch with his ideational elements as a conservative who has to adopt approaches and policies, including the nuclear one, based on conservatives' beliefs rather than realistic beliefs.

The conservatives' beliefs are driven, to a great extent, by the Islamic Revolution's principles that framed the discourses of resistance that reflect Iran's identity. Therefore, as a participant commented, negotiating with a conservative team would be different than with a moderate or a reformist one. *“So, I think it would be more complicated if Ghalibaf were the president. it will be more complicated because it is very simple Hassan Rouhani brought people easy to predict, like Javad Zareef, and Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of national security, brought more professional diplomats, and that was helpful to the West and the United States. You remember John Kerry and Zareef meeting and laughing and smiling.”* (MZ). Overall, it is a matter of values and beliefs rather than individual people. The conservative perception of Iran's identity is constituted by the national pride of Iran's history and features as a distinctive nation, and those behaving with others, especially the US, must adhere to that as well as preserve Iran's interests.



Realism, as opposed to idealism, emphasises understanding the national interest, which is changeable based on power, where the morals of a state will be part of the global morals because it might be difficult to justify a state's action on a moral basis. Hence, the nature of the separation between interests and moral perspectives is where the state is the most powerful actor in IR (Waltz, 1979; Guzzini, 2004). Idealism, on the other hand, emphasises ideas, values, and a spiritual realm that understands reality as being based on ideas. Ghalibaf seems to share the principles of idealism and realism but prefers to apply them together rather than separately. Idealism also stresses ideational variables, including cultural and ideological aspects, where Iran, especially the conservatives, values religious ideology as a fundamental aspect (Kazezadeh, 2017).

Realistic idealism or practical idealism emphasises finding real possibilities while considering ideal principles, while pure idealism struggles to identify a proper solution, which can be typical for other solutions (Schmitz, 2017; Clarke and White, 1989; Nai, 2011). Ghalibaf stresses the importance of realistic idealism to achieve Iran's national interests when the two approaches fail to do so separately. Ghalibaf accused others of failure during the election campaign on national TV, which gave him a good opportunity to provide broadly novel ideas, policies, and solutions, thus trying to persuade voters to gain their support. He wanted to exploit that when linking such approaches that have been applied in previous periods with the failure of Iran's foreign policy. This appears to be a doubtful assessment, which cannot be valid without a robust plan and evidence that supports his assessment.

It might be strange that Ghalibaf, as a presidential candidate, even if he did not say that explicitly, was not enthusiastic about expressing details about Iran's nuclear issue. Perhaps the reason is that he is a conservative and adheres to Khamenei's views on nuclear negotiations, and elaborating on this means he is keen to negotiate with the US, as this may be seen as a weak stance that he was trying not to put Iran in. Yet, this cannot be productive because Iranians would watch and listen to the presidential debate, and thus they would be able to judge and rank presidential candidates based on the salient issues they understood and provide further explanations on. Therefore, his utterances imply that he was not eager for nuclear negotiations when most Iranians were suffering from the effects of the international sanctions, and many were of the view that they were the real cause of the harm. Ghalibaf's disinterest in negotiations can be seen when he insists that internal cohesion, beliefs, national pride, and Iran's dignity and honour are more important than compromising with the enemy to gain economic benefits.

Overall, and in contrast to Rouhani's approach, one can describe Ghalibaf's approach to Iran's foreign policy and future nuclear choices as an inflexible approach. A participant shared this and said that if Ghalibaf had won the elections, he would most likely not accept the concessions

that Rouhani accepted: *“The concessions include agreeing to freeze uranium enrichment by 20%. Alternatively, maybe engaging in some nuclear fuel swap but not dismantling like two-thirds of their new uranium enrichment for structure, which Iran accepted on the JCPOA. So my understanding is that Iran would not have accepted such heavy concessions and obligations under the JCPOA if a conservative president, Ghalibaf, had won.”* (AB). Another participant agreed that Ghalibaf’s manner would be different *“I think that Ghalibaf, because he represents a more conservative constituency, would have had more pressure to either not negotiate or take a harder stance in the negotiations.”* (EL). Both participants have agreed that Ghalibaf’s beliefs as a conservative will affect his nuclear policy, as conservative values and beliefs consider that the acceptance of giving concessions to the West and the US under pressure undermines and affects Iran’s identity of resistance and independence.

#### 9.3.1.5. Towards more resistance and internal cohesion

In contrast to Rouhani, Ghalibaf adopted a resistant approach to Iran’s nuclear policy and declared that the main purpose of a resistant nuclear strategy both nationally and internationally is to achieve Iran’s nuclear rights. He gave more details about the successful implementation of this strategy. The discourse of independence regarding nuclear policy provides new meaning and emphasises the importance of Iran’s self-sufficiency, and this can also be seen in Khamenei’s discourse when insisting on national capabilities; the discourse of justice focuses on Iran’s rejecting the international double standards and calling for global recognition of Iran’s nuclear rights for peaceful purposes; and the discourse of resistance emphasises the resistance of hegemonic powers and committing to Iran’s nuclear rights. Khamenei explained how the Imam understood the resistance as being against any external bullying or intervention and built on strong relationships with Muslim nations. He also talked about international responsibility when he said *“We help oppressed people throughout the world, and we put up a resistance against oppressors”*. By mentioning history, Khamenei and Ghalibaf wanted to connect Iran’s today with Iran’s yesterday; that is, the huge shift in Iranians’ lives materialistically should not disconnect them from their history and heritage.

