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Address: **Humanities faculty, Tarbiat Modares University, Nasr, Jalal AleAhmad, Tehran, Iran. P.O.Box: 14115-139**

Web Address for manuscript submission: <http://eijh.modares.ac.ir/>

Email: [eijh@modares.ac.ir](mailto:eijh@modares.ac.ir)

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پژوهشگاه علوم انسانی و مطالعات فرهنگی  
رتال جامع علوم انسانی

## Political Economy of Cash Subsidies in Iran (2005-2013)

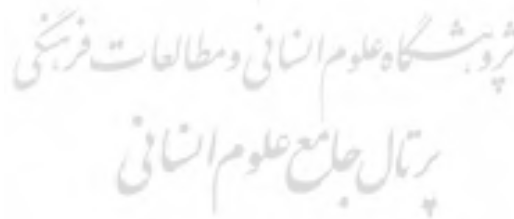
Masuod Ghaffari<sup>1</sup>, Mehdi Abdi<sup>2</sup>

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the goals of the ninth and tenth governments in formulating and executing targeted distribution of subsidies under the title “Targeting Cash Subsidies Plan” in Iran. The question is how targeting these payments during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad can be explained. The hypothesis of this research is that the characteristics of subsidy prepared the circumstances for making such payments by the said government. In this research, considering the nature of government which was always accompanied by an increase in incomes, it’s policies had a distribution approach, with the aim of increasing its support base and providing itself political legitimacy and popularity.

**Keywords:** Political Economy; Targeted Distribution; Cash Subsidy; Political Legitimacy.



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<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding Auteur) ghaffari@modares.ac.ir

<sup>1</sup>M.A., Dept. of Political Science, Faculty of Humanities, Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran. mehdiabdi622@yahoo.com

## **1. Introduction**

During the 1970s, due to the formation of Human-Oriented Development, cash subsidies became a priority for development. This strategy was considered in the United Nations' development program by Mahbubul Haq, the Pakistani economist and a workgroup including people like Amartya Sen and Paul Straiten; and from 1990 onwards its activities have been published annually by the development program. In this strategy, the government assumes the role of guiding and directing the development process. Also, wherever necessary, the government must intervene in policy making and economic planning in order to ensure that the desired results of human development are obtained. But this role neither requires the government to be large-scale, nor does it mean that the government must be small and only provide a small part of services. In human development strategy, the size of the government doesn't matter, but the type of duties and functions of the government and how they are executed is important; and one of the most significant ones among them is income distribution in the form of protectionist policies in the society (Evans, 2003:60-70).

Mahbubul Hag believes that the goal of development is constant reduction and finally elimination of bad nutrition, diseases, illiteracy, and unemployment and opportunity discrimination while focusing on more production with better distribution. This way of thinking inevitably requires that employment be the primary and not the secondary purpose of development because employment is the most important way of redistributing incomes in a poor society (Hag, 1972:17).

On the other hand, the importance of paying attention to supportive policies will be clearer once we consider the fact that one of the foundations of the power of governments and political systems is public service and providing benefits for different sections of society. It has been theoretically proven that each level of governments' interference in economy has its different consequences in the society and politics, and for social classes. For instance, by interfering in economy, the government makes certain social classes benefits while letting others suffer, and therefore, sets the benefited classes as its social base (Fozzard, 2001:23-44). The government's performance in the supporting and distributive policies contributes a great deal to the legitimacy of the government and is the main part of that legitimacy.

For example, 90% of people's demonstration chants at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution of Iran were about "elimination of poverty, providing better welfare and supporting the underprivileged social classes". In different elections, candidates have focused on public welfare and social justice in their mottos, too, though not as much as the revolution chants, and they insist on it as a way to collect votes (Panahi, 2001: 29-31). It seems that, with the knowledge of how these mottos function, the ninth and tenth governments tried to apply the economic development plan and specially the most important section, "targeting the subsidies."

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Since the political economic approach studies the relationship between the government and the market, and the interaction between economic and political

institutions, and their impact on legitimacy and credibility of the government, we have used it in this research. Proponents of this interdisciplinary approach believe that political economy is a social product that both affects and is affected by social phenomena and structures such as politics. In other words, political economy is a reflection of the relationship between forces, classes and groups in the society (North, 1998:176; Yorks, 2004:189-208; Caporaso, and Levine, 1992: 33-54; Clarck, 2010: 60-61).

