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The Role and Position of Armenian Representatives in the Political Sphere from the Constitutional Revolution to the End of the Reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi

1. Saeed. Haghighi¹ : Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History, ToH.C., Islamic Azad University, Torbat-e Heydarieh, Iran
2. Mohammad Ali. Alizade²*: Department of History & Civilization of Islamic Nations, Ma.C., Islamic Azad University, Mashhad, Iran
3. Mohammad Nabi. Salim³: Department of History, Sha.C., Islamic Azad University, Shahrood, Iran

*corresponding author's email: 0701461950@iau.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

The participation of religious minorities in Iran's political system following the Constitutional Revolution constitutes one of the most significant manifestations of the transformation of political thought and public law in contemporary Iran. Among these minorities, Armenians, as the country's most highly organized religious minority, not only participated in the Constitutional Movement but also, through their continuous representation in the National Consultative Assembly, played a role in certain aspects of the country's legislative process and political decision-making. Despite the significance of this subject, most existing studies have focused on the role of Armenians in the Constitutional Revolution, their cultural activities, or their social status, while comprehensive examination of the position of Armenian representatives in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres has received comparatively limited attention. The present study was conducted using a historical-analytical method and drawing on the records of the National Consultative Assembly, archival documents from various institutions, newspapers, books, and scholarly articles. The central research problem is to analyze the extent of the influence of Armenian representatives on developments in Iran from the Constitutional Revolution to the end of the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi and to assess their position in the interaction between the state and the Armenian community. The findings indicate that Armenian representatives, while defending the rights of the Armenian community, actively participated in numerous national issues, including legislation, education, economic development, administrative reforms, and the consolidation of modern political institutions. Nevertheless, the extent of their influence changed under the impact of the structure of political power and the process of state centralization, particularly during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi. Overall, Armenian representatives were not merely spokespersons for the demands of the Armenian community; rather, they played a role extending beyond that of representatives of a religious minority in the processes of state-building, the institutionalization of parliament, and the strengthening of national integration.

Keywords: Armenians, National Consultative Assembly, Constitutional Revolution, Reza Shah Pahlavi, religious minorities, parliamentary representatives



Introduction

The Iranian Constitutional Movement represents a turning point in the country's political history and the development of democracy, because the establishment of the National Consultative Assembly ushered the concept of political participation by citizens and social groups into a new phase. One of the most significant achievements of this transformation was the formal recognition of the participation of recognized religious minorities in the country's legislative structure. Among these minorities, the Armenian community occupied a distinctive position because of its historical background, cohesive social organization, and influential role in trade, industry, education, and international relations. The allocation of parliamentary seats to the Armenians of northern and southern Iran not only reflected recognition of the political rights of this community but also created the conditions for their participation in major national decision-making processes. Although numerous works have been published on the role of Armenians in the Constitutional Movement and on their cultural and economic activities, the performance of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly, as formal actors in the political arena, has received less comprehensive and analytical attention. Most studies have been limited to introducing political figures or recounting historical events and have seldom attempted to assess the extent to which Armenian representatives influenced Iran's political, social, cultural, and economic developments. Accordingly, the principal research gap addressed in the present study concerns analysis of the position of these representatives within the parliamentary institution and examination of their relationship with the state, the Armenian community, and other political forces in the country.

The present study seeks to answer the following question: What role did Armenian representatives play in Iran's political, social, cultural, and economic developments from the beginning of the Constitutional Revolution to the end of the reign of Reza Shah, and to what extent did they influence the country's legislative and policymaking processes? The research hypothesis is that Armenian representatives, while pursuing the demands of the Armenian community, also participated actively in many national issues; however, with the increasing concentration of power during the reign of Reza Shah, the influence of parliament, and consequently the role of these representatives, became more limited.

Methodologically, the present study is based on a historical-analytical approach. Under this method, historical data are first extracted from primary sources and then compared with the findings of recent scholarship. Thus, the final analysis relies neither solely on historical narratives nor exclusively on the interpretations of contemporary researchers; rather, it results from a comparative and critical evaluation of both categories of sources. This approach makes it possible to distinguish among historical reporting, historians' interpretations, and the analysis developed in the present study. The sources used in this article fall into three principal categories.

1. Primary sources include the proceedings of the National Consultative Assembly, documents held by the Documentation Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, records of the National Archives and Library of Iran, documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and contemporary newspapers, particularly *Ettela'at* and *Alik*. These sources provide direct information on elections, parliamentary activities, administrative correspondence, and the positions adopted by Armenian representatives and constitute the principal basis of the historical analysis.
2. Classical sources and historical works on the Constitutional Movement and modern Iranian history include such works as *The History of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, *The History of Iran's Constitutional*

Revolution, The Constitutional Crisis in Iran, and The Iranian Constitutional Revolution. These works provide the political and social context necessary for understanding the activities of Armenian representatives and make it possible to analyze their position within broader national developments.

3. Recent studies on the history of Armenians in Iran, the National Consultative Assembly, religious minorities, and the Armenian community include works that draw on documentary sources and modern historiographical approaches, thereby making it possible to critique and supplement earlier narratives and, through this process, provide a more comprehensive analysis of the role of Armenian representatives.

Theoretical Foundations and Framework

Examining the role and position of Armenian representatives in Iran's political, social, cultural, and economic developments requires an approach that moves beyond the mere description of historical events and analyzes the position of this group within the structure of power and the legislative institution. Accordingly, the theoretical basis of the present study rests on the concept of "the political participation of religious minorities in the state-building process." Within this approach, representatives of religious minorities are not regarded merely as spokespersons for their respective religious communities; rather, as members of the political elite, they also participate in shaping legislation, regulating state-society relations, and directing political and social transformations.