One can follow Ghalibaf’s approach to exploring that even though Ghalibaf had strict views, especially on the relationship with the West and the US, he asserted that the approach of resistance has to be intelligent. This means Iranians have to keep working on two tracks: nationally, to maintain unity and ‘internal cohesion’ and work together to improve the economy; and internationally, to keep negotiating the nuclear issue based on balanced negotiations and avoiding any emotional terms and behaviours. Yet, Ghalibaf, in reality, means negotiations to be used as a ‘tactic’ rather than a desired option or a strategy. The two tracks should operate in parallel because, as the leader stated, the real aim of imposing sanctions is to pressure the

Iranians, and sanctions will not be lifted through negotiations. However, he did not clearly say that the Iranian discourse on foreign policy should be constructed in a smart manner that avoids involving emotions in formal discourse. Although emotions tell us about the reality of things and attitudes towards others, such as fears of war, hatred of enemies, terror at terrorist situations, and so forth, they sound like ‘anti-intellectual points’ (Clement and Sanger, 2017).

To implement that, Ghalibaf was careful to avoid using phrases that may be interpreted and used against him, especially during electoral campaigns. These phrases are references to the Holocaust, wiping Israel from the map, underestimating the others and showing its superior status in the region, etc., as Ahmadinejad used to state. Avoiding such statements, according to him, protects Iran from its enemies’ propaganda and blackmail. By adopting this nuclear strategy, Ghalibaf was aiming to achieve positive results in terms of frustrating Iran’s enemies and reducing pressure on Iran.

He called on Iranians to focus on a great deal internally and improve the economy instead of being eager to negotiate. Ghalibaf may seem contradictory here because, at the same time that he was trying to diminish the effects of sanctions on the economy, he was asking Iranians to strengthen their economies to resist the pressure, namely, sanctions. In addition, the possibility of improving and strengthening the Iranian economy under unprecedented international sanctions is unlikely (Khajehpour, 2013; Habib, 2008). One can realise that Ghalibaf did not have solid ground to debate the minor damage of sanctions and disconnect the relationship with a new flexible nuclear choice. He was literary, describing the impacts of sanctions as a result without mentioning the sanctions explicitly as a cause.

Ghalibaf responded to Khamenei when he stated that the US was saying Iran relies on people; therefore, to reduce its power of resistance, we have to separate them from the Islamic Republic. He re-emphasised internal cohesion in all aspects, including nuclear negotiations. He believes that solidarity is essential to achieving the unity of the nation, regardless of the approach Iran intends to adopt towards resisting, negotiating, or competing. Notably, Ghalibaf ranked Iran’s options in a way that was compatible with his revolutionary background because he began with resistance and then negotiation. Ghalibaf appeared somehow more realistic than an idealist or rationalist. He focused on the importance of power and increasing national power in contrast to Rouhani’s approach of constructive interaction and enhancing cooperation between states. Ghalibaf might have realised the huge division between Iranian factions and the nation at large through the Green Movement, where Iranian society has been vertically and horizontally divided and the regime is at risk (Addis, 2009; Tezcür, 2012).

Undoubtedly, Iranians, for the most part, distrust the US compared to the EU due to their historically hostile relationship. The EU plays a mediating role between the US and Iran, and it also has less hostility towards Iran for some reasons related to the Iranian energy sector. In turn, Iran avoids dealing with the EU similarly to the US to influence their stance and reduce the potential pressure that may emerge from both, which it did not achieve due to the oil embargo in 2012. Khamenei disclosed that the real aim of keeping sanctions is to make the Iranian people exhausted and trigger them to act against the state. Indeed, the leader would not express clearly that the sanctions have been imposed to change the regime; instead, he said to separate people from the Islamic Republic, and then he encouraged the Iranian nation to stand against the enemy. Despite these efforts, the Iranian regime during Ahmadinejad's era managed to survive and keep improving Iran's nuclear programme despite the sanctions, particularly against Iran's oil (Brosizk, 2014).

Ghalibaf interacted with Kayhan about internal cohesion. He stressed that Iran's foreign policy should not act separately from macro-politics. He also stated that Iran has never abandoned its honour to gain 'economic benefits'. Kayhan elaborated on internal cohesion and the resistance approach regarding the nuclear issue. Kayhan revealed that at the time when some politicians asked to adhere to the international demands to constrain Iran's nuclear programme, in particular limiting centrifuges to only 5–25, Iran resisted this and now has 11,000. In a different approach to Iran's nuclear choice, Kayhan also claimed that flexible approaches might damage Iran's achievements, scientific progress, knowledge, and development.

Ghalibaf responded to Kayhan about the potential material benefits of compromising its honour. Kayhan focused on the Westerners' actions against Iran in imposing sanctions, and they used them as a pretext against its peaceful nuclear programme. In another phase, they accused the Islamic Republic of violating human rights. Here it seems to ask how we could compromise with those people to gain economic benefit, as Iran has never left its honour behind its material interests. Therefore, Ghalibaf was aware of the guilt he might commit if he accepted to gain economic benefits and incentives by compromising the nuclear programme, including 'suspension' as it happened before, and ignited a hot debate in Iran for several years.

To counter that, Ghalibaf emphasised the importance of internal cohesion, which begins with intensive participation in the presidential election of 2013, given the regime's legitimacy at large. Ghalibaf was not satisfied with Iran's diplomacy, which might compromise with the enemy at its honour's expense, as he thought it had not considered the history of the Iranian nation, which has always been committed to its honour and never sold it to gain economic benefits. That is, regardless of the background of the president, Iran's nuclear policy must remain within Iran's national interest and never compromise on it. As always, Ghalibaf was

careful to not affect Iran's national pride. It is an unnegotiable issue for him, and it comes first. Ghalibaf connected all aspects and policies with Iran's identity, which he is driven by, to reshape its nuclear choice to achieve Iran's national interests. Rouhani was also aware of that, but in a lesser manner, and focused instead on achieving Iran's interests through rationality and realism, specifically renegotiating the nuclear programme.