This approach is different from conventional approaches of economic studies by several distinctive features such as the importance of facts and variable, and normative and social views in analysis and solutions.

With this method, we can measure the independence of the government from society, the power of social classes and economic and social groups, and the power and legitimacy caused by economic policies of the government on the market system, and that of the market system on the government and society (Hatneh, 2005: 5). On the other hand, one of the most important characteristics of this approach is its prescriptive nature and its emphasis on virtues and norms of society. Clark and Blog have pointed out these features in their works (Clark, 2010: 24; Blog, 2001: 65).

Therefore, political economy is assumed as a series of social and institutional flows through which interest groups in the society including those with economic and political influence and supporters of the government and justice try to allocate resources to their own interests and goals, and also study the mutual impact of political and economic institutions and their impact on the

government's independence, effectiveness and legitimacy, justice in the society, performance of economic activists and how much different groups benefit from the resources (Caporaso and Levine, 1992:159-216). Thus, studying the purpose of targeting the subsidies program in the framework of political economy approach seems possible. Some of the functional features of this approach are as follows:

A. The government appears as the agent and operator of this major economic policy and, the significant presence of the government gives a special role and political status to the program.

B. It has been theoretically proven that any level of interference and policy making of governments in economic affairs has political consequences.

For example, in the voting behavior literature, the relationship between government economic programs and politics are formulated as public choice (Fozzard, 2001: 33-38). So there is a kind of entanglement between economics and politics and socio-electoral base. For instance Anthony Downs in the book *Economic Theory of Democracy* believes that politicians and political parties are mainly concerned with getting elected. So, they present policies that are consistent with the voters' demands and interests; and it is here that he explains political players' behavior according to the concept of "rational choice" (Downs, 1957).

Therefore, subsidies, especially those that impact all groups, can be used as rent and a tool for coalition of different groups with the government. The political aspects of subsidies and its payment system not only can impact the size and amount of subsidies but also is very important in steering its

effects because it is one of the government's most important tools to gain power (Lipton, 1977). Usually, instead of implementing mechanisms that have positive economic consequences, politicians consider plans with political purposes that actually hinder desirable economic goals. Accordingly, in addition to economic effects, this program has considerable political aspects, and inevitably the position of politics and economy in this period (2005-2013) must be explained and analyzed not as single subjects, but as components that have organic relationships with each other.

### **3. Political Economy in Ahmadinejad's Period**

The results of the ninth presidential election must be called "the great surprise". The successful and dominant discourse became famous as serving, justice-seeking, distribution-oriented and fundamentalist. Fundamentalists, in the second municipal election (March, 2003) and the seventh parliamentary elections (March, 2004) achieved the majority of votes by emphasizing the economic problems and questioning the reformists' political development discourse.

In the seventh parliamentary election, reformists' discourse couldn't succeed in the public opinion against the breaking the law by the fundamentalists. In this election, to the socio-political analysts' surprise, the candidates who were announced as the final winners did not even try to pretend to be close to the political discourse that seemed to be dominant in the society.

In this period Ahmadinejad pretended to be the supporter and defender of the poor, promising to increase salaries, especially for teachers and state employees, reduce poverty, fight unemployment and lack of

housing, give loans to young couples, bring justice to masses and especially to those who fought in the war and most importantly eliminating corruption that many believed was endangering the country's political body (Abrahamian, 2012: 336).

Another reason for the success of this discourse was its emphasis on redistributive policies. For example "people" in Ahmadinejad's discourse would resonance with the revolutionary discourse of the 1980's. He mentioned "people ..." which reminds one of the mass mobilizations of the 1980s. He attacked the political development, import development and western democracy, and in reaction to political development signifier in reform discourse, he uses the political growth signifier. Or for example, he presents the "Islamic Economic Development" signifier in his discourse in reaction to the economic development signifier in the reform discourse (Tajik, and Roozkhosh, 2007:109-110).