Within Iran's constitutional system, the National Consultative Assembly, as the country's most important legislative institution, created the conditions for the formal political participation of religious minorities. The allocation of parliamentary seats to Armenians, Zoroastrians, and Jews was not merely the granting of a political right; it also signified their acceptance within the formal structure of power. Consequently, the position of Armenian representatives cannot be assessed solely by introducing individual representatives or recounting parliamentary debates; rather, their degree of influence on legislation, interaction with the government, and defense of both the general public interest and the particular interests of the Armenian community must also be examined.

The principle of source criticism has been observed in analyzing the data. This means that no historical account is treated as incontrovertible fact merely because of its age or the reputation of its author. The credibility of each account is assessed on the basis of the date of composition, the author's temporal proximity to the event, access to information, political or intellectual affiliations, and comparison with other sources. Moreover, where discrepancies exist among official documents, press reports, and historians' narratives, different forms of evidence are compared in an effort to construct an account closer to historical reality. The temporal scope of the study extends from the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 to the end of the reign of Reza Shah in 1941, thereby encompassing both the beginning of the formal presence of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly and the conclusion of the first phase of modern state-building in Iran. The geographical scope covers Iran as a whole, with particular emphasis on the electoral constituencies of the Armenians of northern and southern Iran and their activities in the National Consultative Assembly. The thematic scope is limited to examining the performance of Armenian representatives in four areas—political, social, cultural, and economic—and avoids discussion of the general history of the Armenian community except where directly relevant to the subject of the article. On this basis, the present article seeks, through reliance on primary documents and critical analysis of recent scholarship, to provide a comprehensive account of the position of Armenian representatives within Iran's political structure and to demonstrate how they attempted to balance the defense of the rights of the Armenian community with participation in Iran's processes of state-building and legislation.

The present study is fundamentally based on the assumption that the position of Armenians in the National Consultative Assembly cannot be assessed solely through the study of laws and regulations; rather, a distinction must be drawn between the “legal recognition of rights” and the “practical realization of rights.” In many legal systems, legislation may recognize rights for particular social groups, while the practical realization of those rights remains contingent upon the structure of power, political institutions, state policies, and social conditions. Accordingly, the theoretical framework of this study is based on three axes—citizenship rights, multicultural citizenship, and historical institutionalism—in order to analyze the relationship among law, the National Consultative Assembly, and governmental conduct toward the Armenian community. (1, 2) Citizenship rights comprise a set of rights and obligations that individuals possess by virtue of citizenship and that the state is required to guarantee and protect. In addition to legal protection, these rights encompass political participation, security, freedom of religion, education, and equality before the law. From this perspective, citizenship is not merely a legal relationship between the individual and the state; it also reflects the degree of an individual’s actual participation in the political and social life of the community. Under Iran’s constitutional system, the concept of citizenship entered the structure of public law for the first time through the Constitution and its Supplement, and recognized religious minorities, including Armenians, acquired the right to representation in the National Consultative Assembly and participation in the legislative process. Therefore, examining the status of Armenians in this study essentially entails assessing the degree to which their citizenship rights were realized in the space between law and practice. (3, 4)

In explaining the citizenship rights of minorities, Will Kymlicka’s theory of multicultural citizenship constitutes one of the most appropriate theoretical frameworks. Kymlicka argues that genuine equality among citizens cannot be achieved solely through the recognition of individual rights; rather, in multicultural societies, group-differentiated rights must also be recognized in order to preserve the historical, cultural, and religious identities of minorities. In his view, disregarding cultural differences in the name of equality in practice results in structural discrimination against minorities. Democratic states must therefore facilitate political participation, the continuation of cultural institutions, and the preservation of minorities’ collective identities. (4, 5)

On the basis of this theory, the allocation of parliamentary seats to Armenians in the National Consultative Assembly may be regarded as an instance of group-differentiated rights intended to guarantee the political participation of the Armenian community in the structure of governance. Kymlicka nevertheless emphasizes that the mere recognition of rights in legislation is insufficient; these rights become meaningful only when cultural groups are also able to participate effectively in public decision-making and preserve their own cultural and educational institutions in practice. (1) Alongside the theory of multicultural citizenship, the historical-institutionalist approach also constitutes an analytical foundation of the present study. According to this approach, legal and political institutions acquire meaning within the context of historical developments, and their functioning depends on political conditions and the balance of power. From this perspective, although the Constitutional Constitution recognized the political rights of Armenians, the transformation of the power structure from the Constitutional era to the reign of Reza Shah also altered the manner in which those rights were implemented. The increasing concentration of power, strengthening of the bureaucracy, and declining autonomy of the National Consultative Assembly affected both the influence of Armenian representatives and the extent to which the Armenian community could benefit from its legally recognized rights. (6)

Accordingly, the central concept of this study is the “gap between legal recognition and the practical realization of rights.” Legal recognition refers to the rights provided for Armenians by the Constitutional Constitution, its

Supplement, and electoral laws, including the right to parliamentary representation, freedom to perform religious rites, and the operation of schools and religious associations. Practical realization refers to the extent to which the Armenian community actually enjoyed these rights within the context of the country's political and administrative developments. Thus, the primary analytical criterion in this article is not merely the existence of laws but the manner in which they were implemented in practice and the degree of congruence between citizenship rights expressly recognized by law and the social and political realities of the Constitutional era and the reign of Reza Shah. This approach enables a more precise analysis of the position of Armenian representatives and their role within Iran's political structure. (7, 8)

Review of the Literature

Although Armenians were among the first religious minorities to enjoy formal representation in Iran's National Consultative Assembly, existing scholarship has focused primarily on their role in the Constitutional Revolution, the social history of the Armenian community, or the legal structure governing religious minorities. Relatively few studies have independently compared the legal recognition of Armenian rights with their practical realization from the Constitutional Revolution to the end of Reza Shah's reign. Consequently, although the existing literature is of considerable historical and legal value, a significant analytical gap remains concerning the relationship among law, the parliamentary institution, and government practice with respect to Armenian citizenship rights.