On this basis, one can recognise Ghalibaf's approach to Iran's nuclear choices as an inflexible approach that was built on 'resistance and internal cohesion' rather than a flexible approach that compromises the nuclear programme through negotiations. A participant shared this view that Ghalibaf's approach would be different than Rouhani's flexible one "*Ghalibaf discourse indicates that if elected, he would probably have been significantly less flexible and accommodating.*" (MB). This is the perception that Ghalibaf defended through his discourse, as he considered that the elimination of economic harm requires a flexible nuclear choice, which is a low issue salience for him compared to Rouhani. Ignoring the effects of sanctions as an issue of Iran's foreign policy from being discussed in detail domestically within Ghalibaf's discourse might have led to his loss. The salience of foreign affairs issues domestically is considered a determinant of domestic constraints and will be a more important issue that is highly salient to public opinion compared to the low salience of other issues (Oppermann and Spencer, 2013).

Ghalibaf identifies the elements of the nuclear choice as (i) insistence on Iran's nuclear rights for peaceful purposes, including uranium enrichment; (ii) instead of having negotiations on the nuclear programme, as he thinks Iran has fulfilled its nuclear obligations, he wants Iranians to not be keen on negotiations and focus domestically on improving the economy. In addition, because he did not blame the sanctions as a cause of economic harm, the negotiation process will be a marginal tool; (iii) emphasis on internal cohesion to frustrate enemies because he thinks enemies are working to change the regime, and some sensitive issues such as nuclear programme and sanctions may divide Iranians; (iv) mistrust of the US, IAEA, and the West, which means he is not willing to have transparent and serious cooperation with IAEA, which means the programme will remain a source of suspense; and (v) building national capabilities, especially in the field of nuclear technology, as a matter of national pride, which means he wanted to indigenise the nuclear know-how and thus Iran may move forward in thinking beyond a peaceful programme.

Ghalibaf's discourse was influenced by his understanding of economic harm as a result of mismanagement and Iran's identity and interests, based on conservative and revolutionary beliefs and values, in contrast to the moderate Rouhani. As such, Ghalibaf's discourse created a nuclear policy of 'resistance' as a grand strategy for Iran that he would adopt if elected. The

resistance approach, for him, will be implemented not only within foreign policy, including nuclear policy but also in all aspects, as he called for a ‘jihadist spirit’ and ‘resistance economy’.

### 9.3.2. Conclusion

This section analysed Ghalibaf’s discourse on the approach to Iran’s foreign policy and future nuclear choices. In contrast to Rouhani’s approach, Ghalibaf adopted an approach that focused on resistance and internal cohesion. As we have seen, the section also showed that Ghalibaf’s discourse shared ideas with Khamenei and Kayhan. This section also revealed the significance of discourse in presenting material and Ghalibaf’s ideational elements and, thus, creating nuclear policy. It also showed the strategy by which Ghalibaf defended his perception of salient issues that dominated his discourse during the elections. The section illustrated that Ghalibaf perceived the issue of the elimination of the effects of sanctions, and improving the economy requires a new flexible nuclear choice with a low salience that is not necessary to preserve Iran’s interests. The section illustrated that the ideational elements and values of Iran’s identity and interests influenced Ghalibaf’s understanding, explaining why Iran’s future nuclear choices have to be based on a resistance approach. This flexibility encompasses a lack of cooperation with the IAEA, mistrust of the US and the West, and thus marginalising negotiation tool sanctions effects. This section also illustrated that Ghalibaf considers the US at large and the West to some extent as enemies, in line with Khamenei and Kayhan texts.

Ghalibaf’s discourse on the main idea of resistance and internal cohesion was expressed through some expressions and explanations such as the ‘tactical level’ related to the nuclear negotiations under the two approaches that relied on idealism or realism separately; ‘resistance nuclear strategy’ and ‘intelligent resistance’: through working on two tracks: nationally, to maintain unity, and internationally, to keep negotiating the nuclear issue based on balanced negotiations, and the avoidance of references to the Holocaust, wiping Israel from the map; ‘strategic decisions’ related to Iran’s honour and pride such as resistance, internal cohesion, and macro-politics, particularly the nuclear policy; ‘goals could Iran help the other parties achieve’ which related to the refusal of negotiating the nuclear issue, and entering the negotiations from a weak position, and thus, the US forces its will on Iran; ‘balanced negotiations’ that should be fair, without preconditions, rational, trustworthy, and not dominated by the US; ‘failed policies’ related to the nuclear policy and negotiations based on different approaches of Khatami and Ahmadinejad; and ‘economic benefits’ related to compromising with enemies in return for abandoning Iran’s nuclear rights.

#### 9.4. Chapter conclusion

This chapter examined the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in creating Iran's nuclear choices. More specifically, the chapter analysed how the issue salience of the elimination of the effects of sanctions and improving the economy connected to the framing of appropriate nuclear choices within the competing discourses. Rouhani perceived it with a high issue salience, while Ghalibaf perceived it with a low issue salience. The chapter explained that both the material and ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf influenced their understanding and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. Their discourses shared ideas with Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan. The chapter also showed that their approaches were driven by the discursive themes examined in chapters 7 and 8 on the framing of the effects of sanctions, mismanagement, and responses to economic harm.

The chapter illustrated that Rouhani, as a moderate and a diplomat, constructed in his discourse a flexible approach of constructive interaction for Iran's foreign policy and future nuclear choices and he would adopt it to achieve Iran's national interests. Rouhani's approach demonstrates transparent cooperation with the IAEA through serious, balanced, and time-bound nuclear negotiations, including constraints on uranium enrichment. On the other hand, Ghalibaf, as a revolutionary and a former military officer, constructed in his discourse an inflexible approach that relies on resistance to Iran's nuclear choices, and he would adopt it to achieve Iran's national interests. His approach depends mainly on internal cohesion and intelligent resistance without paying great attention to nuclear negotiations. Ghalibaf also considered that improving the economy would rely on the resistance principle of the Islamic Revolution and enhance economic management. He does not believe that sanctions are a key cause of economic harm and thus there is no need for nuclear negotiations because Iran's nuclear technology is for peaceful purposes.

