



# Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi

## Turkish Journal of Middle Eastern Studies

ISSN: 2147-7523 E-ISSN: 2630-5631  
Publisher: Sakarya University

Vol. 11, No. 1, 31-48, 2024  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26513/tocd.1450484>

Research Article

## Does Leadership Matter? Ahmadinejad, Rouhani, and the Change in Iranian Foreign Policy

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Received: 11.03.2024  
Accepted: 19.04.2024  
Available Online: 02.05.2024

**Abstract:** Following Rouhani's victory in the 2013 presidential elections, Iran's foreign policy (IFP) underwent significant changes after more than a decade under Ahmadinejad. To date, only a few academic studies have attempted to incorporate a specific individual-level theory into their respective analyses, even though a large body of literature contends that leadership change is the decisive factor regarding the differences in Iran's policy toward the US and the EU. This study analyzes the leadership styles of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani to reveal the possible impact of decision-maker personalities on foreign policy, and to develop an account on the moderation in IFP. Accordingly, it asks, "How does leadership style influence IFP toward the 'Western world'?" Theoretically, the study benefits from Hermann's 'Leadership Trait Analysis' to investigate the impact of leaders' personalities on the foreign policy behavior of states. Empirically, it analyzes both presidents' spontaneously given responses to interviews and in press conferences, which were randomly selected. Methodologically, the study utilizes the Profiler Plus software to assess individual traits of leaders. Interpreting leadership trait scores of two presidents, the study concludes that certain leadership features allow the construction of foreign policies that are more moderate.

**Keywords:** Hassan Rouhani, Iranian Foreign Policy, Leadership, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Middle East.

## Introduction

When the then-major of Tehran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, unexpectedly won the elections in 2005, many people wondered who he actually was. Even the then-supreme leader Khamenei allegedly supported him only after he passed the second round (Kozhanov, 2018). The Ahmadinejad period witnessed increased confrontation with the US and 'the Western world'<sup>1</sup> in general, mainly due to the president's bid to create a more independent Iran, securing the country's right to possess nuclear energy, and develop closer relations with the non-Western and non-European world. He also constructed his foreign policy discourse around the concept of justice, which he frequently referred to in Iran's relations with the US and Europe, accusing them of treating Iran and 'the non-Western world' in general unjustly. He had a nationalistic mindset that also wanted Iran to be the most influential regional power in the Middle East and wider Asia. He positioned himself as a member of the traditionalist camp in Iran (the so-called Imam Khomeini's line)

**Cite as (APA 7):** Lüleci-Sula, Ç.(2024). Does Leadership Matter? Ahmadinejad, Rouhani, and the Change in Iranian Foreign Policy, *Türkiye Ortadoğu Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 11(1), 31-48. <https://doi.org/10.26513/tocd.1450484>



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and was ready for struggle and confrontation inside and outside for his worldview, political agenda, and principles.

Following eight years with Ahmadinejad marked by tension including sanctions by the US and the EU, the 2013 presidential elections resulted in Hassan Rouhani's success, which significantly depended on positive outcomes in Iran-US relations. Enhanced relations with the Western world would allow the recovery of not only the country's image and position in world politics but also its economic situation at the time. Overall, Rouhani promised to put an end to Iran's regional and international isolation. His collegial and worldly approach to foreign policy and his moderate personality that is more open to information from other power centers and bodies in the country were sources of hope for the public. Obama's presidency in the first two years of Rouhani's term further helped the two states to develop more positive relations, at least compared to his predecessor, Ahmadinejad's period.

Built on this background, this study aims to investigate the possible impact of leadership traits and personalities on the change in Iranian foreign policy (IFP) after the 2013 presidential elections. Accordingly, it asks, "How did leadership style influence IFP toward the 'the Western world' in the immediate aftermath of the 2013 elections?" The study adopts the Leadership Trait Analysis model in foreign policy analysis (FPA) literature. To reveal their leadership traits, the study analyzes spontaneously delivered public speeches of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani, which have been selected randomly. This analysis then helps understand the shift in IFP following the leader change. The study argues that leadership matters even in political contexts in which foreign policy decisions are heavily circumscribed by higher authorities and power circles such as the Supreme Leader and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

The study first presents a short overview of the foreign policy analysis literature. Second, it examines the leadership traits of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani to identify what type of leaders they are according to LTA. Third, the study utilizes two leaders' LTA scores to assess the impact of leaders on Iran's foreign policy toward the Western world. Finally, it concludes by presenting the findings on how the change in leadership in Iran in 2013 triggered a shift in the country's foreign policy.