Nazari (2019), in *Religious Minorities in the Iranian Parliament*, examines the participation of religious minorities in Iran's legislative institution from the Constitutional era to the contemporary period. The work provides a relatively comprehensive account of the legal position of religious minorities in parliament; however, because of its broad scope, its specific analysis of the performance of Armenian representatives and comparison of their status during the Constitutional era and the reign of Reza Shah remain limited. (9)

Jalali (2013), in *Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution*, examines the role of the Armenian community in the success of the Constitutional Revolution, the activities of Armenian associations, the participation of Dashnaktsutyun forces, and Armenian political involvement during the early years of constitutionalism. A major strength of this work lies in its use of historical documents and Persian- and Armenian-language sources concerning Armenian participation in the Constitutional Movement. Nevertheless, the study focuses more on Armenians' political role during the Revolution than on the legal position of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly and does not examine citizenship rights or the practical realization of those rights during the reign of Reza Shah. (10)

Manoukian (2011), in the article "A Study of Armenian Election Documents during the First Pahlavi Period," uses archival records to examine the conduct of elections for Armenian representatives, administrative correspondence, validation of credentials, and certain electoral disputes. The significance of this research lies in its use of lesser-known documentary sources; however, its scope is limited to the electoral process and does not analyze the parliamentary performance of Armenian representatives or the extent to which their legal rights were realized in the political, cultural, and social spheres. (11)

Houri Berberian, in her study of the role of Armenians in the Constitutional Revolution, analyzes the position of Armenian political forces, particularly the Dashnaktsutyun Party, in Iran's political developments. This research has made an important contribution to understanding the political role of Armenians, but it focuses on the years of the

Constitutional Revolution and does not trace the continuity or implementation of their legal rights during the reign of Reza Shah. (12)

Hovian (2001), in *Armenians of Iran*, introduces the history of the Armenian presence in Iran, their social structure, religious institutions, schools, cultural activities, and aspects of their political participation. This work is among the most important sources on the history of Iran's Armenian community, but its approach is primarily descriptive and social and does not independently analyze the relationship among Armenians' legal rights, the National Consultative Assembly, and government policies during the reign of Reza Shah. (13)

Abrahamian (1998), in *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, analyzes Iran's social and political structure and addresses the participation of religious minorities in the state-building process and modern political developments. Despite the importance of this work in explaining the broader historical context, its principal subject is not Armenian rights or the position of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly, and its discussion of Armenians appears within a broader analysis of Iranian society. (6)

Shojaei (1965), in *Members of the National Consultative Assembly across Twenty-One Legislative Terms: A Study in Political Sociology*, examines the social, professional, and political composition of parliamentary representatives from the perspective of political sociology. The study provides valuable information on the position of representatives of religious minorities, including Armenians, but focuses on the general structure of parliamentary representation and does not independently analyze Armenian representatives' specific rights or role. (14)

Overall, the literature review demonstrates that existing works have each addressed only part of the subject: some focus on the social history of Armenians, others on their role in the Constitutional Revolution, elections, the structure of parliament, or the rights of religious minorities. To date, however, no study has combined legislation, the proceedings of the National Consultative Assembly, archival records, and period newspapers to analyze the gap between the legal recognition of Armenian rights and their practical realization from the Constitutional Revolution to the end of Reza Shah's reign. The present study therefore seeks, by focusing on the performance of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly, to offer a comprehensive account of the relationship among citizenship rights, political participation, and practical realities during one of the most significant periods in modern Iranian history.

Foundations of Minority Rights in the Constitutional Constitution

The Constitutional Revolution should be regarded as the beginning of a transformation in Iranian public law because, with the adoption of the Constitution and its Supplement, the relationship between the state and citizens shifted from a traditional framework based on governmental will toward a system grounded in law. In this system, concepts such as equality before the law, the rights of the nation, public freedoms, and political participation were for the first time articulated in the form of codified legal rules. Although the Constitutional Constitution did not devote a separate chapter to the rights of religious minorities, its provisions concerning the rights of the nation created the legal foundation necessary for recognizing their position within the new governmental structure. (3) In the literature of public law, a minority does not merely refer to a group that is numerically smaller; rather, it denotes a group that, in addition to possessing a distinct identity, occupies a different position from the majority in terms of access to political, economic, and cultural power. From this perspective, during the Constitutional era, Iranian Armenians, while maintaining a distinct religious and cultural identity, entered the new legal order as one of the country's officially recognized minorities and for the first time obtained the opportunity to participate directly in the legislative

process. Nevertheless, possession of a legal status did not necessarily mean the full realization of citizenship rights, because actual enjoyment of rights also depended on how laws were implemented and on the performance of political institutions. (1) Citizenship rights in the modern sense comprise a set of civil, political, and cultural rights enjoyed by individuals by virtue of citizenship and whose implementation the state is obligated to guarantee. In addition to safeguarding individual freedoms, these rights include participation in public affairs, the right to vote and stand for election, freedom of religion, legal security, and equality before the law. Consequently, the position of Armenians in the National Consultative Assembly cannot be evaluated solely through examination of the Constitution; the extent to which they actually enjoyed these rights must also be investigated, since in many societies the gap between rights formally prescribed by law and rights exercised in practice constitutes one of the principal challenges confronting religious minorities. (8) Within this framework, Will Kymlicka's theory of multicultural citizenship maintains that genuine equality among citizens cannot be realized solely through the granting of individual rights; groups possessing distinct cultural and religious identities also require special rights in order to preserve their collective identity. In his view, ignoring cultural differences in the name of equality in practice results in structural discrimination against minorities, and democratic states must, in addition to guaranteeing individual rights, create the conditions for political participation, continuity of cultural institutions, and preservation of minority identities. (5)