Ahmadinejad's social base was a combination of low social classes of urban areas, peasants and of course the revolutionaries who felt during the reformist government, revolutionary values had faded and positions of the country had been taken by liberals and intellectuals (Habibi, 2013:1). These social classes believed Ahmadinejad to be the symbol of reducing the economic gap. Moreover, his simple life style and being an ideologist guaranteed high votes for him in rural areas. In this situation, when marginalized groups such as immigrants, new workers, the unemployed and other parts of the society were damaged and deteriorated as a result of past governments' policies, they welcomed the new circumstances. So that Hashemi Rafsanjani could not even achieve the

highest vote in his home province of Kerman.

In general, Ahmadinejad's ideological base was a group of people belonging to the lower social classes and traditional groups and also military and other power institutions who were unsatisfied with the situation in previous governments.

#### 4. Economic Policies

To assess political economy, policies of the ninth and tenth governments, various theories and discussions have been proposed by researchers. Some believe these policies followed the ones from the previous 16 years and the government's orientation in this regard was in line with the structural adjustment policies. Meanwhile, others believe in populist ... purposes with the strategy of increasing power and government influence among various classes, especially the rural and urban low classes.

##### 4.1. Structural Adjustment<sup>1</sup>

Some economic experts believe that the "Economic Development Plan" that was presented in the ninth government was a sequence to and complimentary of the Economic Adjustment Plan that started in Hashemi Rafsanjani's government and was stopped in the middle. Although the

<sup>1</sup> Structural Adjustment is a generic term, used to describe a series of economic and organizational actions that the International Monetary Fund, World bank and single western contributing loaners took independently but usually in coordination with each other, during the 1980s and 1990s due to a new trend of giving loans to countries based on their political circumstances and they tried to convince many developing countries to accept these loans. (Leftwich, 2006:175)

"Structural Adjustment with a Human Face" was published by UNICEF due to the consequences of this program and the criticisms against it.

Economic Adjustment Plan was implemented during his eight years of presidency that was the most stable economic situation after the Islamic Revolution, it was stopped after a few years. But in Ahmadinejad's government that was Iran's least stable economic period after the revolution, it was executed again.

Experts like Hasan Sobhani and Farshad Momeni consider the policies of the ninth and tenth governments in line with the principles of Structural Adjustment and in spite of value-based orientations about criticizing previous governments, they believe in the area of economic policies they are in line with those policies and sometimes even move in a steeper slope (Sobhani, 2013; & Momeni, 2015). Therefore, from many experts' points of view, in general the economic policies of these governments were in line with those of previous governments: policies that started in Hashemi's government (1989-1997) and continued in the reformist government (1997-2005) in a more moderate manner and then with more destructive effects.

##### 4.2. Clientelism and Populism

From the point of view of political economy, economic policies in this period were linked to a sort of populism (clientelism and popular actions). Ahmadinejad made his economic approach clear during the time he was the Mayor of Tehran and started his redistributing and populist policies by actions such as granting One-Million-Toman (\$1=T3000) marriage loans to young couples, frequent public appearances and announcing his personal phone number to public and soon he gained popularity among low and deprived social classes. According to Knight's definition in 1998, populism has

a close relation to the concept of achieving and preserving political power. Therefore, populism is using economic and social policies as a tool, and trying to gain and apply power and not necessarily remove poverty from the society by statesmen (Farzanegan, 2009: 3-4).

The most important conditions for creating a populist state is people's mental preparation for sudden changes in economic plans due to income inequality and enough space for expansionist plans that require enough financial resources. Without the necessary resources a populist state cannot start and execute those plans.

Due to the previous governments' actions, these conditions were provided for the ninth government to follow the populist policies. Ahmadinejad even tried to use his own words and expressions. In his presidency, the word "improve" was considered a materialistic and western term and instead the word "transcendence" which had more of a spiritual sense was replaced to prove that the new government does not agree with previous ones even on words (Delforouz, 2014: 265-266; Ninth Government Program, 2005:7-9).

## **5. The Origin of Targeting the Subsidies**

In economics, subsidy is the government's charity and free donations to people. Oxford dictionary defines subsidies as an amount of money from public properties that help an industry or profession keep the price of their goods or services low (WTO, 2006: 47-54).

