



Contemporary Iran

ECONOMY,
SOCIETY,
POLITICS

Edited by

Ali Gheissari

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Economy, Society, Politics

EDITED BY

ALI GHEISSARI

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INTRODUCTION

Ali Gheissari

In recent decades Iran has experienced a wide range of changes. These include shifts in the relationship between urban and rural economies, the nationwide growth of the middle class and ensuing social mobility, a higher literacy rate along with the expansion of educational institutions, and new complexities and expectations in gender relations—all within the context of the country's evolving domestic and international politics. This volume examines the extent and the degree of such vicissitudes in contemporary Iran through the prism of different disciplines. Each chapter provides a thorough analysis of its specific and substantive topic, though not in isolation, without neglecting the overarching and interdisciplinary goal of the book to probe the many-sided factors that connect all these radical upheavals and departures together in the still volatile society of contemporary Iran.

Earlier versions of some of the contributions in the present volume were presented at a conference titled “Iran: Domestic Change and Regional Challenges,” held on September 29–30, 2005, at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice at the University of San Diego. Although the idea of a collection of new research on contemporary Iran was conceived at the time, the conference proceedings form the nucleus of only a part of the present book. Numerous revisions and substantive changes have been made, and some entirely new contributions have been included. The chapters in this volume, as a whole, offer detailed and factual examination of Iran's economy, significant aspects of social change, and the dynamics of its domestic as well as international politics in the period after the 1979 Revolution, with the emphasis on the post-Khomeini period to the present. The issue of social change from different disciplinary perspectives, and the way they complement one another, is the leitmotif that runs through the volume.

These perspectives are studied within a tripartite framework of economy, society, and politics. Part I, on the economy, begins with Djavad Salehi-Isfahani's

essay on oil wealth and economic growth in Iran. It argues that as a people with a relatively recent revolution behind them and still affecting their lives, Iranians are naturally preoccupied with redistribution rather than economic growth. In this chapter Salehi-Isfahani examines the record of past growth, the changes in the distribution of income and the level of poverty, and the role of oil and demographic factors in the long-term growth of the economy. In so doing he tackles a wide range of issues, including the question of the distribution of the revenue from oil and how it affects individual incomes, the growth performance of the economy, and the changing attitudes toward market based reforms. In Salehi-Isfahani's view, if the recent mode of popular politics in Iran continues, the attitude of the Iranian voters will be the initial determining factor as to how far a free market economy will be allowed to expand without the restraints placed upon it by the succeeding governments. He points out that by and large the electorate is disappointed with the public sector and ready to once again allow the market greater autonomy. The pragmatic, pro-market economic policies in the eight years of the right-leaning Rafsanjani administration (1989–1997), followed by equally pragmatic policies of the left-leaning Khatami administration (1997–2005), reflect these popular attitudes—even though in certain key areas of expenditure Iran continues to preserve a command economy since its main source of revenue, oil, is a state monopoly.

In chapter 2, Kaveh Ehsani narrates how the collapse of the monarchy and the subsequent political turmoil precipitated momentous social and geographic changes within the Iranian society. Accordingly, the changes that took place during the first decade after the Revolution set the stage for greater sociological and geographic integration of the country. Ehsani argues that political developments since 1997 (when, with the widespread support of the provincial electorate, a reformist government came to power and gained more support in subsequent local and national elections and in public opinion surveys) offer a clear indication that collective identities and political opinions and trends are no longer forged in Tehran or large cities alone, but also in smaller and more distant provincial localities. In his case study of the small provincial town of Ramhormoz in the southwest province of Khuzestan, an examination of how it was affected by the national events of the first decade after the Revolution, Ehsani analyzes two interconnected processes that have radically altered the social and political landscape of contemporary Iran. The first process can be seen in “the agency of subaltern social actors,” namely, provincial and rural populations, women, young people, war refugees, ethnic minorities, and migrants. Accordingly, these social actors have contributed to social change; at the same time, they have been influenced by the very processes that they had set in motion themselves. The second process is “the transformation of urban space itself, as the arena where much of the social and material contestation to reshape society in the wake of major political changes took place.” Ehsani

further explores the role of the public sector, and of new state institutions and the bureaucracy together with their respective new cadres and clients, as the main “material beneficiaries of some of these urban and provincial transformations” in postrevolution Iran.

The issue of women’s employment is analyzed by Roksana Bahramitash and Hadi Salehi Esfahani in chapter 3. The authors reexamine the evolution of women’s labor force participation (LFP) and employment in Iran in the light of the census data from the latter half of the twentieth century, roughly 1956 to 2006. They show that changes in schooling and economic structure have fundamentally transformed the nature of female LFP and employment in the country. Although women’s overall LFP rate was slow to recover following a sharp drop in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution, it has gathered momentum in recent years. More importantly, an increasingly larger proportion of educated women between the ages of 20 and 50 are employed in the private sector in professional positions in urban areas. This is quite different from the expansion of female employment before the Revolution, which was predominantly confined to very young and uneducated women in rural areas who worked mostly as unpaid family workers, for example, weaving carpets or employed in handicraft work. Bahramitash and Salehi Esfahani argue that economic and political factors after the Revolution have been highly instrumental in shaping the new trends. They show that these factors are likely to have played a far more important part than the ideological ones (particularly Islamization), in reducing female LFP and employment during the 1980s, which was essentially due to decline of private sector jobs, particularly low-skill ones in rural handicrafts, closely connected with the disruption of production and trade in the aftermath of Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. In recent years, however, it is unemployment among educated women that has risen sharply because their entry into the labor force has significantly outpaced their ability to find jobs. Nevertheless, as the authors argue, this problem may be temporary since the service sector where female employment is most common, and where the value added per worker is greater than in the rest of the economy, is growing faster than other sectors.

The condition of women is also the focus of Shahla Haeri’s chapter 4 contribution. In this first chapter in part II, which deals with society at large, she analyzes the social context of the relationship between religion, state, and women in Iran since the revolution of 1979. Highlighting women’s growing concern with palpable injustices in their legal and political status and in their social relations, she discusses the apparent paradox that a robust and vibrant women’s movement is in the making in the Islamic republic not despite but *because* of the revival and implementation of serious legal restrictions and discriminatory political practices against their interest. She also analyzes the manner in which the development of structural incongruities and fundamental inconsistencies

in the Islamic state's rhetoric and policies (whether legal/political, religious, or economical), have led to women's awakening to their legal and sociopolitical inequalities. These challenges have in turn motivated women of different backgrounds, classes, and ethnicities to mobilize and to come together to search for common grounds.

Pardis Mahdavi's chapter 5 essay provides an anthropological survey of high-risk behavior among the contemporary Iranian youth. In particular, she focuses on high-risk sexual activity and opiate use. She argues that while preliminary statistics show a rising HIV and drug problem, little is known about the settings and motivations behind such initiations into high-risk practices by urban Iranian youth. Through qualitative and ethnographic research, Mahdavi throws much light on the circumstances, networks, social environments, and motivations surrounding these initiation events. Moreover, she assesses the level of knowledge of high-risk behavior among the youth (e.g., knowledge of transmission of HIV or sterile injection paraphernalia). The findings of this research will be particularly beneficial to the development of educational materials with regard to sex, HIV/AIDS, and the risk reduction campaign in Iran.

The issue of addiction is further analyzed by Amir Arsalan Afkhami in chapter 6. Afkhami argues that after the Revolution the treatment of substance abuse began to be seen by the government outside the previously held medical paradigm. In accordance with the government's new standards of morality, which were drawn along the Islamic religious precepts, and in accordance with new ideological rhetoric, stringent antidrug campaigns were launched; elements of these campaigns included the fining of addicts, imprisonment, and physical punishment and even the death penalty for serious offenses. Afkhami notes that substance abuse specialists from the medical community—no longer benefiting from government support—were marginalized and that treatment centers were closed. Despite these measures (and in tandem with the Iran-Iraq War, political repression, and a deteriorating economy), the drug problem continued to grow, with the number of addicts increasing rapidly. In the early 1990s, as the more pragmatic Rafsanjani came to power, the government began to take a less doctrinaire approach to substance abuse. The chapter explores the history of this shift in policy, beginning with the early days of treatment policy in the Qajar and Pahlavi periods through the early postrevolutionary governments in Iran, and finally to the current crystallization of the harm-reduction treatment model exemplified by community-sponsored methadone and buprenorphine addiction drug treatment programs.

In chapter 7, Farhad Khosrokhavar explains that after a period of relative stagnation immediately after the Revolution, Iran witnessed significant advances in scientific research and activity during 1995–2005. This should be considered as a new trend and departure, Khosrokhavar posits, rather than a mere continuation of the projects left over from the Pahlavi period. Most of those who are

active in producing new scholarly research are young or relatively young and belong to the second or even third postrevolutionary generation; this amounts to the birth of a new scientific community in Iran that has been productive in scientific fields such as chemistry, mathematics, theoretical physics, and genetics. Such achievements are due to a combination of both personal endeavors and the more structural results of the formation of a scientific community. Khosrokhavar argues that many scientists are deeply frustrated, that very few are content with their situation and with the state of research in Iran in general. Nevertheless, in spite of these frustrations, many of those who remain in the country admit to their strong attachment to the country, its culture, and its people. The paradoxical problem is that almost every scientist believes that some headway has been made since the last decade, but many tend to attribute the progress to accident rather than to institution, uncertain as to whether or not it indicates the beginning of a fully fledged scientific community. However, in Khosrokhavar's opinion, the problem is not whether or not a scientific community exists in Iran; rather, the problem is why, in spite of considerable achievements in some fields, Iranian scientists are still skeptical about the Iranian scientific community or deny its existence altogether. According to Khosrokhavar, the general alienation of the Iranian middle class plays a major role in this attitude.

Part III, on politics, begins with chapter 8, Saïd Amir Arjomand's essay on constitutional implications of current political debates in Iran. Arjomand looks closely at Khomeini's constitutional legacy, and emphasizes the importance of the first two decades of the constitutional development in the Islamic republic—namely, the significance of Khomeini's constitutional measures in the last year and a half of his life in terms of his advocacy of the "Absolute Mandate of the Jurist" which was followed by a decree creating of the Council for the Determination [Discernment] of the Interest of the Islamic Order (or the "Expediency Council"). In April 1989, shortly before his death, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered the revision of the Constitution of 1979 with regard to a range of specified items, including the issue of leadership and the constitutional recognition of the new Expediency Council. He thus laid the foundation for the system of collective rule by clerical councils that was consolidated after his death, and set the parameters for Iran's constitutional politics to the present. Within this system, however, there has been a marked growth of the personal power of the supreme leader, Khomeini's successor, Ayatollah Khamenei. To build his personal power, Khamenei has promoted new men from revolutionary armed forces and intelligence, including President Ahmadinejad, at the expense of the clerical elite. In Arjomand's view this has introduced an element of instability into the system of clerical conciliar rule.

In chapter 9, Ali Gheissari and Kaveh-Cyrus Sanandaji argue that the turbulent decade leading up to the 2005 elections—marked by contentious issues over the direction of Iran's domestic and foreign policies—created an opportunity

for the traditional clerical establishment to engage in intense efforts that successfully consolidated conservative power. Indeed, interference in the February 2004 parliamentary elections by the Guardian Council helped to put back in place a conservative parliamentary majority that had been eclipsed since the 2000 elections. By drawing on election data, Gheissari and Sanandaji argue that despite concerns regarding such interference, the public nevertheless took a keen interest in the 2005 presidential campaign. This period generated heated debate about Iran's domestic agenda, particularly the stagnant national economy, and the future direction of its foreign policy. The coherent agenda for economic reform proposed by pragmatic conservatives contrasted sharply with the disorganized reformists and their failure to present concrete solutions to ameliorate public grievances. This led to an increase in political activity in favor of the pragmatic camp, signaling a shift to a new form of conservative politics in Iranian elections that stood in stark contrast to the reform-oriented sentiment that had dominated the Khatami years. Although this development set the tenor of the campaign, the pragmatic conservatives, partly as a result of Guardian Council's vetting method and partly because of certain election irregularities at the eleventh hour, failed to translate voter support into an election victory, as evidenced by the hard-line populist Ahmadinejad's victory over Rafsanjani in the presidential elections of 2005.

Nayereh Tohidi's chapter 10 essay deals with a general overview on the status and rights of ethnic and religious minorities by emphasizing the perils of both secular ultra-nationalist homogenization and religious (Shi'i Islamist) segmentation in contemporary Iran. She argues that an uneven and overcentralized strategy of development has resulted in a wide socioeconomic gap between the center and peripheries. A great part of the grievances of ethnic minorities, who mostly inhabit provincial peripheries of Iran, has its roots in the uneven distribution of power and socioeconomic resources rather than in any interethnic tension. Tohidi further discusses the significance of the recent rise in politicization of ethnic issues, manifested during the presidential elections of 2005 and also in the 2006 clashes in Khuzestan and Kurdistan, from national, regional, and international perspectives. In spite of being treated as a minority, and in spite of the discriminatory attitudes and traditional cultural constraints, ethnic and religious minorities in contemporary Iran have succeeded in improving their social conditions as well as articulating their democratic demands and presenting themselves as a significant political constituency.

Chapter 11, by Anoushiravan Ehteshami, deals with decision making in Iranian foreign policy. Ehteshami argues that both domestic and regional changes have combined to make of Iran an exceptional case study of how an Islamic revolutionary state might set about managing the post-cold war order. Accordingly, in the 1990s it was the new geopolitical realities which came to dominate the agenda of the Islamic republic, bringing Iran closer to its Eurasian hinterland (Central

Asia, China, the European Union, and Russia). Ehteshami also argues that in the new millennium, however, geopolitical complexities have been compounded by the challenge of Salafi Islam, which has emerged as the single most significant source of threat to Iran, as well as to the West's regional interests. Al-Qaeda's fierce attacks on both the Shi'a communities and the West have made tacit, unacknowledged allies of Iran and the West in containing its impact on the status quo in the Middle East. This has been the case, remarkably, despite the ongoing rift between Iran and the United States. The chapter traces Iran's responses to this dynamic environment and analyzes its impact on Iran's elites, outlook, and policies.

Iran's foreign policy is further analyzed by Mohsen Milani in chapter 12. Milani argues that the collapse of Saddam Hussein in Iraq accelerated Iran's transformation from a revolutionary regime to a "regional status quo power" in search of creating "spheres of influence," particularly in southern Iraq. Accordingly, one of Iran's ultimate strategic goals is to become a hub for the transit of goods and services between the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and possibly China. On the other hand, Iran's Iraq policy is directly correlated to Tehran's threat perception regarding the United States. Milani argues that a threatened Iran whose legitimate security needs are ignored would act more erratically in Iraq than would a secure Iran. In Milani's view, the United States and Iran can conveniently build upon their common interests in Iraq to lay the foundation for improving their turbulent relations. Moreover, any future regional security arrangement that excludes Iran will most likely be "expensive, ineffective, and unsustainable." Milani concludes that when the United States, "as the world's hegemonic power," and Iran, "an emerging regional power," are not at peace, the region as a whole will suffer; when they are at peace, the region is more likely to enjoy stability.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This volume contains contributions from a distinguished group of colleagues who have done innovative empirical and analytical research on various aspects of contemporary Iran, and I thank them all for making this collaborative work such an enjoyable experience. My thanks are also due to Mohsen Ashtiany, Ali Banuazizi, Kaveh Ehsani, Linda Eshaq, Anna Gheissari, Mariam Gheissari, and Ali Rahnema for their advice and assistance during different stages of preparing this book, and to Vali Nasr for his help with organizing the conference at which some of the chapters in this volume were initially presented. I am further grateful to the Warden and Fellows of St. Antony's College, Oxford, where the final work on this volume was completed during a visiting fellowship; and to Cynthia Read, my editor at Oxford University Press, for her keen interest in this project; to anonymous readers for their helpful comments; to Heather Hartman, Meechal Hoffman, and Mariana Templin for professional assistance; and to Carole Berglie for copyediting the text.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Diacritical marks in transliteration of Persian names and terms have been avoided. In spite of this, the transliteration attempts to follow current Persian pronunciation as closely as possible. Persian words already established in English are used in their anglicized form.

Part I



ECONOMY

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OIL WEALTH AND ECONOMIC GROWTH IN IRAN

Djavad Salehi-Isfahani

The imposition of economic sanctions in the current confrontation between Iran and the United States has moved discussion of Iran's economic conditions to the forefront of the policy debate concerning Iran. The media and opinion journals commonly report that Iran's economy is a basket case.¹ These accounts of dire economic circumstances clash with basic, widely available macroeconomic indicators. The total output of the country (excluding oil) has grown on average by 5.8 percent per year during 2000–2004, a trend that puts Iran above the median for growth among developing countries and, if continued, would more than double the non-oil gross domestic product (GDP) by 2012.

The debate over the 2005 presidential election—in which the populist candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, won,—has raised more specific issues related to poverty and inequality. The election was fought on the recurring political theme of redistribution and helping the poor. Ahmadinejad's appeal was his promise to fight high-level corruption and “to bring oil money to people's dinner table.” Reports and commentary in the Western press seem to have concluded that his appeal was related to poverty and the widening gap between the rich and the poor.² But even this claim clashes with the facts: evidence shows that poverty has been falling and is now quite low by international standards, and inequality has been stable over the last decade (Salehi-Isfahani 2008).

This evidence points to a different picture of Iran's economy than that which is commonly portrayed, one that has been growing in the past decade, thanks mainly to rising oil prices that helped raise incomes at all levels. This is not to say that all is well with Iran's economy. The economic challenges have moved from reducing poverty to reducing inequality and providing jobs for the nation's growing youth population. In this chapter I examine the record of past economic growth, poverty, and inequality, and I discuss the role of oil and demographic factors in the long-term growth of the economy. I discuss the question of the distribution of the oil wealth and how it affects individual incomes, review the growth performance of

the economy, and discuss changes in the distribution of income and poverty in recent years. In the later parts of the chapter, I take a long-term view of growth, discussing the role of human capital accumulation and emphasizing the effect of demographic factors. I also review institutional changes in key markets designed to give markets a greater role in resource allocation.

FROM OIL WEALTH TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

Dissatisfaction with the distribution of the country's oil wealth is fueled by ignorance about its real worth, which is often exaggerated, and by lack of transparency in using it. With 10 percent of the world's oil (about 130 billion barrels of proved reserves) and 14 percent of its gas reserves (about 169 billion oil equivalent barrels), Iran's hydrocarbon reserves are second only to Saudi Arabia's. The World Bank estimated the value of this wealth at \$780 billion in 2002 (2003a, 26). In 2008, when market prices are in excess of \$100, the expected long-run price should be updated, easily raising this figure to \$1 trillion. How does a country turn such wealth into more jobs and rising incomes, and what is Iran's potential for doing so?

To understand the potential of Iran's oil and gas wealth, consider a simple counterfactual scenario in which the entire trillion-dollar hydrocarbon wealth is invested in a trust fund yielding, say, 3 percent per year in real terms (long-term real returns for safe financial assets are generally lower than 3 percent). To keep the value of the principal constant, annual earnings of \$30 billion from the trust fund would be distributed by issuing checks of about \$430 to each person now, and one-third less a generation later (because by then the population will be about one-third larger). The intergenerational distribution could be improved by spending less now and increasing the annual payments as population grows. The annual payment would stabilize at some point—perhaps around \$230 per person—when the population finally tops at about 130 million, after which this payment would go on indefinitely. This is not a scenario that any country would seriously contemplate, because oil and gas are costly to store. As a mental exercise, however, it serves my purpose well, providing a quantitative perspective on taking the oil wealth to people's dinner tables.

These simple calculations are useful in dispelling two myths prevalent in Iran about the economic power of the oil wealth. First is the myth that if the wealth were properly distributed it would wipe out poverty and inequality. An equitable distribution of oil revenues—or for that matter, all government spending—is a desirable end in itself, but oil revenues by themselves are not large enough to eradicate poverty or improve income equality by much. Suppose the government distributed all oil revenues to individuals equally and raised its revenues from taxation. As noted above, this scheme would put about \$430 in each person's pocket per year, which amounts to less than half the international poverty line of

\$2 per day (which amounts to about \$1,000 per person per year in 2005). If one distributed the oil income in 2005 equally so each person were to receive about \$430 per year, the Gini coefficient of inequality would drop from 0.44 to 0.40.

The second myth concerns the curing power of the oil wealth in eradicating unemployment. No doubt effective use of oil income to promote economic growth can reduce unemployment substantially, but foreign-exchange inflows from oil are generally not good for job growth, as they cause real appreciation, which places the tradable sectors (agriculture and manufacturing in particular) at a disadvantage. A more equal distribution of the oil wealth does not solve this problem, either; the recipients of government handouts most likely will choose to spend most of their windfall on imports rather than invest it in productive activities that create jobs. As a result, the policy of “taking oil money to people’s dinner table” could end up being a mixed blessing, as it may take away the job of the guy sitting at the head of that table.

All oil-exporting countries put their governments in charge of converting the oil wealth into other forms of wealth that promote growth. The government determines how much extraction capacity to develop and how much to produce per year. In Iran, the government has historically decided the rate of extraction, which in 2006 was about 1.7 billion oil equivalent barrels a year from oil and gas fields, one-third of which is burned domestically in cars, homes, and power plants, and the rest is exported. Complex development plans guide the governments in spending their revenues; these expenditures then generate income for individuals who are hired directly into the bureaucracy, are hired to execute development projects, or receive subsidized credits. The distribution of the benefits under this system is much less transparent than the trust-fund scenario I have just outlined. Because it is difficult for an average citizen to determine if the oil wealth is fairly distributed, charges of corruption and unfair distribution abound. Oil-exporting societies are therefore more prone to social tension arising from distribution than countries in which governments define their role more in the accumulation of national wealth than in dividing it up.

The planning mechanism that was instituted in Iran more than 50 years ago was designed to ensure that oil revenues were invested and not consumed (Baldwin 1967). Since the Revolution, the government has been increasingly drawn into the realm of redistribution as payments to consumers from “nature’s trust fund” have steadily increased. The institutional mechanism itself—the Management and Planning Organization—was finally dismantled by President Ahmadinejad in 2007. The allocation of oil wealth between consumption and investment now goes as follows: About one-third of the oil production is allotted for domestic use, which is sold at such low prices that it functions very much as direct payments to citizens, except that it goes mostly to those who own cars, homes, and electrical gadgets. Imported goods that help keep the prices of essential items low—food and medicine—are also similar in effect to

direct payments, but these are more progressively distributed. That part of the oil revenues that is not more or less directly handed out to citizens is divided into investment and consumption, and the beneficiaries are much harder to classify. The part that is not used to maintain the vast bureaucracy, or pay for the losses of public enterprises, goes into investment. The investment funds, the most productive in terms of growth and job creation, are not disbursed without controversy. A complex system of credit at concessionary rates and government contracts tends to favor the politically well connected (Salehi-Isfahani 1989).

In the end, the manner in which oil revenues find their way into people's pockets in Iran makes it very difficult to know who gets what, leaving plenty of room for corruption and, more important, for suspicion of corruption. Added to this are the lack of transparency in government activity and the public's naïve view of how the economic system works. In these circumstances, the politics of "redistribution" trump those of growth. Responding to the promise made by candidate Ahmadinejad to "take oil revenues to people's dinner tables," Khata-mi's oil minister, Bijan Namdar-Zanganeh, was quoted as saying that "there is nothing but the oil money on people's dinner table."³

Interestingly, in Iran popular concern for redistribution seems to heighten during oil booms, in 2005 during the campaign that led to President Ahmadinejad's election, as in the late 1970s, perhaps because when oil revenues rise people expect to see a proportional increase in their incomes, and when they fail to see that, they assume that someone else has their share (Salehi-Isfahani 2008). This phenomenon has led many political observers to mistake the crisis in distribution, be it real or imaginary, with a genuine economic crisis. The popular discontent that led to the 1979 revolution has been in part blamed on the (fairly moderate) economic downturn in the mid-1970s (Parsa 1989), and at least one observer believes that political discontent in recent years is because Iranians "earn about one-fourth in real terms of what they did before 1979."⁴ In fact, as I show below, the economy has been growing in recent years and on average people earn more than they did before the Revolution. Furthermore, distribution of the benefits of this growth has gone to the poor at least as much as to the rich. But perceptions about distribution are hard to change, and even if aggregate distribution measures were widely communicated and believed, impatience with the pace of change in how people fare relative to others may matter more for political behavior than how the society is doing collectively.

REVIEW OF ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

A quick review of the performance of Iran's postrevolution economy reveals two important features of its growth experience: generally lower living standards after the Revolution and a fluctuating economy (Pesaran 2000; Jalali-Naini 2006). Gross domestic product per capita in constant 2000

Purchasing Power Party adjusted dollars (World Bank WDI series in fig. 1.1) fell from about \$8,000 before the Revolution to about \$4,000 at the end of the war in 1988, and increased to about \$7,000 in 2005. In the postwar period, the annual growth rate has fluctuated widely, starting with a high of 12 percent in 1991, falling to zero in 1994, and again rising to over 7 percent in 2002. The average growth rate of about 3.4 percent, resulting in a per capita growth rate of just under 2 percent, is hardly an impressive record of reconstruction. However, the economy's performance has improved considerably in the last 3 to 4 years, when growth has averaged about 5 percent.

The initial decline after the Revolution was the result of three factors: war, collapse of oil revenues, and economic mismanagement. It is hard to disentangle the relative weight of these factors, but the latter played an important role. Shortly after the war's end in 1988, oil revenues shot up (1990 Persian Gulf crisis) and steps were taken to dismantle the war economy (Rafsanjani's reform and reconstruction). The economy expanded for three years, until oil prices fell in 1992 and serious mismanagement of the economy, which racked up nearly \$30 billion mostly in short-term debt in just two years, deflated Rafsanjani's reform and reconstruction. Economic liberalization was put off and import

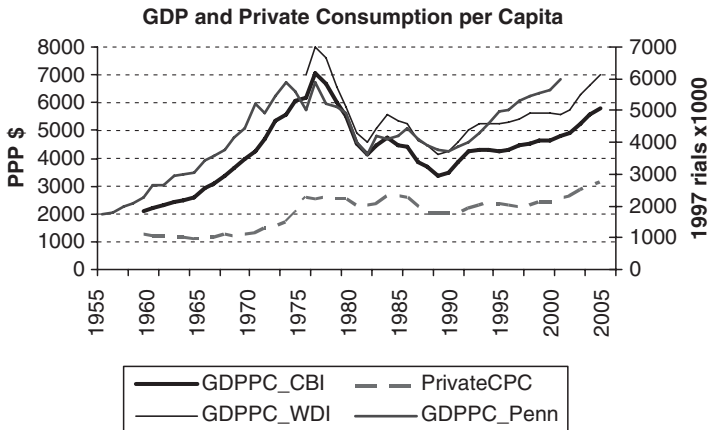


FIGURE 1.1. GDP per capita according to different sources of data, 1955–2005.

Note: GDPPC-Penn and GDPPC-WDI are measured on the left axis and GDPPC-CBI on the right. GDPPC-Penn is from Penn World Tables, which corrects for differences in purchasing power. It shows that per capita GDP exceeded its peak before the Revolution by the year 2000. GDPPC-WDI is from the World Bank World Development Indicators data set and uses 2000 international (PPP) dollars. The GDPPC-CBI series is from the Central Bank of Iran and is measured in 1,000 1997 rials.

Source: World Bank (2003c), Penn World Tables, and Central Bank of Iran, *Annual Reports*.

controls were slapped on, bringing the economy to a screeching halt in 1994–1995. The reform program continued in its essential features—albeit at a slower pace—during Khatami’s years (1997–2005). Serious growth, however, did not resume until oil prices started to rise in 1999. In 2005, oil revenues were \$48 billion compared to \$13 billion in 1998, which has helped the economy to grow at a healthy rate of about 5 percent per year over the last six years.

Improvements in people’s welfare are also evident from survey data of household expenditures. Using the data from a series of surveys of income and expenditures, per capita expenditures in figure 1.2 follow closely the GDP per capita depicted in figure 1.1. Figure 1.2 shows per capita expenditures recovering briefly in 1984 and then falling sharply as a result of the 1986 oil price collapse and the virtual cessation of all Iranian oil exports owing to the war with Iraq. Recovery after the war was fairly quick, and both rural and urban households improved their situations until 1992, which ended the short-lived oil boom of 1990–1991. Household expenditures remained stagnant for about five years, after which they started a long period of increase that has lasted up to the present (2008).

Predictably, the sectors growing the fastest were those most closely connected to oil revenues—manufacturing and construction. Manufacturing and mining, which depend on intermediate imports, grew at 10.0 percent per year since oil revenues recovered (1999–2002). Construction, which as the leading nontradable sector tends to benefit from the real appreciation caused by foreign-exchange inflows, expanded by 10.2 percent per year (Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2003a). Agriculture continued to be affected by the weather, so its growth rate fluctuated between –7.3 percent (1999) and 11.4 percent (2002). Services grew at about the same rate as the GDP, 4 percent.

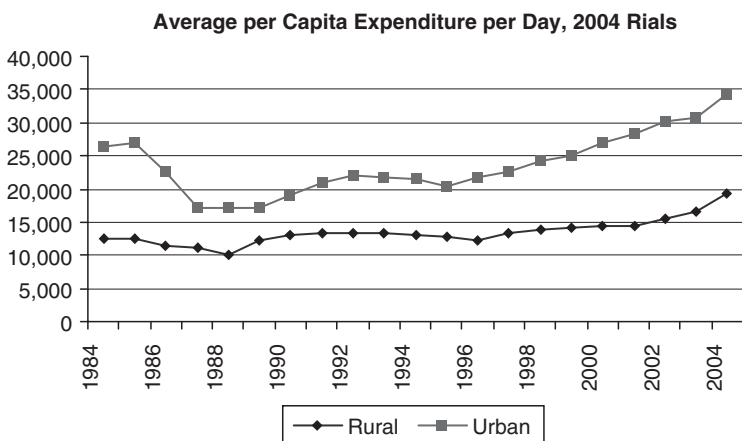


FIGURE 1.2. Per capita household expenditures, 1984–2004.

Source: HEIS, 1984–2005; author’s calculations from microdata.