From this perspective, the allocation of parliamentary seats to Armenians in the National Consultative Assembly may be regarded as one manifestation of group-differentiated rights, because the constitutional legislature, by providing for independent representation of this community, sought to guarantee its participation in the legislative process. Nevertheless, Kymlicka emphasizes that recognition of rights in statutory texts constitutes only the first step; genuine citizenship can be realized only when minorities are also able in practice to participate effectively in public decision-making and preserve their cultural and religious institutions. (1, 4) This approach forms the theoretical basis of the present study. The article assumes that, in evaluating the position of Armenians from the Constitutional Revolution to the end of Reza Shah's reign, a distinction must be drawn between the legal recognition of rights and their practical realization. In other words, the mere statutory provision of parliamentary representation, religious freedom, or cultural activity does not establish that such rights were fully realized in society; the performance of parliament, the government, and executive institutions must also be examined. In Kymlicka's terms, citizenship becomes genuinely multicultural only when cultural groups are not merely recognized in law but are also capable of effective participation within the structure of power. (1)

Armenian Political Mobilization: From the Pursuit of Political Rights to Parliamentary Representation

The Constitutional Movement did not merely transform Iran's political structure; it also created the conditions for new social groups, including religious minorities, to enter the domain of public law. Armenians were among the first groups that, through active participation in the Constitutional Movement, sought to transform their position from that of a purely religious community into part of a nation possessing political rights. Accordingly, the demand for representation in the National Consultative Assembly should be understood as a consequence of their political participation in the Constitutional Revolution rather than merely as a privilege granted to them by the state. Surviving documents and memoirs from the early constitutional period indicate that Armenians supported the movement alongside other social groups from its outset. Reports concerning the extensive Armenian reception of the migrating clerics and their participation in popular assemblies indicate that the Armenian community regarded itself as part of

Iran's movement for the rule of law and pursued its political demands within the framework of establishing government under law. (10, 12) Concurrently with the establishment of the National Consultative Assembly, Armenians, like other religious minorities, sought equal rights within the new order. The submission of petitions to parliament, correspondence with representatives, and pursuit of political rights through the legislative institution demonstrate that they based their strategy on the use of legal and parliamentary mechanisms. This approach reflected the Armenian community's transition from traditional petitioning to participation in formal institutions of government.

Nevertheless, recognition of the political rights of minorities encountered opposition from segments of traditionalist currents. Opponents regarded the allocation of parliamentary seats to religious minorities as inconsistent with Islamic legal norms and maintained that the formal presence of non-Muslims in parliament was incompatible with the nature of Islamic government. This disagreement meant that the practical realization of minorities' political rights encountered considerable difficulties and that a gap emerged between acceptance of equality as a legal principle and its implementation in the political arena. (6) Moreover, examination of the electoral regulations of the First National Consultative Assembly indicates that although the text contained no explicit prohibition against the election of members of religious minorities, the occupational and class-based structure of the electoral system effectively restricted their independent participation. Consequently, Armenians were unable to secure independent representation in the first parliamentary term in the same manner as in later periods and had to pursue their demands through influential parliamentary figures. (15, 16) This situation demonstrates that, at the beginning of the Constitutional era, Armenian political rights depended less on firmly institutionalized legal mechanisms than on political conditions, the balance among social forces, and the degree of acceptance by political elites. Accordingly, the gap between the legal recognition of the right to participate and the actual possibility of exercising that right became one of the defining characteristics of the Armenian political experience during the early constitutional years. This gap narrowed to some extent in later periods, particularly following reform of the electoral law and the provision of reserved seats for religious minorities, although it was never entirely eliminated.

Practical Realization of Armenian Rights in the National Consultative Assembly

The recognition of Armenian political rights in the Constitutional Constitution and electoral laws marked the beginning of a new phase in the history of Iranian public law; nevertheless, the true value of this transformation must be assessed in terms of the extent of its implementation. The granting of representation acquires genuine legal and political significance only when effective participation in decision-making, legislation, and oversight of governmental performance is also possible. Accordingly, the position of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly cannot be evaluated solely through reference to legal provisions; their actual performance within the parliamentary structure and their influence on public policy must also be assessed. (1, 3)

Reform of the electoral law and the allocation of independent seats to the Armenians of northern and southern Iran constituted one of the most important legal achievements of the constitutional system in the field of religious-minority rights. This measure moved Armenians beyond the position of merely a religious community and incorporated them into the country's system of political representation. Armenian representatives thus enjoyed, like other members of parliament, the right to attend plenary sessions, participate in the examination of bills, submit proposals, serve on commissions, and vote. Armenian political participation thereby moved beyond legal recognition and continued within the framework of a formal institution. (9, 14)

Examination of the proceedings of the National Consultative Assembly shows that Armenian representatives did not confine their activities to religious matters but participated actively in issues including fiscal reform, the budget, education, trade, road construction, and administrative affairs. Nevertheless, a significant portion of their speeches and initiatives concerned the preservation of Armenian schools, support for cultural associations, the status of churches, and the provision of educational facilities. This indicates that Armenian representatives regarded parliament as the principal legal mechanism for safeguarding the cultural identity of their community and sought to use the capacity of law to protect the citizenship rights of their co-religionists. (11, 13)

Documentary evidence also confirms this pattern. Correspondence by Armenian representatives concerning the funding of Armenian schools, requests for financial assistance for educational institutions, efforts to address the status of teachers, and communications concerning authorization for schools to operate demonstrate that Armenian representatives were not merely legislators but in practice also served as intermediaries between the Armenian community and the state administration. The continuity of such correspondence indicates that the National Consultative Assembly became one of the most important channels through which Armenian civil and cultural demands were pursued. (11, 17)

The role of Armenian representatives was also significant in the economic sphere. A substantial segment of Iran's Armenian community was engaged in trade, industry, carpet exports, and commercial activities, which led their representatives to pursue economic issues in parliament as well. Requests by Armenian merchants to facilitate carpet exports, remove customs obstacles, support commercial activities, and resolve taxation problems were among the issues reflected in administrative records and representatives' correspondence. These materials demonstrate that Armenian representation was not confined to the defense of religious rights; the protection of the economic and professional interests of the Armenian community also constituted part of their practical responsibilities. (18)

