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The Institution of Vizierate and the Role of Viziers in the Political Legitimacy of the Seljuk State: (Intellectual, Institutional, and Religious–Cultural Dimensions)

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ABSTRACT

The institution of the vizierate in the Seljuk state played a fundamental role in the process of consolidating and reproducing political legitimacy. In addition to administering executive and bureaucratic affairs, viziers contributed significantly to the organization of royal authority and its social acceptance through intellectual–ideological, institutional–bureaucratic, and religious–cultural mechanisms. This study, adopting a historical–analytical approach and based on primary and secondary sources, examines the functions of the vizierate and the role of viziers in legitimizing Seljuk rule. The findings indicate that viziers, by reproducing the theoretical foundations of legitimacy and designing and implementing practical mechanisms such as historical genealogical construction, the selection of royal titles and honorifics, the organization of official ceremonies including coronations, the consolidation of bureaucratic structures, and the management of relations with the Abbasid Caliphate, provided the foundations for political legitimacy and the stability of the Seljuk state. In this regard, the personal standing of viziers, the level of support from the sultan, and their ability to maintain a balance between military and bureaucratic forces played a decisive role in the success of this process. The present study demonstrates that the institution of the vizierate, through the synthesis of Irano-royal traditions, Islamic teachings, and practical bureaucratic experience, elevated the Seljuk monarchy from mere reliance on military power to a form of governance characterized by legitimacy and broad acceptance.

Keywords: *Seljuk State, Vizierate Institution, Political Legitimacy, Bureaucracy, Political Thought*

Introduction

The institution of the vizierate in the political history of Islamic Iran, particularly during the Seljuk period, is regarded as one of the principal pillars in the consolidation and continuation of royal authority (1, 2). Within the Seljuk power structure, viziers were not merely executive agents or administrative managers; rather, they functioned as central actors in the process of legitimizing the government and reproducing political authority (3, 4). The significance of this position lies in demonstrating that political authority in the Seljuk state was shaped not solely



through military dominance but also through institutional, intellectual, and religious mechanisms, in which bureaucratic elites played a decisive role (5, 6).

An examination of Seljuk political history reveals that viziers, drawing upon political knowledge, bureaucratic experience, and the utilization of cultural and religious instruments, played a fundamental role in managing power relations, regulating the relationship between the sultanate and the Abbasid Caliphate, and establishing a synthesis between Irano-royal traditions and Islamic law (7, 8). Nevertheless, a considerable portion of previous research has either been limited to describing the administrative structure of the Seljuk state or has predominantly examined political legitimacy from the perspective of the relationship between the sultan and the caliphate, paying less attention to the role of the vizierate as a multidimensional mechanism in the production and consolidation of political legitimacy (2, 9).

The central problem of the present study is to explain the role of the institution of the vizierate and viziers in the process of consolidating the political legitimacy of the Seljuk state and to analyze the intellectual, institutional, and religious-cultural mechanisms employed in this regard. The objective of this study is to identify and analyze the instruments and strategies through which viziers reproduced royal authority and contributed to the coherence and stability of the Seljuk political structure.

The main research questions are as follows:

What mechanisms did the institution of the vizierate and viziers employ to consolidate the political legitimacy of the Seljuk state?

What role did religious and cultural instruments play in the legitimizing strategies of viziers?

This article, employing a historical-analytical method and relying on primary sources, including mirrors for princes and biographical works, alongside secondary studies, seeks to demonstrate that the institution of the vizierate in the Seljuk state functioned beyond a mere administrative structure and acted as the central axis in the process of legitimization and consolidation of political authority.

Literature Review

Studies conducted on the structure of power and political legitimacy in the Seljuk state can generally be categorized into three groups: books, research articles, and academic theses. Each of these works has approached the subject from a particular perspective; however, the role of the vizierate in political legitimization has received less attention as an independent and integrated subject (1, 10).

Books: Classical works such as *Bureaucracy in the Seljuk Era*, *Continuity and Change in Medieval Persia*, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, and *The Vizierate in the Era of the Great Seljuk Sultans* provide a general picture of the governmental structure, bureaucracy, and political institutions of the Seljuk period (5, 11, 12). Among these, Klausner's work more than others examines the administrative structure of the Seljuk state and the position of the vizierate, highlighting the role of viziers—particularly Nizam al-Mulk—in organizing the governmental apparatus, although the issue of political legitimacy is addressed only implicitly (11, 13). Other works primarily present historical data and introduce viziers and the institution of the vizierate, thereby providing the necessary historical context for analyzing its role in political legitimacy, but they do not offer direct conceptual analyses of legitimacy (14, 15).

Research Articles: Works examining legitimacy and political power in the Seljuk period, as well as studies on political legitimacy and the structure of power in the Seljuk government, have addressed the issue of legitimacy, the relationship between the Abbasid Caliphate and the Seljuk sultanate, and the broader structure of power (3, 9).

Other studies focusing on the process of political legitimization of Seljuk rulers and the necessity of religious and political legitimacy address the general dimensions of legitimacy. In contrast, some articles have directly examined the institution of the vizierate and viziers, including analyses of the role of the vizierate in Seljuk political relations and studies of Seljuk viziers from alternative perspectives (2, 16). Additionally, works related to the political thought of Nizam al-Mulk and mirrors for princes literature primarily focus on the intellectual foundations of legitimacy (13, 17). Despite this diversity, existing studies generally focus either on political legitimacy or on the institution of the vizierate, and the integrated relationship between these two dimensions has been less explored.

Theses: Academic studies addressing power relations and legitimacy in the Seljuk period, the foundations of Seljuk political legitimacy, and the examination of the vizierate after Nizam al-Mulk have contributed to the understanding of legitimacy or the vizierate as separate topics (2, 9). These works, often adopting theoretical or descriptive approaches, have focused on the foundations of legitimacy, mirrors for princes literature, and the relationship between religion and state. However, the role of the vizierate is either addressed in a limited manner or lacks a multidimensional analysis in relation to political legitimacy.

Overall, despite the abundance of bibliographical, article-based, and academic resources on the Seljuk state, the examination of the vizierate and the role of viziers as a multidimensional mechanism in the political legitimization of the Seljuk state—particularly in connection with intellectual–ideological, institutional–bureaucratic, and religious–cultural dimensions—has received limited attention. The present study seeks to address this gap.

Theoretical Framework: Legitimacy and the Institution of the Vizierate

The concept of political legitimacy and legitimate authority, both in the tradition of Islamic political thought and in modern political theory, has always been one of the most fundamental and, at the same time, contested concepts (18). Legitimacy generally refers to the conformity of political power with a set of accepted principles, norms, and beliefs within a society and reflects the justification of political authority from intellectual, normative, and social perspectives (18). From this viewpoint, legitimacy is not merely a legal or moral claim but a social mechanism that enables the acceptance of power and the binding nature of political authority.

