A NUCLEAR IRAN: THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL, AND SOCIAL IMPETUS BEHIND NEGOTIATIONS
Bryn McWhorter (Carrie Humphreys)
Department of Political Science

In a shocking 2013 policy shift, the Islamic Republic of Iran entered into negotiations with the United Nations Security Council in the attempt to resolve the longstanding issue of the alleged militaristic components of its nuclear energy program. Following decades of hostile tensions with Western powers, Iran's striking departure from traditional policy has garnered considerable attention from international media including the BBC, New York Times, Thomson Reuters, and Al Jazeera. Current literature has primarily focused on the success of unilateral and multilateral sanctions in generating sufficient economic turmoil to force rapprochement. Yet the question remains, are sanctions responsible for the timing of the negotiations? To attain a more complete understanding of this issue, I conducted a tri-fold examination into Iran's economic health, shifting political climate, and social instability. In order to examine Iran's economy, I analyzed the impact of international sanctions and domestic economic policy through visual representations of various indicators including GDP, inflation rates, and oil exportation. Next, I examined the political developments Iran has experienced since the 2009 re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and how those developments contributed to the 2013 election of Hassan Rouhani and subsequent negotiations. Finally, I examined social factors by analyzing the differences in civic engagement surrounding the 2009 and 2013 elections and how shifting public sentiment contributed to the 2013 presidential election outcome. Ultimately, I argue that with such a narrow focus, the literature has failed to account for the unique convergence of factors that Iran experienced in the build-up to negotiations. While sanctions and poor domestic policy decisions contributed to Iran's worsening economy, the decline was not to such an extent that it adequately accounts for the timing of these talks. Additional factors, particularly Rouhani's election and his commitment to resolving the nuclear issue, created highly unique circumstances that led Iran to negotiate. In sum, as Iran and the world's major powers continue their mission to reach a more permanent solution to the issue of a nuclear Iran, this research and its comprehensive analysis of the convergence of Iran's economic, political, and social developments, offers a more comprehensive understanding of the situation.