The law of targeting the subsidies was presented to the parliament as a bill by the ninth government in 2008 and after a lot of back and forth and undergoing some changes, it was passed. This bill was a part of the Economic Evolution Program which Ahmadinejad's government called "the

Great Surgery of Iranian Economy" and was finally passed in parliament in 16 articles and 16 notes. On May 16, 2010, the pilot implementation of the Targeted Subsidies Law began in 3 provinces of Ilam, Gilan and North Khorasan.

Sven months later, Ahmadinejad announced the implementation of targeted subsidies across the country on national television (Armane-e-Emrooz Newspaper, Special Issue, 2014: 2).

Some of Ahmadinejad's economic policies including the distribution of Equity Shares, Mehr Mass Housing and Mehr-e-Imam-Reza interest-free loan fund were done in the first term of his presidency. However, the Targeted Subsidies Plan was implemented as a pilot first and it only went to full execution after winning the second election which made many believe that it had advertising purposes for the elections.

Targeted subsidies in Iran meant giving out cash and transitioning from indirect to direct subsidies. Therefore, the nature of this plan can be interpreted as changing the system of paying subsidies in three main areas:

The first area includes removing of subsidies from all forms of energy and other subsidized commodities. Elimination of subsidies and raising the price of energy and other subsidized goods can be considered a shock from the supply side that entails a cost pressure.

The second area of the Targeted Subsidies Law includes redistribution of the income by omitting the indirect subsidies. According to article 12 of the mentioned law, the government is obligated to deposit all the incomes from executing this law into a specific account under Targeted Subsidies in the General Treasury. However, the redistribution of subsidies can be



interpreted as a demand shock, as a result of which, part of the market demand for energy is transferred to the market of other goods.

The third area is the financial and executive mechanisms of this law. Article 15 of the Targeted Subsidies Law allows the government to find a governmental organization nature called Targeted Subsidies Organization within a month after this law's entry into force.

One of the important topics about the nature of this plan is the issue of the government's mistake. The government's main approach was based on budgeting and redistribution which was implemented for all forms of energy. The main concern in the country was suboptimal energy consumption. However, the government's approach gave a distributive aspect to this issue, although they could adopt other effective solutions such as consumption management which is much simpler and more efficient than increasing the price of energy forms. But since the government believed in the distributive approach, they tried to transform the country's economy by pricing mechanisms (Sharif-Zadeh, 2013:76).

The roots of this move by the government go back to the "Price-Stabilizing Bill" in the seventh parliament. After the establishment of the seventh parliament with a fundamentalist majority, the bill for stabilizing the price of energy conduits (passed by the sixth state which required the annual subsidized prices to comply with international standards throughout 5 years) forbade president Khatami's government from gradually increasing the price of some subsidized goods such as fuel and general commodities

which the then the Speaker of Parliament called it a new year's present for the people. Also, in 2006 with the approval of the cabinet, the government started to distribute fuel cards which were the modern version of coupons.

This way, vehicle owners had a monthly quota for using subsidized gasoline or diesel. This plan later went through some changes to distribute fuel more justly (for example, continuous decreasing of quota and omitting the quota of foreign made vehicles). However, this plan was one of the executive moves towards targeted subsidies that were eventually implemented as the government's Economic Evolution Program.

## 6. Purposes of Targeted Subsidies Program

Theoretically, there can be two perceptions of the Economic Evolution Program and its most important clause, targeted subsidies:

A. Economic goals (improving income distribution and supporting low-income social classes).

B. Implementing a theory that had existed in Iran's economy for a long time but no government had been able to put to action before.

Nonetheless, disregarding the main excerpts of the program, ignoring Iran's situation in the international community (adopting a sanctions regime against Iran over nuclear issues), unprepared institutional structures for executing a project with this magnitude, hasty actions such as the dissolution of the Management and Planning Organization, wrong interpretation of targeted subsidies and proceeding to pay cash to everyone, show

that the purpose of this program was to increase the number of government's supporters among the commonalty and especially the low-income social classes.