The existence of legitimacy provides the basis for social acceptance, enhances institutional efficiency, and ensures the continuity of political structures (19). Even governments that have come to power through military conquest or coercion are compelled to secure a degree of social acceptance and intellectual justification to stabilize and maintain their authority (20). Accordingly, legitimacy can be regarded as one of the primary pillars of political stability and the continuity of states.

In the Islamic political tradition, the legitimacy of governance has generally been associated with concepts such as divine sanction, adherence to religious law, the establishment of justice, and the preservation of social order. Historical and intellectual texts indicate that the continuity of governance was considered dependent not merely on military power but on the ruler's commitment to religion and justice (21, 22). Within this framework, intermediary institutions between the sultan, religion, and society played a crucial role in the realization and reproduction of legitimacy.

In modern political theory, Max Weber categorized legitimacy into three primary types: rational–legal legitimacy, based on codified laws and an organized administrative system; traditional legitimacy, grounded in belief in the sanctity of longstanding traditions; and charismatic legitimacy, dependent on the exceptional qualities and personal

authority of the leader (4). The significance of this typology lies in demonstrating that legitimacy can derive from multiple sources simultaneously, and in practice, political systems often rely on a combination of these forms.

The application of this theoretical framework to the Seljuk state is not intended as a mechanical imposition of modern concepts but rather as a historical analytical tool for understanding legitimizing mechanisms. In the Seljuk political structure, royal legitimacy emerged from a combination of military power, Irano-royal political traditions, Islamic law, and the endorsement of the Abbasid Caliphate (1, 7). This multilayered configuration created conditions in which the institution of the vizierate and bureaucracy assumed a central role in organizing and consolidating legitimate authority.

The institution of the vizierate in the Seljuk state functioned beyond a purely administrative structure, acting as an intermediary between the sultan, the bureaucratic apparatus, religious elites, and society. The vizier, as the deputy of the sultan, served both as the executive arm of political power and as the principal agent in the production and reproduction of royal legitimacy. The competence, political knowledge, and administrative capacity of viziers—particularly during the period of Nizam al-Mulk—had a direct impact on the degree of authority, cohesion, and legitimacy of the Seljuk state (2, 13).

Within this framework, the institution of the vizierate can be regarded as the point of convergence of three principal dimensions of political legitimacy: the intellectual–ideological dimension, through the reproduction of theoretical foundations of monarchy and the articulation of its relationship with religion and tradition; the institutional–bureaucratic dimension, through the organization of bureaucracy and the stabilization of administrative order; and the religious–cultural dimension, through the management of relations with the Abbasid Caliphate, religious institutions, and symbolic rituals of power.

This theoretical framework provides the foundation for a historical analysis of the role of viziers in the process of legitimization and consolidation of the Seljuk monarchy and enables the examination of the vizierate not merely as an administrative institution but as a key mechanism in the construction of legitimate political authority.

Bureaucracy and the Position of the Vizierate in the Seljuk Government

The formation and continuity of major states in political history have not been solely the result of the military authority of rulers, but rather the outcome of the interaction between political power, administrative institutions, and bureaucratic elites. In the Seljuk state, which is considered one of the most significant political structures of medieval Iran, the institution of the vizierate and bureaucracy played a fundamental role in transforming a tribal power into a centralized and legitimate government. The early Seljuk leaders, prior to attaining kingship, possessed limited experience in managing complex governmental structures, and the highest level of their authority had been confined to leadership over nomadic tribes. With the conquest of Khorasan and the expansion of their territory, they suddenly assumed responsibility for governing a vast and multiethnic domain; a task fundamentally different from managing nomadic tribal structures. This situation compelled the Seljuks to adopt the Iranian bureaucratic tradition (23).

The Seljuks' reliance on Iranian bureaucracy was not merely a response to administrative necessity but also served a legitimizing function. The Iranian administrative tradition, from the Sasanian period to the era of the Islamic caliphate, had long been associated with concepts such as centralized authority, political order, and the ideology of kingship, and thus functioned as a form of symbolic capital in the production of legitimate authority (24). Consequently, the adoption of this administrative tradition elevated the Seljuks from a purely military-tribal force to

a political state with a recognized structure in the Islamic world, thereby facilitating the social and institutional acceptance of their rule.

The administrative structure of the Seljuk state was organized around institutions such as the vizierate, financial administration, chancery, supervisory offices, and military administration (12). Among these institutions, the vizierate held a distinguished position, as the vizier, in addition to supervising executive affairs, played a central role in coordinating military power, bureaucratic organization, and political legitimacy. In practice, the vizier functioned as the political architect of the state, bridging the gap between the tribal structure of the Seljuks and the centralized Iranian administrative system. Accordingly, the competence, status, and influence of viziers became determining factors in the level of authority and legitimacy of the government (11).

During the early reign of Tughril Beg (1040–1063), the political inexperience of the ruler led to a more prominent role for viziers in the administration of the state. Amid al-Mulk al-Kunduri was among those viziers who, in addition to organizing executive affairs, played an active role in diplomacy and in regulating religious and political relations, thereby contributing to the strengthening of both political and religious legitimacy in the Seljuk state (25, 26). This period demonstrates that the vizierate, from its inception, played a role extending beyond administrative management and was instrumental in consolidating royal authority.

With the rise of Nizam al-Mulk, the institution of the vizierate reached the peak of its institutional and political function within the Seljuk state. Through the reorganization of the bureaucratic structure, the regulation of financial and military systems, and the establishment of a disciplined army, he contributed significantly to the consolidation of centralized power. Moreover, by articulating concepts such as the divine origin of royal authority, the necessity of political centralization, bureaucratic justice, and the connection between kingship and religious law, he strengthened the theoretical foundations of Seljuk legitimacy (27, 28). In the *Siyasatnama*, the vizier is explicitly described as the deputy of the king, and his role in governing the state, maintaining order, and consolidating political legitimacy is emphasized (13). This perspective elevated the position of the vizierate from an administrative institution to a central pillar of legitimate authority.

Following the assassination of Nizam al-Mulk, the weakness of his successors and the intensification of court rivalries gradually led to a shift in the center of power from bureaucracy to military commanders. This transformation challenged both the institutional cohesion of the state and its political legitimacy (11, 25). During the reign of Sultan Muhammad ibn Malikshah (1082–1092), some capable viziers were able to partially restore the authority of the vizierate; however, the influence and pressure of military forces remained a significant obstacle to the full consolidation of bureaucratic power (11, 25).