### **Foreign Policy Analysis Literature**

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) has multifactorial, multilevel, and multi-/interdisciplinary characteristics (Hudson 2007, p. 6; Hermann 1995, p. 251). However, what makes FPA more distinctive is its agent-oriented and actor-specific approach. Thus, what FPA aims to do, which is to analyze the impact of agents, is an even harder task than measuring various elements' impact on the foreign policy of states (See, Hudson 2007; Rosati 1995, among others). Analyzing the impact of

individual leaders in foreign policy-making processes seems to be a great deal due to various reasons. First, researchers generally do not have direct contact with the decision-maker. Second, decision-making is perceived to be a secret process, which only reveals outcomes rather than giving insights about how the decisions are taken. Third, even if a researcher can access direct channels, no leader is likely to reveal that for instance s/he is intolerant, closed to any external information, or s/he is very aggressive and taking decisions purely sensuously, and not rationally (Hudson 2007, pp. 53-54).

There are both rational and cognitive approaches to analyzing the role of individual agents in FPA literature. Rational theories (Graham, 1969; Hermann & Hermann, 1989; Stein & Welch, 1997; Bueno de Mesquita, 2010; Walker et al., 2011; Quackenbush, 2004; Fuhrmann & Early, 2008) as well as role theory (Holsti, 1970; Rosenau, 1987), poliheuristic theory (Mintz, 2003), prospect theory (Levy, 1992; 1997), operational code analysis (See Walker, 1983; Walker et al., 2011, pp. 153-204; Walker et al., 1998), and leadership trait analysis have taken important steps to decode the influence of individuals in decision-making process. LTA allows the researcher to apply quantitative methods, which are discussed to bring an objective look to research. Moreover, in the analysis of trait results of leaders, one may easily benefit from interpretation for a deeper understanding. By applying LTA, Dyson (2006) analyzes Blair's Iraq War decision with a focus on the importance of the individual level factors; Post and his colleagues (2005) decode Saddam and Clinton's leadership traits; Renfro compares father Bush and son Bush's traits to answer the question whether "human beings can be true agents of states" (2008). Kesgin reviews Türkiye PM Çiller's LTA and compares her results with the other post-Cold War leaders, concluding that Çiller's "high results in in-group bias and distrust mark her leadership and foreign policy behavior" (2012, p. 29). Görener and Ucal analyze Türkiye President Erdoğan's leadership traits, defining him as "the most controversial figure in recent Türkiye political history" (2011, p. 357). Yang (2010) compares Bill Clinton and George W. Bush looking at their scores in conceptual complexity to analyze their governments' changing attitudes toward China.

The case of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's presidency in Iran is quite suitable for the analysis of leadership's effect on foreign policy decision-making. These leaders have significantly different perspectives about Iran's foreign policy, which can be understood by looking at their changing attitudes toward the US and nuclear energy negotiations. Both leaders have similarities in terms of their early life and were born into religious families. Besides, both hold a doctoral degree. Ahmadinejad earned his PhD degree in 1997 in transportation engineering and planning from the Iran University of Science and Technology, located in Tehran, when he was the mayor of Ardabil Province, located in the northwest of the country. Rouhani continued his studies at Glasgow Caledonian University in

Scotland, graduating in 1995 with an M.Phil. degree in law with his thesis titled "The Islamic legislative power with reference to the Iranian experience" and a Ph.D. degree in constitutional law in 1999 with the thesis titled "The Flexibility of Shariah with reference to the Iranian experience" (GCU University, 2013). Although both have similarities in terms of being well-educated and growing up in religious families, they have different perspectives regarding Iran's foreign relations with Western states, especially the US.

