

IRAN'S ENVIRONMENTAL POLICYMAKING: ACTORS AND CHALLENGES

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After over four decades of clerical rule in Iran, the country is now facing grave environmental problems. Iran was once home to rare marshes, wetlands, and dense forests. Decades of neglect have led to the devastation of Iran's environment. Iran's land, water and climate continue to remain vulnerable to environmental degradation. Unfortunately, Iran's acute environmental crisis only continues to worsen.⁽¹⁾

Iran has legislation, regulations and decrees to protect the environment as well as environmental institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Iran has also declared its desire to partake in international cooperation to mitigate its environmental problems. However, Iran's short and medium-term political and economic policies are given more priority than those related to sustainable development and countering environmental threats. The recognition of the importance of the ecosystem started very late under Iran's highly centralized political system led mainly by the supreme leader who dominates Iran's decision-making and ruling institutions — this is in addition to many unofficial institutions that have played a pivotal role in bolstering the leadership's policies and ensuring the continuity of the current political system.

The study addresses the following major question: Why has Iran's environmental policy been ineffective? There are also sub-questions including: What are the main environmental issues and risks facing Iran? Why does the Iranian government not accord the same priority to environmental threats as it does to economic issues? How is Iran's environmental policy crafted? Why has the role of organizations to protect the environment declined? Do NGOs and movements have a role in protecting the environment? Does Iran allow civil society to play an active role in safeguarding the environment?

The study also sheds light on the policymaking process and the relationships between various environmental actors. Finally, it highlights the gap in government priorities, with it prioritizing economic development over environmental protection. The government does not pay great attention to environmental protection and haphazard environmental policymaking has led to further complexity and harm.

The study analyzes Iran's general environmental policies, adopting the method of "system analysis" to review environmental policymaking, particularly the inputs needed to craft the aforesaid policies. These policies largely determine environmental policy outcomes as does the relationship between the Iranian state and NGOs. To interpret policy issues, the "rational choice theory" * is applied and its sub-theory, the "median voter theorem." This theory suggests that if a country effectively implements and adheres to democratic principles and values, people can mobilize to demand their rights. In light of popular mobilization, democratic governments are expected to respond in order to satisfy public demands. However, as Iran's government disregards the Iranian people's democratic rights, withholds information regarding institutional performance, and protects the interests of a narrow elite that continues to hold onto power, the country's environmental policy remains floundering on the margins. ⁽²⁾

Public Policy Problems: Alternative Solutions and Government Actions

Public policy reflects the extent to which governments respond to public pressure and the prevailing conditions in society. The alternatives to public policy are often reflective of the preferences and options of those in power rather than public demands. The latter is consistent with the view of Emeritus Professor of Political Science at Florida State University and former McKenzie Professor of Government Thomas R. Dye who said that public policy is whatever the government chooses to do or not to do.⁽³⁾

Public policies are crafted for the sake of satisfying public needs or providing a societal benefit. Policies address outstanding problems and are also designed to prevent potential problems in the future.⁽⁴⁾ A policy problem is included in a government's agenda which is steered by policymakers and cov-

ers the issues and public demands that necessitate a government review and response through introducing the necessary measures. However, the steps to craft public policy are not the same for all governments. Every government has its own respective priorities and considers a diverse range of variables. In addition, each government has its own way to achieve specific goals and face different challenges. Thus, the method of crafting public policy is flexible and changeable. In other words, it varies according to a government's position on national policy issues.⁽⁵⁾ A government may opt to tackle a problem at its roots but if it fails to implement an appropriate policy response, it will worsen and evolve into different forms and generate further problems, or a government may work to lessen a problem's impact as much as possible. However, a government may overlook problems due to technical and financial constraints or for political and foreign policy reasons.⁽⁶⁾

All of the aforementioned indicates that identifying solutions to problems is the core purpose of public policy. Public policies are crafted through the interactions between official and unofficial actors that make up the political system and institutions that execute them. These interactions reflect the extent of a political system's actual performance and its position on public policy issues as well as highlighting the differences between official and unofficial actors in a political system.

Iran's Environmental Problems

Iran suffers from water supply shortages, depletion of ground water resources, desertification, vehicle exhaust pollution, land erosion, oil pollution in the Arabian Gulf, and drought. These problems were caused by the first Gulf War, sanctions, climate change, inefficient water use, the misallocation of natural resources, vehicle emissions, outdated oil refinery processes, industrial/solid waste, urbanization policies, desert expansion, deforestation, overgrazing, weak oversight, and lack of enforcement of environmental legislation and regulations.