### 10.1. Summary

How did economic sanctions and Iran's identity and interests affect its nuclear choices through elite discourse in the 2013 election? To address this question, the thesis was structured and driven by a central epistemological argument relying on a social constructivist approach to analysing the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf. The economic sanctions on Iran's nuclear programme from 2006 to 2013 had significant features as they were sustainable, inclusive, mandatory, collective, and articulated (SIMCA), and such sanctions are more likely to inflict severe effects on the economy. Therefore, the latter would be a priority to candidates and voters alike as a high issue salience. However, the difference in the ideational elements and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests led Rouhani and Ghalibaf to construct the main cause of the economic harm differently in a way that affected Iran's nuclear choices.

The study arguments flowed consistently and revealed the role of the discourse in presenting material and ideational elements that constructed the effects of economic sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation and creating Iran's nuclear choices through the elite discourse of Iranian presidential candidates in the 2013 election. To address the thesis puzzle of "Iran chose a flexible approach to its nuclear programme after the presidential election of 2013", I have specifically followed the social constructivist assumption that discourses, ideas, ideational elements, identity, and interests are significant in shaping meanings and constructing conceptions within texts that result in creating policies.

I designed the research in a specific way to understand the Iranian case in depth and gain novel data using discourse analysis and interviews. To do so, I analysed 97 texts from Rouhani and Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan. This contributes to examining their responses to the sanctions regime as a sensitive issue that might be constrained by the discourse of Khamenei and texts from the domestic newspapers. I also conducted 15 semi-structured elite interviews with academics, experts, and policymakers who have wide experience and deep knowledge of the effects of economic sanctions on Iran's nuclear programme, focusing on the elite discourse of presidential candidates in the 2013 elections regarding nuclear non-proliferation, the role of Rouhani and Ghalibaf's beliefs, values, and experiences, the effects of economic sanctions, and Iran's nuclear choices. This design was underpinned by the constructivist explanation of discourse, ideational elements, identities, and interests to understand the ideas and meanings produced by Rouhani and Ghalibaf related to economic policies and nuclear choices.



This is crucial to understand the elements and factors that influenced their discourses. For instance, sanctions effects as an issue salience were marginalised by Ghalibaf, Khamenei, and Kayhan newspapers; nonetheless, they received great attention from Rouhani and Shargh, and thus, constructed perceptions that could help in expressing explicitly the importance of adopting a flexible approach to Iran's nuclear choices that would help in improving the Iranian economy through lifting sanctions or at least alleviate them.

In this thesis, we have seen the extent to which the effects of economic sanctions and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests have influenced the construction of the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf on themes of the effects of sanctions, the main cause of economic harm, the effective solution to improve the economy, and consequently, Iran's future nuclear choices. Analysing the key texts of presidential candidates uncovers various responses to the sanctions regime and, thus, helps understand the ideas and meanings framed around the effects of economic sanctions driven by actors' ideational elements. Considering subjectivity, and since the relationship between the effects of economic sanctions and Iran's nuclear choices was not clear and straightforward, I argued that Rouhani and Ghalibaf have explained, responded, and constructed differently the relationship between the effects of economic sanctions and economic harm according to their understanding and conceptions of Iran's identity and interests.

## **10.2. Study limitations**

This thesis has three main limitations that slightly affected the research design and the analysis, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The first limitation was the lack of engagement of Iranian academics, experts, and policymakers in the interviews. Despite the thesis having found insightful findings based on interviewing other academics, experts, and policymakers, the collective refusal has resulted in some minor changes to the research design and analysis. Intensive participation of Iranians in interviews would perhaps provide, in particular, a greater explanation of the real effects of sanctions and a better understanding of presidential candidates' approaches to Iran's future nuclear choices. Despite following the academic and formal measures in contacting and inviting them to participate, the refusal was mainly because of the sensitivity of dealing with such issues with someone abroad.

The second limitation was the incomplete accession to Iranian resources, specifically the texts, speeches, and interviews for Rouhani and Ghalibaf in the elections. This is because of the poor spread of the internet in Iran in 2013. It can also be attributed to the nature of the context, namely presidential elections, where candidates give enthusiastic speeches to huge crowds of people in the absence of recordings or reporting the full speeches. It can also be said that the sensitivity of the aforementioned issues constrains the discussion in the media and among the elite, including politicians, experts, and academics. The language can also be placed here under this limitation.

Because I do not speak Persian, access to some primary data in Persian has not been perfectly comprehensive, although I have made huge efforts to accurately translate the texts in Persian into English with the cooperation of a native speaker.

Finally, the third limitation was the lack of previous research studies on the Iranian case regarding presidential candidates' texts or speeches that framed, in particular, the effects of economic sanctions and, thus, nuclear choices about Iran and/or other case studies. This study builds on the existing nuclear non-proliferation scholarship to identify essential factors and conditions that might affect or increase the likelihood of sanctions success, especially issue salience. This shows the emphasis on the role of discourse, driven by ideational elements, in framing the real effects of sanctions in affecting nuclear choices and showing that the effects of sanctions were contingent. The Iranian case study required in-depth research to identify meanings and ideas that delivered the policies, solutions, and approaches of Rouhani and Ghalibaf.

Regardless of the lack of some Iranian texts and the limited access to them, the above issues have received great attention and considerable analysis. I have reviewed hundreds of discourses and texts, and consequently, I have analysed 97 texts for Rouhani, Ghalibaf, and Khamenei, and texts from the domestic newspapers Shargh and Kayhan. In chapter six, I provided the necessary context through an analysis of Iran's economic statistics before and during the sanctions. These data are sufficient to demonstrate the conclusions I outlined below because this thesis has focused on analysing Iran's elite discourse of Rouhani, Ghalibaf, Khamenei, Shargh, and Kayhan during a specific time in 2013 on the themes of the effects of economic sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation for Iran's nuclear programme and future nuclear choices.