### **7. The Nature of Subsidies in Iran**

In Iran, thanks to oil incomes, the government has been able to stay independent from social classes and make them depend on the government. The distributive feature of Iran's rentier government after the Islamic Revolution have been intensified due to the government economy (even more than before) and the ideological nature and especially the justice-seeking ideals. The political literature in the economic area shows that the government's interventionist policies had increased after the revolution. Hana Arendt believes that "social issues" and "poverty" were the main reasons of the major revolutions across the world and that's why after triumphing, these revolutions seek to implement social policies such as distributive policies.

The government's structure and economy in post-revolution Iran still depends heavily on oil revenues. This is despite the fact that in the early days after the fall of the monarchy, almost all of the revolutionary leaders and groups condemned that regime for depending on oil revenues and their policies in spending oil revenues and they demanded fundamental revisions in previous arrangements.

In this regard, Terry Lynn Karl, a researcher of political economy of oil, mentions a phenomenon called "oil fascination" in rentier governments. This means when there is a sudden increase in oil revenues, the authorities of these countries get the optimistic impression that a historical opportunity for the countries

development has appeared and they spend all the incomes, dreaming of making a name in history. Karl refers to the formation of this phenomenon in Venezuela and Iran as examples, in that before the revolution, in both countries slogans like "Making the Great Venezuela" and "Moving towards a Great civilization" were raised (Karl, 2014:184-216).

Oil revenues allow states to reduce the influence of social classes and groups on their policies and advance their own agendas. Accordingly, in countries with rentier economy, the government always has a key role in major policy making and implementing, and their main tool is distributing subsidies and granting economic advantages to their supporters. Since rentier states achieve the income resources and the wealth from selling raw material and oil by themselves, they make hasty actions in order to increase supporters and their influence among different segments of the society, especially vulnerable social classes.

Paul Haywood considers clientelism the most important form of state corruption. Weak states along with natural resources and absence of party institutionalization, prepare the most favorable environment for clientelism and growth of supporter/follower networks because rent supplies the necessary budget for this mechanism (Haywood, 2002: 32). Thus, Ahmadinejad's objective by the Targeted Subsidies Plan was increasing his own power and influence among people and especially low-income groups. Unprecedented oil revenue of 800 Billion dollars in 8 years made it possible for him to dedicate a huge budget to current costs, short-term projects and distributing money in different ways.

### **7.1. Increasing Oil Prices**

An extensive foreign financial resource was another influential factor in adopting economic policies with distributive and populist approach. Ahmadinejad promised to bring the oil money to people's dinner tables and he insisted on having a non-luxury lifestyle in comparison to his rivals. He became president when the oil price was at the highest point which meant a false growth rate and it caused an enormous wave of importation into the country and reduced the impacts of the inflation and high prices that were caused by the American and European sanctions. The oil revenues increased during 2005-2013, but neither the Iranian economy nor its productive capacities experienced any change and the greatest opportunity for the country's development was lost mainly because of the ninth and tenth governments' mishandling of oil revenues.

### **7.2. Distributive Approach Policy**

Distributive approach has been one of the ninth and tenth governments' most important features of their economic policies which clearly appear in their plans and slogans. Ahmadinejad's government took various actions for this purpose. One of these innovations was trips to provinces during which he would travel to far away towns and villages and hold the cabinet meetings there and pass many bills that would increase the general costs of the country.

Some of his other similar plans were increasing marriage loans and granting small loans from Mehr-e-Imam-Reza Loan Fund to resolve the Iranian youth's three main problems: housing, employment and marriage, and granting national industrial

shares to all people under the title of "Justice Shares". Following the privatization pattern, he presented a justice-based privatization plan to the seventh parliament in 2005 and according to that plan 80% of stakes of government-owned companies, valued at approximately 115 to 120 Billion dollars had to be reassigned. This plan started in January 2006 in four deprived provinces of the country.

According to the report of the special commission to monitor and track the general policies of Article 44 of the constitution, only about 6% of the government-owned companies' stakes were really transferred to the private sector and 94% were transferred to the quasi-government sector such as institutions and foundations. In addition, according to The Supreme Audit Court in 2010 only 36% of the specified objectives in the implementation of Article 44 were achieved and therefore his actions were more of non-nationalization of the companies rather than privatization of them (Amir-Arjmand, 2009: 1-160).