Water Problems

Water is a vital natural resource. At present, Iran's water policies are inadequate, and they are crafted in light of the following realities/factors:

- Sanitation problems: About 60 percent of the sewage from northern Iran is dumped into the Caspian Sea which causes water pollution.⁽⁷⁾

- Food self-sufficiency policies have forced Iranian farmers to use larger amounts of ground water for irrigation. As a result, wells are continuously depleted and agricultural lands are dwindling and increasingly salinized. Extensive dam construction and rapid agricultural expansion have caused problems in Iran's lakes such as the Urmia Lake crisis.⁽⁸⁾

■ The complex problems in the Arab-majority Ahwaz Province have been caused by shortages in water supplies that have negatively impacted agricultural practices. This is due to the diversion of water resources from Ahwaz to the central desert areas. This is part of Iran's policy to reshape the ethnic makeup of this province to forcibly displace the Arab community. This has been deliberately done by causing water poverty, destroying the agricultural heartland of Ahwaz and confiscating thousands of hectares of land around the Karun River.⁽⁹⁾ As a result, Ahwaz's farmers staged protests in 2018 because of water scarcity and severe drought.

Based on the aforementioned, it becomes clear that water and agricultural problems have arisen because of the government's policies, particularly those regarding dam construction, the diversion of water resources to desert areas, and land confiscation for national agricultural projects. Furthermore, Iran's flawed water allocation policies have also heightened the country's regional inequalities. As a result, Iran ranked 131 globally in terms of water resource management.⁽¹⁰⁾

These examples clearly indicate that Iran's water crisis is a real challenge for drinking water supplies, livestock, and fisheries. This water crisis is a direct threat to human security and quality of life. At the same time, Iran's water crisis is a new source of potential political conflict.

Industrial Pollution

Since the late 1970s, Tehran has ranked among the most polluted capital cities in the world, pressuring the government to act. The Iranian government has gradually adopted limited measures to tackle pollution. Examples of causes of Iran's industrial pollution are as follows:

■ Suspended particles: The Iran-Iraq War leveled the land and turned it into dust and dry tidal flats, increasing dust storms that cause pollution. Dust storms across Iran's provinces have led to high levels of particle matter in the air as witnessed in 2018 when "the intense suspended atoms spread across more than 20 provinces in Iran." The suspended particles reached Tehran covering more than 1 million square kilometers and affecting a population of 20 million. The crisis of the suspended particles in the provinces of Khuzestan and Sistan and Balochistan led to a political crisis.⁽¹¹⁾

■ Large-scale industrial and urban development and the extensive use of water has produced different pollutants in Isfahan city.⁽¹²⁾ Ahwaz is also the most contaminated city in the world due to waste coming from oil and petrochemicals.

■ The contamination caused by the discharge of pharmaceutical waste into the marine environment of the Arabian Gulf. Active compounds present in pharmaceutical waste, especially erythromycin residues, have serious health

risks for humans and all living organisms. The urban wastewater from the water treatment plants Jarsozan and Soro in Bandar Abbas is a major source of effluent in the marine environment of the Arabian Gulf at a rate of 500 liters to 700 liters per second. These pollutants threaten the future of the marine ecosystem.⁽¹³⁾

Accordingly, contamination is almost an accepted part of daily life in Iran's provinces. Iranian decision-makers are expected to develop more effective and coherent policies to confront the country's mounting pollution problems.

The Threat to Biodiversity and Ecosystems

Iran's ecosystem has a rich and extensive biodiversity. However, forests, pastures, wildlife, and marine resources are destroyed because of deforestation, overgrazing, the cutting of vegetation, and the random plowing of grasslands for dry farming on unsuitable land. Forest areas have decreased, and some marshes have been blighted by drought such as the Hamoun and Anzali marshes.⁽¹⁴⁾ These destructive practices do not only impact human security but also threaten wildlife and various species of animals in Iran.

These damaging practices as well as Iranian environmental policies have been based on estimations that do not take into consideration the preservation of the country's biological diversity and rich natural resources. Iranian policymakers have also disregarded the massive economic and aesthetic value of Iran's ecosystems. Consequently, Iranian policymakers have irreversibly harmed water catchments, eroded lands and marshes, and destroyed forests.