### **10.3. Major conclusions of the study**

The existing sanctions and non-proliferation sanctions scholarship is limited and has not examined the role of discourse during general elections to understand and explain the processes by which sanctions affect nuclear choices. Therefore, the thesis builds on the work of Park (2018), who provides a significant analysis of how sanctions affect incumbent electoral performance. It also builds on Ang and Peksen (2007) who provide a significant analysis of the role of perceptions on issue salience in contributing to economic sanctions outcomes. This is essential because this study works to contribute to the conditions of the regime type and issue salience within discourses in elections, in particular those related to the possibilities of making sanctions successful. Having said that, however, the thesis has not studied multiple cases to explain the effective role of economic sanctions in affecting nuclear choices through presidential candidates' texts. Instead, it has started this area of research with the Iranian case, where there is a gap in the existing scholarship that the thesis will fill by unpacking ideas and meanings in response to economic sanctions effects and the sanctions regime at large.

As such, this inquiry needs to be extended through analysing the presidential candidates' discourses and texts to demonstrate how economic sanctions affected nuclear choices. The Iranian elite discourse of presidential candidates in the 2013 elections has not been adequately researched on nuclear non-proliferation, the effects of economic sanctions, and Iran's nuclear choices; hence, the focus will be on the Iranian case in depth. Considering the interest of this thesis in the discourses of the presidential candidates, I have researched the Iranian case in depth rather than other cases or doing comparative case studies such as Iraq, North Korea, or Libya. Moreover, the Iranian case provides a clear understanding of the conditions and factors affecting the effectiveness of economic sanctions in terms of SIMCA that the sanctions scholarship has researched.

Analysing the elite discourse of presidential candidates is crucial to revealing competing interpretations of the effects of economic sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation in the Iranian case, where the texts of the presidential candidates provide novel and reliable data, especially when they have a strong connection with think tanks like Rouhani. Since economic sanctions on Iran are considered to some extent a sensitive issue, officials try to hide or manipulate the real effects on the economy, and this may affect reality; thus, analysing discourse contributes to the scholarship in terms of exploring the reality of the heavy cost of sanctions on a certain target, such as Iran.

Driven by the heavy cost of SIMCA sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation against Iran's nuclear programme that were outlined in chapters 3 and 4, Iran's economy struggled significantly, and consequently, Iranians expressed in several polls that sanctions related to the nuclear programme have hurt their lives. It is worth noticing that the presidential election is a crucial opportunity for changing policies and leaders, especially for voters who believe that the effects of economic sanctions have impacted the economy sharply and consider some candidates' approaches that do not confess that as invalid.

Based on that foundation, the thesis found significant findings that are linked to the argument about question 1, "What is the most dominant factor that was expressed in the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf as a salient issue among other factors?", and question 2, "How did the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf interpret the main cause of Iran's economic harm in light of nuclear non-proliferation sanctions and their ideational elements?". It demonstrates that the economic factor 'economy' was a high issue salience for candidates and the most expressed among other factors in the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf.

Rouhani's discourse was convergent with Shargh on ideas about the effect of economic sanctions as the main cause that resulted in economic harm, whereas Ghalibaf's discourse was convergent with Khamenei and Kayhan about the minor effect of sanctions, but the main cause is mismanagement. The thesis has also found another significant finding about question 3, "What were the most salient issues in the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf that interpreted their approaches and policies to resolve the harm and improve the economy?". This result illustrated two different approaches: when Rouhani's approach adopted lifting the sanctions through renegotiating the nuclear programme as a high issue salience, Ghalibaf's approach, in contrast to Rouhani, considered lifting sanctions to improve the economy as a low issue salience, and adopted enhancing management to solve Iran's economic harm as a high issue salience.

Finally, the thesis has found an interesting finding that constitutes Iran's nuclear choices in relation to question 4, "How can the tools of social constructivism contribute to examining the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf about perceiving Iran's future nuclear choices based on sanctions effects and Iran's identity and interests?". This is a significant result because it is the core of this study. It revealed the effective role of discourse in presenting the effectiveness of economic sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation in affecting Iran's future nuclear choices, driven by the ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in understanding Iran's identity and interests in the 2013 election that led to the desired outcome of changing target behaviours if elected.

Actors' experiences play an important role in forming understandings and perceptions about a certain issue that they perceive as of high importance or importance. Rouhani, as a moderate with a diplomatic background, adopted a flexible approach to Iran's foreign policy, including the nuclear choice, which depends mainly on constructive interactions and adherence to Iran's nuclear rights for peaceful purposes. Ghalibaf, in contrast, as a conservative with a revolutionary background, adopted an inflexible approach to Iran's foreign policy, including the nuclear choice, which depends mainly on resistance and internal cohesion, adherence to Iran's nuclear rights for peaceful purposes, mistrust of the US concerning negotiations, and enhancing the management.

The interviews have also provided genuine and novel knowledge that underpins the analysis of the study and addresses the puzzle and the research questions. The findings were consistent with the study's findings. For example, most participants acknowledged that the effects of economic sanctions were the main cause of Iran's economic problems from 2006 to 2013; they responded positively when asked about the importance of linking the effects of sanctions within the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf to influence voters' preferences; they believe that voters would support a candidate who considers the effects of sanctions to be the main reasons for economic harm, and the suggested approach on this basis; participants emphasised the ideational elements of Rouhani and Ghalibaf in affecting the way they perceive the economic harm and sanctions and thus explaining

its relationship with Iran's identity and interests; they believe that the moderate discourse of Rouhani revealed a new flexible approach to Iran's nuclear choice has contributed to his victory and reaching the nuclear deal according to the JCPOA agreement in 2015; and, participants tended to believe that if Ghalibaf won the elections, his approach to Iran's nuclear choice would be extremist and less flexible than Rouhani one.

#### **10.4. Main contributions**

This study has contributed to the existing scholarship on the effectiveness of sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation and to the existing scholarship on social constructivism. Specifically, it contributes to expanding the role of discourse in general and to Iran in particular in terms of the social construction of Iran's nuclear choices. It does that by explaining the interpretation of the material effects of sanctions as an issue salience through the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf and their conceptions of Iran's identity and interests. The thesis has done that using a social constructivist approach by developing a new focus on the discourse analysis of presidential candidates in general elections.