In general, the experience of the Seljuk state demonstrates that the institution of the vizierate was not merely an administrative tool but rather a strategic pillar of legitimacy and political stability. The authority of capable viziers contributed to the centralization of power, the coherence of bureaucracy, and the strengthening of royal legitimacy, whereas the weakening of the vizierate and the increasing intervention of military forces led to the destabilization of central authority and a decline in political legitimacy. From this perspective, the function of the vizierate in the Seljuk state depended on a combination of the personal competence of the vizier, the support of the ruler, and the ability to manage interactions with military forces—factors whose fluctuation directly affected the stability and legitimacy of the Seljuk dynasty.

Intellectual–Ideological Legitimization

Intellectual–ideological legitimization in the Seljuk state refers to an organized process through which the theoretical and ideological foundations of kingship were formed and consolidated beyond mere military power. This type of legitimacy involved the integration of ancient Iranian political concepts, Islamic teachings, and the practical requirements of governance, through which the Seljuk monarchy was elevated from the level of military domination to that of an accepted and legitimate political order. Within this framework, viziers—particularly Nizam al-Mulk—played a central role by guiding the reproduction of theoretical foundations and employing practical instruments and symbolic forms, thereby creating the conditions necessary for the consolidation of kingship, the establishment of religious legitimacy, and the linkage of government with the cultural and historical traditions of Iran.

Reproduction of the Theoretical Foundations of Seljuk Political Legitimacy

One of the most fundamental functions of governments in the process of consolidating and sustaining authority is the active construction of intellectual–ideological legitimacy. The Seljuks, as a Turkic power emerging from a tribal–military structure, initially lacked a coherent and institutionalized theoretical foundation capable of elevating their domination from mere military conquest to a recognized and legitimate form of governance. Therefore, the necessity of redefining Seljuk kingship within the framework of the established intellectual traditions of Iranian–Islamic society created the conditions for bureaucratic and intellectual viziers, particularly Nizam al-Mulk, to become the principal architects of this legitimizing process.

In this context, the conscious utilization of the Iranian political tradition assumed a central role. This tradition, which concerned models of governance and political legitimacy in pre-Islamic Iran, was based on the relationship between political authority, cosmic order, and social structure. Its continuity, even after the advent of Islam, was preserved through historical and literary texts, allowing it to remain a valid source for explaining political legitimacy (29). The persistence of these concepts enabled Islamic governments established in Iran, including the Seljuks, to represent their authority in a familiar and socially accepted framework.

One of the most fundamental concepts of this tradition was the idea of divine royal glory, a sacred force and divine gift bestowed upon the ruler, rendering him worthy of kingship. This concept, rooted in earlier Iranian imperial traditions, was based on the belief that earthly order reflected cosmic order, and that the king, endowed with this divine favor, acted as its mediator (30). Through literary and historical works, this concept continued to shape the political consciousness of Iranian society even after the Islamic period (31, 32).

When the Seljuks entered Iran in the eleventh century, they encountered a society in which these concepts were deeply embedded. Practical experience in governance demonstrated that reliance solely on military power, or even on the support of the Abbasid Caliphate, was insufficient for consolidating rule. Rather, stable acceptance required redefining kingship within the enduring framework of Iranian–Islamic concepts. Consequently, the idea of divine royal glory was reinterpreted in connection with Islamic notions such as divine trust and the representation of divine authority on earth, thereby ensuring compatibility with both Iranian tradition and Islamic teachings (10).

In this reinterpretation, divine royal glory was no longer regarded as an inherent and hereditary attribute, but rather as a bestowed and conditional gift dependent upon the moral and functional qualities of the ruler. In Seljuk political thought, especially in the works of Nizam al-Mulk, the ideal ruler was one endowed with reason, justice, and administrative competence, capable of establishing security, order, and prosperity. This conceptual

transformation enabled the reconciliation of Iranian political tradition with the Islamic intellectual environment, in which attributing divine attributes to individuals outside prophetic or saintly categories was subject to limitations (17, 25).

Within this framework, the role of Nizam al-Mulk in formulating and disseminating the Seljuk model of political legitimacy was central. The *Siyasatnama* can be regarded as the most important ideological text of the Seljuk state, in which the theory of the ideal king, as the core of Iranian political thought, was reformulated. At the beginning of this work, it is asserted that in every age, God selects an individual and equips him with the qualities necessary for kingship so that the source of the world and the well-being of the people may be secured through him (13). This statement clearly emphasizes the divine selection of the ruler and his role in establishing order and justice, presenting divine favor as a sign of suitability for rule.

From Nizam al-Mulk's perspective, the institution of kingship constituted the most important pillar of the political structure. He regarded a powerful monarchy not as a source of despotism, but as the guarantor of justice, security, and social order, asserting that it is under the authority of the ruler that disorder is contained and the prosperity of the world is ensured (13). Accordingly, he emphasized the necessity of concentrating power in the hands of the ruler and controlling the influence of subordinates, since the excessive empowerment of officials would undermine royal authority and disrupt social order.

An important implication of this theoretical framework was the relative marginalization of the caliphate in the construction of political legitimacy. In the *Siyasatnama*, the caliphate is not presented as the primary source of legitimacy, and references to caliphs are largely historical or moral in nature. This meaningful silence reflects the view that the political function of the caliphate in Iran had weakened and that, in order to prevent disorder and fragmentation, real power needed to be concentrated in the hands of the ruler (23). Within this perspective, even in the absence or weakness of the caliphate, a strong monarchy could maintain political order.

The distinction between the Iranian political model and the caliphal model becomes evident at this point. In Sunni jurisprudential thought, the legitimacy of the caliph is derived from allegiance, designation, or dominance, along with the implementation of religious law; whereas in the Iranian political tradition, the ruler, by virtue of possessing divine royal glory, is regarded as the embodiment of order and justice and does not require an intermediary to attain legitimacy (23). Thus, by reviving this ancient source of legitimacy, Nizam al-Mulk made it possible to present the Seljuk state as legitimate without full dependence on the institution of the caliphate.

This theoretical framework did not remain confined to the realm of ideas but was also reflected in the official discourse and administrative documents of the Seljuk state. During the reign of Sultan Sanjar, the ruler was explicitly described as the shadow of God on earth and as a legitimate holder of authority. In correspondence attributed to the vizier of Sanjar, opposition to the ruler was equated with deviation from divine command, and the ruler was described as a manifestation of divine authority over the people (9). Similarly, in official decrees, it is stated that God entrusted sovereignty to the ruler and elevated him to a position of divine representation on earth (33).

In conclusion, intellectual–ideological legitimization in the Seljuk period was a conscious and structured process through which viziers—particularly Nizam al-Mulk—succeeded in elevating Seljuk kingship from the level of military power to that of a system supported by a coherent theoretical and ideological foundation. By integrating Iranian political concepts, Islamic teachings, and the practical requirements of governance, they established a framework that enabled the effective use of institutional, religious, and cultural instruments of legitimacy, which will be examined in subsequent sections.