## **Utilizing Trait Analysis to Analyze Leadership Style**

As widely discussed in the literature, it is not an easy task to measure an individual touch in the policy-making process. Analyzing the speeches of leaders is a frequently used method to understand how leaders attach meaning to the world they operate in. LTA is an individual-level approach to foreign policy analysis, which is introduced by Margaret G. Hermann (1999) aiming to analyze the impact of personalities of leaders in foreign policy-making. Admitting that it is an uphill task to develop a full understanding of the personality and perceptions of a leader, Hermann (2002, p. 1) argues that we can learn something about the images the leaders display in public by analyzing the content of what they say.

### **Theory, method, and data**

LTA benefits from an at-a-distance method. Such a method claims that the public verbal output of a leader can provide information about their understanding of the world as well as their decision-making style, "when processed by content analysis schemes linked to psychological concepts" (Dyson 2006, p. 290). As Winter et al. state, the at-a-distance method utilizes the words of individuals as data for the aim of measuring their personality traits (1977).

LTA develops seven schemes - *belief in the ability to control events (BACE)*, *need for power (PWR)*, *conceptual complexity (CC)*, *self-confidence (SC)*, *task orientation (TASK)*, *distrust of others (DIS)*, *in-group bias (IGB)*- to assess the traits of leaders by analyzing their own words. LTA calculates a score between 0 and 1 based on the frequency of particular terms in a given text and how frequently they are present or absent. Words like "me, mine, I" for example, are frequently used, which indicates that the researcher who named the leader has a high level of self-confidence. The software Profiler Plus (PP), created by Dr. Michael D. Young to decode the utterances of leaders and quantify certain aspects of their personalities, is used in numerous research on LTA, including this one. Conceptual complexity and task focus variables are calculated by a simple frequency content analysis, while the others require the software to take into account the "types, positioning and relationships of words" (Görener et al., 2011, p. 363).

I gathered scripts (published in English) of spontaneously made speeches of both leaders and analyzed them to identify Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's personality

traits. The material consists of their answers in interviews and press conferences. In line with Hermann’s recommendation, I avoided pre-prepared speeches such as election campaigns and annual addresses, because these materials are generally written not by the leader but for the leader by staff members or speech writers (Hermann, 2002, p. 2). Thus, random speeches between the years 2003 and 2014, consisting of 25.842 words in total, have been analyzed. It is important to note that I did not make any translations of speeches in Persian; instead, I collected translated material from reputable journals. Table 1 summarizes the LTA outputs of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani, and compares the results with one reference group named “world leaders”. The data of world leaders is gathered and analyzed by Hermann and her colleagues by using the same software (PP) and was last updated in October 2012. The reference group consists of 284 leaders, from whose LTA outputs I measured Iranian leaders’ levels according to seven schemes.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1. LTA scores of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani in comparison with world leaders**

LTA Characteristics	Ahmadinejad	Rouhani	World Leaders (WL) (N=284)	Range (based on WL)
BACE (Belief in Ability to Control Events)	0.40 High	0.31 Average	0.35	Low < 0.30 High > 0.40
PWR (Need for Power)	0.19 Low	0.24 Average	0.26	Low < 0.21 High > 0.31
CC (Conceptual Complexity)	0.51 Low	0.55 Average	0.59	Low < 0.53 High > 0.65
SC (Self-Confidence)	0.42 Average	0.35 Average	0.36	Low < 0.26 High > 0.46
TASK (Task Orientation)	0.38 Low	0.55 Low	0.63	Low < 0.56 High > 0.70
DIS (Distrust of Others)	0.18 Average	0.34 High	0.13	Low < 0.07 High > 0.19
IGB (In-Group Bias)	0.10 Average	0.13 Average	0.15	Low < 0.10 High > 0.20

Hermann asks three questions to come up with a general result about the subject leader: *Does Leader Respect or Challenge Constraints? Is the Leader Open or Closed to Contextual Information? Is a Leader Motivated by Problems or Relationships?* Assessing their scores, Ahmadinejad is a leader who challenges constraints; and is open to information; and his motivation for action is relationships rather than problems. This makes Ahmadinejad an 'evangelistic leader,' whose "focus of attention is on persuading others to join in one's mission, in mobilizing others around one's message" (Hermann, 2003, p. 185). Rouhani is an 'influential leader' whose "focus of attention is on building cooperative relationships with other governments and states to play a leadership role; by working with others, one can gain more than is possible on one's own" (Hermann, 2003, p. 185).