The thesis has developed an in-depth focus on Iran as a case study and has developed a different methodological approach because the existing scholarship has not yet explored the role of discourse in creating policy change by affecting the discourses of presidential candidates, especially in democratic countries where the regime type matters, and how this then affects the framing of nuclear choices. Therefore, discourse analysis has sought to properly explore the neglected role of discourse in the Iranian case. The thesis has shown that the framing of the effects of economic sanctions within the discourses of the presidential candidates has produced two different approaches to Iran's future nuclear choices and that neither was predetermined but contingent on context. The Iranian case reflects what the sanctions scholarship has explored in terms of the conditions that might increase the likelihood of sanctions success, such as sustainability, comprehensiveness, unilateral cooperation, and regime type in democratic states. The thesis also focused on the role of issue salience in discourse in increasing the likelihood of sanctions effectiveness through actors' conceptions in the Iranian case.

#### **10.5. Future work**

It has been shown in this thesis how the discourse creates nuclear policy by presenting the effects of economic sanctions and ideational elements during presidential elections. This thesis intends to analyse the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf during the 2013 presidential elections in light of the effects of international sanctions, economic harm, and nuclear choices. This thesis has not researched the ways that the discourses of Rouhani and Ghalibaf have been distributed through various channels and how voters consumed them. To provide a holistic understanding of the effective role of the effects of economic sanctions on nuclear non-proliferation in the Iranian case, further work in depth about voter

preferences may be required to complement the relationship between the effects of sanctions and the election result. This would assist in demonstrating more securely and effectively the role of economic sanctions in election outcomes by affecting voter preferences through the competitive discourses that have framed the effects of economic sanctions and declared choices that converge with the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

The research scope of this thesis covers the effects of economic sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme from 2006 until 2013, the date of the eleventh presidential election. Further research may be required to extend our understanding comprehensively of the effects of economic sanctions on the economy in three periods: 2013–2015, the period of conducting serious nuclear negotiations with the P5+1; 2016–2018, the period of lifting some sanctions due to the JCPOA; and eventually, 2019–onward, the period of reimposing US sanctions on Iran after the withdrawal from the JCPOA. This would help to further explore potential causality when economic sanctions were the 'cause' that resulted in the 'effect' of severe damage to the economy. It also helps, considering the contingency and the context of the 2013 elections, in demonstrating that the heavy cost to Iran's economy of SIMCA sanctions might have led to constraining its nuclear programme in 2015.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: List of analysed texts of Rouhani, Khamenei, Ghalibaf, Shargh, and Kayhan.

No	Code	Date	Link
1	Rouhani1, 2013	11/04/2013	<a href="https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2030675/%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D9%85">https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2030675/%D8%A7%D8%B9%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%85-%D8%B1%D8%B3%D9%85%DB%8C-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AA%D8%AF%D8%A8%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D9%85</a>
2-7	Rouhani2, 2013; Rouhani3, 2013; Rouhani4, 2013; Rouhani5, 2013; Rouhani6, 2013; Rouhani7, 2013	29/05/2013	<a href="https://anjoman.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx/newindex.aspx?pid=17257&amp;tid=647631&amp;forumID=721">https://anjoman.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx/newindex.aspx?pid=17257&amp;tid=647631&amp;forumID=721</a>
8	Rouhani8, 2013	31/05/2013	<a href="https://www.parsine.com/fa/news/114090/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%AF-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AF%87%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-1392">https://www.parsine.com/fa/news/114090/%D9%85%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A9%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%AF-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AF%87%D9%85-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-1392</a>
9-11	Rouhani9, 2013; Rouhani10, 2013; Rouhani11, 2013	27/05/2013	<a href="https://fararu.com/fa/news/151198/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D9%DA%98%D8%A7%D8%AF">https://fararu.com/fa/news/151198/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%B4%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D9%DA%98%D8%A7%D8%AF</a>
12-16	Rouhani12, 2013; Rouhani13, 2013; Rouhani14, 2013; Rouhani15, 2013; Rouhani16, 2013	13/06/2013	<a href="https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/ali-pedram/interviews/in-conversation-with-hassan-rouhani">https://eng-archive.aawsat.com/ali-pedram/interviews/in-conversation-with-hassan-rouhani</a>
17	Rouhani17, 2013	04/06/2013	<a href="https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/06/hassan-rouhani-ira-elections-documentary-tv.html#ixzz6XE1pnJJl">https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/06/hassan-rouhani-ira-elections-documentary-tv.html#ixzz6XE1pnJJl</a>

18-19	Rouhani18, 2013; Rouhani23, 2013	07/06/2013	<a href="https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/217658/%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%88%86%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A78%AA-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86">https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/217658/%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%88%86%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A78%AA-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86</a>
20	Rouhani19 2013	28/05/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11507/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%DA%AF%D8%B0%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%87">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11507/%D9%86%D9%82%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%DA%AF%D8%B0%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%87</a>
21	Rouhani20, 2013	5/06/2013	<a href="https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2070049/%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%8DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%88%86%DB%8C-8-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%A7">https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2070049/%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%8DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%88%86%DB%8C-8-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%B1%DA%AF%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AA%D8%A7</a>
22	Rouhani21, 2013	4/06/2013	<a href="https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/109542/%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%DA%86%D8%AA%D8%B%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%81%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%82%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B3%D9%87-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%D9%85">https://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/109542/%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%DA%86%D8%AA%D8%B%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%86%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%81%D8%B6%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7-%D9%88-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%82%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D9%85%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D9%81%D8%B9%D9%84%DB%8C-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%84-%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B3%D9%87-%D9%86%D9%85%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%D9%85</a>
23	Rouhani22, 2013	20/04/2013	<a href="https://web.archive.org/web/20130713143547/http://www.rouhani.ir/iss hp?issue_id=3">https://web.archive.org/web/20130713143547/http://www.rouhani.ir/iss hp?issue_id=3</a>
24-31	Khamenei1, 2013; Khamenei3, 2013; Khamenei6, 2013; Khamenei13, 2013; Khamenei14, 2013; Khamenei15, 2013;	27/04/2013	<a href="https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1773/Leader-s-Speech-to-Laborers-and-Produrers">https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1773/Leader-s-Speech-to-Laborers-and-Produrers</a>