Internal Displacement

The environmentally induced displacement from 2006 to 2011 reduced the proportion of villagers from 32 percent to 29 percent and increased the proportion of Iran's urban population from 68 percent to 71 percent.⁽¹⁵⁾

Rates of internal displacement indicate the extent of the country's environmental degradation. It should be noted that some causes of environmental displacement are related to deliberate government interventions in order to change the ethnic composition of some regions, such as the case of Ahwaz.

The aforementioned problems reflect the environmental inequality in Iran. A 2020 United Nations Environment Program report ranked Iran 117 out of 133 countries in regard to environmental indicators. According to the World Bank, Iran's environmental problems have reduced the country's GDP by approximately 5 percent to 10 percent. Most of Iran's environmental problems are the result of the practices of the Iranian government. Throughout the decades of totalitarian rule, the government's policies never extended beyond revolutionary principles to ensuring the welfare of the people and the environment.

The Impact of Economic Policies on Environmental Quality

The Iranian government has always included environmental protection measures within the context of national development programs, energy plans, and economic reform policies. The most recent plan conducted by the Iranian government was the Sixth Development Plan for five years, from 2016/2017 to 2102/2022. However, in Iran's case, environmental plans rarely translate into realistic and serious policies. In the best-case scenario, the adoption of legislation and regulations or programs and policies are not often executed. However, when deemed to be in the interests of the government to sustain the political system, policies are enacted to the extent of undermining other public interests.

Economic policies are given much more importance than those related to environmental protection. In practice, the government focuses only on the resistance economy and policies which are reflective of the ideas and character of Iran's political system. The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei may have underestimated the impact of international sanctions on Iran and does not accept the country's continued dependence on the import of strategic goods. His "sermons" mainly focus on an independent, rich and capable Iranian nation, especially in the agricultural and pastoral domains and the compulsory conformity between government plans, budgets and all programs of the resistance economy, even if the natural environment is destroyed.⁽¹⁶⁾ Therefore, Iran's economic policies have played a key role in destroying the environment as reflected in the recent water scarcity crisis, which has not only caused internal tensions but has also led to tensions with Iraq and Afghanistan over shared water resources.

The resistance economy basically aims to prevent foreign domination over the Iranian economy. It is composed of three sectors: the state, cooperative and private sectors. The state sector includes all large-scale industries, major mineral mines, power generation infrastructure, dams, and large-scale irrigation networks. All these are publicly owned and administered by the state.⁽¹⁷⁾ The state presence is noticeable in the industrial and financial services sectors as well. There are many companies connected to military and security institutions. Iran depends on oil and gas exports and also relies on the agriculture and service sectors.⁽¹⁸⁾ Although Iran's economy is relatively diversified compared to its counterparts, the economy still largely depends on oil revenues.⁽¹⁹⁾ Therefore, Iran's sustainable development goals and its green transformation project will not be achieved in the near to medium term.

According to the World Bank, Iran's economy has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic and international and regional developments. Despite the possibility of sanctions relief, Iran is facing mounting challenges in the con-

text of climate change which is exerting further pressure on society, particularly on the poor segments.⁽²⁰⁾

The environment suffers as a result of the structure and nature of the Iranian economy itself. The economy depends mainly on fossil fuels, which increases the level of air pollution in the long run. Since this economic pattern is environmentally destructive, any growth in the energy sector will inevitably increase the threat to the environment. Urban public transport systems, rural and urban manufacturing and services dependent on unclean sources of energy can also lead to irreparable environmental damage.⁽²¹⁾

Environmentally unfriendly concepts and practices dominate the Iranian economy. This exacerbates the country's environmental woes. Environmental problems impact not only economic security but also human security.

Iran's Environmental Policies—Contradictions and Selectivity

The Iranian government has passed legislation, regulations and decrees in order to protect Iran's environment. However, long-term environmental threats such as pollution and water scarcity have increased. These problems have negatively impacted sustainability, wellbeing and the overall quality of life in Iran.⁽²²⁾ Therefore, Iranian policymakers face the challenge of crafting and implementing policies that are environmentally friendly and ensure sustainable development.⁽²³⁾

The following two aspects highlight the key factors/determinants of environmental policymaking and government performance in Iran. The first aspect relates to some dimensions of the framework regulating environmental policymaking and the second aspect relates to the factors needed to develop effective policies in Iran.