Nevertheless, the country's political conditions directly affected the degree of influence exercised by Armenian representatives. During the early constitutional years, because parliament occupied a central position in political decision-making, representatives had greater opportunities to express their views and defend the demands of their constituencies. From the late Qajar period onward, however, and particularly with the establishment of Reza Shah's rule, the concentration of power in the central government and the decline of parliamentary autonomy limited representatives' practical influence. Consequently, although the Armenian parliamentary seats were retained, their capacity to affect major national policies declined in comparison with the early constitutional period. (6, 19)

From the perspective of multicultural citizenship theory, the Armenian experience during this period provides a clear example of the distinction between recognition of rights and their practical realization. The Constitution and electoral laws recognized Armenians' rights to representation, political participation, and parliamentary presence, but the full realization of these rights was affected by the structure of power, the state's centralization policies, and restrictions on parliamentary authority. Thus, although Armenians legally remained part of the national representative system, the extent of their practical enjoyment of citizenship rights varied across different periods in accordance with the country's political transformations. (1, 5)

The Role of Armenian Representatives in Safeguarding Cultural, Educational, and Religious Rights

One of the most important areas of activity for Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly was the defense of the Armenian community's cultural and educational rights. Although the Constitutional

Constitution, by accepting the principle of legal equality, created the basis for the political participation of religious minorities, the continuity of their cultural identity depended above all on the preservation of schools, churches, cultural associations, and freedom to perform religious rites. Armenian representatives therefore devoted a significant portion of their parliamentary activities to pursuing demands directly related to the continuation of Armenian cultural life. In effect, they regarded the National Consultative Assembly not merely as a venue for legislation but also as an institution for defending the cultural rights of Armenian citizens. (13, 20)

Examination of evidence concerning the Ministry of Education and related administrative records indicates that Armenian schools consistently faced problems such as insufficient funding, inadequate educational facilities, teacher recruitment difficulties, and administrative licensing requirements. Under such circumstances, Armenian representatives sought, through parliamentary inquiries, formal correspondence, and continuous follow-up with the Ministry of Education, to prevent school closures and create the necessary conditions for their continued operation. Correspondence concerning requests for financial assistance for Armenian schools in Arak and efforts to address the status of their teachers illustrates the direct role played by representatives in supporting the Armenian community's educational system. (17)

The significance of Armenian schools extended beyond education itself, because these institutions played an important role in transmitting Armenian language, culture, history, and religious identity. Consequently, restrictions on school activities were regarded by the Armenian community as restrictions on their cultural rights. Armenian representatives in parliament therefore consistently emphasized the need for state support of Armenian community schools and respect for their legal rights and sought to use existing legislation to ensure the continuation of their activities. (17, 21)

Alongside schools, Armenian churches were among the most important social and cultural institutions of the community. Churches were not merely places for religious worship; numerous Armenian educational, charitable, cultural, and social activities were also organized around them. Accordingly, preserving the autonomy of churches and respecting their religious prerogatives constituted a continuing demand of Armenian representatives in parliament. Evidence from the period indicates that Armenian representatives corresponded with relevant ministries on various matters concerning church property, affiliated schools, and the administrative affairs of the Armenian community and called for the precise implementation of the law. (13, 22)

In addition to education and religion, Armenian representatives played an active role in supporting cultural and charitable associations. Armenian associations in Tehran, Tabriz, Isfahan, and Arak, in addition to cultural activities, assumed responsibility for aspects of the community's welfare, health, and social affairs. Parliamentary representatives sought to ensure that these institutions could continue operating within the framework of national law and remain protected from unnecessary interference by executive authorities. This approach demonstrates that, from the perspective of Armenian representatives, preserving civil institutions was a fundamental condition for realizing the citizenship rights of the Armenian community. (23, 24)

With the beginning of Reza Shah's reign, although the principle of Armenian representation in the National Consultative Assembly was preserved, the government's centralization policies affected the sphere of activity of many social and educational institutions. Expanded Ministry of Education supervision over schools, increased governmental control of associations, and restrictions on certain powers of local institutions meant that Armenian representatives devoted a significant portion of their efforts to preserving the legal prerogatives of the community's

cultural institutions. From this perspective, their function shifted from participating in the development of cultural institutions to defending the continued existence of those same institutions. (6, 25)

These developments demonstrate that the practical realization of Armenian cultural rights depended less on the mere existence of legislation than on state policy and the degree of autonomy enjoyed by civil institutions. Although the law continued to recognize the right of Armenian schools and churches to operate and the community's right to political representation, increasing state intervention in educational and cultural affairs restricted the practical exercise of these rights. The experience of the Armenian community between the Constitutional Revolution and the end of Reza Shah's reign thus provides a clear example of the distinction between the "recognition of rights in law" and the "realization of rights in practice," which constitutes the central analytical theme of the present study. (1, 4)

The Role of Armenian Representatives in Protecting the Economic and Social Rights of the Armenian Community

Although Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly were primarily known as defenders of their community's cultural and religious rights, examination of parliamentary debates, administrative documents, and surviving correspondence demonstrates that a substantial portion of their activities was also devoted to Armenian economic and social concerns. This approach reflected the fact that during the late Qajar period and the early years of Pahlavi rule, the Armenian community was among the country's most economically active groups in trade, industry, banking, transportation, carpets, handicrafts, and urban production. Consequently, any change in fiscal, customs, or commercial policies directly affected the economic circumstances of this community, requiring Armenian representatives to defend the economic interests of their constituents alongside their legislative responsibilities. (18, 26)