	Khamenei19, 2013; Khamenei30, 2013		
32-41	Khamenei2, 2013; Khamenei16, 2013; Khamenei17, 2013; Khamenei20, 2013; Khamenei21, 2013; Khamenei25, 2013; Khamenei26, 2013; Khamenei33, 2013; Khamenei34, 2013; Khamenei35, 2013	16/02/2013	<a href="https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1744/Leader-s-Speech-to-People-of-Ea-Azerbaijan">https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1744/Leader-s-Speech-to-People-of-Ea-Azerbaijan</a>
42-43	Khamenei11, 2013; Khamenei31, 2013	4/06/2013	<a href="https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1799/Leader-s-Speech-on-24th-Demise-Anniversary-of-Imam-Khomeini-r-a">https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1799/Leader-s-Speech-on-24th-Demise-Anniversary-of-Imam-Khomeini-r-a</a>
44-45	Khamenei4, 2013; Khamenei7, 2013	20/03/2013	<a href="https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1757/Leader-s-Norouz-Message">https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1757/Leader-s-Norouz-Message</a>
46-57	Khamenei5, 2013; Khamenei8, 2013; Khamenei9, 2013; Khamenei10, 2013; Khamenei12, 2013; Khamenei18, 2013; Khamenei22, 2013; Khamenei23, 2013; Khamenei24, 2013; Khamenei27, 2013; Khamenei28, 2013; Khamenei29, 2013	21/03/2013	<a href="https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1760/Leader-s-Speech-at-Imam-Ridha-s-Shrine">https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1760/Leader-s-Speech-at-Imam-Ridha-s-Shrine</a>
58	Khamenei32, 2013	6/05/2013	<a href="https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1779/Leader-s-Speech-to-Officials-in-Charge-of-Elections">https://english.khamenei.ir/news/1779/Leader-s-Speech-to-Officials-in-Charge-of-Elections</a>
59-61	Ghalibaf1, 2013; Ghalibaf2, 2013; Ghalibaf3, 2013	15/05/2013	<a href="https://www.isna.ir/news/92022516972/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DA%A9-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA">https://www.isna.ir/news/92022516972/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B9-%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AA%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DA%A9-%D8%B4%D8%AF%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA</a>
62-63	Ghalibaf4, 2013; Ghalibaf5, 2013	12/06/2013	<a href="https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1392/03/22/76651/%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B24-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81-">https://www.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1392/03/22/76651/%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%85-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B24-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%81-</a>

			<a href="#">%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%86%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D9%87%D9%86%D8%AF</a>
64-70	Ghalibaf6, 2013; Ghalibaf7, 2013; Ghalibaf8, 2013; Ghalibaf9, 2013; Ghalibaf10, 2013; Ghalibaf11, 2013; Ghalibaf12, 2013;	23/04/2013	<a href="http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1916733/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%/%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%DB%8%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-">http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1916733/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%/%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%DB%8%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-</a>
71	Ghalibaf13, 2013;	11/06/2013	<a href="https://www.isna.ir/news/92032111827/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%/%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-24-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85">https://www.isna.ir/news/92032111827/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%/%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-24-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85</a>
72	Ghalibaf14, 2013;	1/06/2013	<a href="#">Interview with Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf 1 JUN 2013 - Third Electio</a> <a href="#">Conversation with Qalibaf - YouTube</a>
73	Ghalibaf15, 2013;	11/06/2013	<a href="https://www.isna.ir/news/92032111827/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%/%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-24-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85">https://www.isna.ir/news/92032111827/%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%/%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-24-%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B7%D9%82-%D9%BE%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D9%87%DB%8C%D9%85</a>
74-75	Ghalibaf16, 2013; Ghalibaf17, 2013;	31/05/2013	<a href="http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1916733/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%/%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%DB%8%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-">http://www.irdiplomacy.ir/fa/news/1916733/%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%/%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AC%DB%8%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%85%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%84%DB%8C%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%81-</a>
76	Ghalibaf18, 2013;	7/06/2013	<a href="https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/217658/%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%/%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%88%/%86%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%8%AA-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86">https://www.hamshahrionline.ir/news/217658/%D8%B3%D9%88%D9%/%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B8%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%AA%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C%D9%88%/%86%DB%8C-%D9%87%D8%B4%D8%AA-%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B2%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AA%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%A8%D8%A7%8%AA-%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA-%D8%AC%D9%85%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86</a>
77	Shargh1, 2013	27/05/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11381/%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%/%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%88-%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85%DB%8C-">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11381/%D9%86%D8%B1%D8%/%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%88-%D8%B1%D9%82%D9%85%DB%8C-</a>