Practical Instruments and Symbols of Legitimization

One of the most important dimensions of legitimization in the Seljuk government was the deliberate use of practical instruments and symbolic forms that enabled the transfer of power from a purely military level to a recognized and legitimate political order. Within this framework, viziers—especially Nizam al-Mulk—played a central role by designing and strategically employing various instruments that positioned Seljuk rulers on a path toward the consolidation of power, religious legitimacy, and integration with the cultural and historical traditions of Iran.

One of these instruments was the use of historical lineage and genealogy. The Seljuks, as a Turkic power emerging from a tribal–military structure, initially faced accusations of being outsiders upon their arrival in Iran. Therefore, in order to gain acceptance among elites and the broader population, it was necessary to present a credible and legitimate narrative of their origins and to associate themselves with the traditions and rulers of ancient Iran. The Seljuks belonged to the Oghuz Turks, specifically the Qiniq branch, one of the major tribes of Central Asia (25). This group migrated in the fourth century of the Islamic calendar to the borders of the Samanid domains in Transoxiana, marking a turning point in their history, as they moved away from the sphere of steppe politics and came into direct contact with Iranian culture and Islamic civilization (34, 35).

Nizam al-Mulk, drawing upon Iranian bureaucratic experience and long-standing traditions, facilitated the integration of the Seljuks into Iranian society and, in his *Siyasatnama*, presented Seljuk rulers as descending from a dual foundation of kingship and hereditary leadership linked to the lineage of Afrasiyab (13). This act was not merely historical but constituted a strategic instrument of legitimization, particularly at a time when the Abbasid Caliphate had lost much of its effective power. By constructing a genealogy associated with Afrasiyab, the Seljuks portrayed themselves as successors to earlier ruling traditions. Historical accounts emphasize this claim, noting that the Seljuks traced their lineage through multiple generations to Afrasiyab (36). Scholars have also observed that the Seljuks invoked pre-Islamic Iranian traditions and royal models to strengthen their legitimacy and present themselves as continuators of earlier dynasties (14). In the *Siyasatnama*, this genealogical construction is explicitly connected to the moral and political qualifications of the ruler, emphasizing that kingship is both inherited and conditioned by virtue and competence (13). Thus, the use of lineage not only reinforced intellectual and ideological legitimacy but also contributed to the concentration of power and the reduction of internal opposition.

Another important instrument was the selection and use of royal titles and honorifics. Titles reflected the awareness of the importance of linking past and present and functioned as tools for reinforcing political authority and religious legitimacy. Nizam al-Mulk emphasized that titles should be carefully assigned according to rank, as inaccuracies in their use could disrupt social and administrative order (13). The Seljuks pursued two key objectives in adopting titles: invoking religious legitimacy and reflecting the heritage of earlier Iranian political traditions. Titles emphasizing religious authority were combined with those evoking earlier royal traditions, thereby creating a symbolic synthesis of political and cultural legitimacy (6, 26, 37, 38). In the reign of Alp Arslan, composite titles were employed that reflected both religious affiliation and earlier traditions of kingship, demonstrating a deliberate effort to unify these elements within a single framework of authority (38).

This dual strategy, particularly under the guidance of Nizam al-Mulk, resulted in the formation of a combined identity that simultaneously secured legitimacy through religious authority and fostered cultural and historical continuity among Iranian subjects. Through detailed attention to the historical and functional significance of titles,

Nizam al-Mulk demonstrated that their use was not merely ceremonial but served as a mechanism for reinforcing legitimacy, consolidating power, and institutionalizing monarchy (13).

Coronation ceremonies and royal rituals constituted another major instrument of practical legitimization. These ceremonies preserved many elements of earlier Iranian traditions while incorporating religious practices. Coronation represented not only the formal beginning of kingship but also a crucial mechanism for affirming the ruler's position within the political order. Seljuk crowns often incorporated symbolic motifs associated with power and divine favor, reflecting continuity with earlier traditions of royal symbolism (39). The coronation ceremony itself combined Iranian and religious elements, as the ruler was formally invested with authority and recognized in religious contexts through public declarations that affirmed his legitimacy (40).

These practices not only strengthened the ruler's legitimacy but also contributed to the formalization of aristocratic culture and court rituals, establishing enduring patterns for subsequent periods of Iranian history. Thus, coronation in the Seljuk period functioned not merely as symbolic ceremony but as a strategic instrument for political legitimization and the consolidation of a distinct Iranian–Islamic model of governance.

The principle of justice constituted another central component of practical legitimacy. This concept, deeply rooted in earlier traditions, was reinterpreted within a religious framework and became a foundational element of political continuity. In earlier Iranian thought, the legitimacy of rulers was closely tied to their capacity to uphold justice, and injustice was seen as a cause of political decline (30, 41). In the Seljuk period, Nizam al-Mulk reformulated this tradition within a religious discourse, emphasizing justice as a necessary condition for the continuity of the state and asserting that the stability of rule depended on the fair treatment of subjects (13). Similarly, al-Ghazali identified the just ruler as the most favored among God's creation and considered injustice a source of corruption affecting both religion and governance (17).

The practical realization of justice was facilitated through institutions such as grievance courts, which were further organized during the reign of Malikshah under the supervision of Nizam al-Mulk. These institutions were responsible for addressing public complaints, supervising endowments, and ensuring the implementation of justice (22, 26, 42).

In addition, the tradition of counsel and moral guidance served an important ideological function. In the *Siyasatnama*, Nizam al-Mulk emphasized guiding the ruler through historical narratives, instructive anecdotes, and references to the experiences of earlier rulers, highlighting the importance of justice and ethical conduct (43). This intellectual and symbolic instrument integrated political authority with moral responsibility and divine legitimacy, linking Seljuk kingship with the broader heritage of Iranian political thought (13).

In conclusion, the practical instruments and symbols of legitimization in the Seljuk period included the construction of historical lineage, the use of royal titles and honorifics, coronation ceremonies and court rituals, the implementation of justice through bureaucratic and judicial institutions, and the guidance of political authority through ethical counsel. Together, these instruments, under the leadership of Nizam al-Mulk, enabled the consolidation of Seljuk kingship, the integration of Iranian political tradition with religious teachings, and the establishment of a stable, legitimate, and widely accepted system of governance.

Institutional–Bureaucratic Legitimization

In this study, the term “institutional–bureaucratic” is used to analyze the organizational structures and administrative system of the Seljuk period. It does not refer to modern European bureaucracy, but rather emphasizes the role of institutions and administrative organization in consolidating political legitimacy.

The vizierate in the Seljuk state, until the end of the reign of Sultan Muhammad ibn Malikshah, was characterized by delegated authority. This meant that the vizier, acting on behalf of the ruler but with broad discretion, managed administrative and governmental affairs. As the head of the central administration, the vizier distributed responsibilities among four principal departments: financial administration, supervisory offices, chancery, and military administration. However, the position of the vizier was always influenced by the power of military commanders, and the strengthening of these commanders often led to the instability of the vizier's position (1, 3).