Oil resources by themselves cannot sustain growth of this magnitude in the long run. Despite the sharp increase in the price of oil in recent years, oil prices cannot increase forever, and as they stabilize, or even begin to fall, the recent oil-propelled growth will run out of steam. Iran's capacity to export oil is challenged by competition from domestic consumption, which was claiming about half of the oil output, causing oil exports to decline in the near future. The ascent of populist politics has—at best—delayed the plan to increase energy prices in Iran to bring them closer to cost. Assuming, optimistically, that oil prices hold at a long-term real price of \$80—the OPEC target—and assuming a constant level of exports at 2.4 million barrels per day (mbd), Iran would earn roughly \$40 billion in oil revenues per year. As in the past, about half of this sum goes to consumption and depreciation. Investing the remainder—less than 10 percent of the GDP—could at best generate 2 to 3 percent growth per year.⁵ Growth rates of 7 percent, which would reduce unemployment to 8 percent over time, as envisaged in the Fourth Plan, would require an additional 15 to 35 percent in investment (depending on the capital-output ratio). This implies heavy reliance on the private sector, domestic or foreign, not as a passive agent of investment from government oil revenues as in the past but as a source of additional funds. This changes the game of growth considerably. Instead of “rent seekers,” the country needs people with money to invest. The rules of the game that engage one or the other type of private investor are very different. Private investors who bring additional resources expect reforms that guarantee the safety of their property and enhance the enforcement of contracts. They also need competitive product markets, so their investment is not threatened by competition from government monopolies or the foundations. They ask for trade reform and possible membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO). Finally, they need workers with useful skills, which requires a more flexible labor market and educational reforms (Salehi-Isfahani 2005).

Reforms of the markets for foreign exchange and credit are important steps taken in this direction. The passage of the first foreign investment bill by the parliament in 2002 has paved the way for investment in non-oil sectors, and already it may have borne fruit in attracting Renault's investment of close to a billion dollars in Iran's auto industry. Renault's decision is perhaps more significant than Total's nearly a decade ago, when it breached the U.S. oil embargo in 1995 to invest in Iran's oil and gas sector (Hourcade 2004). Whereas Total's investment was protected in part by the buy-back arrangement, and its operations were offshore and its employment policies were not subject to Iran's labor laws, Renault has to recoup its investment by operating profitably inside Iran, employing Iranian workers subject to Iran's labor laws, and following foreign-exchange regulations for repatriation of its profits. The legal environment in Iran needs a lot of improvement before smaller investors, which may not enjoy protection of a powerful government, feel safe.⁶

Iran's oil wealth is no longer sufficient for economic growth because its oil revenues are too small relative to the investment needs of a fast-growing labor force, especially the young. Furthermore, succeeding in the global economy, into which Iran is increasingly drawn, requires investment in productive skills and not merely an increase in formal schooling. The good news is that the demographic precondition to go from dependence on oil wealth to dependence on human capital has been already satisfied. Iran's fertility decline provides the country with a historic opportunity to invest in its human capital. Rising ratios of adults to children in the next few decades will allow more and better education (Salehi-Isfahani 2005). This demographic transition is in part the result of prior investments in infrastructures of health, education, and transportation, all of which are also necessary to increase the type of investments that can make Iran more competitive in the world economy. The bad news is that the institutional underpinning for such a transformation is lacking. Several important steps have been taken in this direction, starting with improvements in foreign-exchange markets and credit, but legal reforms of various kinds that govern employment, property rights, and contract enforcement remain to be made. It seems that since the election of 2005, and with intensified U.S. sanctions, this task is now much harder than it seemed only a few years ago.

Capital Formation and Growth

From a growth perspective, the most important division of proceeds from the oil wealth is between current consumption and investment. Between the end of the war with Iraq (1988) and 2002, Iran earned nearly \$300 billion in oil revenues (in 2002 prices) and invested about \$120 billion of that, an average of just under \$10 billion per year. A careful study of Iran's resource use by the World Bank (2003a) compared the rate at which oil revenues are used for investment with an optimal scenario and concluded that the investment rate was too low. So, despite the fact that Iran has erred on the side of consumption, the question of how to take the oil wealth to the dinner table still looms large.

Compared to most developing countries, investment as percentage of GDP in Iran has been reasonably high, averaging about one-third of the GDP in 2002–2004 (see figure 1.3 and table 1.1). The fluctuations in the investment ratio betrays the dependence of Iran's investment program on oil revenues. (The three series depicted in figure 1.3 generally move together, but the Penn series is lower for most years because it measures net investment, as opposed to the gross investment measured by the other two series.) The distribution of investment by sector indicates the direction in which the economy was moving in 2004. Services, followed by industry, received more investment than their share of the GDP, while agriculture was almost neglected. During 2000–2004, about 60 percent of investment was in services, which had a share of 52 percent

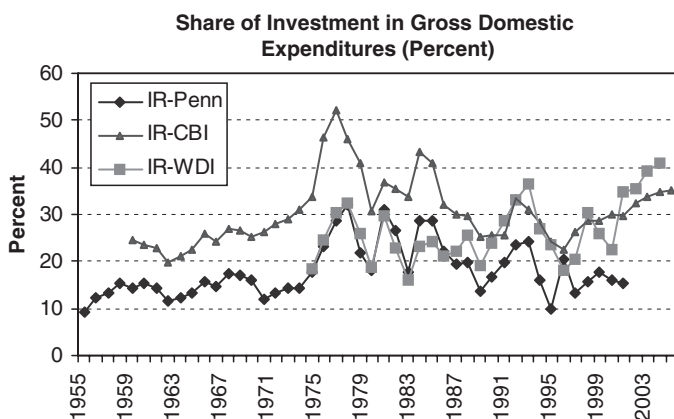


FIGURE 1.3. Wide fluctuations of the investment ratio, 1955–2004. Investment ratios for WDI and CBI are percent gross fixed capital formation of gross domestic expenditures. IR-Penn is the ratio of net investment to GDP (percent).

Source: World Bank (2003c), Penn World Tables, and Central Bank of Iran, *Annual Reports*.

TABLE 1.1. National income accounts (1997 billion rials and percent shares).

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Gross domestic expenditures	306,513.9	322,278	334,049	359,041	379,518	406,031
Consumption	191,880	207,540	216,041	231,682	245,663	263,601
Share of private consumption	80.6	79.9	80.3	80.7	82.3	83.3
Share of public consumption	19.4	20.1	19.7	19.3	17.7	16.7
Gross investment	91,505	95,267	108,762	121,631	133,855	142,430
Share of private investment	0.63	0.65	0.69	0.69	0.62	0.65
Share of public investment	0.37	0.35	0.33	0.33	0.37	0.35
Other items						
Terms of trade effect	3,048.8	1,305.0	1,629.7	13,818.1	17,711	34,592
National income	259,203.6	271,785.4	282,526.5	317,877.6	341,161	373,506
Gross savings	120,469.0	124,329.7	130,180.3	158,388.5	N/A	N/A

Note: To convert 1997 rials to international (PPP) U.S. dollars, divide by 880 (see World Bank WDI).

Source: Central Bank 2003a, 2003c.

of the GDP, and one-third was in industry (excluding oil and gas), with a GDP share of 23 percent. Only 2 percent of all investment was in agriculture, whose share of the GDP was 16 percent, and 5.5 percent of investment was in oil and gas, with a GDP share of 10 percent.

Public investment historically has been dominant in Iran. In the 1970s, it exceeded private investment, but in the postwar reform and reconstruction era it fell short of private investment. In recent years, private investment has been close to two-thirds of total investment. Table 1.1 shows the details of expenditures at the national level during 1999–2004. During these years public investment maintained its share of about 11 percent in total expenditures while private investment picked up, increasing its share from 18.6 to 23.4 percent. The private sector also differs in its investment behavior from the public sector, in that its investment expenditures are mainly in machinery (about 70 percent) whereas the public sector spends mostly on infrastructure construction (also 70 percent).

Public Sector Finances

In the 1950s, with advice from international organizations, the government set up the Plan Organization as a way of shielding oil revenues from the government's current expenditure needs and save it for investment (Baldwin 1967). In the 1970s, the Shah undid that by giving budgeting authority to the Plan Organization (hence the new name Plan and Budget Organization, or PBO). In 2000, the government took a step back toward the old principle of giving priority to investment by creating the Oil Stabilization Fund, to be institutionalized during the Fourth Plan by a unit set up within the once again renamed Management and Planning Organization (MPO), called the National Savings and Investment Fund. The MPO intended the fund to absorb all oil revenues in excess of those predicted in the budget, for release when oil revenues were down.⁷ The mechanisms by which the government manages the oil wealth are five-year development plans and annual budgets. But the annual budgets do not necessarily follow the plan's recommendations, especially when oil prices diverge from what is anticipated in the plan. This has particularly been the case for the last few years, when the upward movement of oil prices was underestimated by planners. As a result, there is need for more negotiations in the annual budgeting process.

The size of the budget is a good indicator of the importance of the public sector in the economy. According to official budget data, during 2001–2007, when oil prices have been increasing, the share of public expenditures to the GDP has also been increasing, from 18.0 percent in 2000 to 27.5 percent in 2007. However, estimates that include all implicit expenditures show a public sector twice as large, claiming about 42 percent of the GDP in 2000 (World Bank 2003a, 34). Viewed this way, Iran's public sector is much larger than Egypt's (30 percent), the United States' (20 percent), or East Asia's (15 percent).

The pressure to spend oil revenues on current expenditures is constant and increases during periods of intense electoral competition, as in recent years.⁸ In this atmosphere, the Oil Stabilization Fund provides an important cushion between oil and populist politics, though before the ink was dry on the legislation, politics intervened to draw from the reserves. In 2004, a year of high oil prices, when the Fund should be building, with parliamentary approval the government withdrew \$5.4 billion from the fund to pay for current and development expenditures. Following the election of 2005, in which at least two candidates promised direct payments to voters, the electoral politics has had negative consequences for inflation, as well as for investment and economic growth.

An important innovation in the reporting of government finances is increased transparency. To emphasize their nature as income from assets, the government now places oil revenues below the budget bottom line (see table 1.2). During the period when multiple exchange rates prevailed, the government was able to earn more from its oil assets by converting part of the oil proceeds at a higher exchange rate. Since 2002–2003 a stable exchange rate has removed this possibility. Another important change in accounting and reporting of the budget, which also increased the transparency of public-sector financial activities, is including the energy subsidies in the expenditures. This change in accounting explains the large increase in (predicted) expenditures for 2003, as shown in table 1.2.

Table 1.2 also lists “development expenditures,” which are now called “acquisition of nonfinancial assets.” In the past, the budget distinguished between development and current expenditures (the latter are now called simply “expenditures”). The name change is intended, again, to draw a distinction between the use of oil revenues to create other assets versus their use in consumption. Pressures to spend on consumption show up in this table in terms of the decrease in the ratio of development to current expenditures, down from 33 percent in 1998 to 25 percent in 2002. If anything, this trend shows that increased oil revenues do not necessarily mean more government investment; with increased revenues come increased expectations on the part of the population and a willingness on the part of politicians to indulge those expectations, however briefly.

Energy subsidies, which cost the government about 15 percent of the GDP, have been on the reform agenda for at least ten years (Salehi-Isfahani 1995; World Bank 2003a). They encourage waste and pollution, and are a barrier to WTO entry, which Iran needs in order to expand its non-oil exports. Increased transparency is the first step in eliminating these subsidies. Intermittent increases in the domestic prices of oil products has not done the job; the price of gasoline, which has been more aggressively pushed than others, is still only 15 percent of its world price. President Ahmadinejad’s administration has preferred to contain energy subsidies by gasoline rationing rather than increase energy prices. Gasoline rationing in 2007, which proved disruptive and even failed to cut consumption

TABLE 1.2. Government budget (current billion rials).

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003 ^a
Revenues	31,006.1	47,828.1	44,846.6	53,146.1	61,973.5	204,508.4
Taxes	24,163.8	39,060.1	36,585.2	41,786.1	50,587.0	74,780.6
Other	6,842.3	8,768.0	8,261.4	11,360.0	11,386.5	129,727.8
Expenditures	53,545.6	68,219.3	85,847.3	104,772.0	148,297.3	285,749.9
Operating balance	-22,539.5	-20,391.2	-41,000.7	-51,625.9	-86,323.8	-81,241.5
Disposal of nonfinancial assets	22,619.9	44,487.6	59,794.2	72,333.4	103,183.2	126,851.8
Oil revenues	22,619.9	44,487.6	59,448.5	71,957.1	102,626.8	124,232.1
Crude oil	14,604.3	21,807.0	20,125.0	22,512.0	101,126.8	—
Oil products	1,993.7	4,148.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	—
Sale of foreign exchange	6,021.9	18,532.2	39,323.5	49,445.1	0.0	0.0
Other	0.0	0.0	345.7	376.3	2,056.4	2,619.7
Development expenditures	17,424.7	25,023.60	23,559.80	24,087.60	37,212.50	85,206.3
Net lending (+)/borrowing (-)	17,344.3	927.2	-4,766.3	-3,380.1	-20,353.1	-39,596.0

^a 2003 is approved budget; "Other Revenue" which is much larger than before includes energy subsidies.

Source: Central Bank (2003a), (2003c).

significantly, was not a policy for the long run, so the issue of what to do with energy subsidies remains unresolved after a decade of public discussion.

The role of tax revenues in funding government operations has decreased as oil revenues have risen. In 1998, before the recent rise in oil prices, taxes comprised 46.4 percent of government revenues, but with the increase in price of oil fell to 36.6 percent in 2006. About 60 percent of income taxes are from corporations (two-thirds of which are from private corporations), and 40 percent from private income and wealth taxes (Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2003a, 58).

POVERTY AND INCOME DISTRIBUTION

The Islamic revolution of 1979 is perhaps unique among modern revolutions in that it identified the poor as its social and political base, in much the same way that the Russian and the Chinese revolutions associated themselves with

the working class and the peasantry.⁹ The dominant slogan of the revolutionaries was not growth but redistribution from the capitalist rich class to the disinherited (or *mostazafin*, a term that Ayatollah Khomeini made into a household word). Not surprisingly, after the Revolution, distribution rather than growth has dominated public discussion of economic performance. Despite all this, it is commonplace to hear that the gap between the rich and the poor has widened in Iran.

The pro-poor policies of the postrevolution period have their roots in this important ideological shift that followed the Revolution. Some of these policies have been also pro-growth, such as rural electrification and programs in rural health, fertility reduction, and education. Others constitute trade-offs and compromises: food subsidies and labor-market regulations. The effect on growth of other policies, such as direct transfers to low-income families and social protection, are less clear. Most of these policies have been highly effective in transforming the lives of Iran's poor households. In particular, the delivery of health services to rural areas is credited with the rapid decrease in child mortality and fertility, while education policies have played an important role in reducing illiteracy and eliminating the gender gap in schooling. The government spends about \$2 billion on subsidies for food and medicine, and several semipublic foundations and charities assist the poor with income and credit (Esfahani 2005). The largest such charity, Komiteh Emdad Emam (Imam Khomeini's Assistance Committee), which operates under the supervision of the supreme leader's office, offers direct aid to about one million households (2.6 million individuals) identified by community organizations to be in extreme poverty (worth about \$820 million in 2006¹⁰).

By international standards, the incidence of poverty in Iran is quite low. Comparisons of poverty levels are more difficult than measures of inequality because there are no satisfactory ways to compare living standards, and therefore poverty thresholds, across countries, whereas there are objective statistical yardsticks to compare levels of inequality. The World Bank (2005) reports poverty (and inequality) measures for a number of countries, including Iran, using the standards of \$1 and \$2 per person per day. Table 1.3 compares poverty and inequality in Iran with a number of countries of interest: Egypt and Turkey, the two other large countries in the Middle East besides Iran; Mexico and Venezuela, two oil-exporting countries in Latin America; China, India, and Pakistan, poorer but fast-growing countries of Asia; and Malaysia, a predominantly Muslim country with a dynamic economy. The poverty rates are for 1997–2001, the closest neighboring years for which comparable data were available.

In terms of poverty, Iran compares well with these countries. The proportions of individuals under \$2 per day is 7.2 percent in Iran, which is lower than in Malaysia, Mexico, and Turkey, whose average incomes are the same or higher than Iran's. Not surprisingly, Iran's poverty rate is considerably lower than

TABLE 1.3. International comparison of poverty and inequality.

Country	GDP PC in 2003	Poverty rate % under \$2	Gini index
Iran	6,608	7.2 (1998)	43.0 (1998)
Egypt	3,731	43.9 (1999)	34.4 (2000)
Turkey	6,398	10.3 (2000)	40.0 (2000)
China	4,726	50.1 (1999)	44.7 (2001)
India	2,732	80.6 (1999)	32.5 (2000)
Pakistan	1,981	65.6 (1998)	33.0 (1999)
Venezuela	4,647	30.6 (1998)	49.1 (1998)
Mexico	8,661	26.3 (2000)	54.6 (2000)
Malaysia	8,986	9.3 (1997)	49.2 (1997)

Note: GDP PC (per capita) is in constant 2000 international (PPP) dollars, and the poverty rate is the percentage of individuals living under \$2 per day.

Source: World Bank (2005).

that of the poorer countries of China, Egypt, India, and Pakistan. In terms of inequality, as measured by the Gini index, Iran is about average (0.43) for this group of countries. The poorer countries of Egypt, India, and Pakistan have lower inequality (0.30–0.35), but Iran's index is lower than for countries with similar income (0.49 and 0.54 for Malaysia and Mexico, respectively) except for Turkey (0.40). In short, following a tumultuous postrevolution period, judged by the standards of this group of developing countries, Iran's poverty rate is quite low and its inequality is about average.

My own calculations of poverty rates for Iran, based on multiple Expenditure and Income Surveys (HEIS), indicate that there is hardly any "severe poverty" (defined as those below \$1 per day, the international standard for severe poverty).¹¹ Only about 2 to 3 percent of the population are below this poverty line, compared to 25 percent in India. Using Iran's own poverty lines (based on Pajouyan 1999) of \$2.40 per day per person in rural areas, \$2.9 in urban areas, and \$4 in Tehran, we find in 2002 poverty rates of 32.8 percent in rural areas, 10.4 percent in urban areas, and 5.9 percent in Tehran. Figure 1.4 shows a rather dramatic decline in poverty since the early 1990s at the level of the country and for urban areas and Tehran, but not for rural areas. Unlike what is reported in popular accounts of poverty, growth has been pro-poor. Rural poverty has declined less because rural households have not enjoyed the same income growth as have urban households. The World Bank (2003b) study of poverty in Iran also found that growth has reduced poverty, from 26 percent in 1990 to 21 percent in 1998.

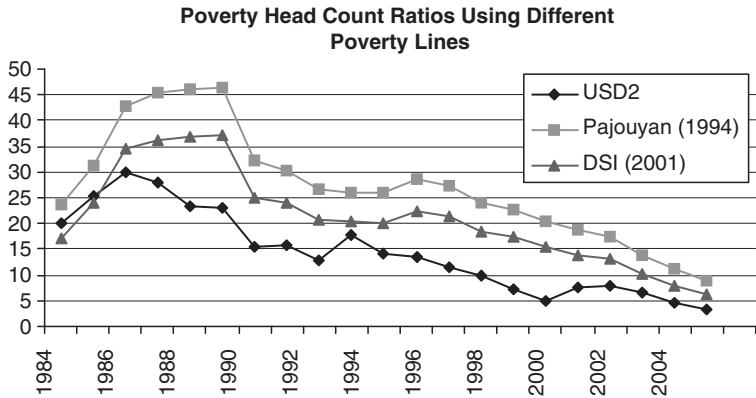


FIGURE 1.4. Poverty rates for rural and urban areas, 1984–2005.

Note: Poverty lines are defined by expenditure of individuals with calorie intake of 2,200 as calculated by Pajouyan (1999).

Source: Author's calculations using HEIS, 1984–2005.

For inequality, as measured by the Gini index, the distribution of per capita expenditures has been relatively stable and high despite egalitarian social policies in postrevolutionary Iran, as shown in Figure 1.5. Iran's inequality is higher than Korea's (0.32) and Egypt's (0.34), but much lower than Brazil's (0.60). Inequality within rural and urban areas is slightly lower; in 2003, the Gini stood at 0.37 for both urban and rural areas (the higher overall Gini reflects the inequality between average incomes in rural and urban areas). The Gini coefficient reached its highest values in 1986 and 1992 (0.46), but has since remained below 0.45. The level of inequality as reflected in per capita expenditures is lower than immediately before the Revolution, but very similar to that which prevailed in the early 1970s.¹² It is a remarkable fact that overall inequality has not changed after nearly three decades of revolutionary change.

Another view of the distribution of income is obtained from the more intuitive measure of the relative shares of the very rich and the very poor. The decile dispersion ratio, which measures the ratio of average consumption in the top 10 percent to that of the poorest decile, is more sensitive to changes in the tails of the distribution. As seen in figure 1.6, this ratio has fluctuated between 15 and 20 from 1984 to 2000, rising sharpest during the 1990–1993 period when rationing had ended and reconstruction and restructuring was in full swing. At one level, the data in figure 1.6 corroborate the stability in inequality that was just noted using the Gini coefficient; at another level, it shows greater inequality than is reflected in the Gini. For example, Iran and the United States have about the same Gini coefficients, but Iran's dispersion ratio is about twice that of the United States, which is about 7. However, in comparison with Brazil's whopping value of 50, Iran's dispersion ratio is quite modest.

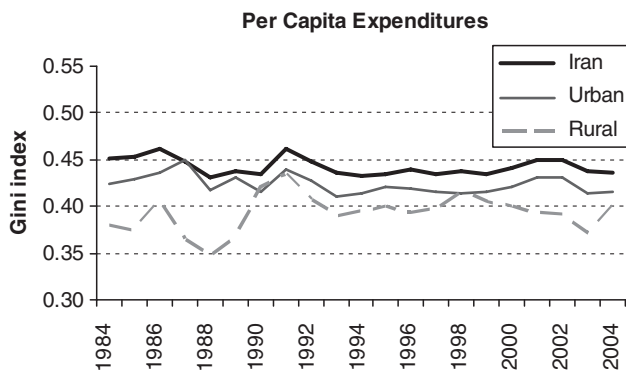


FIGURE 1.5. The Gini coefficient does not indicate a rise in inequality over time.
Source: Author's calculations using unit records for HEIS, 1984–2004.

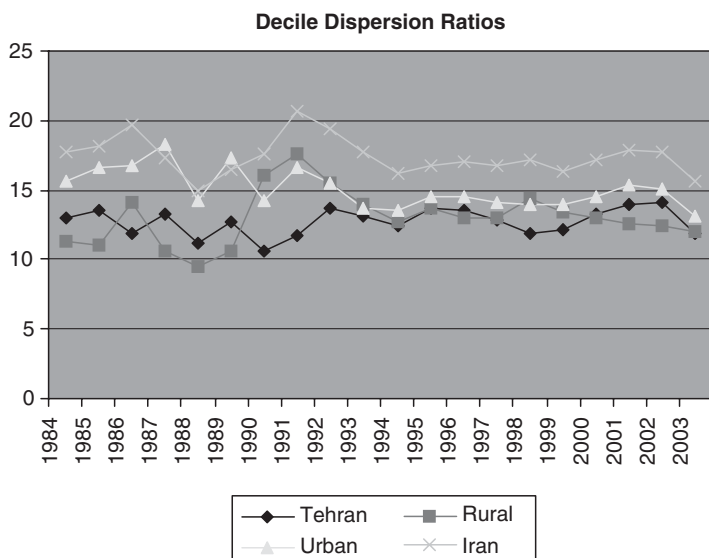


FIGURE 1.6. Decile ratios show an improvement in the share of the very poor relative to the very rich in recent years.

Note: Decile ratios are the ratio of average consumption of the richest 10 percent to the lowest.

Source: Author's calculations using unit records for HEIS, 1984–2003.

Improvements in living standards are only partially measured by changes in household incomes and expenditures. Neither include allowances for public investment, which in Iran has shifted focus to rural and poorer communities. Public investment has increased access by the poor, especially in rural areas, to basic services such as electricity, piped water, and natural gas. The value of these services is not fully reflected in household income or expenditures, in part because the services are highly subsidized. Table 1.4 shows changes in indicators of housing, appliance ownership, and access to basic services for the average household over time, as reflected in HEIS survey data. According to these indicators, there has been a significant increase in access to basic services and the availability of household appliances. Home ownership has remained high despite rising urbanization, which tends to promote rental housing, but the living area per person has increased. The rural-urban gap in access to basic services has narrowed, which is in the opposite direction from per capita expenditures (compare with fig. 1.2), leaving the change in overall welfare gap between rural and urban areas ambiguous.

An ambitious program of rural electrification increased access by rural households from 16.2 percent in 1977 to 98.3 percent in 2004; this change is responsible for the other improvements recorded in table 1.4. For example, ownership of refrigerators in rural areas increased from 7.6 percent to 92.4 percent during the same period. Among urban households, nearly all of whom had access to electricity by 1977, only 36.5 percent owned refrigerators; by 2004 it was 98.5 percent. Ownership of televisions increased in both urban and rural areas, from 22.6 percent to 97.5 percent in urban and 3.2 percent to 89.1 percent in rural areas. Interestingly, TV ownership in urban areas, where access to electricity already existed, jumped from 22.6 percent to 79.0 percent in just seven years, perhaps because television received the stamp of approval from religious leaders. Nearly half of rural homes had a fixed telephone line in 2004, up from less than 1 percent before the Revolution.

Access to piped water in rural areas increased from 11.7 to 89.0 percent of households, an impressive gain in view of the fact that rural families live in over 60,000 villages, some of which are quite remote. Delivery of cheap piped natural gas to residential homes, which started after the Revolution, is now a reality for 80.1 percent of urban homes. The geographic dispersion of rural households made it very costly to extend the same services to rural households, of whom only 14.1 percent have access to piped natural gas. In housing, despite a rapidly increasing population, in the last two decades the average living area per person increased for both rural and urban families.

For the years after 1984, have the poor experienced improvements in basic services and ownership of home appliances to the same extent as have the average family? This question can be answered for the years for which unit record data are available. Changes in the indicators of interest for different expenditure

TABLE 1.4. Home ownership, household appliances, and access to services, 1977–2004.

Year	Home owner	Living area	TV	Car	Phone	Washing machine	Refrigerator	Gas stove	Electricity	Water	Natural gas
Urban											
1977	—	—	22.6	5.9	—	2.4	36.5	40.1	—	—	—
1984	71.3	20.1	79.0	17.2	21.3	32.3	90.7	84.5	99.5	96.2	8.5
1989	73.6	17.9	83.9	17.2	27.4	38.4	92.4	88.7	99.6	96.0	16.7
1994	74.2	25.0	93.5	17.1	42.4	48.4	95.1	93.0	99.7	97.9	42.0
1999	74.2	26.4	95.3	17.4	53.7	52.4	97.0	95.6	98.9	99.9	60.0
2004	68.3	28.3	97.5	25.8	81.2	64.3	98.5	97.9	100.0	99.1	80.1
Rural											
1977	—	—	3.2	1.4	0.4	—	7.6	—	16.2	11.7	—
1984	89.4	—	25.6	2.8	—	—	35.8	45.5	57.1	43.9	0.2
1989	89.7	—	42.8	3.6	—	—	51.7	58.8	71.2	56.9	0.9
1994	87.6	16.3	68.1	4.2	6.0	12.3	69.0	72.6	83.6	72.2	2.3
1999	86.8	18.2	77.9	5.1	16.0	15.7	81.8	80.0	82.4	94.5	2.9
2004	86.0	21.3	89.1	9.3	49.4	23.4	92.4	89.5	98.3	89.0	14.1

Note: Home owner is percent who own their home; living area is square meters per person; all other numbers are percents.

Source: Author's calculations using HEIS, various years.

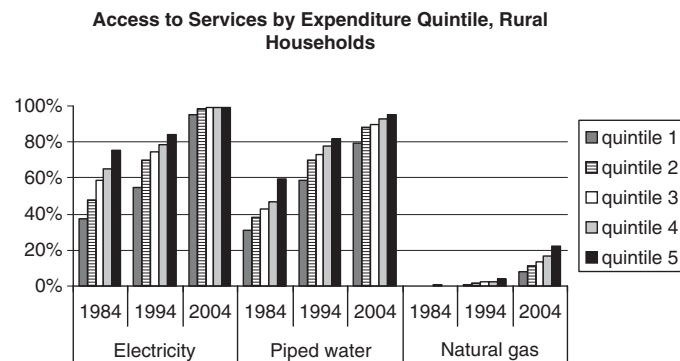
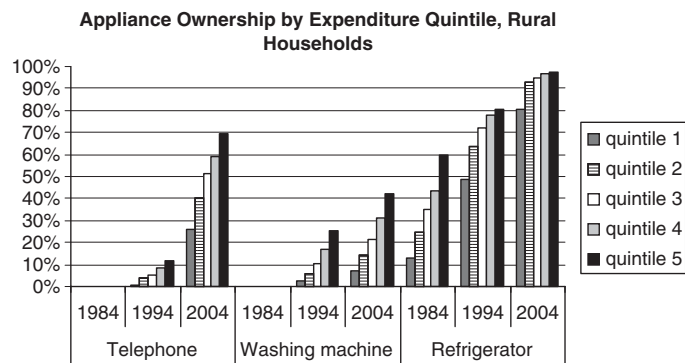
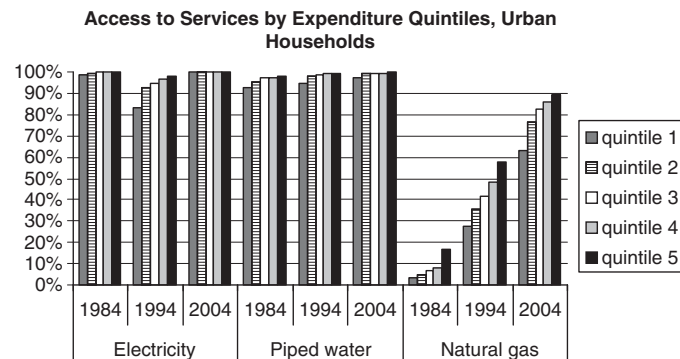
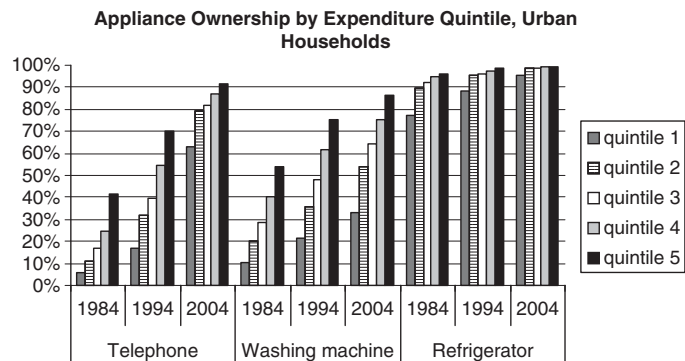


FIGURE 1.7. Ownership of appliances and access to services by expenditure quintile, 1984–2004.

Source: Author's calculations using HEIS, various years.

quintiles are presented in figure 1.7. Ownership of household appliances and access to basic services for poorer households (quintile 1) increased at least as much as for richer households (quintile 5). In urban areas, by 2004, differences between the top and bottom quintiles had decreased considerably. Rich and poor households had about equal access to basic services, except for natural gas. Nearly two-thirds of households in all expenditure quintiles owned their homes. The bottom quintile enjoyed an ownership rate of 63 percent for telephone, 93.4 percent for TV, 95.7 percent for refrigerators, and 33.4 percent for washing machines. Nearly all had access to electricity and piped water, and 62.8 percent were hooked up to the natural gas network.