**Table 3. Leadership styles of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani**

	<b>Ahmadinejad</b>	<b>Rouhani</b>
Reactions to constraints	Challenge	Respect
Openness to information	Closed	Closed
Motivation for seeking office	Relationship oriented	Relationship oriented
Leadership style	<b>Evangelistic leader</b>	<b>Influential leader</b>

Whether a leader respects the constraints or challenges is measured by looking at the results in BACE and PWR traits. Taking two results into consideration, leaders who share Ahmadinejad's results seem to "challenge constraints; are skillful in both direct and indirect influence; know what they want and take charge to see it happens" (Hermann, 1999, p. 13). They tend to push the limits of what is possible. Leaders who are high in BACE and low in PWR are generally too open and direct in their use of power (Hermann, 2003, p. 187). Hermann indicates that leaders who have a high level of belief in their capacity to control events, such as Ahmadinejad, tend to be "more interested in and active in the policy-making process" (1999, p. 14). In a sense, this trait can be considered as having a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', since leaders who believe their ability to influence policies are more likely to initiate activities rather than waiting for others to take the lead. Moreover, their self-belief generally causes them to be less willing to compromise or work with others. Leaders who respect constraints, like Rouhani, tend to work within the contextual constraints toward their goals. Such leaders have political skills like building consensus and achieving compromise (Hermann, 2003, p. 187). Although they are average in both BACE and PWR, Rouhani's scores are closer to the low range. Such leaders are likely to wait for others to take responsibility and react based on the first move. In contrast to their counterparts, leaders who share

Rouhani's scores on these traits tend not to shoulder responsibility and move on, and they easily accuse others if something goes wrong (Hermann, 2003, p. 190).

Ziller et al. (1977) conclude that CC and SC are interrelated to form a leader's self-other orientation, which gives us hints about their openness to contextual information coming from other sources. Looking at Hermann's classification, leaders whose CC result is lower than their SC result, like both Ahmadinejad and Rouhani, are closed to contextual information (1999, p. 20). Such leaders are generally driven by causes and they are ideologues (Hermann, 2003, p. 192). They interpret the environment according to their worldview and are close to cues from others. When CC is low, as Ahmadinejad, the leader perceives situations as well as ideas and people as good or bad, and black or white (Hermann, 1999, p. 22). Leaders with a low score also tend to choose like-minded advisors. Rouhani's score on this trait is average. He seems to be more flexible in issues with a comparatively lower significance, while for instance in issues he links with security, he tends to perceive the world as black and white and makes strong distinctions between 'us' and 'them'. Both leaders have average scores on SC, but Ahmadinejad has a higher level of SC compared to Rouhani. Leaders like Ahmadinejad are more consistent in their decisions, and they filter and interpret the information based on their high sense of self-worth (Hermann, 2003, p. 195).

Leaders are generally driven by two factors: internal focus (a problem), or external cause (a relationship in their environment). In the first situation, the leaders tend to make decisions according to "a particular cause, an ideology, or a specific set of interests." In the second, they aim to get "acceptance, power, support, or acclaim" (Hermann, 1999, p. 24). Three traits are considered such motivations: TASK, DIS, and IGB. LTA indicates that leaders who have similar results to Ahmadinejad and Rouhani tend to perceive the world as conflict-prone, but because other countries are viewed as having constraints on what they can do, some flexibility in response is possible; leaders, however, must vigilantly monitor developments in the international arena and prudently prepare to contain an adversary's actions while still pursuing their countries' interests. (Focus is on taking advantage of opportunities and building relationships while remaining vigilant) (Table 5 in Hermann, 1999, p. 28).