The responsibilities of the vizier were extensive, allowing decision-making across multiple domains, and in some cases his authority approached that of the ruler. The administrative structure of the Seljuk vizierate showed considerable similarity to earlier Islamic administrative systems, and the influence of the vizier in appointing and dismissing officials varied. Although appointments were formally issued by the ruler, the vizier's role was typically advisory rather than coercive. In addition to leading the central administration, the vizier participated in judicial oversight institutions and supervised financial and military departments, including the regulation of public revenues and expenditures (5).

Among Seljuk viziers, Amid al-Mulk al-Kunduri and Nizam al-Mulk represent prominent examples of administrative skill and political influence. Amid al-Mulk, due to his mastery of administrative affairs and the trust placed in him by both the ruler and the caliph, played an important role in managing governmental affairs and in shaping judicial appointments (42). Nizam al-Mulk emphasized the independence of the vizierate and the hierarchical structure of administration, limiting the influence of court factions and organizing the main departments of government in a systematic manner (5, 13). He also administered institutions responsible for oversight and information gathering, and structured the Seljuk territories into a system of centrally governed and subordinate provinces (11, 13).

In the administration of provinces, Nizam al-Mulk divided territories into two categories: directly governed provinces under central authority and subordinate regions that remained accountable to officials appointed by the central administration. The purpose of this division was to prevent the concentration of power in a single individual and to limit the autonomy of local authorities (13). As a result, Seljuk territories, particularly during his long tenure, were incorporated into a centralized administrative system, with provincial governors functioning as representatives of the central authority (11).

Nizam al-Mulk also implemented reforms in the system of land assignments granted to military officials. This system, used to provide income for military forces and to manage state lands, was placed under the supervision of the central administration. Military commanders and landholders were appointed and dismissed through administrative channels, ensuring that both centrally governed and assigned territories remained subject to a unified administrative framework (33). These measures enhanced central control and strengthened the overall authority of the Seljuk state.

Later viziers, including Muayyid al-Mulk and Saad al-Mulk, contributed to maintaining administrative coherence and strengthening the independence of the vizierate through effective management of governmental departments (44). The role of Saad al-Mulk in consolidating the rule of Sultan Muhammad was particularly significant. During periods of political unrest and instability, he ensured the continuity and stability of the monarchy. The administrative structure, which had become disordered under previous rulers, was reorganized under his leadership, and financial and administrative systems were restored. These actions not only reestablished administrative order but also created conditions for temporary stability and relative political cohesion (42).

Another prominent figure was Mujīr al-Dawla, an influential vizier during the Seljuk period and one of the early ministers of Sultan Sanjar in the region of Khorasan. Before attaining the position of vizier, he had acquired experience within the administrative system. Historical accounts indicate that he rose through bureaucratic ranks and eventually assumed a leading role in the administration, demonstrating competence and administrative capability that contributed to his prominence (12, 45).

Another notable but controversial figure was a vizier who served in different periods under several Seljuk rulers. In his first period of office, he attempted to centralize authority and unify administrative structures across eastern and western territories. However, these policies faced strong resistance from local administrators, military elites, and longstanding regional divisions, ultimately leading to their failure (16, 37). In his second period of office, supported directly by the ruler and granted broader authority, his influence expanded to western regions. Nevertheless, his governing methods, which relied on suppressing opposition, confiscating the property of elite families, and limiting the power of military figures, resulted in administrative instability and increased distrust toward the office of the vizierate (46).

In conclusion, Seljuk viziers, through the management and supervision of administrative institutions and the preservation of the autonomy of the vizierate, played a crucial role in institutional–bureaucratic legitimization. Their performance represented a combination of administrative expertise, political influence, and institutional management, which strengthened the stability and cohesion of the Seljuk government and prepared the ground for further developments in areas such as relations with the caliphate, succession, and military and financial organization.

Interaction with the Caliphate: The Political–Ceremonial Dimension

One of the most important responsibilities of Seljuk viziers was to perform a dual role as simultaneous representatives of both the ruler and the caliph. This role extended beyond administrative duties and functioned as a key instrument for legitimizing Seljuk kingship. By occupying an intermediary position between the two centers of power, the vizier reinforced royal decisions with the religious and political legitimacy of the caliphate while also expanding his own influence. This position was particularly significant in interactions with the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad, as the vizier could manage relations between the ruler and the caliph and thereby secure the political and religious support necessary for stabilizing Seljuk authority.

A prominent example of this role is found in the actions of Amid al-Mulk al-Kunduri during the reign of Tughril Beg. During the entry of Seljuk forces into Baghdad, he skillfully prevented conflict and destruction in the capital of the caliphate and established favorable relations between the Seljuks and the caliphate (7). These actions strengthened the legitimacy of Tughril's rule without leading to direct confrontation with the caliph.

Between the years 1046 and 1048, communications between the caliph al-Qa'im and Tughril were largely conducted through their respective viziers, including Amid al-Mulk, demonstrating the centrality of ministerial mediation in political relations (2). The granting of honorific titles and participation in formal reception ceremonies reflected the combination of political and ceremonial dimensions in the relationship between the monarchy and the caliphate (47).

Amid al-Mulk also contributed to regulating financial and administrative relations between the Seljuk ruler and the caliph, establishing a framework that defined revenues and rights and effectively placed the caliphate within the

sphere of Seljuk political authority (2). This example illustrates that the vizierate was not merely an executive institution but also an effective instrument for producing and stabilizing political and institutional legitimacy.

During the vizierate of Nizam al-Mulk, the management of relations between the monarchy and the caliphate was further systematized. When Alp Arslan refrained from traveling to Baghdad, Nizam al-Mulk assumed responsibility for maintaining a stable balance between the ruler and the caliph. Through his control over diplomatic relations, he established a cooperative and peaceful interaction that strengthened the political and symbolic legitimacy of Seljuk rule (42).

To secure the favor of the caliph, political measures such as dynastic marriages and diplomatic exchanges were arranged, and the caliph in turn conferred titles upon the Seljuk ruler that reinforced his authority (2). Nizam al-Mulk also influenced appointments within the caliphal administration and used networks of alliance to safeguard Seljuk political interests (46).

In 1086, Sultan Malikshah and Nizam al-Mulk entered Baghdad and presented valuable gifts to the caliph, after which administrative authority over territories of the caliphate was effectively transferred to the Seljuk ruler, and the vizier received ceremonial honors (2). These actions demonstrate the consolidation of political authority and the legitimizing role of ceremonial recognition in the relationship between the Seljuk state and the caliphate.