In rural areas, too, except for natural gas, there has been a high degree of basic service delivery to poorer homes. In 2004, 95 percent of the poorest quintile of households had access to electricity, 79.4 percent to water. Because of the wide dispersion of over 60,000 rural communities in the country, only 7.7 percent had been hooked up to the natural gas network. In ownership of basic appliances, poorer households naturally lagged behind, as they had less income with which to buy them. Nevertheless they have made significant gains. Television ownership among the lowest quintile increased from 7 percent in 1984 to 76.7 percent in 2004, refrigerator ownership from 12.7 percent to 80.4 percent, and gas stove ownership from 21 percent to 75.8 percent.

HUMAN CAPITAL AND GROWTH: A DEMOGRAPHIC GIFT

In the last 20 years attention in economics has shifted from investment in physical capital to human capital as the engine of growth (Becker, Murphy, and Tamura 1990; Lucas 1988, 2002). The main message of this literature is that sustained growth is possible only if a society shifts its energy from procreation to production of human capital. Since much of this change happens at the household level, understanding household behavior takes center stage in understanding long-term growth. Two distinct stages of development, each characterized by a particular type of behavior, are recognized. In the traditional or pre-modern phase, families have high fertility rates and there is little investment in child education; in the modern phase, fertility is low and investment in education is high. If countries are classified along these two dimensions, a clear delineation emerges between countries that have assumed modern growth and those that are stuck in an underdeveloped stage. All the developed and rapidly developing countries, such as the East Asian “tigers,” exhibit the modern household behavior I have referred to, while the stagnant economies—comprising the majority of the sub-Saharan countries—exhibit traditional behavior (Guriev and Salehi-Isfahani 2003). A further marker of these behaviors is gender bias: the education gap between male and female children decreases as household behavior changes from traditional to modern.¹³

Attention to changes in Iranian household behavior reveals an important difference in economic growth before and after the mid-1980s, when the decline in fertility started. Prior to the mid-1980s, fertility rates were fairly high, even *increased* briefly in 1979–1982, before beginning their rapid decline (see figure 1.8). Economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s—the most impressive record of growth to date—simply failed to “modernize” the average household in the sense of bringing a shift from traditional to modern behavior. But sometime in the mid-1980s, fertility rates began to decline and there was more investment in human capital (health and education), especially for women. As shown in figure 1.8, fertility fell from 7.24 to 2.56 births per woman in less than 15 years—a record speed matched only by the decline in Japanese fertility after World War II. Figure 1.8 also shows increased investment in health, indicated by the steady and impressive decline in child mortality, from 281 per 1,000 in 1960 to 42 per 1,000 in 2001, though this steady decline started at least 20 years before fertility fell.

As with child mortality, education was on a steady rise throughout the last century. The increase in average years of schooling and a narrowing of the gender gap are further signs of change in household strategy. On average, the educational gender gap for a population over 25 years old reaches zero at per capita incomes of over twice that of Iran (Mammen and Paxson 2000). In Iran, this gap is nearly two years, with years of school for men 25 and over averaging 5.8 years and for women 3.9.¹⁴ As the number of older and less literate people in the population decreases, the average years of education will increase and the

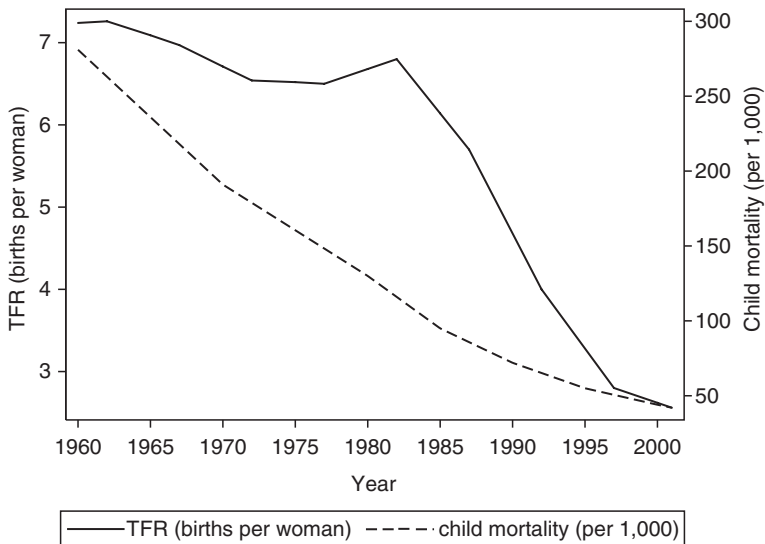


FIGURE 1.8. Fertility and investment in health and education, 1960–2001.
Source: World Bank (2003c).

gender gap will decrease. In fact, the gender gap has already disappeared for younger age groups. The average difference in years of education for men and women born before 1960 had been between two and three years, but that difference disappeared for these born by 1976 (see table 1.5). Urban women born in the 1940s had, on average, less than half the education of men, whereas in 2003 those born after the Revolution (1980–1984) had, on average, nearly half a year *more* schooling. Similarly, rural individuals born in the 1940s attained, on average, about 10 percent of the schooling of urban individuals, compared to 80 percent for the 1980–1984 cohort. The narrowing of the gender education gap is also evident from enrollment rates (table 1.6). In the last several years Iranian women have been entering universities at greater numbers than men;

TABLE 1.5. Educational attainment by gender and birth cohort
(average years of schooling).

Cohort	Rural			Urban		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1940–49	1.42	0.18	0.78	5.22	2.57	3.87
1950–59	3.55	0.81	2.14	7.68	4.58	6.2
1960–64	4.93	1.86	3.41	8.54	6.59	7.61
1965–69	5.74	3.24	4.52	8.82	7.36	8.09
1970–74	6.96	4.44	5.74	9.11	8.27	8.69
1975–79	7.82	6.09	6.98	9.99	9.71	9.85
1980–84	8.39	7.61	7.98	10.60	11.03	10.83

Source: Author's calculations, HEIS, 2003.

TABLE 1.6. Enrollment rates by gender and level of education, 1995–2002.

Year	Primary			Lower secondary			Upper secondary		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
1995	108.6	101.4	105.1	100.1	81.6	93.1	72.7	66.7	69.8
1998	108.9	102.9	106.0	102.2	85.1	95.9	79.9	81.2	80.5
1999	107.7	102.4	105.1	102.6	85.0	96.0	78.0	81.5	79.7
2000	107.2	102.2	104.8	102.6	85.0	96.1	77.1	81.7	79.3
2001	103.7	99.5	101.6	102.8	85.9	96.6	77.9	83.8	80.8
2002	101.8	98.1	100.0	103.6	87.5	97.8	76.6	82.6	79.5

Source: Ministry of Education, Tehran, Iran.

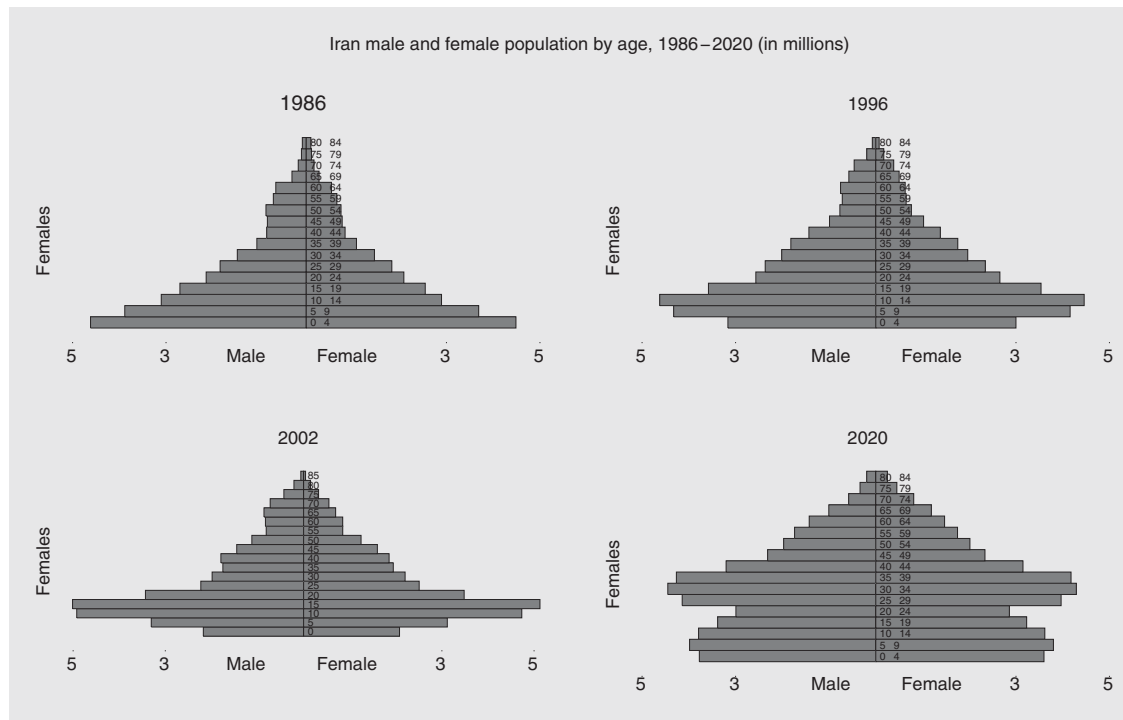


FIGURE 1.9. Changes in age structure of Iranian male and female population (in millions), 1986–2020.

Note: The age structure pyramid for 2002 is constructed using survey data. Sample weights are used to inflate sample numbers to population levels.

Source: 1986–1996 data, Census of Population and Housing, Statistical Center of Iran; 2002 data, survey, HEIS, Statistical Center of Iran; 2020 data, United National projections, 2003.

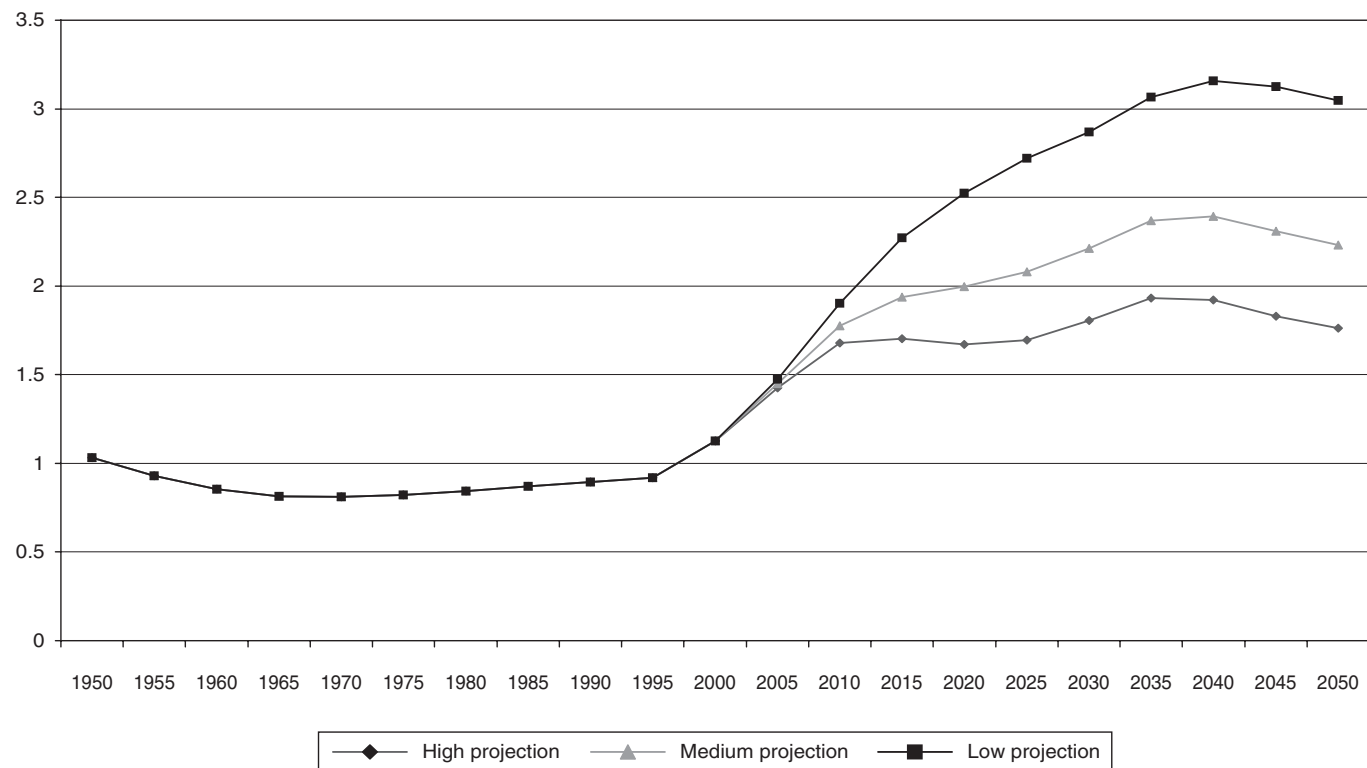


FIGURE 1.10. Rising adult-child ratio, 1950–2050.

Note: The ratio of adults 20–54 years old to children ages 0–4.

Source: Author's calculations, United Nations (2003).

in the school year 2001–2002, in public universities (which are more difficult to enter), women made up 55 percent at the bachelor's level (Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2003b).

The narrowing of gaps in education, along with the fertility decline, is evidence of significant changes in the role of the family in the economy, from the traditional unit of survival and procreation to agent of growth. But how will this change in family behavior affect economic growth? The education of a future generation of Iranian youth depends more on women than men and implies even lower fertility in the long run. Lower fertility rates affect the age structure of the population in a dramatic way, as portrayed in figure 1.9, which shows population pyramids for 1986 through 2020, based on census data (1986–1996), survey data (2002), and United Nations (2003) projections to 2020.

A notable change in the proportion of adults to children is evident in these population pyramids. This change in age structure is depicted differently in figure 1.10, showing more clearly the impressive rise in the ratio of adults (ages 20–54) to children (ages 0–14). The adult-child ratio measures the human-resource dimension of educational resources. Children are taught by adults, whether at home or at school. The home environment is important for education and is heavily influenced by the number of children, which is one reason we find a strong correlation between the education of children and their parents, in Iran as elsewhere (Salehi-Isfahani 2001). The parent-child education correlation is particularly strong in the case of mothers. Historically, the ratio of adults to children has been very low—less than one adult per child until 2000—but it could rise to as high as 3 adults per child later this century. Such a significant change in the ratio is an obvious stimulus for the accumulation of human capital.

The favorable demographic situation facing Iran will increase education levels but will it result in economic growth? There is little doubt that in a broad sense an educated public, with gender equality in education, is a prerequisite for modern economic growth. Demographic transition and adoption of modern technology are the two foundations of modern growth that cannot happen without widespread education. But education is only a necessary condition and not all education directly adds to growth of output. The empirical literature in economics that studies the link between education and growth does not provide a unified picture. Some studies based on cross-country comparisons show that, on average, each additional year of education can increase the GDP by as much as 10 percent. But others have failed to observe any positive effects of increased education on output (Benhabib and Spiegel 1994; Pritchett 2001, among others). Unfortunately, the latter view appears to be more relevant for Iran. Pritchett (1999) makes the case for the Middle East region as a whole. As I have argued elsewhere (Salehi-Isfahani 2000, 2002), one important explanation for the low productivity results of education in Iran is that it promotes the wrong skills. Learning in Iran is aimed mainly at passing tests and advancing through the

formal structure. In fact, for the majority of Iranian students, only the “big test,” the national university entrance examination, matters. As a result, the education system has gravitated toward producing diplomas rather than productive skills.

The education system has been adversely influenced by the labor market. Employment in Iran is a long-term affair; there is little turnover, in terms of either quits or layoffs. Public-sector employment has always carried with it implied lifetime tenure. After the Revolution, this situation was extended to formal private-sector employment as well. The Labor Law of 1990 imposes heavy fees on employers for layoffs, requiring them to pay fines if a government-appointed council finds a worker has been laid off without good cause. Both public and private employers are thus discouraged from taking risks with new hires, preferring to pick those who can better demonstrate their productivity *before* they are hired. So, those with diplomas from better schools and higher test scores have a greater chance of finding a job. But other important skills—those that are not easily tested, such as creativity, ambition, perseverance, and even writing—are not similarly rewarded. Individuals and parents, therefore, do not have much incentive to invest in these skills and productivity suffers (Salehi-Isfahani 1999, 2002, 2005). Iran’s rigid labor market and the education system that it has fostered together threaten to dissipate the benefits of the above mentioned demographic gift into rote memorization and wasteful competition in search of credentials. The labor market bears responsibility for providing social protection as well as allocating workers to jobs. Reform of the labor market to increase flexibility and deliver unemployment insurance when needed must go hand in hand.

INCREASING THE SCOPE OF MARKETS

The revolution of 1979 and the war economy of 1980–1988 hugely increased the role of the state in Iran’s economy. The Revolution brought a broad array of industries and with it many markets, such as credit, under full control of the government. The war added rationing of essential commodities, which further tightened the state’s grip on the economy. Relaxing these controls was the goal of the first Rafsanjani administration, which moved swiftly to end rationing and increase the role of markets in setting prices for essential commodities. Some key reforms to increase market determination of foreign exchange rates and interest rates have gone some distance, while others, such as increasing competition in product markets, reducing the role of the state in production, and reform of the labor market, have proceeded more slowly.

Foreign Exchange Market

The unification of the exchange rate in 2002 is probably the single most important reform so far to increase competition and efficiency. In an economy in

which foreign exchange, which makes up about one-tenth of the GDP, is distributed administratively, free competition is impossible. Until 2002, except for a brief and disastrous period in 1993, multiple rates were used to sell foreign currency to importers. The mechanism was necessarily subject to political influence, and powerful foundations, such as Bonyad *mostazafan*, or businesses with good connections to centers of political power, could enjoy lower rates, giving them a huge advantage in the market.

However, it is still uncertain how long this unified system will last. Only with time (and other reforms that reduce arbitrary economic power) will confidence in the foreign exchange system increase. Confidence that markets, rather than politics, influence the exchange rate is important for foreign investment. The first attempt at unification in 1993 was poorly managed; it was announced too early, encouraging firms to borrow abroad heavily before devaluation. In a short period, Iran racked up \$23 billion in foreign debt, which was adopted by the Central Bank, creating a balance-of-payments crisis that forced a sharp retreat in economic reform, resulting in decreased imports, 50 percent inflation in 1995, and the reimposition of price controls (Pesaran 2000). It will take some time before investors consider the possibility of a second failure remote. Recently the exchange rate has come under pressure from a growing money supply, which is about 30 percent per year. The economic boom under way in 2008 has already doubled the rate inflation to about 30 percent and threatens to destabilize the economy.

Foreign Trade

The Islamic republic inherited a highly protected internal market with tariffs and quotas to protect a variety of domestic sectors. The Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations rationalized the foreign trade restrictions, mainly replacing nontariff barriers (quotas) with tariffs and reducing tariffs on a host of goods (International Monetary Fund 2003). Despite efforts at liberalizing its foreign trade, by 2003 the average import tariff was 27.6 percent (International Monetary Fund 2003).

Trade protection is an important tool to combat the de-industrialization caused by the Dutch disease, so removing it altogether may not be sound industrial policy (Karshenas 1990). But trade protection creates inefficiencies in domestic production that prevent increases in productivity. The Iranian auto industry, which has received generous protection during the last 50 years, is a good example. High costs and low product quality still prevent the industry from competing with better-made imports. Weaning the protected industries off protection and finding a balance between efficiency and protection that ameliorates the effects of the Dutch disease is an important challenge for trade policy in Iran.

A promising sign that Iran is committed to trade liberalization can be found in its desire to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). Iran submitted its first application in 1996, during the Rafsanjani administration, and placed 16 applications until 2005, when its application was accepted and negotiations began for joining the WTO. The chances for Iran's entry any time soon are not high, not just because of opposition from the United States but also because of Iran's protectionist lobby and its huge energy subsidies.

Financial Markets

Successive Islamic governments have inherited highly regulated financial markets. Before the Revolution, the financial sector was characterized by strict control of lending by public and private banks, by subsidized interest rates, and by credit allocation through development banks (Salehi-Isfahani 1989). The Shah used credit rationing to direct resources to projects and sectors he deemed important. The system was further centralized after the Revolution with the nationalization of private banks. Credit rationing has continued in the form of administrative allocation of subsidized loans, which, as in the allocation of foreign exchange, has been subject to political influence.

The liberalization of the financial markets took a step forward with permits issued to private banks in 2002, of which four operated by 2004. Foreign ownership of private banks up to 40 percent of their capital is permitted under the Fourth Plan. Another step toward liberalization was to loosen restrictions on interest rates charged to depositors.¹⁵ As a result, beginning in 2002 banks in Iran offered positive real rates of interest (Jalali-Naini and Khalatbari 2002), where nominal rates of 17 to 20 percent were offered on five-year deposits and on "participation papers" (a form of bond) sold by the Central Bank, exceeding the rate of inflation at 13 to 16 percent.

The small stock exchange in Tehran, which had operated since 1968 but was closed after the Revolution until 1989, has been growing steadily. It has proved a useful part of the privatization effort, as it offers a way of valuing and selling public enterprises. Along with the real estate market, it serves as a leading indicator of inflation. In 2007, 416 firms with a market capitalization of nearly \$40 billion (or one-third of the GDP) were listed on the market. The market's contribution to supply of available funds for investment has been limited, however. It is expected that its role in financing private investment may expand in the future with further liberalization of the financial markets, inducing companies to raise capital by selling equity. The market index rose by an average of 50 percent per year between 1999 and 2004—more than three times the rate of inflation. Recently, however, it has suffered setbacks following political uncertainty and international pressures regarding Iran's nuclear energy program.

Product Markets and Privatization

The constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran declares many economic sectors the domain of the public sector (Article 44). Privatization of these sectors, such as banking, has nevertheless gone forward, thanks to some creative legal work, albeit at a very slow pace. The number and scope of public enterprises is in dispute. Depending on the source, anywhere between 400 to 2,000 firms can be considered public (Khoshpour 1997). According to the budget appropriations bill, in 1996 there were about 400 public enterprises, of which one-third were in industry and the rest were in mining and services.

The main impetus behind privatization has been to reduce the huge burden that public enterprises impose on the national budget. They mostly lose money and, to cover their losses, they either receive direct payments from the government or borrow from government banks. In 1996, about 70 percent of the total budget went to public enterprises (Khoshpour 1997). The legal framework for privatization was spelled out in the First Development Plan (1989–1993), but has since proceeded slowly. Public firms have been offering their shares to the public for a number of years, but so far few have been bought (International Monetary Fund 2003). A major obstacle to privatization is overstaffing of public firms. Private owners are prevented from shedding unwanted labor. In addition, the Labor Law restricts employers from laying off workers because workers have the right of appeal to a government body (Salehi-Isfahani 1999).

The budget figures show a rise in the pace of privatization in 2002—revenues of 8,364 billion rials (about \$1 billion) from the sale of public enterprises, up from 93.6 billion rials in 2001. However, of the 18,000 billion rials projected for 2004, only 5 percent was realized by the end of the third quarter (Central Bank 2003c, 17).

Another major way to increase competition in the product market is anti-trust legislation, which is new to Iran (Salehi 2002). During the Third Plan, legislation was passed to prepare the legal basis for preventing monopolies and promoting competition.

The Market for Labor

The labor market serves two important functions: to allocate individuals to job for which they are best suited and to provide rewards for accumulating human capital. In Iran, as in other Middle Eastern countries, the labor market is heavily influenced by public-sector employment policies and regulations. As the largest employer, the public sector emphasizes university education as a prerequisite for government employment and promotes credentialism, or high rewards for diplomas rather than for productive skills. Public-sector employment policies are also characterized by lifelong employment and a weak link

between productivity and compensation. The public sector's influence is particularly strong because it employs 84 percent of college graduates between the ages 25 to 54.¹⁶

The Labor Law of Iran, which is the government's principal instrument of regulation, similarly distorts incentives for education (Salehi-Isfahani 1999). Private-sector employers are restricted from laying off unproductive workers and from paying wages that correspond to individual worker productivity rather than according to a wage scale based on diplomas. Therefore, these regulations reduce worker incentives not only to work hard but also to acquire skills that improve productivity before and during entry into the labor market (Salehi-Isfahani 2002). As noted earlier, the rigid labor market is responsible for the low social productivity of education (rising education without increase in output) and high private returns. The labor market in Iran, and the education system that serves it, are unable to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the new global economy. In particular, labor regulations are a disincentive for private investment and privatization because private employers are sensitive to the restrictions on how they can manage their labor force and set wages.

Labor-market reform is both timely and politically sensitive. It is central to the theme of knowledge-based growth adopted in the Fourth Plan, and it is important if Iran is to take advantage of the demographic window of opportunity discussed earlier. To serve these purposes, labor reform should remove the distorted incentives for investment in productive human capital. Measures to increase flexibility by allowing natural and productive turnover to take place will go a long way toward improving the effectiveness of the labor market. One small but significant step in this direction was the 2002 legislation to exempt firms with fewer than five workers from the Labor Law. The fact that the legislation garnered enough support from conservatives and Khatami's reformist political base and without stiff opposition from the main labor lobby, Khaneh Kargar, is a good sign that pragmatism and consensus can work to achieve economic reform.

Another important reform would include improving the social insurance system, such as unemployment insurance and poverty assistance. A comprehensive social-protection program is necessary before further flexibility in employment can be expected. At this time, the burden of social protection is in large part borne by the labor market, which is not what it does best. As I have argued (Salehi-Isfahani 2005; Salehi-Isfahani and Egel 2007), the cost of providing protection through the labor market is high, not just in lower worker productivity but also in distorted incentives for human capital investment.

CONCLUSION

For a country that more than a generation ago went through a revolution whose main message was the redistribution of wealth and economic power, an

obsession with redistribution at the expense of economic growth is not surprising. The fact that oil is at the center of wealth accumulation in Iran only adds to this obsession (Salehi-Isfahani 2008). Successive Islamic governments have continued to adhere, in rhetoric if not in actual policy, to the ideals of the Revolution and to service to the poor. This commitment has been most clearly reflected in social policies to reduce illiteracy, improve private and public health in low-income communities, and promote family planning in rural areas—all steps that have done much for the poor and for encouraging long-term economic growth.

The revolutionary spirit carried over to the economic sphere as well, at least during the first decade after the Revolution, favoring collective (government) action over individual initiative and decentralized action coordinated by the markets. What Deepak Lal (1999) calls *dirigisme* comes naturally to revolutionaries. Besides the early wave of nationalizations, which increased state control over the economy, there were price controls and rationing to soften the blow of shortages for the poor, who bore the main burden of the war with Iraq.

By the time the war ended in 1988, the revolutionary ideas for economic planning had run out of steam and a reverse trend was set in motion. Since then, successive governments have moved the economy away from the war-imposed restrictions that had severely limited the role of markets in resource allocation. By the early 1990s, the *raison d'être* for the war economy had disappeared and central planning in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union had been discredited.¹⁷

The pragmatic administration of President Rafsanjani (1989–1993) lost no time in moving to dismantle the system of rationing and replace dirigiste thinking in the Planning Organization. The clearest expression of this change was the Second Five-Year Development Plan (1995–1999), soon to be followed by the Third Development Plan (2000–2004), both of which drafted the legal framework for increasing the role of the markets and prices in resource allocation.

The Second Plan was only partially implemented because Rafsanjani's reforms stalled during his second term (1994–1997) and dirigiste thinking made a comeback. In 1997, the left-leaning administration of President Khatami (1997–2005) took over from Rafsanjani. Though the coalition that supported Khatami had earlier opposed Rafsanjani's reforms, it gradually continued the latter's pro-market policies. The focus of this coalition was reform of the political process, which did not go very far, but the experience of their eight years in office seems to have convinced many of the coalition's top thinkers that economic dirigisme was incompatible with democracy. The well-known reformist intellectual Akbar Ganji and his "Republican Manifesto" were significant in this respect. Quoting Robert Nozick and Amartya Sen, he argued for a free market economy as the path to democracy: "A market economy leads to the dispersion of wealth and resources, which in turn leads to competition in politics and

prevents monopolies of power. Such an economic organization gives people a sense of sovereignty and independence, which are values intrinsic to democracy" (Ganji 2003). The idea that centralization of economic power is incompatible with decentralized politics has thus entered serious intellectual debate in Iran, where political thinking is still dominated by socialist and Marxist ideas (Tabibian, Ghani-Nezhad, and Abbasi 2001).

Thus, the left-leaning planners under Khatami ended up drawing the pro-market Third Development Plan (2000–2004), which pushed for privatization, antitrust legislation, and labor market reform. The same vision of reform continued into the Fourth Development Plan (2005–2009), subtitled Knowledge-based Growth of the National Economy in Interaction with the Global Economy, which also called for reforming education and the labor market to prepare Iran for integration into the global economy (Management and Planning Organization 2005). Regarding labor market reform, which is politically the most difficult to implement, the Plan aimed to reduce the burden of income security from employers and replace it with a public system of social security.

The task of approving the Fourth Plan in 2005 fell to incoming President Ahmadinejad and the conservative-dominated eighth parliament. Despite the change in regime, the plan was approved with most of its pro-market policies intact, especially privatization. And although the Ahmadinejad administration belongs to the political right, it has strong dirigist tendencies and has gone even further than Khatami in making redistribution its number one goal. However, early statements by its top economic policymakers indicate that they will pursue their redistributive objectives with market tools.¹⁸ Very likely, using market forces to redistribute wealth was not exactly what the people who voted for Ahmadinejad took from his campaign promise of "taking oil money to the people," but his dismantling of the MPO and the manner in which he has distributed public funds in the provinces are seen by his supporters as in line with that promise.

If the recent atmosphere of populist electoral politics in Iran continues, the real foundation of economic reform will rest on the attitudes of Iranian voters. While voters are generally disappointed by the performance of the public sector in production, as the recent election indicates, they continue to believe in its ability to redistribute resources. If President Ahmadinejad fails to deliver on his promise of redistribution, voters may return to the pragmatic, pro-market economic policies of the right-leaning Rafsanjani administration and the left-leaning Khatami administration. The coming presidential election in June 2009, provided that it takes place in a calm and competitive atmosphere, will be very revealing about the preferences of the Iranian public because the public is now better informed than ever about the ability of a range of administrations, from pragmatic to populist, in responding to its needs.

NOTES

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1. See, for example, Amuzegar (2005) and Amir Taheri's op-ed piece in *Wall Street Journal*, "Iran's Economic Crisis," May 9, 2007.

2. For example, see Michael Ignatieff's piece in the *New York Times*, July 17, 2005.

3. *Sharq* daily newspaper, July 27, 2005.

4. Afshin Molavi, "Economic Ills Fuel Iranian Dissent," *Washington Post*, July 8, 2003, A13; and Abbas Milani, "Regime change," *Wall Street Journal*, October 31, 2005.