One of the principal areas of Armenian representatives' activity was the protection of Armenian merchants and industrialists against administrative restrictions. Documentary evidence indicates that Armenian merchants repeatedly approached their parliamentary representatives concerning export licenses, customs difficulties, validation of commercial documents, and facilitation of trade. Requests by groups of Armenian merchants to simplify the certification required for carpet exports provide a clear example of such demands being pursued through parliamentary representatives and demonstrate that the National Consultative Assembly had become one of the principal channels through which the Armenian community transmitted its economic demands to the state. (18)

In addition to commerce, economic security constituted one of the Armenian community's principal concerns. The spread of insecurity in certain parts of the country, particularly during the final years of Qajar rule, created difficulties for the economic activities of many Armenian citizens. Administrative evidence concerning requests to ensure Armenian security in a number of cities indicates that their representatives regarded protection of the lives and property of Armenian citizens as a prerequisite for the enjoyment of other citizenship rights and repeatedly called upon the government to adopt more effective measures against insecurity and attacks on citizens' property. (27)

Alongside economic issues, Armenian representatives also attended to the social problems of their community. Addressing the conditions of medical centers, charitable institutions, support associations, and the livelihood difficulties of certain Armenian citizens formed part of the responsibilities they assumed in their interactions with executive agencies. Such activities indicate that representation, in their understanding, was not confined to participation in legislative sessions but also entailed a form of social responsibility toward the Armenian community.

Consequently, much of the representatives' administrative correspondence was service-oriented and supportive in nature and aimed at resolving citizens' everyday problems. (21, 24)

With the establishment of Reza Shah's rule, the state's policies of economic and administrative centralization created new conditions for the economic activities of religious minorities. The development of bureaucracy, expansion of state supervision over economic activities, and increased role of executive agencies, while contributing in some areas to greater administrative order and security, also reduced the autonomy of many economic and civil institutions. Under these conditions, Armenian representatives increasingly focused on the executive, administrative, and economic problems of the Armenian community, and a substantial portion of their activities was devoted to resolving difficulties arising from the concentration of power in governmental institutions. (6, 25)

Despite these limitations, the continuous presence of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly helped preserve the Armenian community's connection with the formal structure of government. They used the legal mechanisms of parliament to transmit citizens' economic and social demands and attempted, through such instruments as questioning ministers, corresponding with ministries, following up complaints, and participating in the examination of bills, to alleviate some of the community's problems. Although the degree of success achieved by these efforts varied across periods, their continuity demonstrates that Armenian representation was not merely ceremonial but frequently served as an effective intermediary between the Armenian community and the state.

Overall, examination of the performance of Armenian representatives demonstrates that they understood citizenship rights as a multidimensional concept and did not limit their defense of such rights to the political sphere. Support for education, culture, religion, security, trade, employment, and social welfare all fell within the scope of their activities. This indicates that Armenian representatives attempted to move the concept of equal citizenship beyond the level of legislation and realize it in the social life of the Armenian community, although the centralized power structure and political restrictions of Reza Shah's reign prevented the complete realization of this objective. (1, 7)

Challenges to the Realization of Armenian Political Rights during the Reign of Reza Shah

With the establishment of Reza Shah's rule, Iran's political structure entered a new phase of state-building and centralization of power. Seeking to create a strong and integrated state, Reza Shah placed many local institutions, popular associations, and independent organizations under direct governmental supervision. Although this policy strengthened central governmental authority, expanded the bureaucracy, and promoted administrative order, it also restricted the activities of civil institutions, including institutions affiliated with religious minorities. Under these conditions, Armenian representatives retained their legal position in the National Consultative Assembly, but the country's political environment substantially reduced their ability to make full use of the institution's capacities. (6, 19)

One of the most important manifestations of this transformation was the decline in the autonomy of the National Consultative Assembly vis-à-vis the government. Whereas during the early constitutional years parliament had constituted the principal center of political decision-making and a forum for competing views, during Reza Shah's reign its role increasingly became limited to approving government policies. This change affected not only Armenian representatives but all members of parliament; however, because representatives of religious minorities possessed only a limited number of seats, they were particularly affected by the decline of parliamentary autonomy, and their ability to influence the legislative process diminished. (6, 28)

Despite these restrictions, the Reza Shah government did not abolish the principle of parliamentary representation for religious minorities. Armenians continued to send their representatives to the National Consultative Assembly, and their reserved seats remained legally protected. The continuity of this arrangement suggests that, unlike certain governments elsewhere in the region, Reza Shah's regime did not seek formally to eliminate the political participation of religious minorities; rather, it attempted to redefine that participation within the framework of state centralization and governmental authority. In other words, the right to representation remained intact, while the scope of its practical influence became more restricted. (9, 11)

The state's policy of administrative standardization also affected education. By introducing new regulations, the Ministry of Education imposed broader supervision over non-governmental schools, including Armenian schools. This oversight extended to curricula, school administration, the appointment of principals, and cultural activities. Although Armenian schools continued to operate, their former autonomy was reduced to some extent, and many educational decisions required the approval of governmental bodies. Under these conditions, Armenian representatives devoted a substantial part of their activities to protecting the legal rights of these schools and preventing restrictions on the educational activities of the Armenian community. (17, 25)

Similar developments occurred with respect to cultural and social associations. Armenian associations that had enjoyed greater freedom of action during the early constitutional years were required during Reza Shah's reign to align their activities with state policies. Increased supervision of public gatherings, registration of associations, and control over cultural activities, although undertaken in the name of administrative order, reduced the autonomy of civil society. Armenian representatives in parliament attempted, within the scope of their authority, to employ legal mechanisms to preserve the activities of these institutions, but their success depended primarily on the approach adopted by executive agencies. (13, 21)