Seljuk viziers were also representatives of the monarchy in ceremonial contexts. Their participation in receptions, formal greetings, declarations of allegiance to new caliphs, and attendance at official ceremonies reinforced the symbolic legitimacy of the monarchy. Historical examples indicate that viziers regularly attended such events, representing the ruler and affirming political hierarchy through ceremonial presence (42).

Political marriages, managed by viziers, constituted another important instrument of legitimization. Viziers such as Amid al-Mulk and Nizam al-Mulk arranged and supervised marriages between ruling families, thereby strengthening ties between the Seljuk monarchy and the caliphate. These alliances served both diplomatic and symbolic purposes, reinforcing political authority and mutual recognition (25, 35).

Nizam al-Mulk continued this strategy by organizing marriages that linked the Seljuk ruling house with the caliphal family, using diplomatic pressure and negotiation to ensure their acceptance. He also secured Seljuk interests through careful appointments and the use of familial alliances within the administrative elite (11, 42).

Later rulers maintained this practice, arranging marriages with members of the caliphal family as a means of reinforcing political alliances and mutual legitimacy (48). These marriages symbolized the connection between the two major centers of power and functioned as a strategic instrument for stabilizing political relations.

Viziers were also responsible for introducing military commanders and court elites to the caliph, thereby maintaining the hierarchical structure of authority and reinforcing the legitimacy of the monarchy. In formal gatherings, the vizier acted as the representative of the ruler, presenting officials and confirming their status within the political order (42).

In conclusion, the historical experience demonstrates that Seljuk viziers were not only administrative and political intermediaries but also agents of ceremonial legitimacy in relations with the caliphate. Through the management of diplomatic relations, political marriages, and formal ceremonies, they played a decisive role in consolidating the monarchy and strengthening institutional–bureaucratic legitimacy.

Control of Succession and Transfer of Power

In the Seljuk state, the transfer of power and the designation of a successor constituted one of the most sensitive stages in preserving political stability, and the institution of the vizierate played a central role in this process. In addition to administrative and bureaucratic management, viziers often assumed responsibility for consultation and decision-making in critical matters of succession. A clear example is the testament of Alp Arslan to Nizam al-Mulk. Before his death, he entrusted the affairs of the state and the prevention of disorder to the judgment and competence of the vizier and designated his son Malikshah as heir apparent (42).

Likewise, when Tughril died, Amid al-Mulk al-Kunduri placed Sulayman ibn Dawud, the ruler's brother, on the throne, although this action faced opposition from military commanders (46). Another example is Shihab al-Din Mahmud al-Nishaburi, the vizier of Sultan Sulayman, whose management and political judgment led to the issuance of a decree concerning rule and the appointment of Malik Arslan as heir in order to resolve political difficulties (42).

In the case of Malikshah, when his father Alp Arslan was killed in 1072 during the campaign toward Transoxiana, Nizam al-Mulk, through political wisdom and careful judgment, prepared the ground for Malikshah's succession (49). He sent an envoy to the caliph al-Qa'im in order to secure a caliphal decree confirming Malikshah's rule, and in the early part of 1073 the Abbasid caliph issued this confirmation (47).

These examples demonstrate that Seljuk viziers, beyond their administrative and bureaucratic functions, played a decisive role in organizing the transfer of power and containing succession crises. Through this role, the stability of the state and the continuity of royal legitimacy were preserved.

Management of Military Affairs

The management of military affairs was one of the most sensitive and decisive arenas in which Seljuk viziers contributed to the process of institutional-bureaucratic legitimization. Within the Seljuk structure of power, the vizier occupied a distinguished rank immediately after the ruler and often accompanied him on military campaigns. Although viziers belonged to the scholarly and administrative class, especially in the early phases of the Seljuk state many of them participated directly in military operations and assumed responsibility for the organization, direction, and utilization of armed forces. In later periods, this situation changed, and the military role of viziers gradually shifted from direct field command to supervision and military policy making (5, 11).

From an institutional perspective, the military administration constituted the principal instrument through which the vizierate organized military affairs. This department, directed by the officer responsible for the army, was charged with preparing troops, organizing equipment, and regulating military affairs before campaigns (42, 50). The significance of this institution lay in the fact that it enabled military forces to operate not merely on the basis of tribal ties but within an administrative order supervised by the central state.

The highest point of this institutionalization of military affairs can be observed during the vizierate of Nizam al-Mulk. By creating a permanent and professional army, he sought to transform military power from a scattered and tribal force into a coherent, lasting, and state-dependent institution. This army, composed of slaves, mercenaries, and organized troops, gradually replaced tribal forces and reduced the influence of independent military commanders (42). In this way, the vizierate was able, through military organization, to strengthen the ruler's authority and reproduce the legitimacy of the state in the form of durable order and security.

However, the military role of Nizam al-Mulk was not limited to structural reform. In practice, he also stood beside the ruler and participated directly in important campaigns of Alp Arslan, including the war against Qutalmish in 1057 and the conquest of Fars in 1060 (21). In the battle of Manzikert as well, his role as political adviser and moral supporter of the ruler was notable (42, 51). This active presence consolidated the position of the vizier as the figure connecting military power with bureaucratic rationality.

Nizam al-Mulk also sought, through the proposal of strategic bases and continuous supervision over the permanent army, to coordinate the land assignment system with the administrative structure and to prevent commanders holding land assignments from becoming independent forces (13). Despite these efforts, the full institutionalization of the military–administrative structure faced limitations. Conflicts of interest between bureaucrats and military commanders, together with the absence of a unified collective authority within the vizierate, meant that the Seljuk state retained strong tendencies toward a military and personalized structure of power (44).

After Nizam al-Mulk, some viziers continued to play roles in military affairs, but these roles became increasingly dependent on political conditions and court rivalries. Mu'ayyid al-Mulk, the son of Nizam al-Mulk, in addition to bureaucratic experience, possessed notable military capacity. He led troops in military operations and achieved important victories that strengthened his standing as a powerful vizier (26, 35, 45).

During the internal wars between Barkiyaruq and Sultan Muhammad, viziers also appeared in military alignments. In these conflicts, ministerial participation reflected the politicization of military functions, and in one of these struggles Mu'ayyid al-Mulk was captured (25, 46). These examples show that in periods of succession crisis, the military role of viziers could be reduced from an institutional instrument to a factor in political competition.

Saad al-Mulk, the vizier of Sultan Muhammad, provides another example of the connection between the vizierate and military power. Through political strategy, he stabilized the rule of Sultan Muhammad, and by confronting major military threats he removed some of the most serious challenges to the state (42). His actions against dissident groups were likewise intended to reinforce state authority and maintain political order (42).

In later periods, viziers such as Diya al-Mulk Ahmad also participated in military operations. His campaign, undertaken by order of Sultan Muhammad against the Ismailis of Alamut, although unsuccessful because of environmental conditions, nevertheless demonstrates the continuing military role of the vizierate in preserving security and political order (35, 37, 46).