The Regulatory Framework Governing Environmental Policies

The following are the main legislative, institutional and political dimensions that dictate the framing of environmental policies in Iran:

■ The Iranian Constitution considers it important to protect the environment. Preserving environmental integrity is the duty of the state. Economic activities that inevitably involve pollution and despoliation of the environment or cause irreparable damage are therefore forbidden.⁽²⁴⁾ In a similar context, the Constitution mentions that natural ecosystems such as water resources, natural forests, marshland and unenclosed pastureland are public property, and the government may utilize these areas in accordance with detailed procedures regulating their use.⁽²⁵⁾ It is noted that Iran included in the 1979 Constitution, (revised in 1989), the principle of environmental protection in Chapter Four which is mainly related to economic and financial affairs. In this part of the Constitution, Iran's environment and natural resources are linked to the objectives of the resistance economy; the economic independence of the Irani-

an state and society; and the increase in agricultural, livestock and industrial production to satisfy the country's needs and to reach a level of self-sufficiency.⁽²⁶⁾ At the decentralized level, the Constitution calls for non-discrimination among the various provinces and regions when it comes to the exploitation of natural resources, and the distribution of economic activities.⁽²⁷⁾

■ Iran has an environmental protection law which was enacted in 1974 and includes 21 articles. These specify the rules and measures for the preservation and the improvement of the environment.⁽²⁸⁾ However, the law is not sufficient to prevent the deterioration of the environment. To save the environment, civil society and institutions must be involved to protect it. It is important to make oversight more robust to ensure that the policies and practices causing environmental harm are not replicated in the future.⁽²⁹⁾

■ In 2021, several environmental documents and programs were announced. Among the most important was the national document for preserving water, which was drafted by the vice president for science and technology. It outlines strategies to address drought and soil erosion and the preservation of water resources.⁽³⁰⁾ The national document on promoting environmental protection was jointly drafted by the Department of Environment and Culture and the Islamic Guidance Ministry. This document defines the strategies and comprehensive mechanisms to increase cross-sectoral and inter-institutional partnerships, and foster a culture of environmental protection, education, social responsibility and environmental literacy.⁽³¹⁾

■ Iran announced its support for international efforts to reduce gas emissions based on “common but differentiated responsibilities.” Iran signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992 and ratified the convention in 1996 and the Kyoto Protocol in 2005 but did not accept the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol. It signed the Paris Agreement on climate change in 2015 without ratifying it. It should be noted that the Iranian government implements environmental projects funded by international organizations like the World Bank.⁽³²⁾

Environmental issues were a primary focus of presidential campaigns and programs in 2021. As Iran's environmental problems increase in magnitude, tensions and protests worsen. This was witnessed just before the elections in 2021 when the environmentally harmful policies of some presidential candidates were exposed. Ebrahim Raisi's presidential campaign promised the drafting of a comprehensive environmental document to prioritize sustainable development, water management, natural resource management and waste management, as well as public environmental education, watershed management, the development of aquifer recharge plans, underground dams, rehabilitation and construction of wetlands and lakes, and many other environmentally friendly policies. With this comprehensive vision, Iran is expect-

ed to make a shift toward environmental conservation as a high priority during President Raisi's administration. However, the Raisi government has not yet announced any specific environmental program. The Raisi government is willing to comply with, but is not yet ready to consider the ratification of the Paris Agreement and link it to the outcome of the nuclear deal.⁽³³⁾ It should be noted that former President Hassan Rouhani, before the last presidential elections were held, made the protection of the environment a top priority for his government. The Rouhani government adopted policies to reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions by improving gasoline quality.⁽³⁴⁾

A review of Iran's regulatory framework governing environmental policies shows that priority is accorded to advancing the political system's ideology at the expense of realistic policy solutions. This has had a substantial impact on any adopted policies or actions to conform with international benchmarks and to mitigate the threats of environmental deterioration.