5. I am assuming a capital-output ratio between 3 and 5, which covers a wide range of possibilities for productivity of investment.

6. A case in point is the closure of the Imam Khomeini International Airport near Tehran. A Turkish firm that won the bid to run the airport found itself at the mercy of Iran's security forces. On May 9, right after an inaugural ceremony followed by the landing of one foreign aircraft, the airport was closed by the armed forces for "security" reasons. *IRNA*, Tehran, May 9.

7. In 2007, President Ahmadinejad all but dismantled the MPO, looking for more freedom in how to spend the oil wealth.

8. Mr. Rafsanjani once noted in dismay that the people of Qom would have been happier with him had he spent the investment funds to secure drinking water for the city on subsidized washing powder!

9. The discussion in this section draws heavily from my paper (Salehi-Isfahani 2008).

10. Data taken from the Web site of the Komitch Emdad, <http://www.emdad.if>.

11. For more detail, see Salehi-Isfahani (2008).

12. See Pesaran (1976) for the prerevolution numbers and Salehi-Isfahani (2008) for the comparison with postrevolution data. Differences in the method of calculation may account for some of the discrepancy.

13. See Salehi-Isfahani (2005) for more details.

14. Author's calculations based on the 2003 Household Expenditure and Income Survey (HEIS) data files obtained from the Statistical Center of Iran.

15. Under the Islamic Law of Interest (*Ghanoun reba*) a bank cannot offer ex ante fixed rates of interest, but in practice what banks offer depositors in Iran differs little from that in other countries.

16. Authors' calculation based on raw data files from the 2001 Household Expenditure and Income Survey, Statistical Center of Iran.

17. Mohammad Tabibian, a prominent Duke University-educated Iranian economist, the architect of the Second Plan and the intellectual father of liberal market reform in Iran, has described how a visit to Eastern Europe in 1981, arranged by the government to inspire the country's top planners with central planning, convinced him that central planning was not a workable system. See "Eslah talabi eghtesadi" (Economic reformism), *Hamshahri Daily*, 2915, December 2, 2002.

18. See the speech by Iran's new economy minister, Davood Danseh-Jafari, in the Annual Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank, Washington, D.C., reported in *Sharq*, September 27, 2005, and similar remarks by the chief economist of the MPO: "Without steady economic growth, it is not possible to combat poverty and unemployment, provide productive jobs and reach an equitable distribution of income." *Sharq*, November 17, 2005.

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THE URBAN PROVINCIAL PERIPHERY IN IRAN: REVOLUTION AND WAR IN RAMHORMOZ

Kaveh Ehsani

This chapter sheds light on some of the developments that have affected provincial Iran since the 1979 revolution. Postrevolution Iran is socially and geographically a far more integrated society than it was 30 years ago,¹ a fact that has become increasingly evident since the contentious Iranian presidential elections of 1997, when a reformist government was elected with widespread participation by voters from the provinces. Subsequent elections and opinion surveys also indicate that political coalitions, collective identities, and public opinions are not shaped solely in Tehran and other large cities, but also in the smaller communities and provincial localities.² The complexity of contemporary Iran can be understood only if the multilayered social transformation of the country's rural and provincial society is taken as an integral part of its postrevolution history. My aim in this chapter is to describe and analyze how national events and processes that transformed Iran after the revolution equally affected small towns and rural areas. Throughout this essay, "provinces" refers to the administrative territorial units of the country, and "provincial" refers to all of the country outside Tehran, the capital.

IRANIAN REVOLUTION: ISLAMIC OR PROVINCIAL?

The 1979 Islamic revolution occurred at a symbolic moment when the Iranian population was also becoming predominantly urban for the first time in history.³ The formation of the modern nation-state in Iran, especially since the 1920s, had been a centralized, authoritarian, and bureaucratic process whereby political power, administrative authority, and economic wealth had accumulated in the central state and the capital, Tehran. Yet an important factor in the fall of the monarchy was the widespread nature of protests against the monarchy, which were not limited to Tehran and a few large cities, but more or less took place throughout the country. The postrevolutionary power structure

that consolidated during a civil war against domestic oppositions (1979–1982) and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) was Khomeinist in ideology,⁴ but it was based on networks of local activists and institutions.⁵ The new political elite and the supporters of the new regime by and large came from varied social backgrounds, but it is their equally significant yet often overlooked *geographic backgrounds*, mostly from provincial towns and areas, that are of special relevance to our discussion.⁶ From this perspective the Islamic republic should be characterized as much by its provincial character as by its Islamist ideology.

Underlining the provincial dimension of the Iranian Revolution not only highlights the agency of the periphery, the populations of small towns and villages, in shaping national events, but it will force us to pose a number of intriguing questions, such as (a) When and how did these patterns of provincial political participation and shared values and opinions emerge in this decidedly uneven but historically highly centralized society? and (b) What has been the role of the provincial periphery in modern Iranian social, political, and national life? These are important questions that require, first and foremost, a sustained accumulation of empirical and comparative information that cannot be provided in a short chapter like this. We can only approach an explanation of this assertion by looking specifically at the social history of localities and of the social actors from provinces across the country.

Any attempt to grapple with these challenging questions has to start somewhere, and so this chapter presents a modest case study of a small provincial town, Ramhormoz, in the southwest province of Khuzestan (fig. 2.1), and it shows how this town has been affected by the historic events of the 1977–1979 revolution and the decade following the fall of the Pahlavi monarchy. The spotlight on a specific provincial community, over a limited but significant length of time, illuminates a number of interconnected processes that may otherwise be overlooked if one were to focus exclusively on macronational events.

I begin by discussing the complex historical experiences and the agency of subaltern social actors in Ramhormoz—namely its provincial and rural populations of women, young people, war refugees, ethnic minorities, and migrants—during the crucial years of 1978 to 1989. I then analyze the geographical transformation of this small town, during which attempts to reshape Iranian society left their marks on the social and physical fabric of urban life. Last, I analyze the growing role of the “state class”—namely the public sector, state institutions, bureaucracy, new revolutionary cadres, and state clients—as the primary material beneficiaries of the urban and provincial transformations that took place in postrevolution Iran. The extent to which the local developments discussed in this chapter can be generalized and extended to apply to the rest of the country is a valid question that can be addressed only through further empirical and comparative analysis. But if this chapter succeeds in posing the question convincingly, it will have done its job.



FIGURE 2.1. Map of Iran (left) and the province of Khuzestan (right).

Key: Provinces referred to in the chapter: (1) Ardabil, (2) Eastern Azerbaijan, (3) Mazandaran, (4) Golestan, (5) Northern Khorasan, (6) Khorasan Razavi, (7) Southern Khorasan, (8) Qazvin, (9) Zanjan, and (10) Tehran.

RAMHORMOZ: LIFE ON THE PERIPHERY

It should be said at the outset that Ramhormoz is not an exceptional place in any sense of the word, nor has the town's experience with the Iran-Iraq War and the Revolution been particularly different from other similar urban regions. It is, in fact, this ordinary quality that gives us a window on this formative period in Iranian history. Ramhormoz's main distinction is that it is a border town, situated between two distinct physical and ethnic geographies.⁷ The town is located in the center of the province to the east, approximately 130 kilometers east of the province's capital, Ahwaz, and at the foothills of the Zagros mountains, where the Iranian plateau ends and the flatlands of southwestern Iran stretch toward the Persian Gulf.⁸

Ramhormoz's distinctive location on the border of highland and lowland is mirrored in the separation of Khuzestan's two largest ethnic groups, the Lur and the Arabs. Between the 16th and early 20th centuries, west and southwest Khuzestan were predominantly populated by Arab *ashayer* (tribes),⁹ while the highland regions to the north and east were the territory of the Luri-speaking tribes of Bakhtiari, Kuhgalu, and Bahmayee.¹⁰ The province's main cities of Dezful and Shushtar¹¹ have a long recorded history and a distinct sense of urban identity,¹² along with a well-established resident merchant and landlord bourgeoisie and urban elite.

On the other hand, with the discovery of oil in Khuzestan at the turn of the 20th century, a new petroleum industry, under the control of the Anglo Persian Oil Company, led to the founding of industrial towns and ports such as Abadan, Masjed Soleyman, Khorramshahr, and Mahshahr. These industrial cities were populated by workers, migrants, expatriates, merchants, and state officials, forming a distinctly modern and heterogeneous urban industrial culture and environment.¹³ With consolidation of the modern central state in the mid-1920s, the Iranian government also established its own political-administrative center, designating the rather decrepit village of Naseri (Ahwaz) as the new provincial capital.¹⁴

The collapse of the Safavid state in the 18th century had accelerated the relative decline of Khuzestan's historic cities, and for much of this period—well into the later 20th century—Ramhormoz remained a marginal place in the conventional sense of the word.¹⁵ At the point where the new economy and the old society met, the town was affected by neither rapid development brought on by the oil industry nor the increasing influence of the central state, which was expanding or founding bureaucratic and industrial towns like Ahwaz, Andimeshk (a railroad juncture), and Mahshahr (an industrial port). Although many traditional merchant traders from other cities had settled in Ramhormoz, they did not appreciably alter the small and lethargic town.¹⁶

By the end of the 1970s, and on the eve of the Revolution, Ramhormoz was in the eyes of its residents a backwater, curiously unaffected by the modernization

that had been fast transforming other locales in the province and the country.¹⁷ The town's population of 12,000 was a mixture of Luri-speaking Boyer Ahmadis, Bakhtiari, and Bahmayees; of Turkish-speaking Qashqai; and of Arabic-speaking Al-e Khamis and Al-e Ghadir clans affiliated with the Bani-Lam tribe. Commerce was predominantly in the hands of merchants who were from established cities such as Dezful, Shushtar, and Behbahan, and with which they kept their connections and important business ties.

The tip of the social pyramid was occupied by landlord families mostly of Bakhtiari origin, although there were number of prominent landlords from Behbahan and Isfahan.¹⁸ Much of the city's affairs, its agricultural lands, and its resources were under the control of these leading families of Rakhshandeh, Shakeri, Musa Khan, Dehqan, Kalantar-Hormozi, and Samimi, among others.¹⁹ Prior to the Revolution, Ramhormoz's members of the Majles came from the latter two families.²⁰ These landowners owned much of the best agrarian land in the city and its surrounding areas, as well as most of the renowned fruit orchards of Ramhormoz, which produced and exported pomegranates, apricots, sour apples, and dates, mostly to other urban markets in the province.²¹ Educated members of the landed elite also staffed the second tier of the local state bureaucracy, such as the post office, the electricity department, the malaria combat unit, the public health dispensary, the document registry office, and so on.

The ethnic Arab population had for the most part settled in rural villages, although a number of their prominent leaders and community elders resided in town. After the consolidation of the modern central state in the 1920s, Khuzestan's Arab tribes were politically marginalized by the official nationalist discourse, which strongly privileged Iran's Persian identity. Clan elders and notables by and large avoided direct involvement in the town's affairs unless it directly affected their interests or those of their kin and clan members.

Senior officials of the more "strategic" state bureaucracies, such as the gendarmerie (the rural police), the judicial court, the governor's office, the municipality, and the police, formed the remaining members of the urban elite. Following a long-standing practice of the central government not to appoint locals to sensitive posts, these high officials were not native to the city, having been assigned to duty in Ramhormoz on short-term rotations. The town's economy was mostly agrarian, with fruits, grain, rice, and dairy and livestock products (wool, meat) as the main sources of revenue. There was little industry to speak of except for one gypsum mine and a couple of small gravel quarries.²²

REVOLUTION AND SOCIAL UPHEAVAL

The 1980s were a decade of significant transformation in Ramhormoz, as well as in Iran's other provincial regions, both urban and rural.²³ The composition

of the population, sense of social identity, patterns of quotidian life, modes of public behavior, and norms of civic life, as well as the political economy of the town and the region, were deeply affected by the 1979 fall of the monarchy, shortly followed by the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988. Much of the literature about the Iranian Revolution emphasizes its urban character, downplaying any role performed by the rural population.²⁴ Nevertheless, the social protests against the monarchy that had begun in 1977 eventually came to involve the populations of rural and small urban areas in the provinces as well.²⁵

The accelerating political engagement of small provincial towns and their rural peripheries in national affairs during the revolutionary years was, in part, a reaction to the authoritarian and highly centralized actions that characterized the formation of the modern national state. One of Reza Shah's (1926–1940) initial strategies in consolidation was the systematic subjugation and eventual elimination of all autonomous local power centers; the intent was to concentrate administrative, coercive, and political decision making in Tehran.²⁶ With some fits and starts, this centralization process continued for half a century.

The land reform program of the 1960s under Mohammad-Reza Shah was the next step in eliminating the remaining independent local power held by the major tribal and provincial landowning classes and turning them into clients of the central state.²⁷ As a result, established local social structures did not so much evolve during the process of modern nation building as they were dominated, engineered, and often dissolved.²⁸ The bureaucracy was not just a means of administration but also an instrument of domination. Local elites did not adapt or reproduce themselves as a modern local bourgeoisie, but instead gradually relocated to the capital as clients of the central state, no longer connected to or representing local interests.²⁹ As a consequence of these developments local civil society came to be highly controlled by the political society. After the White Revolution of the 1960s, local associations, political organizations, and social groups played little if any role in national, or even local, decisions.³⁰

Marvin Zonis, in his analysis of the political elite of Iran in the late 1960s and early 1970s, discovered that four-fifths of the cohort he studied were either employed by or directly connected to the state. More than half had spent over ten years abroad and were quite cosmopolitan, wealthy, urban, professional, and highly educated.³¹ According to David Menashri, who studied the educational accomplishments of an approximately similar cohort of the political elite a few years later, nearly half of Iran's political elite in the mid-1970s had a university degree from abroad—in a country where only 2 percent of the general population had received higher education.³²

By the time of the Revolution, a significant number of the Iranian ruling elite had few if any remaining provincial ties. They spoke one or more foreign languages, but very few spoke any of the other languages spoken by non-Persian Iranians, nor a dialect other than Tehrani Persian. Some 86 percent of those

surveyed by Marvin Zonis had been born in Tehran or had permanently located there since the 1940s. They were strongly Western oriented, in the sense that they used the West as a main reference point. They showed little interest in traveling to or maintaining interest in the affairs of Iran's neighboring countries or the developing world. According to Zonis, the Iranian ruling elite seemed obsessed with the notion of Iran's national "backwardness," and voiced incessant criticism over the slow pace of change. They seemed to be constantly finding scapegoats for the failure of the country's insufficient progress.³³ In Iran's prerevolutionary political culture, this slow pace of development was associated with everything "traditional," local, provincial, rural, and so on—in short, with the social and geographic background with which the political ruling class had severed its ties.

NEW SOCIAL ACTORS

The contrast in backgrounds of the postrevolutionary political elite compared to the prerevolutionary ones could not be more striking. Although available data on the social backgrounds of members of the Islamic regime are dispersed and have not yet been fully tabulated, detailed published accounts of the first parliament of the Islamic republic show that, of the 263 elected members of the First Majles, only 43 had visited or lived abroad.³⁴ More significantly, of these 43, only 12 had lived or visited "the West" or Japan; 27 had lived in Iraq and 7 had lived in the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan, and India. In all, 78 members spoke a European language, but 140 were conversant in Arabic. The Majles members (MPs) were predominantly young, with 167 below 40 years of age. Nearly 70 percent of MPs were teachers, students, and seminarians at lay or religious learning institutions. But most significant, very few were born in the capital. In fact, all of the MPs either had been born in the district they represented or had close ties there. Although only four of the elected MPs claimed farming and manual labor as their profession, at least 30 percent had a farmer as a parent. Interestingly, most representatives from Tehran had been born in a provincial city. In short, the collapse of the ancien régime affected the social hierarchies of formal status, but also those of age, geographic background, and gender. The new political order ushered in a new set of ruling political and social actors who came to dominate postrevolution Iran.

It is important to emphasize that the new Islamist regime overthrew the monarchy without contesting the desire to turn Iran into a modern country. The popular groups and social classes supporting the new regime had different motives and pursued different alternatives. What they shared was a desire for political inclusion and enfranchisement in a moral and egalitarian polity in which modernity would benefit the poor, the *mostaz'afin* (the downtrodden), and the provincial periphery.³⁵ Those who made up the new power structure were predominantly young, provincial, and from what can

be termed traditional backgrounds.³⁶ They tended to be highly motivated and antibureaucratic, but not necessarily qualified for or competent to perform the tasks they were undertaking.³⁷ They had been affected by the modernization of the Pahlavi era, but they were conscious of their professional and cultural shortcomings. Many believed that they could replace expertise (*takhassos*) with commitment (*ta'ahhod*),³⁸ culminating in a violent cultural revolution that led to purges from the state institutions, the military, and the universities of secular and oppositional intelligentsia who were suspected of disloyalty and of individuals accused of association with the former regime.³⁹

Nevertheless, it was this same emerging political class who mediated and brought in modernity, whether cultural or material, to milieus where previously its rewards had seemed unattainable or had been resisted as culturally alien. It was the Islamic republic that succeeded in localizing international culture among the masses, not just the urban middle classes and elites.⁴⁰

The institutionalization of this new power structure, and the consolidation of new political, social, and economic elites at local national levels, took place through several processes: (a) through the expansion of the public sector and state institutions; (b) through speculative commodification of urban land as a result of both populist state policies and local land grabs; and (c) through the étatisation of the economy, whereby direct involvement by the state in the production and distribution of essential goods led to the emergence of new state clients who accumulated wealth through their political connections. In the rest of this chapter I will discuss these processes as they unfolded in the local provincial town of Ramhormoz.

The Expansion of the Public Sector

In provincial areas of Iran, the dramatic expansion of the public sector following the collapse of the monarchy seems to have been the main pathway for upward mobility of the new social actors. Table 2.1 shows that the number of public-sector employees—people employed in ministries, municipalities, government organizations and bureaucracies, and most important, the new Islamic revolutionary organizations—more than doubled after the Revolution, from 1.7 million in 1976 to 3.5 million in 1986. According to one estimate, within three years after the Revolution, one in every six Iranians above the age of 15 belonged to one or more such revolutionary bodies.⁴¹ The spectacular expansion of the public and semipublic (revolutionary foundations and organizations) sectors lasted a decade, and began to level off after the end of the Iran-Iraq War, as can be seen in table 2.1.

The repercussions of these changes, especially in smaller provincial towns, were quite significant and noticeable. In the course of the Revolution, and soon after the fall of the monarchy, provincial cities such as Ramhormoz were no

TABLE 2.1. Expansion of national and urban public sector.

Year	1976	1986	1996
Total employed	9	11	14.6
Public sector	1.7	3.5	4.3
<i>Public sector as % of total employed</i>	19%	32%	29.5%
Total employed in urban areas	4.1	6	8.8
Urban public sector	1.4	2.6	3.3
<i>Urban public sector as % of total urban</i>	34%	43%	37%

All numbers save percentages are millions.

Source: *National Census of Population and Housing*, Tehran:

SCI, various years.

longer exclusively dominated by landlords, khans, sheikhs, bazaaris, senior bureaucrats, or even clerics. In fact, gradually over the course of the next decade, and through events like the Iran-Iraq War, considerable expansion of the university campuses, a new urban middle class emerged in the provinces with strong connections to and a voice in national politics.⁴² The lobbying power and solidarity of these new provincial elites have been on display in recurring negotiations for attracting new resources and development projects to their regions or, in more dramatic cases, for redrawing provincial boundaries and gaining autonomous administrative powers, as was the case of Ardabil's becoming a separate province,⁴³ Qazvin's gaining autonomy from Zanjan, Golestan (formerly Gorgan) from Mazandaran, and the more recent breakup of Khorasan into three smaller provinces. In all of these instances, coalitions of local interests mobilized their resources to achieve substantial gains. Most of the actors in the coalitions can trace the roots of their influence and lobbying power to the gains made in the first decade after the Revolution.⁴⁴

RAMHORMOZ IN REVOLUTION In my interviews and wide-ranging conversations, I have found that the residents of Ramhormoz express acute awareness of the far-reaching changes they experienced during the momentous years of 1978–1980. Perhaps the most immediate impact was the politicization of the young generation of rural and provincial activists, who found themselves for the first time at the center of transformative national events.⁴⁵ Following land reform and the White Revolution (1962–1973), and being socialized during the modernizing projects of the post-1953 Pahlavi era, this generation of young Iranians in the late 1970s was more literate, more educated, and perhaps politically

less cynical than their parents, who had lived through the increasingly repressive reign of the shah. The young people proved more daring, ready to throw in their lot with the rising social movement that began by challenging the monarchy.

During the revolutionary years (1978–1979), young people in Ramhormoz, from the town and the surrounding villages, began organizing protests and on occasion sent activists to the larger cities of Ahwaz and Abadan to participate in political meetings and demonstrations.⁴⁶ Much like their more cosmopolitan counterparts in these larger urban areas, they engaged in debates and political discussions in the schools, in the streets, at soccer matches, and in fields of crops. Whether urban, rural, or provincial, the younger generation more readily accepted than their parents the transformations that Iran was undergoing and even began to shape those transformations.

The dramatic political changes of 1978–1979 inverted the local power pyramid. The properties of many of those perceived as associated with the previous regime were confiscated, and most were purged from prominent official positions.⁴⁷ As in the rest of the country, revolutionary institutions sprang up and others took charge of local affairs. The local youth flocked to these new revolutionary institutions, which included, among others, the Construction Jihad, the Revolutionary Committees, the Imam [Khomeini] Relief Committee, various revolutionary foundations, the Revolutionary Guards, the Basij militia, the Literacy Movement, and the Foundation for the War Refugees.⁴⁸ As a result, from 1976 to 1986, employment in the public sector in Ramhormoz almost quintupled, from 870 to 4,100 (see table 2.2), with more than half those employed in the city working for the state, in one capacity or another.

Unable to either abolish or trust the existing and established military and bureaucracy, the new regime purged old cadres expected of disloyalty and at the same time created new revolutionary institutions that duplicated the tasks and restricted the authority of existing state institutions. These new institutions

TABLE 2.2. Employment in Ramhormoz, by sector.

Year	1976	1986	% growth
Total employed population	2,201	8,234	374
In industry	196 (9%)	546 (7%)	278
In construction	341 (15%)	802 (10%)	235
In retail sales	331 (15%)	1,052 (13%)	318
In transportation	156 (7%)	817 (10%)	524
In public sector	872 (40%)	4,131 (50%)	474

Source: *National Census of Population and Housing*, Tehran: SCI, 1976, 1986.

soon came to form the backbone of the dual state that characterized the first decade of the Islamic republic. Local revolutionary activists found their way into both these new organizations and the old bureaucracies, not on the basis of professional qualifications but through political credentials. A 1990 study of the Basij militia in Tehran, which was formed in the wake of the takeover of the U.S. embassy as a way to combat possible external attacks or internal sedition, showed that the vast majority of its members came from modest social backgrounds. Nearly 90 percent did not have a high school diploma and more than half had menial occupations. While 60 percent of Basijis had been born in urban areas, 72 percent of their fathers were from rural regions, which implies that the majority of Basijis were either from provincial areas or were recent migrants to towns and cities.⁴⁹

In Ramhormoz, as elsewhere, new faces entered the town's formal and official positions of power and took charge of managing and controlling local affairs, in coordination with the emerging central authority. The criteria for participation in this new power structure were revolutionary religiosity, active and appropriate Islamist revolutionary conduct, unswerving loyalty to the new regime by combating its domestic rivals, and established ties with provincial and national Khomeinist networks and other recently created revolutionary institutions.

The legal imposition of the Islamic *hijab* on women has been one of the most contentious issues in postrevolution Iran, but women were not alone in becoming the focus of politicized attention. The Revolution brought with it a new semiology of public presentation and of the interpretation of the individual appearance as a sign of political loyalty.⁵⁰ Personal behavior and appropriate public appearance and conduct became universal marks of distinction that could be evaluated, punished in case of transgression, or rewarded when displaying recognizable loyalty. The politicization of the body via public codes involved a range of nuances, including types of attire and manners of wearing cloths, facial hair for men, and makeup and the chosen *hijab* for women.⁵¹ For example, for men, wearing a groomed mustache without stubble, a goatee, rimmed glasses, colored shirts, neckties, short sleeves, or blue jeans would potentially categorize themselves as suspected leftists, secularists, gigolos, or intellectuals.⁵²

Other significant factors for upward mobility in the early years of the Revolution were modest social background (social class), type of education and wealth, and ethnic and clan ties, although these criteria kept changing over time and with the circumstances. Within the more formally structured Arabic-speaking communities, which were organized around strict kinship, clan, and tribal hierarchies, there were significant shifts in the balance of power between prominent sheikhs and the lowest social castes, which included ethnic Arabs of African origin (a former slave caste, and present servants in the sheikhs' households) and the Mo'aydis (the low caste of water-buffalo breeders).⁵³

THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR: SOCIAL LEVELING AND ASSIMILATION Khuzestan was a war zone for eight years, and Ramhormoz was never far from the front line. Nevertheless, two specific aspects of the war especially affected Ramhormoz. First, the conflict itself, with massive participation of young men in the army, the Revolutionary Guards, and the Basij militia, had a lasting effect.⁵⁴ In the early years of the war participation was mostly voluntary. Later on, especially after 1982, when the Iraqi army was driven from most Iranian territory but the Iranian regime refused to accept a cease-fire and continued the war, popular participation remained high, but it was increasingly supported through obligatory conscription as ideological commitment and zeal waned.

Second, in Khuzestan, the common experience of war led to spontaneous forms of collective self-help. Most of the population in the western part of the province were displaced by the war and fled to Ahwaz, Shadegan, Ramhormoz, Susangerd, and other towns and villages.⁵⁵ Local residents of these areas had little option but to give refuge to this displaced population. With most domestic residences overcrowded with refugees, who were often of different ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds, recurring tensions as well as new solidarities became the new reality of daily life. Over time, the forced cohabitation of disparate populations led to bonds of friendship in addition to rivalry and hostility.

By various estimates, the war made anywhere between two to five million people homeless⁵⁶ and displaced approximately three million people. According to the Foundation for War Refugees, approximately 77 percent of those displaced by the war had lived in Khuzestan.⁵⁷ Estimates show the economic cost of the war at around \$650 billion in 1992.⁵⁸ However, the damage was not only to physical structures. It was accompanied by a sense of pervasive insecurity and psychological, economic, and emotional vulnerability. Chronic shortages led to rationing, and each household mobilized its members to stand for long hours in queues for basic necessities that ranged from kerosene, to bread, to cooking gas, sugar, and the like. Under war conditions, the work routines in offices, workshops, and companies changed, shifting to a rotation of 15 days of work followed by 15 days of rest. Unemployment reached critical dimensions, and the economic crisis affected most of the population, especially those on fixed incomes. Ramhormoz was targeted by at least 13 long-range missiles and received several aerial bombardments. By the end of the war most residents of Ramhormoz had been deeply and personally affected by the war—by having served on the front, by having been displaced, or by having had acquaintances and relatives rendered homeless, doing military service, or lost as casualties.

During the 1980s, Iran was caught between two wars, both of which flooded the country with waves of displaced people from neighboring countries.⁵⁹ On Iran's eastern border, the Afghan war against Soviet occupation led to the influx of an estimated 2.5 million refugees. This was in addition to nearly a million Afghans who had come to Iran before 1979 in search of work.⁶⁰ On its western

border, in addition to the Iranians displaced by the Iraqi invasion, the Iraqi government expelled hundreds of thousands of Iraqi citizens of Iranian descent, of Shi'i faith, and of Kurdish ethnicity. By the end of 1980, when the Iran-Iraq War had begun, Iraq had expelled 200,000 to 400,000 of its own citizens to Iran. By 1985, according to one estimate, this figure had reached half a million.⁶¹

The western half of Khuzestan, consisting of the cities of Abadan, Khorramshahr, Hoveyzeh, Susangerd, and Bostan, and their surrounding areas, remained a war zone for eight years, and the population had no choice but to seek refuge elsewhere. In 1990, nearly two years after the cease-fire, there were still around a million displaced people in Khuzestan alone.⁶² This sudden and massive movement of population caused a great housing shortage, as well as led to other major social and economic disruptions. The influx of several million people, of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities, into socioculturally different regions, which were ill equipped to absorb immigration on this large scale, was bound to have significant repercussions.⁶³ At least in Ramhormoz, the outcome was a not-so-smooth mixture of refugees and natives, and the emergence of hybrid communities based, not on common ethnic, kinship, and clan ties, but on social and spatial circumstances.⁶⁴

War refugees who came to Ramhormoz in 1980–1982, at the onset of the war when the Iraqi army occupied vast stretches of the western parts of the province, were mostly from the cities and villages of Khorramshahr and Abadan. Iran's first modern industrial city, Abadan had a distinct urban culture and history;⁶⁵ its population was a maelstrom of different geographic backgrounds, made up of successive waves of migrants who, since 1911, had been attracted to the city's oil refinery and petroleum industries. Abadanis were particularly aware of their modern, urban, industrial, and proletarian identity. The city's long history of political activism, dating to the rise of the oil industry and the oil nationalization movement of 1945–1953, was integral to its self-image and urban identity. The neighboring port city of Khorramshahr was the country's largest port in the 1970s, with a predominantly Arab-speaking population. The twin cities of Abadan and Khorramshahr were not merely industrial centers; they were surrounded by some of the world's largest and most fertile date plantations, as well as rich agricultural fields, cattle farms, and flocks of sheep, mostly owned by ethnic Arab farmers.

The sudden movement of this heterogeneous population eastward into provincial areas that were ethnically and socially different (Luri speaking, rural, and geographically isolated) had far-reaching social and cultural repercussions that will be discussed in the next section.⁶⁶

DISPLACEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS The influx of war refugees affected some of Khuzestan's cities more than others. The provincial capital of Ahwaz received the greatest influx of displaced people, its population doubling to

approximately 600,000 by 1986. In 1985, 77 percent of those who had moved to Ahwaz during the previous decade stated that the war was the cause of their move.⁶⁷ The arrival of refugees also changed other cities of the province, such as Izeh,⁶⁸ Ramhormoz, Shadegan, and the Port of Mahshahr.⁶⁹ Whereas in 1984 annual urban population growth in Khuzestan averaged around 8 percent, the cities with large numbers of refugees grew at the rates of up to 12.5 percent.⁷⁰

There are still no definitive published or publicly available figures on war refugees, as the whole topic of the Iran-Iraq War, as well as postwar reconstruction, remains a politically sensitive subject in the Islamic republic.⁷¹ In 1989, a year after the final cease-fire, the Foundation for the War Refugees' Affairs in Ramhormoz was still supporting nearly 13,000 refugees in Ramhormoz and in three refugee camps within its jurisdiction.⁷² This organization offered aid and minimum welfare to only the most destitute refugees.⁷³ In the case of Ramhormoz, half of the refugees under the foundation's care were from Abadan, and one-third were from Khorramshahr. In large part, the population of the district of Ramhormoz, and the smaller towns of Haftgel, Ramshir, and their satellite villages, more than doubled, from 69,000 in 1976 to 143,000 in 1986.⁷⁴ More than half of this increase, or 38,000 people, had moved to the district of Ramhormoz from elsewhere in Khuzestan.⁷⁵ The population of the small city of Ramhormoz itself increased from 11,000 to 28,000, from 1976–1986.⁷⁶ Despite Iran's high birth rate at the time, the extent of which is open to debate,⁷⁷ it is clear that the main cause of this significant population increase was the war.⁷⁸ In my estimate, between 1980 and 1982, approximately 10,000 refugees fled to Ramhormoz, nearly doubling the town's population.⁷⁹ The large scale of this influx, compared to existing populations in the area, and the permanence of their settlement in Ramhormoz, inevitably brought changes to every aspect of local social life, from the architecture and spatial organization of the city, to the economy, the social power relations, people's public and individual behaviors, and their sense of identity.