Moreover, leaders with a high level of DIS, such as Rouhani, are hypersensitive to criticism; they want their advisors to be very loyal (because of this, they tend to shuffle them frequently); and they tend to perceive the world as a zero-sum game. To Hermann, a high level of distrust toward others is generally related to past experiences.

### **Does Leadership Matter in Iran's US Policy?**

This study argues that data on both the personal background and leadership style of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani are significant individual-level determinants of Iran's

policy toward 'the West'. However, it is important to note that it is never possible to make clear-cut definitions about leaders' perceptions and their ideas on a specific event. There might be several factors that have potentially been effective in understanding the international position of Iran in the eyes of these leaders. While Ahmadinejad pursued "the politics of confrontation" in his tenure, Rouhani has been pursuing a "reformist" and "moderate" attitude toward the US and 'the West' in general.

Since his CC is low, Ahmadinejad is expected to see the world as divided between good and evil. The US and other states in the West are the "great satan" and the "oppressor" which was part of Khomeini's point of view. The world consists of the "oppressor" and the "oppressed" (Beeman, 2013, p. 201; Roshandel, 2013, p. 44). Following Khomeini, Ahmadinejad also thinks that 'the Muslim world' represents the oppressed and 'the West' represents the oppressor. Accordingly, there cannot be a possibility to positively engage with the policies of the US. As indicated in Beeman's work, there have been myths in both the US and Iran's minds toward each other. From Ahmadinejad's perspective, the US is seen as a corrupter of life on earth and a bastion of immorality. He further thinks that the US is continually trying to "dominate Iranian politics and install a puppet regime" and that the US and Israel have a group of undercover spies who consistently work to weaken the Iranian state. (Beeman, 2013). Furthermore, "the politics of the US and Israel are inseparable" and they "want Iran to remain backward and dependent on the West for technology and modern civilizational aspects." Lastly, he thinks that "Western cultural forces target Iran and other Islamic nations in an attempt to erode traditional values" (Beeman, 2013, pp. 201-204).

Ahmadinejad may have certain motivations for preferring more hostile foreign policy initiatives. From a historical point of view, Iran has been subjected to isolation in the Middle East region and the international arena in general. For example, as mentioned in Juneau and Razavi's article, "Iran is not a member of any security arrangement and four regional powers surrounding Iran –India, Israel, Pakistan, and Russia– enjoy the security guarantees provided by nuclear power" (2013, p. 1). Iran's backing of various regional factions like the Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas in the Palestinian territories does not substantially alter the situation, as these groups function more like allies of the Iranian government rather than mere proxies (Juneau & Razavi, 2013).

Historically, the Khomeini era can be called as "pursuit of universalist causes" and the post-Khomeini era until the Ahmadinejad period can be called as "pursuit of pragmatic foreign policy" through trying to get rid of international isolation and restructuring economy and domestic policy (Juneau & Razavi 2013, p. 3). Ahmadinejad criticized this reformation and structuring period as "the great betrayal of the revolution" and called his presidency the "third revolution" after the Islamic Revolution and the seizure of the US embassy (Ansari, 2007, p. 11). His



aggressive attitude toward the Western world is in line with Hermann's approach that leaders who share Ahmadinejad's scores tend to see the world as conflict-prone. Moreover, he is closed to contextual information, which supports the argument that Ahmadinejad is a neo-conservative leader who pursues an idealistic and ideological attitude towards what he identifies as the Western world, in other words, he sees the world through an ideology-based lens (Juneau & Razavi, 2013, p. 9).

Ansari claims that labeling 'the Western world' as the enemy in his discourse was closely related to the endurance of his legitimacy in the domestic sphere. In contrast with Rouhani, Ahmadinejad's scores make him less willing to compromise and pursue a more active role in policymaking. Moreover, Ansari defines Ahmadinejad's foreign policymaking as "principled" which refers to readiness for confrontation in Iran's foreign relations and adds that Ahmadinejad proposed the idea that "confrontation must be the norm" (Ansari, 2007, pp. 45-46). He tried to legitimize this discourse and attitude toward 'the Western world' by using "Hidden Imam"<sup>3</sup> claims, suggesting the idea that he could be informed by a hidden imam (Ansari, 2007, p. 42).