Requirements for the Development of Environmental Policies

After reviewing the most important dimensions governing Iran's environmental policymaking, the requirements for reforming and developing Iran's environmental policy are discussed as follows:

■ The Constitution has recognized the importance of preserving the environment as mentioned (Article 50). However, there is no political will to address Iran's environmental problems. Iran still faces several challenges to re-greening the environment. Cooperation with international environmental organizations and international and regional forces is essential. New policies to rectify previous mistakes must be implemented. The government must work harder to enforce laws and policies to protect the environment.⁽³⁵⁾

■ The government must act urgently and provide aid and support to the most affected regions and governorates, reduce public anger and prevent the return of protests.⁽³⁶⁾

■ Environmental taxes should be applied, especially carbon and power taxes on industries which heavily use fossil fuels. The main objective of policymakers is to reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, comply with international commitments and equitably redistribute revenues. This can be achieved by imposing a tax on energy consumers.⁽³⁷⁾

■ Economic reforms should mainly focus on growth in the least polluted economic sectors and consider sustainable development projects such as the hydropower projects which Iran gave priority to in the first and second five-year national development plans. However, the country still faces sanctions restrictions. Alternatives need to be considered to diversify the country's energy resources.⁽³⁸⁾ Over the long term, the positive impact on the environment will be evident.

■ In the medium term, possible solutions can be found through devolving power to governorates and local councils. These local bodies should implement development plans to encourage villagers to remain in the rural areas in order to reduce urbanization or migration to the cities. This necessitates the strengthening of Iran's decentralized system by giving local authorities opportunities and enabling them to exercise their powers in land management and local development, thus contributing to bringing governance closer to the people, and enhancing the involvement of local people and resolving regional ethnic differences. The possible administrative reorganization into suitable governorates will overcome the country's geographical, environmental, and economic inequalities. These problems are considered to be at the core of Iran's public administration reform policies. The troubling fact in Iran is that the government has become even more unaccountable and ineffective.⁽³⁹⁾

Accordingly, recognized as a constitutional right, the protection of the environment is the duty of the Iranian government. Iran's environment suffers from serious problems. Therefore, interventions and effective policies are needed as well as the readiness of authorities to enforce environmental protection policies. Iranian environmental policies seem contradictory and are disregarded or selectively applied. This has resulted in drawbacks, thus undermining these policies and increasing environmental threats. As the calls for economic reform to achieve sustainable development and curb environmental problems increase, achieving good economic growth while protecting the environment at the same time in Iran is still possible.

The Influence of Iran's Political System on the DoE's Performance

The Department of Environment (DoE) is a government organization assigned to the president. It was founded in 1972 and commenced operations in the same year by hosting the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance. It is concerned with all aspects of environmental protection such as the management of natural parks, land and marine reserves, natural resources conservation, and pollution control in Iran.⁽⁴⁰⁾ It should be noted that there are other environmental government agencies, including the Management of The Rangelands and Watershed.

The DoE is considered the "environmental arm of the Iranian government," especially in the face of external threats. It transmits "hostile and critical rhetoric" rather than executing its main tasks as a governmental organization: resolving environmental issues and monitoring the implementation of environmental protection laws.⁽⁴¹⁾ The DoE is beset with the following problems and challenges:

- The department's structure is incompatible with its mandated tasks.
- Administrative appointments are politicized. The department's heads are not chosen based on competence but based on nepotism. Some of them do not have the necessary qualifications to lead the department.

- Since the DoE is a government organization, it adheres to the orientations of the political system, which is already destroying the environment.
- Its objectives are not clearly defined.
- The DoE lacks a long-term strategy.
- The DoE's plans and programs depend entirely on the arbitrary environmental perspectives of government officials and the priorities of external bodies — with the approval of the Iranian political system.
- The programs and institutions that monitor the DoE's performance lack effectiveness.⁽⁴²⁾

Thus, the DoE's performance depends on several factors related to the political system's position on environmental issues, the orientations and policies of Iranian governments and institutions on environmental development, the presence of qualified staff (experts) to manage Iran's environmental issues, and the extent of the government's openness to environmental civil society actors.⁽⁴³⁾

The foregoing indicates that Iran's weak environmental policies are largely due to the DoE's structure and its poor performance when it comes to decision-making and management within a highly centralized system.

NGOs and the Limits of Their Effectiveness in Iran

The significance and role of NGOs emerged after the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992. Since then, environmental organizations, whether international or local, have played an essential role in shaping environmental policies across the world.