As mentioned earlier, in the 1970s Ramhormoz was a minor provincial town. Despite its relative proximity to the provincial capital of Ahwaz, the town felt like a cul-de-sac to many of its mostly rural-tribal population, for it lacked the amenities as well as the extremes of wealth and poverty that characterized larger urban areas of Iran in the decade of high oil revenues. Until shortly before the Revolution, only Ramhormoz's main street had been paved, about 25 percent of the town's households had access to electricity, and 30 percent to telephone service; even water piped into households became available only in 1983.⁸⁰

Shortly before the Revolution, the Ahwaz-Shiraz road, which passed through Ramhormoz and Behbahan, was paved. A few years after the Revolution, a second road crossing the Zagros mountains from Ahwaz to Isfahan, also passing through Ramhormoz, was completed, thus situating the town at the junction

of two major roads connecting the province to the rest of the country.⁸¹ Despite this relative geographic and economic isolation, Ramhormoz proved surprisingly flexible in absorbing the war displaced, possibly owing to the ethnic heterogeneity of the town itself.

Arab refugees from rural areas mostly settled in villages around the city, where they had clan or tribal connections, while refugees from urban areas, whether ethnically Arab or not, settled in the town itself. For example, the small home of the Purparviz family in Rahmormoz, with its four rooms, an outhouse, and a tiny courtyard, hosted 25 refugees for nearly a year. These refugees from Abadan and Khorramshahr stayed until it became painfully clear that the Iraqi invasion was not going to be a short-lived affair, as everyone had expected.

Such situations were commonplace in the town and in its satellite villages. In the small village of Diduni, for example, some nine refugee families (Lurs, Iranians of Arab ethnicity, and Iraqis expelled by the Iraqi government to Iran) stayed for nearly two years in the modest five-room farmhouse of the Amirinasabs, a family of ten themselves. Similar arrangements took place in the other 32 households of Diduni, as well as in other villages around Ramhormoz.

An even more remarkable aspect of this long-term refugee settlement was the ethnic differences between the two populations. A substantial number of refugees in Khuzestan were ethnic Arabs, and some of these were expelled Iraqi nationals, even if of Iranian ancestry. Yet many of the Ramhormoz villages where the refugees stayed were not ethnically Arab. The fact that tensions did not erupt between the two groups was remarkable, especially as the Iraqi regime had adopted an explicitly anti-Persian, Arab nationalist discourse to justify the invasion, and rumors were rampant in Iran (most of which remain unsubstantiated) of sympathy for—even collaboration by—local Iranian Arabs.⁸² Certainly the long history of cohabitation and the multiethnicity of Khuzestan (and Iran in general) was a significant factor in preventing ethnic differences and nationalist fervor to explode into tragic conflicts under difficult war conditions. But the pan-Islamist ideology of the new Iranian regime played a significant role, as Iraqis and Arabs were viewed as fellow Muslims and fellow victims of the aggressive and “illegitimate” secular Ba’thist regime of Saddam Hussein.

CHANGES IN URBAN LIFE The urban life of Ramhormoz, and especially the public culture of its younger generation, was transformed during this period. Conversations and interviews with a wide variety of informants in Ramhormoz indicate a recognition of the important role that war refugees played in this change, especially those from Abadan. When I asked people to describe what they meant specifically by the changes that had occurred, respondents listed descriptive experiences, such as how use of the distinct Abadani street slang, with its fashionable urban cachet, had become prevalent among the city’s young men, making them feel cosmopolitan. They pointed out how public

attire and fashion had changed, as young men started to feel awkward in public wearing ethnic garments or casual pants, preferring instead to be seen in more fashionable Western-style clothes. Women mentioned that fashionable items of distinction and status, such as makeup, perfume, designer handbags, and “mantow” (a loan word from the French *manteau*, referring to the topcoat worn in lieu of the Islamic chador), became commonplace.

Young people began to pay attention to their personal appearance, such as having an up-to-date haircut and a color-coordinated outfit despite the puritanical official culture of the time, which disapproved of any visible embellishments. Commercial pop tunes and Western and Arabic music began to be favored over traditional local Luri ballads, called “Toshmal.” People listed novel pastimes, like cruising around on their motorbikes, smoking foreign cigarettes, reading magazines and newspapers, listening to the radio and television and short-wave news broadcasts, engaging in political discussions and debates, spending money on expensive power-boosting television antennas or hi-fi stereos and VCRs, as noticeable examples of the changing urban life during the 1980s.

There were other tangible changes in public life: A haystack field was converted into a large sports stadium and soon a competitive soccer league was started, enthusiastically followed by both players and spectators. Women refugees initiated collective athletic activities such as aerobic exercise and volleyball and artistic endeavors such as theater, painting, and sculpting, and these became highly popular. An entrepreneur from Khorramshahr built a modern cinema with a salon, projector, and seats.

The newcomers also brought new professions, new services, and new enterprises, including car repair and body shop work, locksmithing, house painting, electrical work, welding, dry cleaning, photography, photocopying, luxury boutiques, hairdressers, and athletic equipment stores. Even eating habits were affected, as sandwich stands and fast-food stores, ice cream parlors, candy stores, and pastry shops became popular new hangouts. Fresh seafood and a fish market introduced new culinary habits to Ramhormoz residents.

It is probable that many of these developments would have eventually taken place, but the fact is that my local informants associate these changes with the rapid demographic transformation of the city after the war and the cultural influence of the war’s refugees. The city’s population doubled in a short span of time, from an estimated 13,000 on the eve of the Iran-Iraq War in 1979 to 28,000 in 1986, creating new neighborhoods and new social relationships. This sudden demographic expansion effectively loosened community restrictions on urban life, which previously had been informally, but far more closely, policed by neighborhoods.⁸³ Ramhormoz was and still is a small town, where the urban anonymity of larger cities is in short supply. Nevertheless, the large number of newcomers restricted the ability of both communities—the newcomers and

the old-timers—to effectively police public behavior. Any disorientation and vulnerability caused by displacement was accompanied by new interactions and new acquaintances, and the adoption of more individualistic and cosmopolitan norms and values.

TRANSFORMATION OF PRIVATE SPACE AND DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE The social upheavals caused by the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War affected not only the public space of the city but also the private sphere of domestic homes. As it became clear that the war was going to continue beyond the initial few months, refugees needed to make long-term arrangements. Some left for other regions farther inland, primarily Isfahan, Shiraz, and Tehran; others settled in Ramhormoz. Of those who stayed, the better off, mostly urban Abadanis purchased land and built houses in the city. The less affluent rented, leased, or purchased cheaper housing. The third group, the poorest and the outright destitute, were initially housed in public schools. Gradually they moved to the city's periphery, building temporary dwellings and shanties. Others were moved to refugee camps in the district or settled in surrounding villages.

The geography of Ramhormoz was that of a garden city, its architecture a mixture of Zagros highland style (stone masonry with a courtyard in the front) and the lowland housing designs of smaller towns in Khuzestan (adobe rooms build around a central courtyard).⁸⁴ The existing houses were built of gypsum, stone, and plaster, with arched roofs and high ceilings. Architectural layouts were typical of the region, with a central courtyard and rooms built around and opening onto the courtyard, allowing an extended family and numerous dependents to live in a compound. Internal domestic space was not dedicated to performing specific tasks; each space was multifunctional.

Since 1980, a striking change has been taking place in the architecture of private residences built in Ramhormoz. New constructions have abandoned the traditional layout in favor of a floor plan common to the industrial and more cosmopolitan cities, such as Abadan. This new architecture style features a unified floor plan that combines several interconnected and adjoining rooms under one roof, with a courtyard in front. The front courtyard offers access to the street and often serves as a garage or common space. Depending on the size and affluence of the owners, the kitchen, toilet, and bathroom are often situated indoors, reflecting the availability of piped water, cooking gas, and electricity.

More significantly, these amenities represented important shifts in the notions of privacy, hygiene, and propriety. For example, older homes had a privy and no bathing facilities, with the kitchen situated in the courtyard.⁸⁵ Different internal spaces in this new architecture are more specialized and less flexible in their use. For example, it is no longer possible to accommodate an expanding extended family by adding a room for a newly married son. Thus, it is more difficult for the

(male) offspring to remain part of the extended family and the same household after his marriage. Different rooms are now designated for specific uses, such as bedroom and guest room, whereas in the old houses bedding could be rolled up easily and used as seating for the guests or to sit around a table to share food.

Locating the bathroom, toilet, and kitchen inside the house has blurred the spatial sense of private and public spaces as well as propriety and cleanliness habits and the separation of *andaruni/biruni* (spatial notion of inside/outside, private/public). Even cooking practices and eating habits are affected, as there is less room for bulk storage of staples, and it is nearly impossible to have a bread oven (dug as a circular hole in the ground) or to keep chicken and livestock for eggs, dairy, and meat. Cooking gas has replaced dung cakes and dried brush as fuel, and dishwashing and laundry depend on piped water instead of canal water stored in the courtyard pool.

Internal decoration and aesthetic tastes have also changed, as it is habit now to adorn the inside of the house with decorative plants, industrial colors and paints (instead of whitewashing with chalk), posters, photographs, reproductions of paintings, and framed embroideries. Most houses have installed enamel toilets and bathroom fixtures. Machine-made rugs or wall-to-wall carpets are popular, to the detriment of tribal and handmade carpets. New building materials, including cinder blocks, heat-treated bricks, tile and marble facades, corrugated metal doors and window frames, new piping and electrical wiring, modern kitchen appliances, and wall-hung cabinets characterize this new building pattern. Surrounding villages also began to adapt this architecture, although at a slower pace. Close villages, such as Kimeh, Diduni, Sar-Toli, Abuzar, and Marbacheh, boast many such modern constructions built on this model.

The physical space of social life, whether public or private, is integral to collective life and helps shape social relations.⁸⁶ These new residential patterns from the early 1980s both reflected the far-reaching social changes taking place and were an important factor in shaping them. The novel arrangement of domestic space inevitably influenced family relations, household size, and interactions between generations. These spatial changes strongly privileged the nuclear family over the extended family and were keyed to consumption patterns that make the household increasingly more reliant on the market and the state.

“Revolutionary Housing”

Social revolutions inevitably are accompanied by disappropriations and some transfer of wealth from the previous rulers to those in the new political order. During the Iranian Revolution, much of the property of associates of the former regime was confiscated. As the country descended into political chaos, and the tide of radical populism rose, the new regime stepped in and nationalized

many strategic, modern sectors of the economy, from large industries to banks to insurance companies, telecommunications, and foreign trade.⁸⁷

Spontaneous occupation of private land, in both rural and urban areas, was one of the most contentious issues among policy-makers in the aftermath of the Revolution. In rural areas, peasants and farmers had gone on a spree, occupying the properties of large landowners, agribusinesses, and state farms. This led to an acrimonious debate over "Islamic land reform" between regime radicals who favored land redistribution and conservatives, mostly in the Guardian Council, who maintained that the Shari'a (body of Islamic religious law) ensured the sanctity of private property. By the mid-1980s, the consolidated new regime had managed to contain the peasant movement after the redistribution of some 800,000 hectares of land, or approximately 5 percent of existing arable land.⁸⁸

But it was the widespread and spontaneous occupation of urban land by migrants, the poor, the homeless, and opportunists, during the chaotic first two or three years of the Revolution—a movement (1978–1982) that came to be known as "revolutionary housing" (*maskan-e enqelabi*) that transformed the social geography of urban life in Iran, and perhaps constituted the single greatest material gain the Revolution brought to its followers.⁸⁹ Rigid zoning laws and urban gentrification during the 1970s had pushed the swelling urban poor to the margins of large cities. Their grievances against substandard housing and their right to shelter were key elements in mobilizing their support for the Revolution. After the collapse of the monarchy, amid political chaos and in an administrative vacuum, the way opened for spontaneous occupation of vast tracks of urban land,⁹⁰ often in collusion with new local revolutionary organizations like the Revolutionary Committees, the Revolutionary Guards, Friday prayer leaders, and so on.

The "revolutionary housing" movement had a dual effect on Iranian cities. Initially, it led to an explosive geographic expansion of the existing cities; for example, Tehran doubled in size from 225 square kilometers to 550 square kilometers, Ahwaz tripled from 25 square kilometers to 75 square kilometers.⁹¹ Squatters built permanent homes, often with low-quality materials that they could afford. According to Hourcade and Khosrokhavar, "Tehran experienced a construction frenzy: the number of officially completed buildings in Tehran tripled in three years, from 15,566 in 1978, to 37,676 in 1979, and 43,344 in 1980, only to fall back again to 15,171 in 1981, by which time the urban revolution had come to an end."⁹² The significant expansion of Iranian cities brought a veritable urban crisis or, as Bernard Hourcade has argued, "a crisis of the urban mode of life."⁹³ City living became predominant, but existing cities lost their shape and urban life became increasingly chaotic and difficult to manage. Tehran changed from a class-segregated city, hierarchically organized along a north-south

axis, to a patchwork of multicentered sprawls, with few organic connections between squatter suburbs and city center.⁹⁴

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF HOUSING AND URBAN SPACE During the years 1978–1982, a huge amount of cheap urban land entered the real estate market, in reaction to a combination of factors such as fear of confiscation, squatting and land occupation, flight of capital and large developers away from the country, the damages and dangers of the war, a sense of pending permanent insecurity, and bureaucratic implosion. Many of these tracks that were designated as vacant or undeveloped were, in fact, public land—neither private nor state property. Although urban population growth rate had doubled from the previous decade—to an average of one million people per year⁹⁵—the plentiful supply of cheap urban land and the construction frenzy mentioned above meant that housing supplies during the 1980s exceeded the demand.⁹⁶

To exert authority and bring the spontaneous land occupations under control, the new regime passed a series of laws between 1979 and 1987 that gave the state enormous power to confiscate and redistribute property, and thus directly involved the government in the provision of land and housing.⁹⁷ Indeed, the populist demand for housing had been so intense that Article 31 of the Islamic republic's constitution had recognized access to decent housing as a citizen's right and the state's obligation. The urban land laws passed by the Majles gave the state the authority to confiscate vacant and undeveloped land, as well as land held by individuals above a maximum permitted local limit,⁹⁸ and to issue titles for the qualified recipients of these properties. A new organization, the Urban Land Organization (ULO), was created in 1982 to take charge of implementing the Urban Land Law (ULL).

The government regulation of land distribution had important repercussions. First, the state became the largest provider of urban land for housing, its share increasing from less than 10 percent of land supplied to the residential market prior to the Revolution to more than 60 percent after the ULO was formed.⁹⁹ What is remarkable is the number of the residences built during this period. In 1976, there were 2.4 million housing units in Iran; by 1986, some 2.3 million new residences had been built—*the supply of housing had nearly doubled in a few years*.¹⁰⁰ However, these new residences had been built mostly by private individuals and not by the state, whose share of investment in the housing market actually decreased from 5 percent in 1979 to 1.5 percent by 1992.¹⁰¹

The ULO supplied the land but did not built houses. Its redistributive policies were aimed at providing the qualified poor and the needy with housing, but its direct involvement was limited to controlling the provision of land and, through that, controlling land prices. The state also had control of the supply of building materials following the nationalization of those industries (cement

factories, steel mills, etc.) and of foreign trade, as well as of the wartime rationing system. In addition, through its monopoly on nationalized banks, the state kept mortgages and housing credit well below market rates.¹⁰² As a result of the ULO's control of the urban housing market, land prices on average did not increase much between 1978 and 1989, and the portion of land contributing to the final price of housing did not exceed 40 percent during this decade.¹⁰³ However, as we shall see in the next section, the actual impact of land occupations by residents at the local level, and subsequent state policies in the urban housing sector, offers a more complex picture than the macro account of events at the national level.

REVOLUTIONARY HOUSING IN RAMHORMOZ War zones such as Ramhormoz experienced a different dynamic of urban change than did large cities such as Tehran, especially after 1980 and the Iraqi invasion. Instead of migrants flocking to the city to realize their dreams of building a home on a piece of occupied land, it was an influx of desperate refugees who generated an urgent demand for housing. Ramhormoz does not appear to have had an active real estate market prior to the Revolution, but the onset of urban land grabs after 1978 and the flood of refugees after 1980 changed all that.

On an economic level, the demand for housing had a quick and substantial impact on related industries and sectors such as construction, construction materials, transportation, urban public and commercial services, and the like. In 1976, some 4 percent of the city's labor force was engaged in construction, but by 1986 the percentage had doubled to 8 percent, while the actual number of those employed in the housing sector quadrupled, from 500 to 2,000 (see table 2.2). As mentioned previously, the predominant construction materials in Ramhormoz used to be adobe, stone, and plaster, mostly mined from local quarries in Ramhormoz and Haftgel. The demand for new housing materials after 1980 could not be satisfied with existing local resources, and soon there were a number of gravel and sand quarries dug on riverbeds to the northeast and southwest of the city, while numerous small cement workshops, mostly making cinder blocks, were set up in and around the city.¹⁰⁴ In 1976, there were 138 registered workshops in Ramhormoz; by 1984, there were nearly twice as many (212), many of which were construction contractors.¹⁰⁵

The construction sector was reacting to the dramatic demand for additional housing. Table 2.3 shows the number of completed residential units in Ramhormoz by year. What is remarkable is that of the existing 4,200 homes in 1986, nearly two-thirds, or 2,600, had been constructed after the Revolution. The years 1978–1983 correspond with the wave of revolutionary housing and the Iraqi invasion (1980). It seems that at least the initial phase of the spontaneous urban land occupations did not affect Ramhormoz much, but the beginning

TABLE 2.3. Housing units constructed in Ramhormoz (year completed).

1976–1977	1978–1979	1980–1981	1982–1983	1984–1985	1986
452	409	734	733	461	277

Source: Plan and Budget Organization of Khuzestan, *Shenasnameh-ye Amari-ye Shahrha-ye Khuzestan*, Ahwaz: Plan and Budget Organization of Khuzestan, 1993.

TABLE 2.4. Number of legal residential titles issued by the Municipality in Ramhormoz.

Year	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1989	1990
Number	187	101	133	242	271	255	486	655	717	591	538
% change	N/A	-46	+32	+82	+12	-6	+91	+37	+8	-18	-9

Source: The National Organization of Titles and Deeds Registry–Ramhormoz.

of the Iran-Iraq War and the flood of refugees did initiate a wave of residential constructions by 1980.

The chaotic and uncontrolled expansion of cities owing to migration and war was perceived as a threat by the authorities, who, according to Asef Bayat, considered it “a ‘social catastrophe,’ ‘the most important problem beside the war.’... This was because the population flow was altering the urban order by bringing about communities, social groups, and social practices upon which the central authority would have little practical control.”¹⁰⁶ Authorities in Ramhormoz had a similar reaction, with Hojjat al-Eslam Damghani, the city’s Friday prayer leader, going so far as to call the incoming wave of immigrants and refugees a “a major threat to the revolution and the Islamic republic.”¹⁰⁷

Much of the housing construction took place informally or illegally, as can be seen in the discrepancy between the number of titles issued by the municipality (see table 2.4) and the number of constructed residences (see table 2.3). In the period 1980–1983, some 1,467 residences were built in Ramhormoz, while the municipality issued titles for only half that number, or 747; the rest presumably were built without formal permission by the state, as there were very few multistory residences in the city with more than a single unit.

SPECULATION IN THE HOUSING ECONOMY In a previous section I mentioned the dampening effect that the ULL had on housing prices during the 1980s. However, close study of the Ramhormoz situation presents a more complex picture. Fear of land occupation by refugees or confiscation by the state, as well as the opportunity to make windfall profits, created a speculative, albeit

informal and only semilegal, real estate market. A significant portion of the land converted to residential use for which titles were issued (see table 2.4) had been collectively held family-owned land (*mowrusi*, or hereditary) that had not been previously subdivided.¹⁰⁸ The sudden, acute demand for housing made land a valuable commodity, and these collective properties began to be subdivided and sold. The price of urban residential land rose from 180–220 Iranian rial (RI) per square meter in 1977 to 1,000–1,500 RI per square meter in 1981–1982. By 1985–1986, it had reached the 4,000–8,000 RI per square meter range.¹⁰⁹ This development seems to contradict the macro trend of rather stable national land prices discussed in the previous section. The fact that despite state attempts to control land transactions there was an active local speculative economy demonstrates the limits of the state's capabilities in this regard and the acuteness of the demand for housing.

This leap in land prices was reflected almost immediately in the urban morphology, as the city's ancient and extensive fruit orchards were cut down and the land used to construct residential units,¹¹⁰ despite existing laws prohibiting such conversion of agrarian land into residential use. In fact, as I shall show later, a number of state institutions, such as the Housing Foundation (HF), the banking system, and the ULO, proved instrumental in the conversion of agrarian land into speculative urban real estate.

Despite an economic crisis exacerbated by the flight of capital, mismanagement, political chaos, the mounting expenses of war, and increasing international isolation, the state continued to allocate significant resources for housing, mainly through a network of nationalized banks. Banks consistently channeled significant capital to the construction and housing sectors, avowedly to benefit low-income people. In 1979–1980, for example, Bank Melli alone allocated the equivalent of \$1 billion for low-interest housing loans—triple the amount it had been authorized to issue. Within days of this announcement, more than 400,000 applications for housing loans had been received by the bank.¹¹¹ The following year, another two banks (Workers' Welfare Bank and the Housing Bank) disbursed 131,000 housing loans. These 20-year mortgages were extended at zero percent interest, with little down payment and only a 4 percent service charge. Official mortgage rates stayed well below the inflation rate until 1988 (8 percent interest while the official inflation rate was 20 percent). Despite official state policies to channel credit to the manufacturing and agriculture sectors, more than a third of all bank loans went toward housing until 1988.¹¹²

In essence, the state was subsidizing the housing sector with cheap credit. Under the Islamic republic's nationalized economy, in the 1980s it was not interest rates that affected the housing market in the short term but the volume of credit allocated to that sector.¹¹³ People's pressure for more housing and the spontaneous actions of squatters, migrants, and refugees were forcing

the hand of the state—it had to continue directing scarce funds toward the housing sector. In Khuzestan, the banking sector consistently allocated one-fifth to one-third of its available credit to the construction sector until 1989.¹¹⁴ This substantial volume of subsidized credit lubricated the wheels of real estate speculation and allowed cheap banking credits to be converted into windfall profits.

WHO BENEFITED FROM STATE ACTIONS? It is important to ask who actually benefited from these state subsidies and from the legal and administrative interventions of the new regime. Officially, the new regime's stated purpose was to benefit the poor, the destitute, and the low income. But as I argue in the rest of this chapter, these groups were not the main beneficiaries of state policies. In fact, the greatest beneficiaries of state housing credits, and of ULO land distributions, were public-sector employees, state clients (veterans, and families of war casualties), and the middle classes who could maintain official credit ratings by holding collateral assets, a steady income, or political connections. For example, in Ahwaz, between 1979 and 1988, the government housing policy ended up distributing 74 percent of all land and 91 percent of state-built houses to these groups.¹¹⁵

The ULO was empowered to confiscate vacant and undeveloped urban land, set local prices, enforce the allowed limit on local ownership, and allocate land for public use to other state institutions. The ULO was also to prepare land for residence by building the necessary urban infrastructure and distributing it at government-determined prices well below local market values to qualified recipients. In effect, the state was pursuing a double-pronged strategy: on the one hand, it was attempting to snuff out the spontaneous land appropriations by governmentalizing the urban residential land market; on the other hand, it was opting to distribute the land instead of getting directly involved in the production of mass public housing. This distribution of land to individuals, state employees, and cooperatives in effect converted a public asset—public land—into private property for individual recipients, cooperatives, and state clients. Alternative strategies—for example, leasing land to nonprofit producers of mass affordable housing, whether for rental or eventual ownership—were never considered.

Table 2.5 shows the activities of ULO in Ramhormoz. As can be seen from this table, some 733 individuals received nearly 60 percent of the land distributed by the ULO in Ramhormoz. Cooperatives of state employees received another 16 percent.¹¹⁶ Given the mean household size of 5.5 persons, ULO distributions provided private individual and cooperative residential land (but not housing) for approximately 5,100 people—by 1989, an estimated 16 percent of the population of the city.

During its entire period of activity in Ramhormoz, the ULO issued a total of 1,400 residential titles. But of all this land, only some 6 percent (85 parcels) were

TABLE 2.5. Number of parcels and amount of land transferred by the Urban Land Organization (ULO) in Ramhormoz to different users.

Year	Total number of parcels transferred	Parcels transferred to individuals for housing	Parcels transferred to cooperatives	Parcels transferred to state institutions
1983	4 (40,100)	—	—	4 (40,100)
1984	363 (111,000)	312 (87,000)	45 (12,500)	6 (11,500)
1985	260 (67,000)	75 (21,000)	80 (17,200)	110 (30,000)
1986	86 (21,400)	22 (5,510)	0	64 (16,000)
1987	87 (21,000)	0	20 (4,800)	67 (16,200)
1988	137 (28,000)	87 (18,500)	0	50 (9,784)
1989	307 (63,000)	237 (50,000)	50 (10,400)	20 (2,720)
Total	1,244 (352,000)	733 (182,000)	195 (45,000)	321 (126,000)

Note: For numbers of parcels, area is given in square meters.

Source: Urban Land Organization (ULO), Ramhormoz (unpublished data); and Plan and Budget Organization of Khuzestan, *Salnameh-ye Amari-ye Ostan-e Khuzestan*, various years.

allocated to the Foundation for the War Refugee Affairs,¹¹⁷ which dealt directly with refugees. The rest were distributed among individual war veterans, war casualties (the war wounded, or *janbazan*, and the families of martyrs), and various revolutionary foundations (the Martyr's Foundation, the Revolutionary Guards, the Housing Foundation, the Imam [Khomeini] Relief Committee, the Ministry of Education, etc.)—all recipients with strong institutional ties to the ruling regime.

The land taken over or confiscated by the ULO included orchards, houses, vacant and undeveloped plots, and agricultural land. In the latter case, the ULO exercised its power to divide the land on a 40–60 percent basis with the former owner and rezone the property as residential. Until 1997, the properties transferred by the ULO were priced according to the official local property-price index, which was set well below actual market values. In Ramhormoz, the local price index was set as low as 7 percent of the actual market value. As was to be expected, this dual-price system created a black market in real estate, attracting substantial speculation.

THOSE LEFT OUT The Revolution, and even the Iran-Iraq War, had some winners—people who had joined the staff of revolutionary organizations or the bureaucracy, those who had used the chaotic moment of the political vacuum

to grab a piece of public land, and those lucky enough to benefit from state largesse and distribution of urban land. But not everyone benefited in this game. Refugees and residents who could not master the political connections, and had few resources of their own, had to rent housing or find other shelter. High housing demand and real estate speculation rapidly drove up rents and leasing costs. The newly arriving refugees had created a rental market with skyrocketing rates; for example, the rent for an average house of about 150 square meters increased from a range of 5,000–10,000 RI a month in 1980 to 20,000–40,000 RI a month in 1982.

By the mid-1980s the most economically and socially vulnerable refugees had been relocated to refugee camps or they had managed to build temporary settlements, with makeshift materials such as tin cans, cardboard, and adobe, among the city's orchards and surrounding neighborhoods. As time passed, these temporary dwellings were replaced with structures made with stone, brick, and especially cinder block. They took on a more permanent aura, and gradually melded into the fast-growing town.

Initially, orchard owners fought the encroachments, but eventually they gave up. The Hormozi Orchard was one of the last remaining large estates to succumb to the squatters, who had effectively encircled the walled property. The owner cited the relevant clause of the ULL, and by ceding 40 percent of his property to the state, he had the remaining 60 percent rezoned as residential. The orchard was rapidly subdivided into titled residential parcels and sold.

The State-Run Economy: Rationing, Speculation, and the Consolidation of State Clientelism

By the mid-1980s, the influx of refugees had subsided, but a new wave of immigration followed, mostly people from the rural periphery of Ramhormoz as the war raged on and the national economy deteriorated. Note, for example, in table 2.4 (above) that the number of residential titles issued by the municipality increased by 90 percent in 1985 and continued to grow thereafter. In a pattern similar to what was happening in other Iranian cities, each wave of immigration left a physical imprint that can be detected in the city's landscape. In the bazaar and the commercial public space of Ramhormoz, two distinct patterns of urban and rural/tribal life exist side by side. Patisseries, hair salons, clothing boutiques, and electronic shops are adjacent to stores selling traditional herbal medicine, as well as those who trade in sheep wool, nomadic peddlers offering wild celery and mountain herbs, and Arab women farmers hawking buffalo milk and other dairy products.

The war, the sanctions set by the international community, and the deteriorating economy induced the state to implement rationing of basic goods and to set up distribution networks for an increasing array of products. The rationing and the direct state participation in retail distribution were undertaken to

ensure more equitable access to goods, to provide a safety net for the poor, and to limit profiteering. Unsurprisingly, state involvement in management of the economy, and in the rationing and redistribution of basic necessities, led to widespread inefficiencies, to corruption, and to a politicization of the relationship between distribution and consumption.¹¹⁸

Black markets for rationed goods and illegal and semilegal networks to take advantage of state subsidies and resources were the consequences of this arrangement. Personal connections, secret deals, nepotism, and political and social status in the postrevolutionary society served as a form of "rent," and became the means for accessing scarce goods and resources. Two groups seem to have benefited most from this situation: middlemen (merchants, distributors, store owners) and bureaucrats (especially those employed in "revolutionary" institutions).

In Ramhormoz, as in many other Iranian cities, the successive waves of migrants and refugees led to a crisis in the procurement and distribution of goods. Shopkeepers such as bakers, butchers, and grocers were unable to meet the demand for their goods. People often spent days waiting in long lines for their rations. In fact, the rationing system had a significant and quite paradoxical effect: on the one hand, it alleviated some critical shortages; on the other hand, state rationing became a tool of punishment and reward, of political exclusion and repression, and of surveillance and control against subversion.