In the social sphere, state policy was likewise oriented toward the construction of a unified national identity. While emphasizing the country's political unity, this policy did not encourage the public expression of autonomous ethnic or religious identities. Although Armenians continued to perform their religious rites and preserve their churches, many of their social and cultural activities were defined within the framework of broader state policies. Consequently, the gap between rights provided by law and the possibility of exercising those rights freely became increasingly apparent. (24, 29)

Examination of these developments demonstrates that the principal challenge confronting Armenian representatives during Reza Shah's reign was not the abolition of legal rights but restrictions on the ability to exercise them. Armenians continued to be represented in parliament, participate in public debates, and pursue the demands of their community, but the declining autonomy of the legislature, concentration of power in the executive, and expansion of administrative supervision restricted their practical influence. This situation constitutes a clear example of the distinction made by multicultural citizenship theory between the "recognition of rights" and the "realization of rights": recognition of a right in law, in the absence of independent institutions and effective mechanisms for enforcement, does not necessarily result in the full realization of citizenship rights. (5)

Comparative Assessment: The Gap between Legal Recognition and the Practical Realization of Armenian Rights

Examination of the status of Armenians from the Constitutional Revolution to the end of Reza Shah's reign demonstrates a marked difference between the rights provided for in legislation and the degree to which those

rights were realized in practice. The Constitutional Constitution and electoral laws, for the first time, recognized Armenians as part of the Iranian nation entitled to political participation and, by allocating independent seats to them in the National Consultative Assembly, created the conditions for their formal participation in the legislative system. Compared with the legal order preceding the Constitutional Revolution, this represented an important step toward recognition of the citizenship rights of religious minorities, because their political participation was elevated from the level of governmental toleration to that of a legally recognized right. (15, 16)

Nevertheless, the practical realization of these rights remained dependent on the country's political conditions. During the early constitutional years, a relatively open political environment, the activities of political parties, the relative independence of parliament, and competition among different political currents provided Armenian representatives with greater opportunities for participation. They took part in discussions concerning the budget, education, commerce, financial affairs, and administrative reform and, at the same time, pursued the cultural and social demands of the Armenian community through legal mechanisms. This situation caused the National Consultative Assembly to become the principal institution through which Armenian community demands were transmitted to the government. (10, 13)

Documentary evidence also indicates that Armenian representatives were frequently able to use parliamentary mechanisms to resolve problems affecting the Armenian community. Correspondence concerning school funding, the status of teachers, support for cultural activities, the requests of Armenian merchants, and protection of Armenian citizens demonstrates that representatives did not merely act as legislators but also served as intermediaries between the Armenian community and the state. This role constituted one of the most important manifestations of the practical realization of citizenship rights during the early constitutional years. (11)

With the establishment of Reza Shah's rule, although the legal framework of Armenian representation did not fundamentally change, changes in the power structure transformed the conditions under which these rights could be enjoyed. Concentration of power in the state, declining activity of political parties, reduced parliamentary autonomy, and expansion of the administrative bureaucracy caused many of the capacities provided by law to lose their former effectiveness. As a result, Armenian representatives increasingly assumed responsibility for pursuing executive and administrative matters affecting the Armenian community rather than participating in the formulation of major national policy. (6, 19)

The same pattern can be observed in the fields of education and culture. Although Armenian schools, churches, and associations legally continued their activities, increased governmental supervision of educational and cultural affairs reduced the practical autonomy of these institutions. Consequently, a substantial portion of Armenian representatives' activities became devoted to preserving rights that had already been recognized in law. This transformation demonstrates that, during Reza Shah's reign, the principal concern of the Armenian community was not the acquisition of new rights but the preservation and protection of existing rights against the centralizing policies of the state. (17, 25)

From the perspective of Will Kymlicka's theory of multicultural citizenship, the Armenian experience during this period provides a clear example of the distinction between "legal equality" and "substantive equality." The Constitution and electoral laws recognized Armenians as citizens entitled to political participation, but the full realization of these rights required independent institutions, representatives capable of acting freely, and effective participation in decision-making processes. When these conditions weakened as a result of the concentration of

power and declining parliamentary influence, the gap between legal rights and actual enjoyment of those rights widened as well. (5)

Overall, a comparative study of the Constitutional era and the reign of Reza Shah demonstrates that the most important achievement of the Constitutional Revolution for the Armenian community was the recognition of political rights and their incorporation into the formal structure of government, whereas the principal challenge during Reza Shah's reign was the restriction of the ability to exercise those same rights as a consequence of political centralization. The experience of Armenian representatives therefore demonstrates that realization of citizenship rights does not depend solely on the adoption of legislation; the effectiveness of political institutions, parliamentary autonomy, and the degree of governmental adherence to the law also play decisive roles in transforming legal rights into actual rights. This constitutes the principal analytical finding of the present study and indicates that the position of religious minorities in modern Iranian history cannot be fully understood without distinguishing between the "legal recognition" and "practical realization" of rights.

The Position of Armenian Rights in Light of the Performance of the Government and Parliament

One of the most important indicators for evaluating the citizenship rights of religious minorities is the degree of coordination between the legislature and the executive in implementing the law. The greater the executive support for legislation, the greater the possibility of realizing citizens' rights. With respect to the Armenian community, examination of documents, parliamentary proceedings, and administrative correspondence indicates that although the Constitutional Constitution and electoral laws recognized the legal status of this community, implementation of these rights in practice remained dependent on the government's approach and the country's political circumstances. The performance of the National Consultative Assembly and that of the government must therefore be regarded as two complementary factors in either realizing or restricting Armenian rights. (9, 28)

During the early constitutional years, the National Consultative Assembly enjoyed relative autonomy, and representatives had greater opportunities to raise general and local demands. In such an environment, Armenian representatives could pursue issues relating to schools, associations, churches, trade, and the security of Armenian citizens either on the parliamentary floor or through specialized commissions. This situation enabled many problems affecting the Armenian community to be pursued through legal and parliamentary channels and created a direct relationship between the community and the legislative institution. (10, 13)