For example, environmental NGOs (ENGOS) in Iran have carried out environmental awareness campaigns to protect Isfahan and collected and audited data about the damage to the Zayanderud River. In addition, they proposed solutions, carried out disinfection work, mobilized local communities to protect the river, protested against environmental threats, and participated in planning and decision-making with local councils.⁽⁴⁴⁾ This is the best practice for ENGOS, which is not possible for all organizations in Iran.

The nature of the relationship between the Iranian government and ENGOS can be divided into four aspects: collaborative, complementary, confrontational, and cooperation-confrontation. The relationship between the Iranian government and ENGOS could be cooperative and confrontational at the same time. There could be cooperative cases but the relationship between both parties could also be confrontational.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The nature of this relationship and interactions in Iran are based on the following:

- ENGOS have the constitutional right to file complaints about environmental crimes and violations. In addition, the regulations of ENGOS' activities approved by the government on May 28, 2005 allow such organizations to file

complaints that concern the public interest. The Agenda 21 document is one of the most important environmental documents regarding the main role of ENGOs. Although several rules recognize the role of environmentalists in civil society, the actions of the Iranian government hinder the establishment of a successful partnership between the government and ENGOs to achieve sustainable development. Iran's policymakers do not cooperate with ENGOs. The executive directors of the EPO in Iran are controlled by the ruling elite which adversely impacts the participation of ENGOs. There is hardly any communication, consultation and dialogue between Iranian ENGOs and government agencies on various environmental issues.

■ ENGOs in Iran were primarily established after the Rio Conference in 1992. They are non-profit, independent organizations. The number of civil society organizations working on mining, land and environmental issues that participated in the National Conference of Environmental NGOs held in Shiraz was estimated to be more than 500 in 2003. However, after more than three decades of the proliferation of ENGOs in Iran, a strong green movement has not yet been established. Public discontent over the environmental crisis prevails instead. These organizations have not been able to form active civic associations and communities. In addition, the green discourse has not improved Iran's environmental problems.

■ The establishment of a large number of active ENGOs in all parts of Iran was not part of a coherent government framework but simply an ad-hoc response to the increasing environmental deterioration.

■ A great majority of ENGOs lost their non-profit and independent status by receiving government grants due to government restrictions on receiving foreign funding. Large organizations are trying to receive funding from international organizations to work on environmental activities and not only carry out media campaigns or environmental awareness and training programs.

As the influence of ENGOs on the decisions of policymakers decreases, these organizations resort to following up on environmental demands through the Iranian Parliament given its legislative and oversight role. The ENGOs that are willing to do this are those organizations that have greater communication with the Parliament. This kind of communication is one of the necessary conditions for ENGOs to lobby effectively. However, the interaction and communication with the Parliament will not really influence policymakers. Nevertheless, these organizations are increasingly important as their efforts highlight environmental crises. As a result, many environmental issues are given attention by the public and the elites.⁽⁴⁶⁾

As illustrated above, ENGOs avoid total confrontation with the government and the EPO. In addition, the government and the EPO are interested in building full collaborative relations with ENGOs. Therefore, the relationship

between ENGOs and the government can be described as collaborative and confrontational. In short, Iran's ENGOs have limited influence and effectiveness as they refuse to confront policymakers and EPO officials.

Conclusion

The protection of the environment comes second to economic growth in Iran. This official perception of the Iranian government reflects its commitment to the resistance economy. The Iranian government overlooks the country's environmental problems and fails to solve them. The Iranian government takes arbitrary political decisions regarding the country's environmental resources. Since economic growth in Iran involves the generation of high levels of carbon dioxide emissions, the environment will be further degraded. The acceleration of economic growth accompanied by the extensive use of energy and the increasing presence of pollutants only deepens the environmental damage.

The main reason behind Iran's ineffective environmental policies is related to the complexities of its deteriorating economy, politics, and society.

Environmental threats have been exacerbated. Some aspects of this problem are irreparable. Therefore, the cost of repairing the damage has increased. However, it will not be higher than the cost of postponing alternative policies or continuing to neglect critical environmental problems. If the Iranian government does not rationalize its environmental policies and address previous mistakes, Iran will have limited available options for environmental protection, and its efforts to repair the damage to the environment and its deteriorating natural resources will be impeded. This may lead to further economic losses and increase popular pressure which could affect the social stability of Iran as a whole. Iranian leaders will be forced to prioritize the environment to address the country's mounting environmental challenges.

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