At the social level, however, the highly subsidized supply of basic necessities through the state-private-cooperative networks to which every household was entitled led to drastic changes. Rationing altered consumption habits, shaped public expectations of state responsibilities, and expanded the market economy in localities such as Ramhormoz. For example, the practice of baking bread, the prime staple food, by women at home in the town and in villages effectively disappeared as state-supplied mechanized bakeries began to supply the growing population in the city and larger surrounding villages with highly subsidized bread. By mid-1980s, the vast majority of households in the Ramhormoz region purchased bread from bakeries in exchange for money.

The rationed distribution of rice also had important dietary and economic consequences, the subsidized importation and distribution of cheaper rice from Thailand and Pakistan made rice a cheap staple for daily consumption in most households in Ramhormoz. Other basic food items, such as dairy, meat, vegetables, and fruit, were more readily sold in the market instead of being consumed by producers or bartered in exchange for other goods.

The extensive network of rationing and goods distribution set up during the war led to an expansion of the money-based economy and significantly integrated local society into the market economy. Not only imported rice and machine-baked bread, but also commercially raised poultry and eggs, beef and frozen meat, vegetable oil, and so on were goods that eventually became part of the regular household diet, in town and in the surrounding villages, despite initial resistance.

The expansion of a market economy and the integration into national market and state distribution networks affected the private sphere of domestic work patterns and the division of labor in the household: as mentioned earlier, bread was now rarely baked at home and cooking fuel changed from dung cakes to subsidized propane gas capsules distributed by the state. Local poultry and cattle were less often kept at home to supply the family with meat and dairy, which in turn led to a relative decline in fodder crops such as berseem or alfalfa in home gardens.

These changes in the household and private domains have had paradoxical social repercussions: on the one hand, women and men now have "free time," a notion that was unfamiliar to the older generation. This is time now spent on leisure activities discussed in previous sections, on education, or in search of money income. On the other hand, unemployment and the fluctuations of a market economy have introduced new dimensions of insecurity as well as opportunity into household life.¹¹⁹

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this chapter that, to understand political and social trends in contemporary Iran, we need to comprehend how this society has changed, not only at the center but also at the margins—in its provincial periphery. The investigation of social change in a small provincial town has revealed a remarkable degree of overlap with changes happening in larger metropolitan centers. The emergence of new social actors from the provincial periphery and their active presence on the local and the national scene, the integrative impact of the new regime's development initiatives, the long-term and profound social consequences of the war; the new social relations engendered by massive and forced or voluntary demographic changes and migrations, the utilization of state apparatus as means of social mobility, the long-term impact of the regime's mobilization of political support through the privatization and distribution of public assets among state clients, and the consequences of the redistribution of wealth through revolutionary housing policies are important developments that need to be incorporated into any analysis of postrevolutionary Iran. I have discussed these changes at both national and local levels, as it seems to me that what takes place in the provincial periphery of Iran today can tell us a lot about what takes place in the country as a whole. Postrevolution Iran is a far more integrated society, both socially and spatially,¹²⁰ than it was prior to the Revolution. In this sense, I believe it is important to analyze and to think of Iran's Islamic revolution also as a revolution of the provinces.

NOTES

The fieldwork on which this chapter is based was carried out in different stages during 1989–1990, the spring and summer of 1992, and the spring and summer of 1999. I am

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1. See Kaveh Ehsani, "Islam, modernity, and national identity," *Middle East Insight* 11(5), 1995, pp. 48–53. On the attempts by the Islamic republic to redress the regional unbalances plaguing provincial Iran, see Ahmad Sharbatoghie, *Urbanization and Regional Disparities in Post-revolutionary Iran*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991; and Hooshang Amirahmadi, *Revolution and Economic Transition*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990. Of course, I do not mean to imply that this integration is without tension, or is fair and egalitarian. For a recent study of sociocultural tensions at a local provincial level resulting from this integration, see Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri, "Three faces of dissent: Cognitive, expressive and traditionalist discourses of discontent in contemporary Iran," in Homa Katouzian and Hossein Shahidi, eds., *Iran in the 21st Century*, London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 63–85.

2. The remarkable convergence of social and cultural norms and aspirations across the geographic landscape can be studied in the invaluable "National Survey of Values and Opinions" carried out in 28 provincial centers. This important project has been suspended under the Ahmadinejad administration. See Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, *Arzesh-ha va Negaresh-ha-ye Iranian*, Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2001 and 2003. On the sociological analysis of the reformist movement, see Abdolali Rezaei and Abbas Abdi, *Entekhab-e Naw*, Tehran: Tarh-e Naw, 1998; Ali Rabi'i, *Jame'eh Shenasi-ye Tahavvolat-e Arzeshi*, Tehran: Farhang va Andisheh, 2000; *Middle East Report*, no. 212, fall 1999; Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000; and Bernard Hourcade, "La recomposition des identités et des territoires en Iran islamique," *Annales de Géographie* 3, 2004, pp. 511–530.

3. By 1979 more than half of all Iranians were residing in designated urban areas. See Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), *National Census of Population and Housing*, Tehran: SCI, 1976, 1986; Center for Research and Analysis of Architecture and Urbanism, *Rahnama-ye Jam'iyat-e Shahrha-ye Iran, 1956–96*, Tehran: Center for Research and Analysis of Architecture and Urbanism, 2003, pp. 119 and 138.

4. Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. See also Sami Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*, London: Routledge, 1989; Paul Vieille and Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Le Discours Populaire de la Révolution Iranienne*, 2 vols., Paris: Contemporanéité, 1990.

5. See Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs*, Boston: Basic Books, 1985; Saïd Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988; Arang Kes-havarzian, *Bazaar and the State in Iran*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007; Guilain Denoeux, *Urban Unrest in the Middle East*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993; Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004; Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movement in Iran*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997; Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989; Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'Utopie Sacrifiée, Sociologie de la Révolution Iranienne*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1993.

6. See Eric Hooglund, "Social origins of the revolutionary clergy," in *The Iranian Revolution and the Islamic Republic*, eds. Eric Hooglund and Nikki Keddie, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse

University Press, 1986, pp. 74–83; and Ahmad Ashraf, “Charisma, theocracy, and men of power in postrevolutionary Iran,” in *The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan*, eds. Myron Weiner and Ali Banuazizi, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1994, pp. 101–151.

7. See Ludwig Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer of Iran, Vol.1.3: Abadan*, Graz, Austria: Akademische Druck u. Verlagsanstalt, 1989, pp. 612–615.

8. See Seyyed Mohammad-Ali Emam-Shushtari, *Tarikh-e Joghrafiya’i-ye Khuzestan*, Tehran, 1952, pp. 202–207; Iraj Afshar Sistani, *Negahi be Khuzestan*, Tehran: Nashr-e Honar, 1987, pp. 435–440.

9. See Yusef Azizi Bani-Torof, *Qaba’el va Ashayer-e Arab-e Khuzestan*, Tehran: published by the author, 1993; and Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Pansad Saleh-ye Khuzestan*, 4th ed., Tehran: Gam, 1975.

10. For an extensive bibliography of the Lur areas of Khuzestan, see Kaveh Ehsani, “Izeh,” *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, forthcoming in 2008. On the Bakhtiari, see Arash Khazeni, “Bakhtiari tribes in the Iranian constitutional revolution,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 25(2), 2005, pp. 377–398; Jean Pierre Digard, Asghar Karimi, and Mohammad Papoli-Yazdi, “Les Baxtyari vinght ans après,” *Studia Iranica* 27, 1998, pp. 109–144; Gene Garthwaite, *Khans and Shahs: A Documentary Analysis of the Bakhtiari in Iran*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983; and Stephanie Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*, London: Routledge, 2007.

11. See Emam-Shushtari, *Tarikh-e Joghrafiya’i-ye Khuzestan*, pp. 114–136 and 225–234; Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer*, pp. 218–222 and pp. 711–715.

12. The literature on the provincial and urban history of Khuzestan is quite extensive. See Kaveh Ehsani: “Khuzestan; Human geography” and “Khuzestan, economy in the 20th century,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, forthcoming in 2009. See also Emam-Shushtari, *Tarikh-e Joghrafiya’i-ye Khuzestan*; Mostafa Ansari, *History of Khuzestan 1878–1925*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974; Shahbaz Shahnavaz, *Britain and Southwest Persia*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2005; Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-e Pansad Saleh-ye Khuzestan*; Hajj Abdolqaffar Najm al-Molk, *Safarnameh-ye Khuzestan*, Tehran: Elmi, 1983; Ahmad Ketabi, ed., *Asar-e Najm al-Dowleh; Safarnameh-ye Dovvom-e Najm al-Dowleh be Khuzestan*, Tehran: Pajuheshkadeh-ye Olum-e ENSANI va Motale’at-e Farhangi, 2007; and Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer*, Vol. 3.

13. See Kaveh Ehsani, “Social engineering and the contradictions of modernization in Khuzestan’s company towns,” *International Review of Social History* 48, 2003, pp. 361–399.

14. Highly informative observations of Ahwaz at this period can be found in Ahmad Kasravi’s autobiography, *Zendegani-ye Man*, Tehran: Sherkat-e Ketab-e Jahan, 1946/1990; and Arnold Wilson, *Southwest Persia; A Political Officer’s Diary, 1907–14*, London: Oxford University Press, 1941.

15. On the uneven development of Khuzestan in the 20th century, see Kaveh Ehsani, “Khuzestan, economy in the 20th century.”

16. These descriptions of Ramhormoz in the prerevolution period are based mostly on the oral accounts of a cross section of male elder Ramhormozis, collected in 1990, 1992, and 1999. Informants were representative of the local society, occupations, ethnicity, and rural and urban residence. See also Emam-Shushtari, *Tarikh-e Joghrafiya’i-ye Khuzestan*, pp. 202–207.

17. Michael Watts’s and Paul Lubeck’s studies of Kano Nigeria analyze the confluence of uneven oil-driven modernization, political Islamist activism, and peripheral discontent in Nigeria, where there are many similarities to the Iranian case. See Paul Lubeck, *Islam and Urban Labor in Northern Nigeria*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986; Michael Watts, “Islamic modernities? Citizenship, civil society and Islamism in a Nigerian city,”

Public Culture 8(2), winter 1996, pp. 251–290; and “Oil as money; the devil’s excrement, the spectacle of black gold,” in *Money, Power and Space*, eds. Stuart Corbridge et al., New York: Blackwell, pp. 406–445.

18. At the turn of the 20th century, 11 major landlords held the 30 villages and most of the city orchards of Ramhormoz. See J. G. Lorimer, *Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman, and Central Arabia*, Westmead, UK: Gregg International Publishers, 1915/1970, pp. 1578–1583; Adamec, *Historical Gazetteer*, p. 614. How the state land (*khaleseh*) and landlord property were divided following the land reform of the 1960s, and the connections between pre-land-reform landlords and major landowners in the late 1970 is not clear to me, and should be the subject of further archival investigation. See Ann Lambton, *The Persian Land Reform*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969, pp. 163, 341; and Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, *Asnad-i az Anjoman-ha-ye Baladi, Tojjar, va Asnaf*, vol. 1, Tehran: Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, 2001, pp. 262–264.

19. See Najm al-Molk, *Safarnamēh-ye Khuzestan*, pp. 141–146; and Emam-Shushtari, *Tarikh-e Joghrafiya’i-ye Khuzestan*, pp. 202–207. To my knowledge there are no ethnographies of Ramhormoz, published or otherwise. Archival research, especially into property titles, land-reform deeds, and administrative records no doubt will produce a much more accurate picture than this anecdotal account. My statements here are based on numerous conversations and interviews conducted with a wide range of residents in Ramhormoz during 1989–1990, 1992, and 1999. These oral accounts have not been cross-checked against documented records, so they should be viewed as provisional and not confirmed facts. I am here converting these accounts to a descriptive narrative.

20. Mohammad Samimi represented Ramhormoz in the 20th Majles and Mohammad-Ali Kalantar-Hormozi in the 21st, 22nd, and 23rd Majles. See Zahra Shaji’i, *Nokhbegan-e Siasi-ye Iran*, vol. 4, Tehran: Sokhan, 1965/1993, p. 506.

21. Although absentee landlordism was prevalent in pre-land reform (1962–1973) Iranian feudalism, nevertheless most landlords, at least in Khuzestan, tended to reside in neighboring towns rather than in the capital city or other distant urban centers. See the important work on Dezful landownership patterns by Ekhart Ehlers, “Dezful and its hinterland,” *Joghrafiya* 1(1), 1976, pp. 20–30; and Cyrus Salمانزاده, *Agricultural Change and Rural Society in Southern Iran*, Whitstable, UK: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1980. On landownership patterns in Khuzestan, see Ann K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1951/1991; and *The Persian Land Reform*, 1969, pp. 155–169.

22. Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), *National Census of Population and Housing*, Tehran: SCI, 1976.

23. See Eric Hooglund, “Letter from an Iranian village,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27(2), August 1997, pp. 76–84, for an account of the village of Goyum in the Fars province, not much different from the one presented here. Reinholt Loeffler sketches a complex picture of rural experience in Boir Ahmad, which is not very far from Ramhormoz; see his “Economic changes in a rural area since 1979” in *The Iranian Revolution*, eds. Hooglund and Keddie, pp. 91–110; and Reinhold Loeffler, *Islam in Practice*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988. See Manijeh Dowlat, Bernard Hourcade, and Odile Puech, “Les paysans et la revolution Iranienne,” *Peuples Meditterranens*, no. 10, 1980 (January–March), pp. 19–42.

24. See, for example, Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 69; Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins*, p. 2; Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, p. 100; and Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi, “The state, classes, and modes of mobilization in the Iranian Revolution,” *State, Culture and Society* 1(3), spring 1985, p. 25. Claims of passivity in rural areas is predicated in large part on the recorded occupation of civilian casualties during the Revolution, or on newspaper reports of

the location of demonstrations. However, accounts of the casualties are unreliable and disputed. See Kurzman, *The Untinkable Revolution*, p. 184. Furthermore, these accounts assume a rigid spatial segregation between the rural and the urban. In fact, most rural activists commuted to cities to demonstrate, as public protests in small villages were neither inspiring nor would they get reported in national newspapers. What is more significant in terms of the participation of people in rural and small provincial towns in national politics is the scale of spontaneous land grabs after the collapse of the monarchy. See Asef Bayat, *Street Politics*; Bakhash, *Reign of the Ayatollahs*, pp. 195–216; and Asghar Schirazi, *Islamic Development Policy*, Boulder, Colo.: Rienner, 1993.

25. The notable exception to this problematic literature is Eric Hooglund: *Land and Revolution in Iran*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, esp. pp. 138–152. Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution*, p. 100, quotes Hooglund's statement that "basically the villagers were apolitical," although this is not quite what Hooglund says. In fact, Hooglund draws a generational distinction between younger rural activists and older villagers, and cites the commuting distance to local towns and cities as a major factor in the degree of politicization of rural populations. For a critical survey of the literature concerning rural Iran after the Revolution, see Kaveh Ehsani, "Rural society and agricultural development in post-revolution Iran," *Critique* 15(1), 2006, pp. 79–96. On the political role of recent rural migrants, see Bayat, *Street Politics*.

26. See Stephanie Cronin, *Tribal Politics in Iran*; Shahrough Akhavi, "State formation and consolidation in twentieth century Iran: The Reza Shah period and the Islamic republic," in *The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics*, eds. Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986, pp. 198–226; Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, *Hokumat-e Mahalli ya Estrateji-ye Towzi'e Faza'i-ye Qodrat-e Siasi dar Iran*, Tehran: Amir Kabir, 2007, pp. 203–233; Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, pp. 125–149; and Hamid Ahmadi, *Qowmīyat va Qowmgara'i dar Iran*, Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 1999, pp. 186–236.

27. See Hooglund, *Land and Revolution*; Mostafa Azkia, *Jame'eh-shenasi-ye Towse'eh va Towse'eh-nayaftegi-ye Rusta'i-ye Iran*, Tehran: Ettela'at, 1986; Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Land Reform and Social Change in Iran*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987; Ehsani, "Rural society and agricultural development"; Mohammad-Reza Sowdagar, *Roshd-e Ravabet-e Sarmayeh-dari dar Iran*, Tehran: Sho'leh-ye Andisheh, 1990; Ahmad Ashraf, "Dehqan, zamin va enqelab," in *Ketab-e Agah: Masa'el-e Arzi va Dehqani*, Tehran: Agah, 1982, pp. 6–49. For diverse accounts of the land reform see, for example, Mohammad Gholi Majd, *Resistance to the Shah*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000, from the landlords' perspective; and Nur al-Din Arsanjani, *Doktor Arsanjani dar A'ineh-ye Zaman*, Tehran: Qatreh, 2000, from the perspective of a key state reformer in charge of the initial phase of the Iranian land reform.

28. See Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926–1979*, New York: New York University Press, 1981; Amin Banani, *The Modernization of Iran*, Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1961. Paul Vieille's authoritative study of Ahwaz in the 1960s records a massive exodus of local elites to Tehran. His study of the Ahvaz Chamber of Commerce shows that by the end of the 1950s the provincial commercial bourgeoisie is depleted as most prominent local merchants and entrepreneurs have already emigrated to Tehran to be physically near the seat of power, from which acts of economic largesse and opportunity are distributed. Economic success seemed to have become dependent on proximity to the central bureaucracy, where favorable personal connections are established, passports are obtained, and most administrative documentation of significance—all sorts of import and export permits, exclusive commercial licenses, and state

banking credits—are issued, and profitable ties are established with multinational corporations located in the capital. See Paul Vieille, “Bourgeoisie nationale et bourgeoisie dépendante, fonction et fonctionnement d’une ville iranienne, Ahvaz en 1963,” in *La Féodalité et L’Etat en Iran*, Paris: Anthropolos, 1975, pp. 183–272.

29. Marvin Zonis, *The Political Elite of Iran*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971, pp. 139–141, records the hyper concentration of amenities, networks, and resources in Tehran.

30. Eckhardt Ehlers, who studied the region of Dezful in northern Khuzestan prior to the land reform of 1962, reports that three-fourths of all arable land in this fertile region was owned by absentee landlords. But these are absentee landlords who live in Dezful itself. By all accounts the peasants were permanently indebted and impoverished, but at least the regional surplus was being accumulated in the regional center. A decade later, after three phases of land reform, which replaced the landlords with peasant proprietors, soon followed by state farms, cooperatives, and agribusinesses, the results were anything but successful. Grace Goodell and Cyrus Salmanzadeh, who studied the same region in the 1970, stressed the negative social and economic consequences of the forceful disruptions of all local structures and communities, and their increasing dependency on the state. After 1979, all but two agribusinesses, state farms, and cooperatives were dissolved and their land retaken by local farmers or reclaimed by former landlords. See Ehlers, “Dezful”; Grace Goodell, *Elementary Structures of Political Life*, London: Oxford University Press, 1986; Salmanzadeh, *Agricultural Change*; Azkia, *Jame’eh-shenasi-ye Towse’eh*, pp. 216–255.

31. Zonis, *The Political Elite*, pp. 134–198.

32. David Menashri, *Education and the Making of Modern Iran*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992, pp. 269–281.

33. Zonis, *The Political Elite*, see especially pp. 176–187. A substantial proportion of the hard data used by Zonis and Menashri are from Zahra Shaji’i, *Nokhbegan-e Siasi-ye Iran*, 4 vols., Tehran: Sokhan, 1965/1993.

34. See, *Ashna’i ba Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami*, Tehran: Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami, 1982. See also *Negahi be Arvalin Dowreh-ye Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami*, Tehran: Majles-e Showra-ye Eslami, 1985; Saïd Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, pp. 197–202 and 220.

35. See Vieille and Khosrokhavar, *Le Discours Populaire*; Bayat, *Street Politics*; and Homa Hoodfar, *The Women’s Movement in Iran; Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization*, Women Living under Muslim Laws Series no. 1, Grables: 1999.

36. Bernard Hourcade, *Iran: Nouvelles Identités d’une République*, Paris: Belin, 2002, pp. 157–158; Farhad Khosrokhavar, “Le comité dans la révolution Iraniénne,” *Peuples Méditerranéens* 9, fall 1979, pp. 85–100; Khosrokhavar, *L’Utopie Sacrifiée*.

37. The Jihad-e Sazandegi (Construction Jihad) was the most interesting example of one of the new revolutionary institutions that transformed provincial and rural Iran. Jihad recruited thousands of local volunteers to build rural roads, electricity, dams, and infrastructure projects. Very often the quality of the work was abysmal, but the scale and significance of the work transformed rural and provincial Iran. For the scale of Jihad’s work, see Jihad-e Sazandegi, *Hameh ba Ham*, Tehran: Jihad-e Sazandegi, 1987; and Jihad-e Sazandegi, *Gozarash-e Amalkard-e Jihad-e Sazandegi az Ebtada-ye Ta’sis ta Payan-e Sal-e 1370*, Tehran: Jihad-e Sazandegi, 1991; Asghar Schirazi, *Islamic Development Policy*, pp. 147–161; Marie Ladier-Fouladi, *Population et Politique en Iran*, Paris: Les Cahiers de l’INED, 2003, pp. 181–187; Homa Hoodfar, *Volunteer Health Workers in Iran as Social Activists*, Paris: Women Living under Muslim Laws Occasional Paper no. 10, 1998; Ehsani, “Islam, modernity, and national identity”; and Hourcade, *Iran: Nouvelles Identités*, pp. 150–153.

38. See Morad Saghafi, “Nazariyeh-ye ta’ahhod, sang-e banay-e dowlat-e eideolojik,” *Goftogu* 24, summer 1999, pp. 7–27.

39. On the cultural revolution, see Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1997, pp. 62–65.

40. See Bernard Hourcade, “Conséillisme, classes sociales et espaces urbains: Les squatters du sud de Teheran 1978–1981,” in *Urban Crises and Social Movements in the Middle East*, eds. Kenneth Brown et al., Paris: l’Harmattan, 1989, pp. 91–102.

41. Ali Farazmand, *The State, Bureaucracy, and Revolution in Modern Iran*, New York: Praeger, 1989, p. 187.

42. Hourcade, *Iran: Nouvelles Identités*, p. 46. See also Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Anthropologie de la Révolution Iranienne*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997.

43. See Houchang Chehabi, “Ardabil becomes a province: Center-periphery relations in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29(1), spring 1997, pp. 235–253.

44. In the case of Ardabil’s becoming a separate province, for example, a coalition of war veterans, local magnates, Tehran-based merchants originally from Ardabil, and elected representatives and politicians originally from the region led a coordinated campaign to create an independent province; see Chehabi, “Ardabil becomes a province.” The same sustained strategies of lobbying and coalition building was pursued in similar cases, with significant windfall profits benefiting successful petitioners. For example, in the case of the city of Bojnurd’s beating Sabzevar as the capital of the newly created Northern Khorasan province (2005), urban land prices increased twentyfold within a year in Bojnurd.

45. On the generational break and the role of youth as agents of social transformation, see Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*, Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2007, pp. 49–105; Vieille and Khosrokhavar, *Le Discours Populaire*; Khosrokhavar, *L’Utopie Sacrifiée*; and Ehsani, “Islam, modernity, and national identity.”

46. This and the following section are based on interviews, conversations, participant observation, and fieldwork in Ramhormoz and Khuzestan during 1989–1990, 1992, and 1998. Extensive parts of this section dealing with the personal changes in the town were cowritten in a joint essay with a local resident of Ramhormoz. See Kaveh Ehsani and Mohammad-Reza Purparviz, “Enqelab va jang dar Ramhormoz,” *Goftogu* 25, fall 1999, pp. 95–120.

47. I was unable to obtain documented evidence of the extent of local purges or confiscations of private properties. These observations are based on interviews with officials at the Ramhormoz Land Registry, Municipality, Construction Jihad, the district governor, and Urban Land Organization in 1999.

48. See Emad Ferdows, “The reconstruction crusade and class conflict in Iran,” *MERIP* 113, 1983, pp. 4–17; Bernard Hourcade and Hassan Bassri, “L’expérience conseilliste,” *Peuples Méditerranéens* 29, fall 1984, pp. 41–52; Farhad Khosrokhavar, “Le comité dans la révolution iranienne,” *Peuples Méditerranéens* 9, fall 1979, pp. 85–100.

49. Yahya Alibaba’i, “Barresi-ye vaz’iyat-e eqtesadi-ejtema’i-ye basijian-e jebhe rafteh-ye shahr-e Tehran,” *Nameh-ye Olum-e Ejtema’i* 2(1), winter 1991, pp. 181–185.

50. Of course, this politicization of dress codes should be seen within the historical context of the forced secularization of public attire under Reza Shah in the 1930s. See Patricia Baker, “Politics of dress; the dress reform laws of 1920–30’s Iran,” in *Languages of Dress in the Middle East*, eds. Nancy Lindisfarne-Tapper and Bruce Ingham. Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1997, pp. 178–192; and Houchang Chehabi, “Staging the emperor’s new clothes; dress code and nation building under Reza Shah,” *Iranian Studies* 26(3–4), summer/fall 1993, pp. 209–229.

51. See Norma Claire Moruzzi, “A problem with headscarves: Contemporary complexities of political and social identity,” *Political Theory* 22(4), November 1994, pp. 653–672; and “Response,” pp. 678–679; Norma Claire Moruzzi, “Trying to look different: Hijab as the self-presentation of social distinctions,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle*

East 28(2), 2008, pp. 225–234; Fatemeh Sadeghi, “Negotiating with modernity: Young women and sexuality in Iran,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 28(2), 2008, pp. 250–259; and Fatemeh Sadeghi, *Chera Hejab?*, available at www.meydaan.com/showarticle.aspx?arid=548, accessed July 22, 2008.

52. It should be noted that the imposition of modest and somber public attire has been a feature of many postrevolutionary societies, such as England in the 17th century, France in the late 18th century, or the post–1917 Soviet Union, although it seems Maoist China and Islamist Iran have gone the furthest in systematically imposing a legal dress code. On changing appearances in postrevolution France, see Lynn Hunt and Catherine Hall, “The curtain rises,” in *A History of Private Life*, ed. Michelle Perrot, vol. 4, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990, pp. 16–21. In the same vein, flamboyant, revealing, and provocative attire and public presentation have characterized post–puritanical–radical–repressive sociopolitical orders—for example, post-1658 Restoration-era England or post-Franco Spain.

53. This argument is based on fieldwork I conducted in 1989–1990 in Shadegan, Khuzestan. See Zumar Consultants, *Tarh-e Jame’-e Ehya’-ye Howzeh-ye Abkhiz-e Ramhormoz*, unpublished report, 1991. See Mostafa Azkia, “Modernization theory in a tribal-peasant society of southern Iran,” *Critique* 10, spring 1997, pp. 77–90.

54. See Farideh Farhi, “The antinomies of Iran’s war generation,” in *Iran, Iraq, and the Legacies of War*, eds. Lawrence Potter and Gary Sick, New York: Palgrave, 2004, pp. 103–120. The social impact of the Iran–Iraq War remains critically understudied, despite the proliferation of a literature focused on the conflict’s technical military aspects and on the literary, cinematic, and propagandist renditions of the war experience. The few sociological studies of the war in Iran tend to be subjectivist and remain, in my opinion, highly problematic. See, for example, Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L’Islamisme et la Mort*, Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995, a psycho-culturalist reading of martyrdom and war; and Saskia Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris, 1999. By contrast, the social impact of the war on Iraqi society has been approached by Isam al-Khafaji’s “Jang va jame’eh: Iraq dar masir-e nezami-shodan” (War and society: Iraq’s road to militarization), *Goftogu* 23, spring 1999, pp. 63–81; and “War as a vehicle for the rise and demise of a state controlled society: The case of Ba’thist Iraq,” in *War Institutions and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. Steven Hydemann, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, pp. 258–291.

55. See Bernard Hourcade and Mahmoud Taleghani, “Jam’iyat-e Iran dar 1365, Bohboheh-ye dargiriha-ye mowjud dar Iraq va Afghanistan,” *Tahqiqat-e Joghrafiya’i* 10(2–3), fall 1988, pp. 205–218; and Sharif Motawaf, “Tahavvolat-e shahrha-ye jangzadeh-ye ostan-e Khuzestan dar daheha-ye akhir,” paper presented to the Iran Sociological Association, October 2005; Farhang Ershad and Davoud Aqayee, “Tasviri az mohajerat dar ostan-e Khuzestan dar daheh-ye 1365–75 va mowzu’-e mohajerat-e bazgashti,” *Majelleh-ye Jame’eh-shenasi-ye Iran* 4(1), spring 2002, pp. 79–89.

56. Hourcade and Taleghani, “Jam’iyat-e Iran dar 1365,” p. 214, for the lower figure; and Hooshang Amirahmadi, “War damage and reconstruction in the Islamic republic of Iran,” in *Post-Revolution Iran*, eds. H. Amirahmadi and Manoochehr Parvin, Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988, p. 127.

57. Ershad and Aqayee, “Tasviri az mohajerat,” p. 8. Some 51 cities and nearly 4,000 villages, a third of all villages in western provinces affected by the war, were damaged or destroyed. According to Amirahmadi, “In Khuzestan alone...356 Arab-inhabited villages were...wiped off the map,” in “War damage and reconstruction,” p. 127.

58. Kamran Mofid, “Iran, war, destruction and reconstruction,” in *After the War; Iran Iraq and the Arab Gulf*, ed. Charles Davies, Chichester, UK: 1990, p. 129; and Naser Haqju, “Barresi-ye eqtesadi-ye khesarat-e jang, 1359–67,” *Iran-e Farda* 8, July/August 1993, pp. 2–23.

59. Hiram Ruiz, *Left out in the Cold; The Perilous Homecoming of Afghan Refugees*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Committee for Refugees, December 1992, estimates the number of Afghan refugees in Iran to have been 1.4 million in 1980, increasing to 2.3 million a year later (pp. 3, 4). By 1992 this number had increased to nearly 2.5 million (p. 14). According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), in the wake of Desert Storm, Iran had the largest number of international refugees in the world, 4.5 million in 1991 and 4.1 million in 1992; UNHCR, *The State of the World's Refugees*, New York: Penguin, 1993, p. 150. Approximately 1.5 million of these were Kurds and Shi'a fleeing Ba'thist repression (p. 156). By 2001 the total number of refugees in Iran from other countries had fallen to 2.35 million, still one of the highest in the world; see *Daily Star*, July 18, 2004.

60. Hourcade, *Iran: Nouvelles Identités*, pp. 125, 134.

61. Pierre Jean Luizard, "Iraniens d'Irak, une elite religieuse Chiite face a un état Sunnite," *Cahiers D'Etudes sur la Méditerranée Orientale et le Monde Turco Iranien (CEMOTI)* 22, 1996, pp. 162–190; Ali Babakhan, "Des Irakiens en Iran depuis la Revolution Islamique," *CEMOTI* 22, 1996, pp. 191–208. On the role of the radical shi'a ulema during the expulsion of Iranians from Iraq in the 1970s see Ali Ahmadi, *Ikhrāj-e Iranian az Iraq*, Tehran: Islamic Revolution Documentation Center, 2006.

62. "State of war refugees in Khuzestan," broadcast on Khuzestan provincial radio, April 1990.