Apart from Ahmadinejad's personality and his understanding of where Iran should position itself in the international arena, structural conditions affected Ahmadinejad's formation of his discourse toward 'the Western world'. When he was elected as the sixth president in June 2005, the region witnessed the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan by the US. Besides, George Bush's "preemptive strikes" policy sparked the aggressive foreign policy of Ahmadinejad. This structural environment; namely the rise in the oil prices, the fall of rival regimes, and the continuous security threat of the US, gave birth to an aggressive foreign policy understanding of Ahmadinejad. According to Juneau and Razavi (2013, p. 5), the main objective was to counter-balance the power of the US and its Arab allies by developing closer ties with rising powers such as Russia, Brazil, China, India, and Türkiye, which had the potential to support Iran's challenge to Western hegemony in the region. It can be thought that structural features had an impact on the pursuit of aggressive foreign policy during the Ahmadinejad period apart from his foreign policy rationale. Thus, it can be argued that the personality and leadership style of Ahmadinejad and structural factors interacted throughout the process. As Beeman argues, the Bush Administration's attacks on Iran strengthened the power of the country's conservative ruling elite while harming the reformists (2013, pp. 198-199).

It seems that Rouhani took the differences between the US and Iran for granted and inherent. During the election campaign, Rouhani promised to bring moderation to Iran's foreign policy, especially toward the US or what has been identified as the Western world. Such discourse supports Hermann's LTA which considers Rouhani an influential leader who tends to build cooperative relations with other

states/governments. As Milani argues, the change in Iran's foreign policy is not only toward the West, but Rouhani is likely to start with a charm offensive, beginning with efforts to win over all neighboring countries of Iran, especially the Arab states in the Persian Gulf (Milani, 2013). Additionally, according to Milani (2013), Rouhani pledged to introduce a degree of rationality into Iran's tumultuous and uneven political landscape. He committed to enhancing Iran's declining economic situation, upholding human rights, freeing political detainees, and shifting from Ahmadinejad's adversarial foreign policy to one of renewed engagement with the global community. For instance, in a speech made in 2013, Rouhani said that if the US and other Western nations "accept the rights of Iranians, our nation will stand for peace, friendship, and cooperation, and together we can solve regional and even global problems." (Rezaian, 2013). This shows that Rouhani is a leader who tends to respect challenges coming from the international environment.

Fathi (2014) indicates that Rouhani criticized Ahmadinejad's vision on foreign policy, and especially his discourse during the election campaign. Besides, according to Rouhani, rapprochement with the Western world, handling international sanctions, nuclear issues, and political and social openness at home, are the most prioritized issues that need to be taken into consideration. Rouhani believes that the world has changed since the 1970s. He further argues that international politics is no longer "a zero-sum game" but it is a multi-dimensional arena where cooperation and competition often occur simultaneously. According to Rouhani "Gone is the age of blood feuds" and world leaders are expected to "lead in turning threats into opportunities" (Monshipouri & Dorraj, 2013, p. 136). Iran's foreign policy has become more compromising not only towards the US but also to other Western states. For instance, within weeks following Rouhani's election, Britain and Iran declared their plan to reestablish direct diplomatic ties, years after the British Embassy was stormed by ultra-conservative vigilantes in November 2011, days before speaking to Obama on the phone (Tabaar, 2014).

According to Monshipouri and Dorraj (2013, p. 133),

Unlike Mohammad Khatami's liberal-pragmatic vision or Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's ideological populist stance, newly elected Iranian president Hassan Rouhani is bent on pursuing a centrist-pragmatic agenda. His campaign platform reflected such a vision: Iran should engage in serious negotiations with the Western world, reduce regional conflict, and prioritize its economic recovery and the general well-being of its people above its nuclear program.