			<a href="#">%DA%AF%D8%B1%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A2%D8%AA%DB%8C</a>
78	Shargh2, 2013	28/05/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11503/%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11503/%D8%AE%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%84%D9%88%DB%8C%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%84%DB%8C-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87</a>
79	Shargh3, 2013	1/06/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11795/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11795/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF</a>
80	Shargh4, 2013	10/06/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/12389/%D8%A7%DA%AF%D8%1-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%84%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%85-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/12389/%D8%A7%DA%AF%D8%1-%D8%A7%D8%B5%D9%88%D9%84%DA%AF%D8%B1%D8%A7%8C%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AD%D8%A7%DA%A9%D9%85-%D8%B4%D9%88%D9%86%D8%AF</a>
81	Shargh5, 2013	11/04/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/10969/%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/10969/%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA</a>
82	Shargh6, 2013	22/05/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/10969/%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/10969/%D8%B1%DA%A9%D9%85%DB%8C-%D8%AF-%D8%AA%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%85%DB%8C-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AB-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA</a>
83	Shargh7, 2013	12/06/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/12536/%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%82%E2%80%8C%D9%8D8%A7">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/12536/%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%AF%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B5%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%82%E2%80%8C%D9%8D8%A7</a>
84	Shargh8, 2013	1/06/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11795/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/11795/%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%87%D8%B1%D9%87%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A8%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%B2%D8%B1%DA%AF</a>
85-86	Shargh9, 2013; Shargh10, 2013	22/05/2013	<a href="https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/10945/%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%B1%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B3%E2%80%8C%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87">https://sharghdaily.com/fa/main/detail/10945/%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%B1%DB%8C%DB%8C%D8%B3%E2%80%8C%D8%AC%D9%87%D9%88%D8%B1%DB%8C-%D8%A2%DB%8C%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%87</a>
87	Kayhan1, 2013	22/05/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920301/2.htm#N204">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920301/2.htm#N204</a>
88	Kayhan2, 2013	6/06/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920316/2.htm">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920316/2.htm</a>
89	Kayhan3, 2013	23/05/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920302/4.htm">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920302/4.htm</a>
90	Kayhan4, 2013	27/05/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920306/4.htm">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920306/4.htm</a>

91	Kayhan5, 2013	27/05/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920306/4.htm">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920306/4.htm</a>
92	Kayhan6, 2013	6/06/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920316/2.htm">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920316/2.htm</a>
93	Kayhan7, 2013	6/06/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920316/2.htm">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920316/2.htm</a>
94	Kayhan8, 2013	22/05/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920301/3.HTM">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920301/3.HTM</a>
95	Kayhan9, 2013	8/06/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920318/2">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920318/2</a>
96	Kayhan10, 2013	29/05/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920308/2.htm">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920308/2.htm</a>
97	Kayhan11, 2013	26/05/2013	<a href="http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920305/2.htm">http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/920305/2.htm</a>

## APPENDIX II: List of interviews

No	Initials	Occupation	Interview date
1	EL	Academic: Economic sanctions; Iran	24 Sep, 2020
2	NM	Expert: Nuclear Proliferation; International Security	29 October 2020
3	GS	Expert: International security; nuclear weapons arms control and nonproliferation; Iran	13 October 2020
4	MZ	Academic: Middle East; Iran	20 December 2020
5	NH	Academic: Economic of Middle East; Iran; sanctions	25 October 2020
6	TP	Expert: US-Iranian relations; Iranian foreign policy; and the geopolitics of the Middle East	20 October 2020
7	AB	Academic: Economic of Middle East; nuclear Iran; sanctions; nuclear proliferation	24 October 2020
8	PB	International Economics and Macroeconomics; Economic sanctions; Diplomacy	28 October 2020
9	BA	Academic: Economics of Iran	10 January 2021
10	RN	Expert: Economic sanctions; nuclear weapons; Iran	9 October 2020
11	BS	Expert: Economic sanctions; nuclear nonproliferation; Iran; Arms control	28 October 2020
12	MK	Academic: Economic sanctions; negotiations; Iran	22 December 2020
13	RL	Academic: US foreign policy; nonproliferation; International security	18 November 2020
14	MB	Expert: Nuclear theft and terrorism; nuclear arms control and strategic stability; nuclear proliferation	28 October 2020
15	MH	Expert: International nuclear trade and nonproliferation ; international nuclear trade regime, decisionmaking at IAEA	8 October 2020

### APPENDIX III: Participant consent form

**Title of study:** Effectiveness of Economic Sanctions on Nuclear Non-proliferation: Constructing Domestic Effects of International Sanctions within elite discourse in the 2013 Iranian Presidential Election.

	Please confirm your agreement to each statement by putting the check symbol [✓] in the boxes below.
I have read and understood the participant information sheet.	
I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.	
I have received satisfactory answers to all of my questions.	
I have received enough information about the study.	
I understand my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study without having to give a reason for withdrawing and that interview data will not be used for research purposes.	
I understand that my interview will be audio-recorded.	
I understand that relevant sections of my data collected during the study may be looked at by the researcher and the research supervisors (Nick Ritchie and Nicole Lindstrom) Department of Politics, University of York. I permit these individuals to have access to my interview transcript.	
I understand that any information I provide, including personal data, will be kept confidential, stored securely and only accessed by those carrying out the study. I understand there remains a minimal residual and unintended risk related to my personal data such as my name and position, that I might be identified as a research participant in this study, despite procedures in place to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.	
I understand that any information I give may be included in published documents, but all information will be anonymized unless I provide explicit written agreement otherwise if asked by the researcher.	
Participant signature:	Date:
Name of participant:	
Researcher signature:	

This project has been reviewed by the research ethics review committee at the University of York, UK, and by the Ethics Committee of your institution.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Description</b>
UNSC .....	United Nations Security Council
IAEA.....	International Atomic Energy Agency
NPT.....	Treaty on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
JCPOA.....	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
UN.....	United Nations
EU.....	European Union
US.....	United States of America
CDA.....	Critical discourse analysis
E3.....	France, Germany, and the United Kingdom
FDI.....	Foreign Direct Investments
SIMCA.....	Sustainable, inclusive, mandatory, collective, and articulated “sanctions”
IRGC.....	Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps
IRR.....	Iranian Rial
P5+1.....	France, Russia, China, the UK, the US and Germany
CIA .....	The US Central Intelligence Agency
NBC.....	Nuclear Biological Chemistry
NIOC.....	National Iranian Oil Company
R&D.....	Research and Development
TNRC.....	Tehran Nuclear Research Center
UF6.....	Uranium Hexafluoride
MR.....	Members’ Resources
WMD.....	Weapons of Mass Destruction
GDP.....	Gross Domestic Product
ISLA.....	Iran & Libya Sanctions Act of 1996
OPEC.....	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries

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