During the reign of Sultan Sanjar as well, viziers remained active in warfare and the suppression of unrest. Fakhr al-Mulk ibn Nizam al-Mulk, in addition to his ministerial office, took part in Sanjar's battles and played an important role in military engagements (25, 26). Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Fakhr al-Mulk also played a significant role in encouraging Sanjar to undertake campaigns that expanded the military authority of the state (25, 52).

By contrast, the experience of another later vizier reflects the decline of institutional legitimization in the military sphere. By relying on suppression, confiscation of property, and the reassignment of land grants, he attempted to limit the influence of military commanders, but these measures led less to the strengthening of the vizierate than to increased oppression, instability, and the personalization of power (46). This period presents a clear example of the rupture between military power and the institutional legitimacy of the Seljuk state.

Iranian bureaucrats, drawing on their historical experience, sought to direct and control military power. With the arrival of Turkic dynasties such as the Ghaznavids and Seljuks, Iranian administrators, while accepting military authority, assumed responsibility for parts of political governance and attempted to limit the role of military forces in order to preserve established legitimacy (4).

In conclusion, the management of military affairs in the Seljuk state constituted one of the most important arenas of institutional–bureaucratic legitimization. Wherever the vizierate succeeded in directing military power within an administrative framework, the authority of the ruler was strengthened and the legitimacy of the state was consolidated. Wherever this balance was disrupted, the monarchy moved toward the personalization of power and the weakening of institutions. This process clearly shows that the role of viziers in the military sphere extended far beyond warfare itself and formed an integral part of the logic of political legitimacy in the Seljuk state.

Financial and Economic Management

One of the most fundamental arenas in which Seljuk viziers played a decisive role in consolidating and sustaining political authority was the management of financial and economic affairs. In the political structure of the Seljuk state, which was based on the interaction between military power and administrative order, the organization of financial resources was not only a prerequisite for governing but also a key element in legitimizing kingship. Viziers, in addition to possessing expertise in accounting and financial administration, were responsible for supervising the main sources of state revenue, including administrative taxes, tribute from subordinate states, and other imperial incomes, while also planning and financing the expenses of the administrative apparatus, particularly the army (6). Success in this domain strengthened the trust of the ruler, the military, and society, and prevented financial crises, social discontent, and political unrest.

From an institutional perspective, the financial administration constituted the most important instrument of the vizierate in controlling the economic structure of the empire. The chief financial officer, acting as the executive arm of the vizier, was responsible for collecting taxes, regulating expenditures, and ensuring the steady circulation of financial resources (11). This precise administrative oversight enabled the central government to exercise authority effectively and provided governmental decisions with practical support and legitimacy. Thus, the legitimacy of the state derived not only from military strength but also from its capacity to manage economic resources in an orderly and efficient manner.

In the early period of the Seljuk state, Amid al-Mulk al-Kunduri represents a clear example of the connection between financial management and political legitimacy. By establishing an emerging administrative structure during the period of Tughril's conquests, he coordinated the financing of military campaigns with the organization of revenue sources and even played a role in determining financial allocations related to the caliph (26, 42). Historical accounts emphasize that he exercised considerable independence in managing financial and administrative affairs, reflecting the trust placed in the institution of the vizierate and its importance in consolidating state authority (53).

The peak of this process can be observed during the vizierate of Nizam al-Mulk. Through restructuring and organizing the administrative system, he strengthened the financial role of the vizierate in supporting the central government. He regarded the vizierate as the highest office after kingship and believed that the actual administration of the state rested in the hands of the vizier. The establishment of a permanent army, the organization of military personnel, the development of land assignment policies, and the precise allocation of financial resources were among the instruments that strengthened central authority and restrained autonomous and tribal forces (1, 13).

The practical function of these policies is evident in cases such as the regular payment of soldiers through land assignments, the resolution of financial crises within the army, and the participation of the vizier alongside the ruler in collecting revenues from distant regions. These measures demonstrate that the vizier was not only a manager of financial resources but also a representative of the authority and reach of the central government (13, 26).

Nizam al-Mulk also reorganized earlier forms of land assignment by adapting them to the political, social, and economic conditions of the Seljuk state, thereby giving this system a clear military function. As a result, the Seljuk model of land assignment differed from earlier forms and contributed to the establishment of a more organized land-based military structure.

Viziers were also responsible for restraining the excessive demands of military forces and landholders and for advising the ruler in order to prevent financial abuses and political instability (25). In this framework, land assignment functioned as a dual instrument: on the one hand, it financed the army and administrative responsibilities, and on the other hand, it could operate as a form of tax exemption (54). The manner in which this instrument was employed had a direct impact on the stability or weakening of political authority.

During the vizierate of Nizam al-Din Abd al-Jalil, the conversion of private lands into state-controlled and assigned lands was carried out with the aim of concentrating resources in the hands of the central government (42). This policy not only contributed to financial stability but also conveyed a clear message of the dominance of central authority over dispersed local interests, thereby reinforcing political legitimacy.

In later periods, viziers such as Kamal al-Din Khazin and others attempted to restore public trust and legitimacy through financial reforms. By reducing commercial taxes, reforming tax collection methods, and publicly announcing these changes, they sought to improve economic conditions and public welfare (47). These measures, along with the elimination of financial abuses and the establishment of discipline in revenue collection, contributed significantly to reorganizing the financial structure of the state (5).

Efforts were also made to standardize currency and facilitate economic exchange, which represented an important step in strengthening economic stability and commercial activity (45). However, reliance on coercive measures such as confiscation of property, although effective in increasing revenue in the short term, ultimately led to public distrust and weakened the legitimacy of the government.

In conclusion, financial and economic management in the Seljuk state was not merely an administrative function but one of the principal instruments of institutional–bureaucratic legitimization. Through the regulation of resources, the application of administrative oversight, and the creation of balance among economic, military, and social interests, viziers strengthened the foundations of political authority. This demonstrates that the survival of the monarchy depended not only on military power but also on financial order and institutional effectiveness.

Religious–Cultural Legitimization

In the Seljuk polity, religion and government operated simultaneously, and the institution of the vizierate functioned as a stabilizing force within the framework of rule. Seljuk rulers employed religion as a principal instrument of legitimization. Religion was important not only in consolidating internal power but also in strengthening relations with the Abbasid Caliphate and reinforcing political legitimacy.

Before entering Iran, the Seljuks possessed religious and cultural roots shaped by the traditions of Central Asia. After entering the Islamic world, they adopted the Hanafi school and presented themselves as defenders of Sunni Islam (15, 55). This orientation formed the basis of their political legitimacy and their combined Turkic–Islamic identity. Instruments such as support for Sunni Islam and the Abbasid Caliphate, the establishment of the Nizamiyya schools, and engagement with Sufi figures made possible social integration and resistance against rival sectarian movements.