63. See Ershad and Aqayee, "Tasviri az mohajerat," for a brief case study of the town of Izeh.

64. Bernard Hourcade has argued, convincingly in my opinion, about the integrative emergence of hybrid—what he calls "new ethnicities"—in postrevolution urban Iran. See his "Ethnie, nation et citadinité en Iran," in *Le Fait Ethnique en Iran et en Afghanistan*, ed. Jean Pierre Digard, Paris: Editions du Centre National de Recherches Scientifiques (CNRS), 1988, pp. 161–174.

65. See Abdolali Lahsaeizadeh, *Jame'eh-shenasi-ye Abadan*, Tehran: Kian-Mehr, 2005; and Ehsani, "Social engineering."

66. On the scale of war in Abadan, see Markaz-e Motale'at va Tahqiqat-e Jang, *Abadan dar Jang*, Tehran: Markaz-e Motale'at va Tahqiqat-e Jang, 2003; and Sekandar Amanollahi, "Ta'sir-e jang-e Iran va Iraq bar panahandegan-e Khuzestan," unpublished study, 1986.

67. Mohammad Ali Mowlazadeh, *Evaluation of the Post-revolutionary Urban Land Policy in Iran: Case Study of Ahwaz City*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1991, pp. 30–31.

68. See Ershad and Aqayee, "Tasviri az mohajerat."

69. SCI, *National Census of Population and Housing*, 1986.

70. Ibid. See also Markaz-e Motale'at va Tahqiqat-e Me'mari va Shahrsazi-ye Iran (Iran's Research Center for Architecture and Urban Development, IRCAUD), *Rahnama-ye Jam'iyat-e Shahrha-ye Iran, 1956–96*, Tehran: IRCAUD, 2003, pp. 205–206.

71. Recent urban clashes over ethnic issues, unemployment, environmental crises, and grievances over unfulfilled promises of postwar reconstruction in Ahwaz, Abadan, and Mahshahr in 2000, 2001, 2005, and 2007 show the continuing tensions gripping the province. See the special issue of the quarterly journal *Gofotgu* 23, spring 1999, as one of the rare attempts in Iran to discuss the war from an independent, critical, and analytical, rather than ideological and propagandistic, perspectives.

72. Personal interviews, May and June 1990.

73. Martyr's Foundation, the Foundation for the Downtrodden, and Imam [Khomeini] Relief Committee were some of the other institutions responsible for aiding the war victims.

74. SCI, *National Census*, 1976, 1986.

75. Ibid.

76. From 1976 to 1986; see IRCAUD, *Rahnama-ye Jam'iyat-e Shahrha-ye Iran, 1956–96*, pp. 205–206.

77. Hourcade and Taleghani, “Jam'yat Iran dar 1365,” pp. 206–208; and Marie Ladier-Fouladi, *Population et Politique en Iran*, Paris: Institut National D'Etudes Demographique, Cahier no. 50, 2003.

78. With the same estimated rate of refugee arrivals.

79. My estimate is based on the natural rate of population increase prior to the Revolution and the comparable estimates of refugees to Ahwaz; see note 67 above.

80. SCI, *National Census*, 1976, 1986; Plan and Budget Organization of Khuzestan Province, *Shenasnameh-ye Amari-ye Shahrha-ye Khuzestan*, Ahwaz: Plan and Budget Organization of Khuzestan Province, 1993, p. 39.

81. Aside from the railroad built in the 1930s, the northern Dezful-Khorramabad-Tehran road was the main artery connecting the province to the rest of the country.

82. See Reza Azari Shahrezaei, “The rise and fall of the ‘Arab people,’ 1978–79,” *Goftogu* 25, autumn 1999, pp. 63–80; and the subsequent critique by Reza Badi'i, “Ethnic tensions in Khuzestan in the early years of the Revolution, a critique,” *Goftogu* 27, spring 2000, pp. 195–206; and Reza Azari Shahrezaei, “A response,” *Goftogu* 27, spring 2000, pp. 207–211. All articles are in Persian.

83. As I argue in the next section, the Iranian Revolution precipitated a transformation of Iran's urban geography. The emergence of a hybrid urban ethnicity is discussed by Hourcade, “Ethnie, nation et citadinité en Iran”; and Bayat, *Street Politics*, pp. 83–108.

84. See Markaz-e Tahqiqat-e Sakhteman va Maskan (Center for Housing and Construction Research, CHCR), *Typology of Rural Housing in Khuzestan*, 5 vols., Tehran: CHCR, 1982–1986; CHCR, *Typology of Rural Housing in Chahar Mahal va Bakhtiari*, vol.5, Tehran: CHCR, 1988; Morteza Kasma'i, *Eqlim va Me'mari-ye Khuzestan-Khorramshahr*, Tehran: CHCR, 1990.

85. Grace Goodell's important study of villages and modern townships of Dezful in the early 1970s has extensive descriptions of the disjuncture between the domestic architecture of traditional villages and the designed modern architecture of state-planned townships. In my visits to Dezful and the sites of Goodell's field research since 1989 I have discovered a marked modernization of rural houses (construction materials, design layouts, modern amenities), while the residents of townships (Bijan, currently Shahrak-e Imam Hossein) have modified the modern compounds and houses built for them by planners in the 1970s according to a urban-rural hybrid layout. For example, Goodell's residence in 1989 was subdivided to accommodate grown-up siblings, has a stable in the courtyard, and added rooms made with different construction materials. See Goodell, *Elementary Structures*.

86. On the social transformative impact of domestic architecture, see Dolores Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution*, Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1981; Jacques Donzelot, *La Police des Familles*, Paris: Editions de Minuit; and Henri Lefebvre, *La Production de L'Espace*, Paris: Anthropos, 1973. See also Kaveh Ehsani, “Municipal matters, Tehran's political economic transformation,” *Middle East Report* 212, fall 1999, pp. 22–27.

87. See the fascinating personal account of Ezatollah Sahabi, then head of the Plan and Budget Organization, in Bahman Ahmadi Amu'i, *Eqtesad-e Siasi-ye Jomhuri-ye Eslami*, Tehran: Gam-e Naw, 2003, pp. 9–58. See also Amirahmadi, *Revolution and Economic Transition*, pp. 23–24; Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, pp. 192–197; and Bakhash, *Reign of the Ayatollahs*, pp. 115–116, 166–185.

88. See Schirazi, *Islamic Development Policy*; Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran*, pp. 184–188; Bakhash, *Reign of the Ayatollahs*, pp. 195–216; Hossein Mahdavi, “Molahezati dar

mowred-e mas'aleh-ye arzi-ye Iran," *Ketab-e Agah*, 1983, pp. 167–190; Azkia, *Jame'eh-shenasi-ye Towse'eh*; Ehsani, "Rural society and agricultural development"; Amirahmadi, *Revolution and Economic Transition*, pp. 27–28.

89. Bernard Hourcade and Farhad Khosrokhavar, "L'habitat révolutionnaire: Téhéran 1977–81," *Hérodote* 31, 1983, pp. 61–83. The authors seem to have misinterpreted the conversion of Iranian and Christian calendar years. The accurate years should be 1978–82. See p. 66 of their article.

90. Bayat, *Street Politics*, pp. 59–108.

91. Ibid, pp. 77–81; Mowlazadeh, *Evaluation of Post-revolutionary Land Policy*.

92. Hourcade and Khosrokhavar, "L'habitat révolutionnaire," p. 70.

93. Bernard Hourcade, "Téhéran 1978–89: La crise dans l'état, la capitale et la ville," *Espaces et Sociétés* 65, 1991, pp. 21–37.

94. See Tehran Geographic Information Center, *Atlas of Tehran Metropolis*, Tehran: Sherkat-e Pardazesh va Barnamehri-ye Shahri, 2005, available at www.tehranatlas.com; Alain Berteaud, *Tehran Spatial Structure*, revised April 2003, http://alain-berteaud.com/images/AB_Teheran_report_final_3.pdf, accessed August 10, 2008.

95. IRCAUD, *Tarh-e Majmu'eh-ye Shahri-ye Tehran va Shahrrha-ye Atraf-e An*, Tehran: IRCAUD, 1999, p. 48.

96. The average annual growth in constructed housing units 1976–1986 was 4.5 percent, while the official rate of growth of households was 4 percent. See Mohammad Mehdi Azizi, "The provision of urban infrastructure in Iran," *Urban Studies* 32(3), 1995, pp. 507–522.

97. See Jahangir Mansur, ed., *Majmu'eh-ye Qavanin va Moqararat-e Sabti*, Tehran: Nashr-e Didar, 2003, pp. 637–685. See also Ali Kiafar, "Urban land policies in post-revolutionary Iran," in *Modern Capitalism and Islamic Ideology in Iran*, eds. Cyrus Bina and Hamid Zangeneh, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, pp. 235–256.

98. The 1979 Urban Wasteland Ownership Abolition Law (UWOAL) permitted qualified individuals to develop (presumably after occupation) one piece of land within a specific time limit. The 1982 and 1987 Urban Land Law (ULL) restricted the amount of land held by individuals, limited land transactions except to and from the state, and declared the state as the proprietor of all urban wasteland (*mavat*) and undeveloped (*bayer*) land. See Mohammad Mehdi Azizi, "Evaluation of urban land supply policy in Iran," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 22(1), 1988, pp. 94–105.

99. IRCAUD, *Tarh-e Majmu'eh-ye Shahri-ye Tehran*, p. 50. The state's share in providing residential land decreased to 45 percent in the 1985–1987 period.

100. Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, *Amar va Ettela'at-e Payeh-e Bakhsh-e Maskan*, Tehran: Ministry of Housing and Urban Development, 1992.

101. Kamal Athari, "Bakhsh-e maskan dar Iran: Bazaar ya barnameh?" *Iran-e Farda* 7, June/July 1993, pp. 41–47. On the limited role of the Housing Foundation in providing mass affordable housing see Kamal Athari, "Sanjesh dar andakhtan-e tarhi Naw: Bonyad-e Maskan Enqelab-e Eslami," *Goftogu*, 39, March 2004, pp. 39–60.

102. Kamal Athari, "Bakhsh-e maskan."

103. Farzin Yazdani, "Eqtesad-e Zamin," in *Sazman-e Melli-ye Zamin va Maskan* (National Organization of Land and Housing, NOLH), *Eqtesad-e Maskan*, Tehran: NOLH, 2003, pp. 9–33. It must be noted that there are conflicting accounts regarding this issue. Another study states that the share of land costs in the final price of housing decreased to an average of 27 percent during the "revolutionary housing" period, 1980–1981, only to increase again above 51 percent after 1983; see IRCAUD, *Tarh-e Majmu'eh-ye Shahri-ye Tehran*, p. 51. Of equal importance in assessing the impact of these state policies are the economic indicators for inflation, wages and salaries, housing, and construction materials collated until 1992,

indicating the relative stability of the housing market. After 1992, following the liberalization policies of Rafsanjani's second presidency, these indicators diverge, with wage and salary indicators falling well below the others; see Minou Rafi'i, "Eqtesad-e Maskan," in NOLH, *Eqtesad-e Maskan*.

104. A total of 98 industrial permits had been issued in Ramhormoz by 1986, 46 for nonmetallic mining, 16 for heavy industry, and 16 for food-related industries; see Sazman-e Barnameh va Boudjeh-ye Ostan-e Khuzestan (Plan and Budget Organization of Khuzestan Province, PBOKP), *Salnameh-ye Amari-ye Ostan-e Khuzestan*, Ahwaz: PBOKP, 1986.

105. The number of registered manufacturing/industrial workshops in Ramhormoz was 138 in 1976, 212 in 1984, 237 in 1989, and 459 in 1999, as per National Organization of Titles and Deeds Registry—Ramhormoz, data collected in 1999.

106. Bayat, *Street Politics*, p. 101.

107. Quoted in *ibid*, pp. 101 and 188.

108. More than 60 percent of all issued titles had been formerly collective hereditary land, according to Mr. Ahmadi of the National Organization of Titles and Deeds Registry—Ramhormoz. Personal interview in 1999.

109. Information collected at interviews with officials of the Municipality, National Organization of Titles and Deeds Registry—Ramhormoz, and residents of Ramhormoz, in 1999.

110. Ramhormoz had 960 hectares of fruit orchards in 1981, most of which have disappeared. See PBOKP, *Salnameh-ye Amari-ye Ostan-e Khuzestan*, various years.

111. Mowlazadeh, *Evaluation of Post-revolutionary Land Policy*, pp. 132–133.

112. Athari, "Bakhsh-e Maskan dar Iran." It should be added that a significant portion of the subsidized banking credit allocated for manufacturing was channeled to construction-related industries and consequently entered the residential housing sector.

113. Asieh Mansur and Morteza Asadi, "Dowreh-ha-ye kutah-moddat va boland-moddat-e maskan dar eqtesad-e Iran," *Eqtesad-e Maskan* 15, summer 1995, pp. 13–30.

114. PBOK, *Salnameh-ye Amari-ye Ostan-e Khuzestan*, various years.

115. Mowlazadeh, *Evaluation of Post-revolutionary Land Policy*, pp. 169, 173–183, 200–202.

116. This trend correlates with national figures. Nationwide, the ULO transferred 432,000 titles during its period of activity (1982–1992), 55 percent to private individuals, 31 percent to cooperatives, and 14 percent to developers; see Yazdani, "Eqtesad-e Zamin," p. 50.

117. Interviews at the Ramhormoz branches of the Foundation for War Refugee Affairs, the ULO, and the National Organization of Titles and Deeds Registry—Ramhormoz, summer 1999.

118. For informative insiders' accounts, see Bahman Ahmadi Amouyei, *Eqtesad-e Siasi Jomhuri-ye Eslami*.

119. See Azadeh Kian-Thiebaut, *Les Femmes Iraniennes entre Islam, Etat, et Famille*, Paris: Maisonneuve and Larose, 2002.

120. See Bernard Hourcade et al., *Atlas D'Iran*, Paris: Reclus-La Documentation Française, 1998.



NIMBLE FINGERS NO LONGER!

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN IRAN

Roksana Bahramitash and Hadi Salehi Esfahani

This chapter reexamines the patterns of women's economic activity in Iran over the past half-century in light of the country's 2006 census figures. Women's role in public life has long been a central social and political issue in Iran, and it gained particular prominence with the Islamic revolution of 1979. The Revolution was followed by major changes in female employment and labor-force participation (LFP), which became the subject of hot debates. Many scholars and other observers view Islamic religious rules as impediments to women's participation in the labor market, and find confirmation for that view in the decline and subsequent slow recovery of the female LFP rate in the wake of the Revolution (V. Moghadam 1991, 2000; F. Moghadam 1994; Moghissi 1996; Afshar 1997; Atzadeh 2000; Behdad and Nomani 2006). Others, pointing to the massive expansion of female schooling and professional activity, argue that "Islamization" may have in fact facilitated education, mobilization, and participation in public life for most women by creating an environment acceptable to the culturally conservative majority of the population (V. Moghadam 1988; Paidar 1995; Kian 1997; Hoodfar 1999; Poya 1999; Mehran 2003; Bahramitash 2007).¹ Meanwhile, many factors other than Islamization—for example, demographic change and formation of new institutions, as well as internal and external shocks—have also been at work in complex and dynamic ways, influencing labor market conditions and interacting with the Islamization process. These complexities make it difficult to assess the full impact of the Revolution on women's role in the economy; hence, the need to reassess these hypotheses as new data become available and more long-term trends can be better mapped.

While the data from the first two decades of the Revolution seemed to suggest marginalization of women in the labor market, recent, more detailed data and longer term trends point to a more nuanced picture. The role of Islamization appears to have been quite complex, especially beyond the chaotic first decade of the Revolution, and to have interacted with many other factors in

shaping the labor market for Iranian women. Despite hindrances in some respects, Islamization along with other factors may have helped improve women's employment conditions in some other respects. Notably, the social and political environment after the Revolution was apparently consistent with the rapid extension of education beyond the modern middle and upper classes. Availability of substantial resource rents and the disposition of the government to distribute resources more equally have further supported the expansion of education and have helped drastically change the structure of women's labor force and the nature of the jobs available to them in Iran. The result has been an accelerated rise in the share of adult women in total employment after its drop in the 1980s, appreciably surpassing the prerevolution levels by 2006, at the same time as schooling and retirement options and the social safety nets have improved and expanded.

As we show in this chapter, the mode of women's employment in Iran, which before the Revolution was low-pay or unpaid family work in the rural carpet industry for very young women with little education, has been shifting toward more professional service occupations for educated women ages 25 to 50 years. Employed women are also increasingly working in the private sector and taking on managerial and entrepreneurial roles. Young women in both rural and urban areas attend school more often than join the carpet and cottage industry workforce, which was the main source of an increase in female employment in the 1960s and 1970s. Interestingly, the current pattern of economic development in Iran is also shifting the sources of growth toward services, especially professional services, which better match the growing education and job preferences of the new generations of women. These shifts are likely to have significant consequences for Iran's economic and political developments in the coming decades. Already it is tangible in daily activities across the country. One finds women more and more frequently in skilled and professional positions, from taxi drivers, to real estate developers, to engineers. Also, a growing number of them have established their own businesses, some of which have expanded to other countries ranging from Central Asia to Africa. It is also notable that many rules advocated in the past as "Islamic," which emphasized gender segregation at the cost of professional merit, seem to be fading away in everyday practice. In clinics in Tehran or provincial towns, it is no longer unusual to see female doctors attending male as well as female patients.

A downside to the shifts in women's LFP has been a major rise in unemployment for women under 30 years. While the number of women in their 20s participating in the labor force went up almost 2.4 times between 1976 and 2006, the number of those holding jobs rose only 1.6 times, with the rest swelling the ranks of the unemployed. As a result, in that age group, women constituted 31.5 percent of all the unemployed in 2006, compared to 26 percent in 1976. Interestingly, exactly the opposite has happened for women in their 30s

and over, whose share has gone down from 23.3 percent to 17.2 percent among the unemployed and up from 8.3 to 12.3 percent among the employed during the same period. This is particularly important because, as we argue below, it indicates that a substantial part of the high unemployment rate among young women is transitory.

The increasing role of women in Iran's labor market parallels the situation in most other countries. However, there are also notable differences. In particular, a significant increase in women's employment in many developing countries has been due to globalization and the expansion of export zones, where women are employed as cheap flexible labor (Beneria 1992, 2003; Standing 1999; Elson 1999; Elson and Cataway 2000; Loutfi 2001; Bahramitash 2005). Those jobs, which are mostly in manufacturing for export, rely on women's skills to perform menial jobs with their nimble fingers (Elson and Pearson 1981; Safa 1981; Beneria 2003; Caraway 2005). In Iran, the trend has been the opposite: women have increasingly left nimble-finger jobs in the carpet industry to go to school so as to take on clerical, technical, and professional positions.

Our analysis is based on decennial census data from 1956 to 2006, available from the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI). A number of other studies of female LFP and employment in Iran also use census data, but cover only data until 1996 (e.g., Mehryar et al. 2004; Behdad and Nomani 2006). A few studies have gone beyond the 1996 census, using Household Expenditure and Income Surveys (HEIS) and Socio-economic Characteristics of Households (SECH) data sets produced by SCI (e.g., Salehi-Isfahani 2005b; Salehi-Isfahani and Marku 2006). However, those surveys are available only for the years after 1984, precluding comparisons with prerevolutionary times. Also, the margins of error in those samples appear to be large because the statistical distributions concerning the role of women in the labor force are in some respects at variance with census results.²

Our analysis benefits from 2006 census data, which has been made available recently. These data enable us to better map the labor market trends after the Revolution and to sketch the longitudinal profiles of the labor market experience for various cohorts of Iranian women over the past half a century. We analyze these outcomes in the broader context of overall trends in the economy in order to better separate the different factors. The result is a much richer picture of the trends in the evolution of the female labor market.

In the next section, we offer a brief overview of the economic performance of Iran since the 1950s. We then examine the aggregate trends in women's LFP and employment. Next, we review the sectoral pattern of female employment and analyze the role of age structure and education, and we deal with trends in women's occupations and positions in the labor market. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of likely opportunities and challenges for Iranian women in the coming decades.

IRAN'S ECONOMY SINCE THE 1950S: AN OVERVIEW

To understand female employment in Iran, it is important to place its trend within a larger frame of overall economic growth and structural transformation since the 1950s. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 present the basic data for the past five decades. As table 3.1 shows, Iran's economy experienced a period of rapid and stable growth from the mid-1950s until the mid-1970s. During that time, the population and labor force also grew rapidly and became urbanized at a fast pace. The share of agriculture as a source of value added and of employment sharply declined, while that of the service and especially the industrial sectors

TABLE 3.1. Iran's aggregate economic indicators, 1956–2006.

	Year					
	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Population (in millions)	19.0	25.8	33.7	49.4	60.1	70.5
Growth rate of population in prior decade	2.9%	3.1%	2.7%	3.9%	2.0%	1.6%
Labor force (10 years and over, in millions)	6.1	7.8	9.8	12.8	16.0	23.5
Growth rate of labor force in prior decade	N/A	2.6%	2.2%	2.7%	2.2%	3.8%
Female labor force (10 years and over, in millions)	0.6	1.0	1.4	1.3	2.0	3.6
Growth rate of female labor force in prior decade	N/A	5.8%	3.4%	−1.0%	4.4%	5.8%
Share of women in labor force (10 years and over)	9.5%	13.2%	14.8%	10.2%	12.7%	15.5%
Share of urban population	31.4%	37.3%	47.3%	53.3%	60.8%	68.5%
Per capita PPP GDP in 2000 constant U.S. dollars	1,823	3,409	7,959	4,876	5,987	8,089
Average annual growth rate of per capita PPP GDP in prior decade	3.6%	6.3%	8.5%	−4.9%	2.1%	3.0%
Per capita PPP non-oil GDP in 2000 constant U.S. dollars	1712	2933	5107	4662	5068	6307
Average annual growth rate of per capita PPP non-oil GDP in prior decade	4.1%	5.4%	5.5%	−0.9%	0.8%	2.2%
Consumer price index inflation rate	4.9%	3.5%	6.3%	15.4%	22.9%	14.1%

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

grew (table 3.2). Though absolute labor productivity increased in all sectors of the economy, the process was much slower in agriculture and fastest in industry. Consequently, the process of economic growth and structural transformation in Iran was associated with a decline in the relative productivity of agricultural labor and a corresponding rise for industrial labor (table 3.2). Interestingly, these productivity trends went against the normal pattern of structural transformation in developing countries, where labor productivity in agriculture is initially very low compared to industry and migration of labor out of agriculture tends to play an equalizing role (see World Bank 2000: chap. 9). The outcome in Iran was different for two reasons, both important for women's employment. First, until the 1950s, the non-oil industrial sector in Iran was dominated by carpet weaving and handicrafts—relatively low productivity cottage industries that relied largely on young female workers. On the other hand, the emerging industries were modern and highly productive, thus raising the average labor productivity in the sector as a whole (Karshenas 1990). These industries employed mostly male labor. Second, government policy was far more supportive of capital formation in industry as compared to agriculture via its credit, trade, and public investment policies (Karshenas 1990). These observations hold whether or not one includes the low-employment/high-value-added oil sector among the industries, as we do in tables 3.1 and 3.2.

TABLE 3.2. Employment and value added shares and the relative labor productivity of the main sectors in non-oil GDP.

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Employment shares (percent)						
Agriculture	56.3	46.2	34.0	29.1	23.0	18.0
Industrial	20.1	27.1	34.2	25.3	30.7	31.7
Services	23.6	26.7	32.1	45.9	46.3	50.3
Sectoral value added shares (percent)						
Agriculture	47.6	31.4	15.2	23.5	17.5	12.5
Industrial	7.4	15.7	27.2	17.3	25.0	21.6
Services	45.0	52.9	57.7	59.2	57.5	65.9
Sectoral relative productivity						
Agriculture	0.85	0.68	0.45	0.81	0.76	0.69
Industrial	0.37	0.58	0.79	0.69	0.81	0.68
Services	1.91	1.98	1.80	1.29	1.24	1.31

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

After the revolution of 1979, especially during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980–1988, per capita gross domestic product (GDP) sharply declined and inflation accelerated (table 3.1). Population and labor-force growth rates increased, but urbanization proceeded at a somewhat slower pace. Disruptions in production and trade affected industry much more than agriculture and led to a notable increase in the share of agriculture (Mojtahed and Esfahani 1989). The revolutionary government's concern about food security and self-sufficiency also contributed to the relatively better performance of agriculture, especially through increases in technical support, investment, and provision of inputs. However, employment in agriculture continued to decline, thus raising the relative labor productivity in the sector (table 3.2). The opposite was the case for the service sector, which ended up absorbing large numbers of workers from agriculture and industry.

Iran's economic growth resumed after the end of Iran-Iraq War. But the recovery was cut short by the emergence of a balance-of-payments crisis in 1993, which substantially slowed economic growth and raised the inflation rate (table 3.1). Growth gathered momentum and inflation subsided only after 2001, when oil prices increased. Meanwhile, urbanization proceeded at a steady pace and the population growth rate dropped sharply. The impact of population growth on the labor force was delayed as the pre-1990 baby boomers went through school and entered the market at very fast rates after 1996.

The boost in the relative standing of agriculture in the economy after the Revolution proved temporary. After 1990, agriculture's relative labor productivity and shares in value added and employment gradually fell, though not as fast as in the 1956–1976 period (table 3.2). For industry, employment share steadily rose during 1986–2006, but the value-added share and relative labor productivity declined during the last decade after some recovery between 1986 and 1996. Employment in the service sector has also continued to grow, though the behavior of its value-added and employment shares have been the opposite of those in industry. Of particular significance for the role of women in the labor market is the recent rise in employment, value-added share, and relative productivity in the service sector, where female employment has been rising fastest. We explore this interaction in more detail below.

Services now form the most important non-oil sector of the Iranian economy, by all measures. This is in some ways similar to the pattern of growth in many other developing countries. However, it is far more pronounced in Iran because of the large oil-export revenues, which have allowed imports to rise and compete with agriculture and industrial production, but have boosted the demand for domestic services, which are largely nontradable. As a result, the service sector has continued to increase its share of employment since the 1950s. The relative productivity in services has also been consistently higher than the other sectors, though it experienced a sharp drop in the first decade of

the Revolution associated with a jump in its employment share. Relative labor productivity of the service sector rose in the 1950s and 1960s, and again in the 1990s, as the economy grew and the government developed new institutions that boosted the opportunities for the expansion of modern services—education, medicine, finance, law, engineering, and the like.

To sum up, economic growth was high before the Revolution, declined sharply in the 1980s, and remained low during most of the 1990s. Population growth before 1990 brought large cohorts of young people to the labor market, at an accelerated pace after 1996. The service sector has been the largest and most productive part of Iran's economy outside of the oil industry, and remains the fastest-growing sector with significant employment possibilities for women. Agriculture, on the other hand, has shrunk over the past decades, despite a temporary improvement in its relative position during the decade of economic decline after the Revolution. Industry has fared better than agriculture and has kept its relative position more or less constant since the 1970s.

WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN IRAN: AGGREGATE TRENDS

The middle rows of table 3.1 show that in 1956, Iran's labor force in the age range of 10 years and over consisted of about 600,000 women and 5.5 million men. By 1976, the number of women had expanded by more than 150 percent to over 1.4 million, while the ranks of men had increased by only about 50 percent to 8.3 million. As a result, the share of women in labor force rose from 9.5 percent in 1956 to 14.8 percent in 1976. In the following decade the number of men in the labor force increased by another 38 percent, while that of women declined by 10 percent, bringing down the share of women to 10.2 percent in 1986. Since then, however, the size of the female labor force has again grown much faster—by almost 180 percent growth to over 3.6 million in 2006 as compared about 70 percent for men to about 20 million. The share of women in the labor force reached 15.5 percent in 2006, going beyond the peak before the Revolution.

The evolution of women's share in Iran's LFP has been shaped by a host of factors—in particular, changes in age structure, urbanization and other social and economic trends, and political change and Islamization after the Revolution. As a starting point for the analysis of such factors, we examine the rural-urban breakdown of the LFP rate and the trends in employment for the population aged 10 years and over, shown in table 3.3. The first rows of the table show that the share of women in Iran's population has been well below 50 percent. The gap was larger in urban areas and became particularly visible during the 1960s and 1970s, when men made up the absolute majority of rural-urban migrants. That trend was reversed after the 1980s, when the migration of women increased and some rural areas gained urban status. These shifts have moved the mode of female employment from rural to urban areas.

TABLE 3.3. Share of women in population, labor force, employment, and unemployment for population age 10 years and over (percent).

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Population						
All country	48.8	48.3	48.7	48.8	49.3	49.1
Urban	48.1	47.6	47.3	48.5	48.9	49.1
Rural	49.2	48.7	50.1	49.1	49.9	49.3
Labor force						
All country	9.5	13.2	14.8	10.2	12.7	15.5
Urban	9.9	11.5	11.3	10.5	11.7	15.8
Rural	9.3	14.1	17.6	9.8	14.2	14.7
Employment						
All country	9.7	13.3	13.8	8.9	12.1	13.6
Urban	10.3	11.8	11.2	8.8	11.3	13.9
Rural	9.4	14.1	16.0	8.9	13.4	12.8
Unemployment						
All country	1.3	12.4	23.8	18.3	18.7	28.3
Urban	1.2	7.6	13.0	20.1	16.6	30.0
Rural	1.4	13.7	26.9	15.7	21.5	25.4

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

Comparing women's share of the total labor force in urban and rural areas quickly reveals that the rapid growth of female LFP before the Revolution and its decline and slow recovery afterwards have been largely rural phenomena. In urban areas, the share of women in the labor force had actually started to decline before the Revolution and began to recover after the mid-1980s, surpassing its prerevolution peak by 1996 and reaching much higher levels by 2006. More important, most of the rise and decline of female share in the labor force during 1956–1986 can be attributed to the entry and exit of very young women aged 10 to 19 years, especially in rural areas. In the absence of that group, the picture changes more dramatically, as shown in table 3.4, which reproduces the same indicators as in table 3.3, but with a focus on the population aged 20 years and older. It is clear from the fifth row of table 3.4 that among urban labor-force participants beyond their teenage years, the share of women has increased since 1956 almost without interruption. Interestingly, it has accelerated since the mid-1990s and is now at a level much higher than it

was before the Revolution. The main source of the decline in the labor-force share of women in this age group was the withdrawal of rural women from the labor market, which seems to have been mainly caused by disruptions in trade and production, as we show in the following section.

These observations challenge the presumed impact of Islamization on female employment because Islamization was essentially an urban issue. Indeed, many of Iran's rural areas had never been "Westernized" in the first place to require Islamization after the Revolution. While it is true that middle-class and elite women who refused to wear the veil were forced or chose to leave their jobs (F. Moghadam 1985), that effect turns out to have been marginal compared to the overall picture of the urban female labor force. This observation should not be viewed as minimizing or justifying the losses of a visible group of women who were driven out of labor market by the Islamization process. Rather, it should be treated as a quantitative indicator of the extent of the problem. It is, of course, possible that many secular middle-class and elite women lost their jobs and were replaced by those

TABLE 3.4. Share of women in population, labor force, employment, and unemployment for population age 20 years and over (percent).