Although it is not quite clear that Iran's foreign policy under Rouhani will experience a paradigmatic change, softer rhetoric in foreign policy making under Rouhani compared to Ahmadinejad is observed. There have been some steps to reach a rapprochement with the West on nuclear issues under Rouhani's

leadership. However, despite the paradigmatic change in the foreign policy rhetoric during Rouhani's presidency, it is questionable to what extent US-Iran relations or rapprochement would be sustainable and turn into a strategic partnership in the long run. This question arises since both sides have experienced historical prejudices against each other. Moreover, international and domestic structural elements that have had an impact on the determination of foreign policy making in both countries, are other factors that shape relations of these countries apart from leadership. Thus, it is still unclear to what extent this rhetoric change can bring a real change in the foreign policy of Iran.

In the case of Iran's nuclear program, Entessar claims that "since late 2002, when the extent of Iran's nuclear program was revealed, no other issue has dominated her relations with the West as much as the nuclear issue" (2013, p. 70). Taking advantage of the rise in oil prices and the fall of rival regimes, Ahmadinejad became more willing to implement aggressive and assertive policies on nuclear issues by claiming Iran's right to improve nuclear energy peacefully and Iran's right to have a security guarantee against her rivals with nuclear power. It is essential to point out that Ahmadinejad criticized the policies of Rouhani when he was the chief negotiator of the Iranian nuclear program. Rouhani responded that "the prolonged nature of the talks had at least allowed Iran to further its nuclear program and had provided Iran with some diplomatic leverage" (Ansari, 2007, p. 50). This critique of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani's responses is one of the examples for the different perspectives of these leaders. While the former had an unrealistic and idealistic understanding of foreign policy, Rouhani seemed to be interested in accommodationist foreign policy objectives. This is in line with Hermann's classification deeming Ahmadinejad an evangelistic leader while labeling Rouhani as an influential leader. As indicated in Juneau and Razavi's work, during the Ahmadinejad period, Iran increased its power in the region. However, the question is to what extent this power rising fulfilled her potential and how much it was sustainable (2013, p. 18). From this point of view, the unrealized potential interests in the US-Iran engagement can be realized through realist and reformist leaders. According to Beeman "It must be hoped that the US and Iran will eventually come to realize that their differences stem largely from visceral cultural reactions to historical events that have long passed" (2013, p. 205).

Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's former foreign minister, indicated in June 2014 that Rouhani and he talked on the issue, and they were confident that Iran and the US could reach a comprehensive agreement. They assured the world that Iran's nuclear program would remain exclusively peaceful. He further criticized the past rhetoric that caused Iran to miss many opportunities and not be realistic in the environment Iran operated (Zarif, 2014).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The role of leadership in foreign policymaking processes has been widely studied by the literature on Middle East politics. However, few studies focus on the impact of leadership on foreign policy change in Iran by adopting a specific theory or model in their respective analyses. Curious about the source of moderation in Iranian foreign policy after the 2013 elections, this study analyzes how the leadership styles of the presidents before and after the election influenced Iran's foreign policy toward the US. To do so, it analyzed the leadership styles of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani and their influence on the convergence in Iran-US relations after 2013, specifically on the nuclear issue. Following an analysis of Rouhani and Ahmadinejad's leadership styles, the study finds out that Ahmadinejad is an "evangelistic leader" and Rouhani is an "influential leader" according to the LTA model, first introduced by Hermann.

As their leadership traits and personalities, the foreign policies of Ahmadinejad and Rouhani, especially toward 'the Western world' had significant differences. First, the leaders had distinct tone and rhetoric in their speeches about foreign relations. While Ahmadinejad was known for his confrontational and provocative rhetoric that was marked by 'anti-Western' sentiments, Rouhani adopted a more moderate and diplomatic tone that emphasized the significance of dialogue and negotiation while addressing the conflictual issue areas with the West, especially the US. Another difference was in their policies of nuclear deal. The Ahmadinejad period witnessed increased sanctions and international isolation mainly as a reply to his ideas and attitude about Iran's nuclear power and limited progress in negotiations during his term. Rouhani's administration played a significant role in the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action of 2015 that aimed to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for decreased or no sanctions as well as improvement in diplomatic relations with Western states. Ahmadinejad's administration also engaged in limited economic relations with Western economic institutions, which added another layer on top of the economic degradation resulting from international sanctions, while Rouhani adopted, albeit limited, economic reforms seeking to attract foreign trade partners and investments. Their approach to regional conflicts was another point of divergence in their leadership and foreign policymaking styles. Ahmadinejad's term was marked by his administration's support to governments and groups that had conflictual relations with the West. He also aimed to increase Iran's influence in regional politics, which 'concerned' the Western states. Rouhani adopted a more moderate and pragmatic approach in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region due to his administration's search for cooperation and dialogue with the West, which can be exemplified by his attempts to find a common ground on issues such as Syria and Yemen.