Theoretically, it has been determined that some states in the Middle East have sought to recruit from social classes and build social status for themselves using specific economic policies. For example, many of them have tried to recruit supporters among lower classes by resorting to populist policies, and among middle and upper classes by accumulation policies, thereby strengthening their social base, increase their influence, and increase their supporters (Murphy, 2004: 203-231). These actions increase people's satisfaction with the government and create credibility for it. A credibility that is based on distributing commodities and not through the existence

of democratic institutions (Luchiani, 2001: 48).

Thus, the Targeted Subsidies Plan can be explained based on the clientelistic goals of Ahmadinejad's government.<sup>2</sup> Although targeted subsidies is a right move for the country's public interest, considering the above-mentioned conditions in spite of frequent warnings from economy experts, adopting a method that was not actually targeting and paying subsidies to the general public was done to increase supporters. Therefore, it had political motives. Despite the fact that in this plan the term "social justice" was regularly mentioned, non-normative implementation of the project did not lead to reducing poverty and establishing social justice.

#### **8. Unsuitable Timing of Implementation**

One very important aspect that must be handled carefully in the field of reformative policies is synchronization of reforms and availability of proper circumstances for administrating the economic reforms. In general, there are four prerequisites for executing such a massive project:

- A. The government's political acceptance must be at the highest level.
- B. The economic growth rate must be at the highest level.
- C. Inflation rate must be low.
- D. The social security system must be efficient and capable.

During that period, Iran was in bad condition from a financial point of view, and

stood in the first place in the region with respect to economic indicators such as inflation and unemployment.

Therefore, it was no surprise that this project did not have positive consequences for micro and macro-economics. The Targeted Subsidies Plan was implemented when production was in bad conditions and the country was facing the strictest sanctions from western countries which caused disruption in many economic activities such as selling oil. In 2010, the year the plan was implemented, Iran ranked 137 among 183 countries in terms of business climate (Doing Business, 2010: 4). Also according to the following table, the employment rate was 13.5% and the economic participation rate was experiencing a 3% drop in comparison to 2005. On the other hand, the economic growth by increasing the government's revenues (oil) shows a false growth which becomes clear in the subsequent years.

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<sup>2</sup> The political power structure in Iran before the revolution was a class structure (horizontal downturn layers). But after the revolution it became a class and mass structure one and the war intensified it. According to this theory, the political system in Iran after the revolution is not a class structure, but a clientelist (populist) one. (Alamdari 1998)

**Table 1. The rate of economic participation, unemployment and economic development (by percent) 2005-2012 in Iran**

Year	Economic Development **	Unemployment *	Economic Participation *
2005	6/19	11/5	41
2006	7/32	11/3	40/4
2007	7/48	10/5	39/6
2008	0/83	10/4	38
2009	3/16	11/9	38/9
2010	6/59	13/5	38/3
2011	3/02	12/	36/9
2012	-5/4	12/2	37/7

**Resources:** \*Planning and Strategic Supervision of President (Country's Economic Government in 2003-2013 Period, Challenges and Solutions, 2013: 13-14). \*\*Bimonthly Journal of Analytical Research Statistics, 2014, Statistical Center of Iran, Second Year, Issue No.7, August and September.

Therefore, considering the unfavorable economic indicators, as well as the experiences in other countries, we can say that implementing such large-scale plans reflect the political intentions of their performers. Generally, even before the Targeted Subsidies Plan, it was clear that the Ahmadinejad government refused to pay attention to accurate economic policy making and planning in accordance with Iran's economic structure. For example, the significant rise in oil revenues during the Fourth Development Plan (2005-2009) led to an increase in importation and non-oil trade deficit. This was in spite of the fact that in this period, imports of consumer goods was 36% and imports of capital goods were 49% less than the third development plan. The purpose of the imports was to prevent the inflation rate growth, but it harmed the domestic production and many production units reduced their production to 30-40% of their capacity (Amouzegar, 2010: 120).

Also, other countries' experience in the field of economic reform show that their

plans have only been successful when there were a group or council comprised of several economic theorists who knew the economy of that country well. It has been either this or the head of the government has been an economy expert him/herself.