At the beginning of Seljuk rule, viziers often acted with marked religious partisanship. Tughril Beg, the first ruler, adhered to the Hanafi school, and his vizier, Amid al-Mulk al-Kunduri, acted with strong sectarian intensity, ordering public denunciations against certain religious groups and mobilizing Hanafis against Shafi'i circles (42, 47). This policy strengthened the political legitimacy of the government through the suppression of religious opponents, but it also forced many religious elites into migration.

The most prominent Seljuk vizier, Nizam al-Mulk, redirected religious policy toward the consolidation of Shafi'i–Ash'ari Sunni Islam and toward institutional organization. By founding Nizamiyya schools in Baghdad, Nishapur, and Balkh, he created a network of scholars and officials loyal to the regime, thereby reinforcing religious unity and political legitimacy (8, 26). Nizam al-Mulk also viewed intervention in caliphal affairs as an instrument for preserving social unity, and he often associated political and religious opponents with groups such as the Kharijites or the Ismailis (13, 40).

Viziers and rulers also suppressed religious and political opponents, including the Ismailis. Military action against their fortresses, carried out with the support of Sunni legal opinions, served as an example of legitimized coercion in defense of state authority (56, 57). Other ministers likewise combined religious action, the patronage of educational and charitable institutions, and measured suppression of adversaries in ways that strengthened both political and religious legitimacy (42, 44).

At the same time, Seljuk viziers maintained conditional tolerance toward more moderate groups such as Sufis and moderate Shi'i communities. Support for Sufi masters contributed to spiritual legitimacy and social calm, while the inclusion of Shi'i figures in administrative service reflected a pragmatic and deliberate engagement with religious diversity. For example, administrative appointments involving figures connected to earlier regional dynasties and Shi'i circles demonstrate that the Seljuk regime could incorporate such actors when this served broader political stability (42, 58). In later periods, Shi'i viziers also rose to high office (26, 42). This policy has been interpreted as a combination of tolerance and repression: tolerance so long as no threat to political domination existed, and repression whenever legitimacy or central authority appeared endangered (11).

Some Shi'i viziers, despite their personal religious commitments, observed justice and moderation and acted impartially in governing society (51, 59). They introduced reforms beneficial to Shi'i communities while simultaneously preserving political unity and stability (60). This approach demonstrates the importance of political intelligence among viziers in using religion as an instrument of legitimization.

Viziers also played an important role in consolidating political legitimacy through careful management of institutions and oversight of justice and adjudication. Figures such as Nizam al-Mulk and Amid al-Mulk supervised courts of grievances, influenced the appointment of judges and judicial officials, and at times heard public complaints on behalf of the ruler (11). The direct presence of the ruler in the hearing of grievances also enhanced the moral and political legitimacy of the government (13).

The establishment of the Nizamiyya schools by Nizam al-Mulk, in addition to their educational role, served as an instrument for training capable personnel for administration and the judiciary and for strengthening political and religious legitimacy (58, 61). Judges and legal scholars, acting as representatives of both ruler and caliph, guaranteed justice through decisions based on religious law and thereby legitimized the policies of the government (33). Vizierial support for scholars and supervision over endowments likewise created a durable network for reinforcing both religious and political legitimacy (5, 8).

In addition to religious and judicial policy, viziers strengthened the legitimacy of the government through charitable works and religious endowments. The dedication of lands, markets, bridges, reservoirs, caravanserais, and schools attracted the support of scholars and religious institutions while also generating public satisfaction (50, 62). The Nizamiyya schools, by training loyal religious and administrative elites, became symbols in the public mind of justice, piety, and public service (42).

The Seljuk period, from 1040 to 1194, marked a turning point in the development of educational and scholarly institutions in the Islamic world. Older forms such as mosques and elementary schools continued, while innovations such as the Nizamiyya institutions emerged. These schools not only trained loyal elites but also strengthened religious unity, enhanced bureaucratic cohesion, and facilitated resistance to the influence of the Ismailis and other rival groups (24, 55, 56, 63).

Viziers also contributed to legitimacy by reviving Iranian ceremonial traditions, strengthening the Persian language, and organizing the administrative apparatus through that language. In doing so, they enhanced both the administrative and cultural function of the state and stabilized the Iranian–Islamic identity of the regime. Support for the production of Persian scholarly and literary works, as well as court poetry, transformed language and artistic culture into instruments of cultural and political legitimacy (13, 17, 64-66).

Among the most important scientific and cultural initiatives of Seljuk viziers, especially Nizam al-Mulk, was the reform of the calendar during the reign of Malikshah. At the initiative of the vizier and by order of the ruler, astronomers and mathematicians, including Umar Khayyam, were assembled and an observatory was established in 1074. This measure, in addition to its scientific value, played an effective role in organizing administrative, financial, and religious affairs and in stabilizing the political order of the regime (46, 67).

In the same context, the establishment of the Nizamiyya schools and the creation of charitable foundations throughout the Seljuk domains demonstrate that viziers, by institutionalizing education and supporting public welfare, sought to connect religious knowledge, bureaucratic order, and political power (35, 44). This process contributed to the reproduction of legitimacy and the strengthening of governmental cohesion.

Conclusion

The institution of the vizierate in the Seljuk state played a central role in the consolidation and reproduction of political legitimacy. Viziers, beyond their executive and administrative responsibilities, functioned as intermediaries between the ruler, the bureaucratic system, and society, and through the combination of political knowledge, administrative expertise, and mastery of cultural and religious dynamics, they established a legitimate framework for governance. This role was evident both at the intellectual and ideological level and in institutional mechanisms and political rituals, transforming Seljuk kingship from a purely military and tribal power into a system supported by theoretical and social foundations.

By drawing upon Iranian political concepts and integrating them with Islamic teachings, viziers were able to present royal authority in a form that was acceptable to both elites and the broader population, thereby ensuring the independence and centralization of political power. At the same time, the reconstruction and organization of administrative institutions, the establishment of a centralized provincial system, and the supervision of financial and judicial structures provided practical and institutional instruments of legitimization that strengthened administrative cohesion and central authority. Concurrently, the management of relations with the Abbasid Caliphate and the use

of political ceremonies, dynastic alliances, and royal titles reinforced the symbolic and religious legitimacy of the monarchy and solidified the position of viziers as architects of legitimacy.

Accordingly, the performance of viziers, particularly Nizam al-Mulk, demonstrates that political legitimacy in the Seljuk state was the result of a deliberate integration of intellectual–ideological, institutional–bureaucratic, and religious–cultural dimensions. The institution of the vizierate constituted the principal pillar of this process and served as the foundation of cohesion, centralization of power, and governmental stability. Without this multidimensional mechanism and the active role of viziers, Seljuk kingship would not have attained theoretical legitimacy, and its political coherence and stability would have been severely undermined.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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