Education constituted one of the most important areas of this interaction. Armenian representatives repeatedly invoked existing laws to request financial support for Armenian schools, the recruitment of teachers, expansion of educational facilities, and removal of administrative obstacles. Correspondence between Armenian representatives and the Ministry of Education demonstrates that parliament frequently acted as an intermediary between the Armenian community and the government and sought to employ legal mechanisms to resolve educational problems. Nevertheless, implementation of many such requests depended on the final decisions of the ministries, which in turn affected the extent to which the rights concerned were realized. (17)

A similar relationship between parliament and the government can be observed in the economic sphere. Numerous requests from Armenian merchants concerning facilitation of exports, reduction of customs obstacles, resolution of tax problems, and support for commercial activities were generally referred through parliamentary representatives to the relevant ministries. This evidence indicates that Armenian representatives, in addition to

exercising legislative functions, also acted in practice as representatives of their community's economic demands and attempted to use legal instruments to reduce the problems confronting merchants. (18)

With Reza Shah's accession to power, although this formal relationship between Armenian representatives and executive agencies continued, the concentration of power in the government reduced parliament's role in directing public policy. Consequently, much of the representatives' correspondence, instead of developing into legislative initiatives, became limited to administrative and executive requests. This transformation indicates that the decline in parliamentary autonomy also restricted the influence of religious-minority representatives, who increasingly operated within the framework of government policies. (6, 19)

Examination of the performance of the Reza Shah government indicates that its official policy was not to abolish Armenians' legal rights but to standardize the country's administrative and cultural structures. Armenian schools, associations, and institutions therefore continued to operate, but their decision-making autonomy declined and a significant portion of their activities came under direct state supervision. Although this policy was implemented in pursuit of administrative order and political centralization, in practice it restricted some of the institutional freedoms of the Armenian community, while parliamentary representatives lacked effective instruments for preventing such restrictions. (21, 25)

The historical experience of Armenians therefore demonstrates that preservation of rights in statutory law is a necessary but insufficient condition for the realization of citizenship rights. Effective implementation requires independent institutions, a capable parliament, an accountable executive, and genuine opportunities for citizens to participate in decision-making. Whenever any of these elements is weakened, the gap between legal rights and rights enjoyed in practice increases—a condition that the Armenian community encountered during the closing years of the period under study and whose effects were evident in the political, cultural, educational, and economic spheres. (1, 2)

Conclusion

The present study, undertaken to examine Armenian rights from their legal recognition to their practical realization between the Constitutional Revolution and the end of Reza Shah's reign, demonstrates that the Constitutional Revolution constituted a turning point in the transformation of the legal position of the Armenian community in Iran. The adoption of the Constitution and reform of electoral laws formally recognized Armenians' participation in the structure of political power for the first time and enabled their participation in the country's highest legislative institution. This transformation not only reflected the gradual acceptance of the principle of political participation by religious minorities but also demonstrated that the constitutional order sought to create a structure grounded in law and public participation beyond religious affiliation.

Examination of the performance of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly demonstrates that their activities were not confined to ceremonial attendance at parliamentary sessions; rather, they played active roles in political, cultural, educational, social, and economic affairs. Defending Armenian schools, supporting cultural associations, addressing problems affecting churches, seeking the removal of obstacles to economic and commercial activities, and transmitting the demands of the Armenian community to executive agencies were among their most important activities. Their performance indicates that Armenian representatives sought to employ the legal capacities of parliament both to safeguard the rights of their community and to participate

in the administration of public affairs, thereby establishing a sustained link between the Armenian community and the governing structure.

Nevertheless, the findings demonstrate that a gap consistently existed between the recognition of rights in law and their practical realization. Although constitutional legislation consolidated the legal position of Armenians and recognized their right to parliamentary representation, the actual extent to which these rights could be enjoyed depended less on statutory texts than on political conditions, the degree of parliamentary autonomy, governmental performance, and the structure of power. During the early constitutional years, the relatively open political environment enabled Armenian representatives to participate more effectively; however, with increasing concentration of power during Reza Shah's reign, the influence of parliament and, consequently, the practical capacity of Armenian representatives declined. At the same time, the policies of the First Pahlavi state demonstrate that the government preserved Armenian representation in the National Consultative Assembly and did not formally abolish their legal status, while simultaneously restricting the autonomy of many cultural, educational, and social institutions of the Armenian community through its centralization policies.

Consequently, during this period, a substantial portion of the Armenian representatives' efforts was devoted not to expanding the rights and prerogatives of the Armenian community but to preserving the legal achievements of the Constitutional era and preventing their erosion. This development demonstrates that continuity of legal rights does not necessarily entail continuity in the same degree of practical freedom and participation. The findings further indicate that the position of religious minorities cannot be evaluated solely on the basis of laws and regulations; the performance of political and administrative institutions must also be considered. The historical experience of Armenians demonstrates that whenever parliament enjoyed greater autonomy, opportunities to defend minority rights increased, whereas whenever political power became concentrated in the executive, the gap between rights provided by law and their actual enjoyment widened. Accordingly, the quality of legal implementation and the effectiveness of governmental institutions play a decisive role in realizing citizenship rights.

Overall, it may be concluded that the most significant achievement of the Constitutional Revolution for the Armenian community was the institutionalization of political participation and formal recognition of their place within Iran's system of public law, an achievement that enabled the continuous presence of Armenian representatives in the National Consultative Assembly. Nevertheless, the historical gap between rights formally prescribed by law and their practical implementation demonstrates that the full realization of citizenship rights requires not only legislation but also independent institutions, an effective parliament, a government governed by law, and sustained adherence to the principles of the rule of law. From this perspective, the study of the position of Armenian representatives constitutes not merely part of the history of a religious minority but also a reflection of the broader evolution of citizenship rights, political participation, and state-society relations in modern Iranian history.

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All authors equally contributed to this study.

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Transparency of Data

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