It is significant to note once again, that, presidents of Iran are not completely independent in their foreign policy rhetoric and actions due to the regime and

government type of the country. Along with several broader domestic forces and institutions, Iran's supreme leaders have always constituted the greatest influence on the president's decisions. Furthermore, the foreign policymaking process is never as simple as the leader working alone to shape the outcomes, since multiple domestic and international factors are always at play. However, this study made the case that, while it did not entirely rule out other factors, the leadership styles of the two leaders have been the main influence on how Iran and the West interact (specifically the US on the nuclear question). In all the above-mentioned issue areas that both leaders had different approaches to, leadership traits and personalities played a significant role. Ahmadinejad's scores according to LTA make him an evangelistic leader with a high level of belief in his ability to influence the political environment including making unilateral decisions. The implications of this on Iran's US policy yielded increased rigidity throughout his presidency. More specifically, his leadership style resulted in more assertive policies toward the Western world. Although both Ahmadinejad and Rouhani share certain traits according to LTA, Rouhani is an influential leader who is more open to cooperation and to be consulted by others in his political environment. This not only makes his discourse friendlier but also results in more friendly relations with the West, which goes beyond a policy of otherization.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This study employs ambiguous and binary terms such as 'Western world/states' and 'non-Western world/states' due to their frequent usage in the speeches of Iranian leaders.

<sup>2</sup> Low and high scores for Rouhani and Ahmadinejad are measured based on their scores falling one standard deviation lower or higher than the mean of the reference group (WL).

<sup>3</sup> The term "hidden Imam" or "Imam in hiding" refers to a central figure in Shia Islam known as the Mahdi, who is believed to have disappeared from public view in the 9th century. Shia Muslims await his return, which they believe will coincide with the establishment of justice and peace in the world.

<sup>4</sup> The table is directly imported from Hermann's chapter in "The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders" (Table 8.1 in Hermann 2003:185).

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**Appendix: Leadership Style as a Function of Responsiveness to Constraints, Openness to Information, and Motivation<sup>4</sup>**

		<b>Motivation</b>	
<b>Responsiveness to Constraints</b>	<b>Openness to Information</b>	<b>Problem Focus</b>	<b>Relationship Focus</b>
<b>Challenges constraints</b>	<b>Closed to information</b>	<i>Expansionistic</i> (Focus of attention is on expanding the leader's, government's, and state's span of control)	<i>Evangelistic</i> (Focus of attention is on persuading others to join in one's mission, in mobilizing others around one's message)
<b>Challenges constraints</b>	<b>Open to information</b>	<i>Actively Independent</i> (Focus of attention is on maintaining one's own and the government's maneuverability and independence in a world that is perceived to continually try to limit both)	<i>Directive</i> (Focus of attention is on maintaining one's own and the government's status and acceptance by others by engaging in actions on the world stage that enhance the state's reputation)
<b>Respects constraints</b>	<b>Closed to information</b>	<i>Incremental</i> (Focus of attention is on improving the state's economy and/or security in incremental steps while avoiding the obstacles that will	<i>Influential</i> (Focus of attention is on building cooperative relationships with other governments and states in order to play a leadership role; by working

		inevitably arise along the way)	with others, one can gain more than is possible on one's own)
<b>Respects constraints</b>	<b>Open to information</b>	<i>Opportunistic</i> (Focus of attention is on assessing what is possible in the current situation and context given what one wants to achieve and considering what Important constituencies will allow)	<i>Collegial</i> (Focus of attention is on reconciling differences and building consensus- on gaining prestige and status through empowering others and sharing accountability)