Impatience and lack of tolerance culture among Ahmadinejad and his senior managers resulted in the dissolution of the majority of the decision-making councils in economic affairs. Failing to benefit from opinions of capable and expert economic researchers of the country in spite of their frequent warnings, led the country into the crisis phase.

### Conclusion

Governments have various and specific goals by granting social benefits and subsidies, such as reducing poverty, a fair distribution of incomes and supporting specific social classes. But from the political economy point of view, we can also mention the states' political objectives. For example, presentation and implementation of some

plans and programs in the ninth and tenth governments in Iran have been associated with distributive approach. The Targeted Subsidies Plan, Meh-e-Imam-Reza Fund for marriage loans or Mehr mass housing project were all types of paying subsidies because they were paid with specific conditions and facilities to specific groups. In fact, according to human development requirements, the purpose of targeted subsidies was to help out groups or individuals so that they can earn the minimum conditions for a dignified life. But with paying cash subsidies to all groups and classes, even the rich, the program was

deviated from the specified path and even became in clear breach of the law passed by parliament.

This type of distributive approach in addition to the rentier structure of the governments in Iran shows that the objective was clientelism, increasing the government's influence and extending its legitimacy. Moreover, insufficient attention to economic conditions in Iran at the time of implementation of the plan, not using the opinions of experts and most importantly not using the revenues to increase production in this period, all indicate the political objectives of the project.

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## اقتصاد سیاسی یارانه‌های نقدی در ایران

مسعود غفاری<sup>۱</sup>، مهدی عبدی<sup>۲</sup>

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### چکیده

هدف این پژوهش، بررسی اهداف دولت‌های نهم و دهم از تدوین و اجرای طرح هدفمند کردن یارانه‌ها است. این برنامه از مهم‌ترین بندهای طرح تحول اقتصادی است که توسط دولت‌های فوق به اجرا درآمد و از آن با عنوان جراحی اقتصاد بیمار ایران یاد می‌شود. پرسش پژوهش حاضر، این است که هدفمند کردن یارانه‌ها در دوره تصدی ریاست جمهوری محمود احمدی‌نژاد چگونه قابل تبیین است؟ در این راستا، فرضیه مطرح شده این است که می‌توان گفت، اهداف غیر اقتصادی، از جمله اهداف سیاسی و افزایش مشروعیت و اقتدار دولت و نظام سیاسی از مهم‌ترین انگیزه‌های اجرای این طرح توسط دولت‌های نهم و دهم بوده است. از آنجاکه برای بررسی سیاست‌گذاری‌های اقتصادی دولتی، فقط نمی‌توان به اصول و چارچوب‌های اقتصاد متعارف و محض اکتفا کرد، لذا از رهیافت اقتصاد سیاسی و رویکردهای مطروحه آن به‌عنوان رهیافتی بین‌رشته‌ای استفاده شده است. روش پژوهش، تبیینی-تحلیلی است و شیوه گردآوری داده‌ها، استفاده از منابع و اسناد دست اول، کتابخانه‌ای و اینترنتی است. یافته‌های پژوهش، نشان می‌دهد که با توجه به رویکرد توزیعی و همچنین تأکید این دولت‌ها بر انگاره‌های پوپولیستی، می‌توان بر فرضیه فوق صحه گذاشت، مضاف بر آن ماهیت رانتی دولت در ایران و افزایش بی‌سابقه قیمت نفت در دوره ۱۳۹۲-۱۳۸۴ به تأیید ادعای پژوهش کمک می‌کند.

واژه‌های کلیدی: اقتصاد سیاسی، هدفمند کردن یارانه، دولت  
پژوهش‌های بین‌رشته‌ای و مطالعات فرهنگی  
پرتال جامع علوم انسانی

۱. استادیار علوم سیاسی، دانشکده علوم انسانی، دانشگاه تربیت مدرس، تهران، ایران (نویسنده مسئول) ghaffari@modares.ac.ir

۲. کارشناسی ارشد علوم سیاسی، دانشکده علوم انسانی، دانشگاه تربیت مدرس، تهران، ایران mehdiabdi622@yahoo.com