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Population						
All country	49.1	48.3	48.9	48.9	49.3	49.3
Urban	48.2	47.4	47.7	48.6	48.8	49.2
Rural	49.5	48.8	50.0	49.3	50.0	49.5
Labor force						
All country	8.3	10.7	12.0	8.8	11.3	14.8
Urban	8.6	9.5	10.2	9.8	11.4	15.6
Rural	8.2	11.4	13.7	7.3	11.2	12.9
Employment						
All country	8.4	10.7	10.9	8.1	11.1	13.3
Urban	8.8	9.7	10.0	8.9	11.3	14.0
Rural	8.3	11.4	11.7	7.1	10.9	11.5
Unemployment						
All country	1.5	10.4	24.2	14.5	14.3	27.6
Urban	1.6	5.4	13.1	16.7	13.8	30.0
Rural	1.5	11.7	27.0	10.1	15.3	22.8

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

who were more willing to conform to the rules of behavior after the Revolution. However, as we argue based on age and occupational structures of female employment after the Revolution, even that effect is unlikely to have been large in the context of the female labor market as a whole (see also Salehi-Isfahani 2005a).

In the literature on women and the labor market in Iran, little attention has been paid to the role of youth aged 10 to 19 years in female labor force. To highlight that role further, in table 3.5 we present data on the share of that group in the female population, labor force, and employment. Between 1956 and 1976, the share of this youth group in total female population aged 10 years and over rose from 25 percent to over 34 and remained in that range until recently, when it returned to 25 percent. Their share in the labor force initially rose from 27 percent in 1956 to almost 37 percent in 1966 and then declined somewhat to 34.5 percent in 1976. It is notable that overrepresentation of teenagers in the female labor force was particularly high in rural areas, where their labor-force share reached 132 percent of their population share in 1966. (See the top half of rows in table 3.5.) As we will discuss later, the presence of this large and growing teenage labor force is closely connected with the expansion of the carpet industry in Iran. The process was similar to the situation in many other developing countries where young women are employed in large numbers at low wages in export-processing zones (Afshar 1991; Lim 1993; Beneria and Rodan 1987; Braunstein 2000; Caraway 2005; Bahramitash 2005). Rising oil revenues and incomes and expansion of education had started curbing such opportunities in Iran in the 1970s, especially in urban areas. However, after the Revolution the decline in the teenage labor-force share accelerated, and by 2006 it dropped to one-half of their population share. Interestingly, this happened even in the 1980s and 1990s, when the economy was declining or stagnating, though education did increase, especially in rural areas (see below).

Participation in the labor force does not necessarily translate to employment, and the deviation between the two can be different for men and women. This has indeed been the case in Iran. The shares of women in employment, shown in the mid-rows of tables 3.3 and 3.4, more or less follow the same trends as their shares in the labor force, except for the rise and decline of teenage employment (table 3.5) and changes in unemployment. In most decades women's entry into the labor market has not been matched with sufficient job creation for them, especially for younger women (table 3.5). As a result, female unemployment has been a major problem for women seeking jobs both before and after the Revolution, though it has grown more serious in recent years: in the unemployment pool, women are represented almost twice as frequently as they are in the labor force (see the bottom panels of tables 3.3 and 3.4). Also, the locus of the female unemployment problem has shifted from rural areas before the Revolution to urban areas since the 1980s. Although, as we will see below, skill structure and demographic factors explain a portion of the imbalances, another

TABLE 3.5. Share of women age 10–19 in population, labor force, employment, and unemployment (percent).

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Share of women age 10–19 in...						
Female population age 10 and over						
<i>Total country</i>	25.0	31.2	34.1	33.6	35.7	25.8
Urban	27.4	33.1	34.4	31.2	34.6	24.4
Rural	23.8	29.9	33.9	36.5	37.6	28.9
Female labor force age 10 and over						
<i>Total country</i>	27.1	36.8	34.5	28.0	21.4	12.9
Urban	26.3	30.9	21.9	18.1	10.4	7.7
Rural	27.5	39.6	41.0	40.9	35.1	24.7
Labor force relative to the population share of 10–19 group						
<i>Total country</i>	109	118	101	83	60	50
Urban	96	93	64	58	30	32
Rural	115	132	121	112	93	86
Total female employment						
<i>Total country</i>	27.0	36.0	35.2	20.4	17.3	9.2
Urban	26.3	30.0	20.8	8.7	6.6	4.4
Rural	27.4	39.0	44.1	34.0	30.9	20.4
Female agricultural employment						
<i>Total country</i>	25.8	37.1	34.0	23.0	17.6	15.9
Urban	n.a.	28.4	25.9	15.1	10.0	7.1
Rural	n.a.	37.5	34.4	23.2	17.8	16.1
Female manufacturing employment						
<i>Total country</i>	29.9	41.3	48.7	52.9	38.8	20.6
Urban	n.a.	43.6	44.2	34.2	24.5	11.0
Rural	n.a.	40.4	50.0	60.7	45.7	29.8
Female service employment						
<i>Total country</i>	23.3	20.0	10.4	4.5	2.2	4.2
Urban	n.a.	17.6	9.3	3.8	1.8	3.7
Rural	n.a.	31.0	21.1	12.1	6.3	8.2

(continued)

TABLE 3.5. (*continued*)

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Female unemployed						
<i>Total country</i>	24.6	44.9	30.8	50.4	48.1	25.3
Urban	4.6	54.8	38.9	40.8	37.0	19.2
Rural	44.5	43.4	29.6	67.8	59.7	37.5

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

important part is likely to be discrimination and other social factors that work against women's employment. Islamization does not seem to be an important factor of this kind because the share of women in the unemployment pool had risen sharply before the Revolution and, in fact, fell during 1976–1986.

SECTORAL STRUCTURE OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

As we have seen, the share of the agricultural sector in Iran's total employment has taken a systematic and sharp downward trend. However, when one focuses on the structure of female employment, that decline turns out to be less pronounced, with a temporary upturn during the 1980s (figure 3.1). Indeed, women's share in agricultural employment has risen consistently over the past five decades (see table 3.6). This rise was rather sharp during 1956–1966 and slowed afterwards until 1996, when it accelerated again. Though the share still remains relatively low (about 11 percent), this feminization of the agricultural sector is in line with trends in other developing countries (Cagaty and Ozler 1995). Throughout much of U.S. South, women tend to take over jobs in low-productivity, low-wage, and declining sectors as men migrate to other activities where employment opportunities are far better (Beneria 2003). In Iran, however, this pattern seems limited to a small part of the economy and a declining share of the female labor force, primarily the rural sector. Only about 15 percent of women work in agriculture nowadays, as opposed to about 25 percent two decades ago. Also, the share of age group 10–19 in female agricultural employment has declined at about the same pace, though slower than in other sectors (table 3.5).

The manufacturing sector was the scene of a dramatic decline in female employment. As figure 3.1 indicates, manufacturing was by far the largest source of employment for women before the 1980s. It started to decline after the mid-1960s, a process that sharply accelerated after the Revolution, with a temporary recovery between 1986 and 1996. The same pattern can be seen in the share of women in the total manufacturing labor force (table 3.6). A closer look at the situation captured in the census data reveals that between 80 and 90

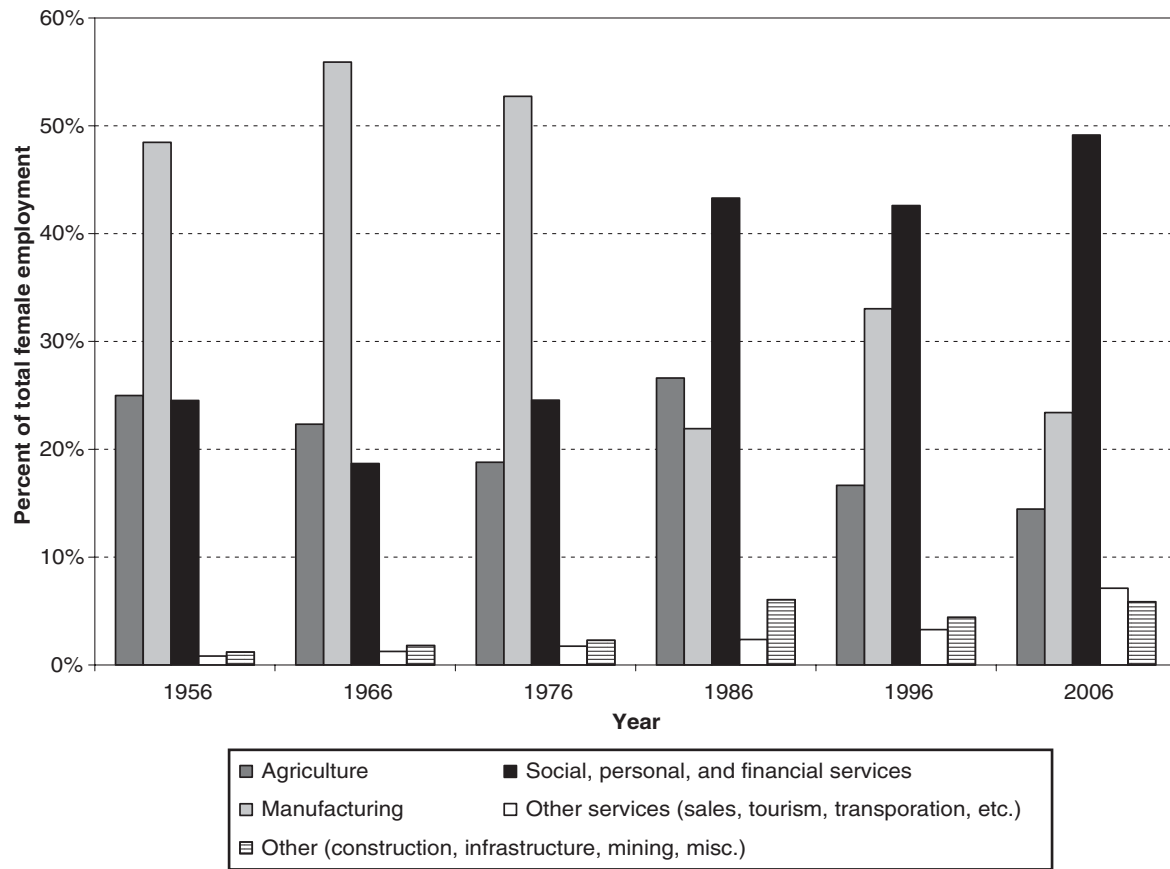


FIGURE 3.1. Composition of women's employment across non-oil sectors.

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

TABLE 3.6. Women's share in aggregate and sectoral employment of population age 10 years and over (percent).

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Total economy	9.7	13.3	13.8	8.9	12.1	13.6
Agriculture	4.3	6.4	7.6	8.2	8.8	10.9
Manufacturing	34.1	40.1	38.2	14.8	22.8	18.7
Social, personal, and financial services	21.5	18.3	18.3	13.4	21.0	28.2
Education, health care, and social services		27.9	39.5	37.5	43.0	48.6
Urban	10.3	11.8	11.2	8.8	11.3	13.9
Agriculture	3.5	4.8	4.6	4.1	4.6	5.7
Manufacturing	15.6	19.4	16.2	6.4	11.3	13.5
Social, personal, and financial services	22.7	19.6	19.2	15.9	23.8	30.2
Education, health care, and social services			43.1	41.2	46.7	50.6
Rural	9.4	14.2	16.0	9.1	13.4	12.8
Agriculture	4.4	6.5	7.9	8.7	9.4	12.0
Manufacturing	59.6	67.6	63.3	31.3	45.2	35.1
Social, personal, and financial services	19.0	13.9	12.5	5.0	9.7	15.9
Education, health care, and social services			22.2	18.8	24.4	33.3

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

percent of women's manufacturing employment in the past had consisted of very low paying jobs in rural areas for very young, uneducated women in carpet and cottage-industry textile production. Indeed, teenagers constituted a rising share of the female employment in manufacturing until 1986, especially in rural areas where it reached over 60 percent (see table 3.5). However, there has been a sharp decline in teenage female employment, from 55 percent of female employees in manufacturing in 1986 to only 20 percent in 2006. This has been partly due to rural-urban and sectoral shifts in employment location as well as the downward trends in teenage employment in both rural and urban areas.

It is also notable that even the large increase in female employment in manufacturing between 1986 and 1996 was essentially due to such employment (accounting for almost 85 percent of the increase in total manufacturing employment for women from 216,320 in 1986 to 583,156 in 1996). Indeed, the ups and downs in women's manufacturing employment are closely correlated

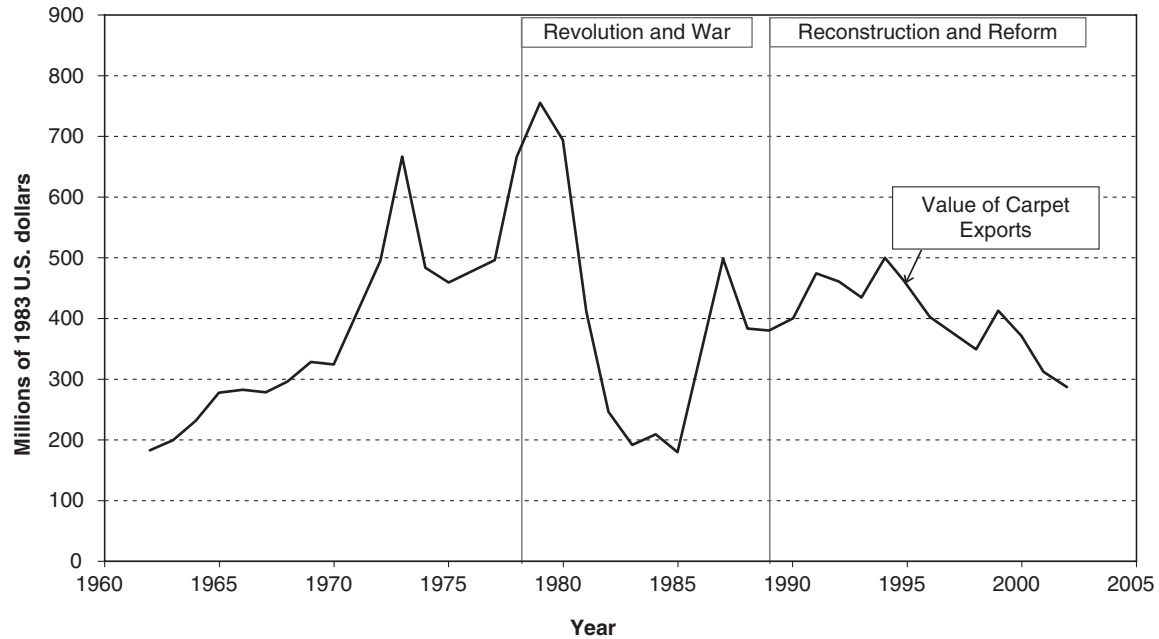


FIGURE 3.2. Value of Iran's carpet exports in constant 1983 U.S. dollars.

Source: NBER–United Nations trade data (see <http://cid.econ.ucdavis.edu/>), Customs Administration, Islamic Republic of Iran (see <http://www.irica.gov.ir/>).

with carpet exports (see figure 3.2). Both variables were on the rise, reached high levels in the 1960s, and then declined in the 1970s as oil revenues rose and the Iran's real exchange appreciated (i.e., wages and local costs increased relative to prices of tradable goods). After the Revolution, there was a sharp drop owing to economic turmoil, restrictive policies, and foreign sanctions. The industry experienced some recovery in the early 1990s, but then started a process of slow decline as competition from other countries, especially China, intensified.

As illustrated in figure 3.1, it is the social, personal, and financial service activities (making up about 50 percent of the total service sector position) that provide the largest share of employment for women since 1986, reaching almost 50 percent of the total in 2006. Other services, especially sales and restaurants, have also been a rising source of employment for women, though their share still remains relatively small. As further shown in table 3.6, the social, personal, and financial service sectors had a declining female employment share during the two decades prior to the Revolution. The decline continued for another decade after the Revolution, but then it picked up and sharply increased. These processes have happened in both in rural and urban areas, though women have a much greater presence in these services—almost twice in terms of employment share—in urban areas than in rural areas.

The service-sector share of female employment is critical because it illustrates that although its relative productivity and value-added share were high before the Revolution, women's share of employment was declining. In the aftermath of the Revolution, and once its relative productivity dramatically decreased, women's share in its employment increased. This seems typical of female labor, when a sector's productivity decreases, women's employment gets clustered around it (Anker 1998). However, it is notable that since the mid-1980s, the rapid rise in the share of women in this sector has been associated with increased valued-added share and an upward edge in relative factor productivity.

A key segment of the social, personal, and financial service sectors where women's presence is particularly visible is education, health care, and social services. Indeed, jobs in these activities constitute 60 to 70 percent of all female employment in the service sector. As further shown in table 3.6, the share of women employed in those activities has been on the rise, except for a small drop after the Revolution. In recent years, that share has reached almost 50 percent in the economy as a whole. In urban areas, the share is even higher than 50 percent. The increased presence of female service providers in these areas has had important consequences for their expansion, especially in rural and low-income urban areas. In particular, much of the rising education among girls has been because teachers are women and Islamization has made attending schools more acceptable to the socially conservative population. One example of this process is the nationwide literacy campaign, which was conceived as a *jihad* and in many cases its classes were held in mosques. These classes were

extremely accessible to religious and low-income women, and since it was viewed as a religious duty, women were able to attend the classes even when their families might have wanted to prevent them. As a result, basic literacy and educational programs for such groups became very successful in part because of sexual segregation (Poya 1999; Bahramitash 2003; Mehran 2003). Islamization and segregation also facilitated the expansion women's employment in education, health, and social services. On the demand side, the government had to hire large numbers of women to implement the segregation policies. On the supply side, more women from conservative backgrounds could come forward because the workspace could be confined to women and the professional positions were highly respected. Whether in the long run segregation will be sustained, and will prove harmful for further progress in women's economic lives, remains to be seen. However, there are already some signs that women's growing role as professionals is bringing down some barriers (e.g., female doctors attending male patients and a rising number of women in traditionally male professions such as engineering). Interestingly, the new atmosphere has even enabled rural women to migrate to urban areas, seek employment in these professions, and live independently, as we have observed in our field observations in various cities in Iran. We will return to this issue when we analyze the data on organizational positions and the occupations of employed women.

THE AGE STRUCTURE OF THE FEMALE LABOR FORCE AND DIFFERENTIAL COHORTS EXPERIENCES

In this section, we examine in detail Iranian women's experiences with LFP, employment, and unemployment. Table 3.7 offers an overview of the situation for working-age women (defined as those age 10 years and over). It shows that, in line with the share of women in the labor force examined earlier, the female LFP rate (share of working-age women participating in the labor market, whether employed or unemployed) had risen from 9.2 percent in 1956 to 12.6 percent in 1966, but then grew more slowly to 12.9 in 1976. It declined sharply after the Revolution and bottomed out at around 8.2 percent in 1986 and started to gradually recover afterwards, reaching 8.7 percent in 1991, 9.1 percent in 1996, and 12.5 in 2006. By this measure, the female LFP rate is still somewhat below its pre-Revolutionary peak. However, as we have seen earlier, the picture changes when we set aside women below 10 years of age. We explore this issue in more detail below.

The situation appears even less favorable for women's employment if one looks at the share of those of working age who actually have found jobs. That share actually peaked at 11.5 percent in 1966 and then declined to 10.8 in 1976 before falling precipitously to 6.1 percent in 1986. Although the share of women with jobs has risen since the mid-1980s, it was still no more than 9.6 percent in

2006. The decline after Revolution was actually more drastic than these figures suggest, because the census data for 1966 and 1976 classified seasonally unemployed workers who were not seeking jobs as unemployed, while in other census years they were listed as employed. As a result, the employment rates in 1966 and 1976 were in fact somewhat higher than those reported in table 3.7. However, since data are collected in the fall of each census year, the problem largely pertains to agricultural workers in rural areas. In urban areas, there was not much unemployment before the Revolution anyway, and one can say with great certainty that the share of women holding jobs in 2006 was higher than in 1976, particularly if the age group below 20 is left out. However, unemployment (the divergence between LFP rate and the share of working-age women with employment), which had increased during 1956–1986 and declined between 1986 and 1996, has again risen sharply in the past decade. This, of course, reflects the many remaining difficulties that women face in finding jobs. But it also suggests notably that despite those difficulties, more women demand employment for pay.

Table 3.7 presents the LFP rate, employment share, and unemployment rate for men as well as women to provide a source of comparison. Note that the

TABLE 3.7. Labor force participation rate, share of population employed, and unemployment rate of population age 10 years and over (percent).

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Labor force participation rate						
All country—female	9.2	12.6	12.9	8.2	9.1	12.5
Urban areas—female	9.3	9.9	9.0	8.4	8.1	12.6
Rural areas—female	9.2	14.3	16.6	7.9	10.7	12.3
All country—male	83.9	77.4	70.8	68.4	60.8	66.1
Share of population holding jobs						
All country—female	9.2	11.5	10.8	6.1	7.9	9.6
Urban areas—female	9.2	9.6	8.5	5.9	7.1	9.8
Rural areas—female	9.2	12.7	13.0	6.3	9.2	9.2
All country—male	81.5	70.2	64.3	59.5	55.6	58.9
Unemployment rate						
All country—female	0.3	8.7	16.4	25.5	13.4	23.3
Urban areas—female	0.5	3.8	5.9	29.1	12.5	22.5
Rural areas—female	0.3	10.9	21.7	20.6	14.3	25.5
All country—male	2.9	9.3	9.1	12.9	8.5	10.8

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

rates at which men participated in the labor market and held jobs had declined steadily until 1996. Unlike women's situation in 1986, their LFP rate did not decline much after the Revolution, though their unemployment did rise noticeably. Since 1996, as the post-Revolution baby boom generation entered the labor market, men's LFP rate, share of population with jobs, and unemployment rate increased similarly to those of women, though they lost their shares to women in both employment and unemployment pools.

To explore some of the key factors behind the LFP and employment trends, we start by examining the role of age structure in detail. In figures 3.3 and 3.4, we graph the female LFP rate for various age groups in urban and rural areas. The graph for 1956 in figure 3.3 shows that the LFP pattern in urban areas had started in the 1950s with an LFP rate of around 8 percent for the age group less than 35 years and about 11.5 percent for those 35 to 60. In the 1960s, as the post-WWII baby boomers entered the labor market, the curve became flatter, around 10 percent, shifting upward for women in their 20s and downward for those over 35, especially the older cohorts. These shifts became much more pronounced in 1976, and the curve took a full humped shape, peaking for the large cohort born in the 1950s, aging around 20 to 24 at the time, and dropped sharply for women above 40, who seem to have retired in large numbers. By the time of 1986 census, many more urban women over 45 had left the labor market and there was somewhat less participation among those in their 20s, but the participation rate had gone up for the 30 to 44 age groups. This is important because it shows that the drop in the overall urban female LFP rate after the Revolution had come via retirement of women over 45 and schooling, child-bearing, or discouragement of cohorts below 30. Part of the decline may be due to the fact that many women in the 1980s worked as volunteers, especially in urban areas (Poya 1999; Paidar 1995; Rostami 2001). The early retirements or discouragements may have had ideological or political causes, but there was also a seemingly unintended policy factor: the government wanted to provide better income security to families with only one breadwinner and offered them some benefits, thus creating a disincentive for married women to seek employment or to keep their jobs (F. Moghadam 2004). It is possible that the 30–44 age groups might have participated more under different conditions. However, the observed increases in the LFP rates are still noteworthy. As we will see below, this pattern can be attributed to the education and work experience of 30–44 groups, which played an indispensable role in education, health care, and social service activities. In any event, ten years later, in 1996, there was somewhat less participation among those below 25, but a clear rise in the presence of those 30 to 55 years old.

From 1996 to 2006, women cohorts younger than 20 years did not increase their LFP rates by much, largely due to schooling. However, there were major increases in the rates for all urban age groups above 20, especially among the

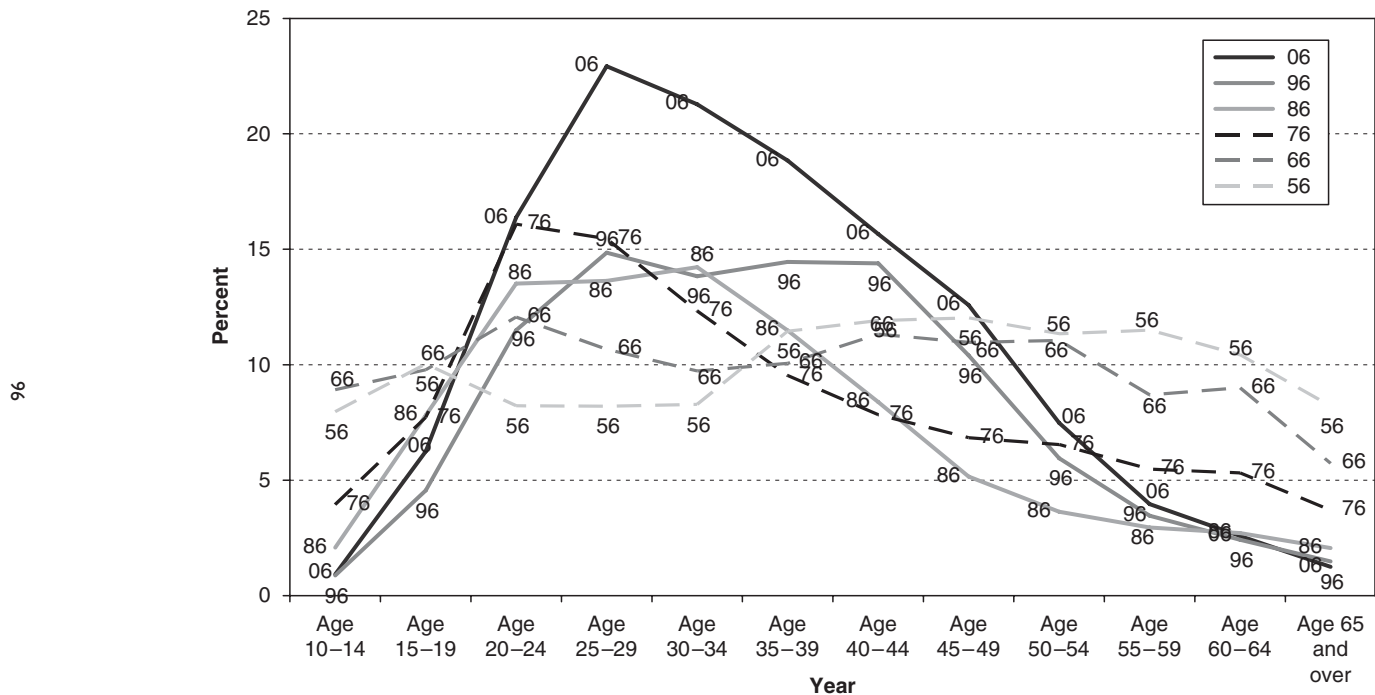


FIGURE 3.3. Age pattern of female labor force participation rate in urban areas, census years 1956–2006.

Source: SCL.

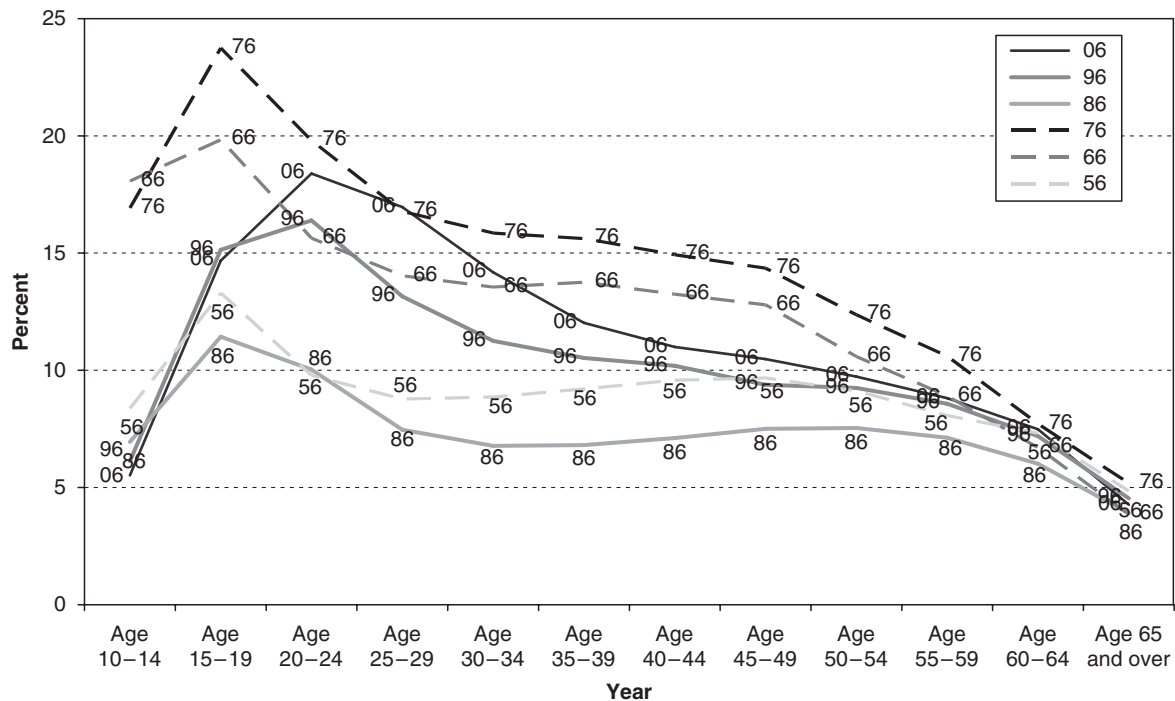


FIGURE 3.4. Age pattern of female labor force participation in rural areas, census years 1956–2006.

Source: SCL.

postrevolution baby boomers who had reached their 20s and finished their schooling. Benefiting from their higher levels of education, women in that generation were entering the labor market in large numbers. In addition, there have been concomitant increases in marriage age and divorce rate, leading to a significant rise in the share of single women in the population and contributing to women's incentives to join the labor market (Salehi-Isfahani 2005b). Census data show that while in 1976 single women comprised 66.2 percent of the female cohort aged 15–19 and 22.5 percent of those aged 20–24, by 2006 those percentages had reached 82.6 and 50.2 percent, respectively. The increases for women in their 30s are even more striking: in 1976, 2 percent of women in that age group were never married and 0.8 percent were divorced, compared to 9 and 1.4 percent, respectively, in 2006. (See also Kazmipour 2007.) These changes are important because the LFP rates of never married and divorced women are higher than those of married women. In 2006, 11.3 percent of married women participated in the labor force compared to 14.8 percentage for the never married group and 33 percent for divorced women.

In rural areas, as shown in figure 3.4, the situation was quite different. Participation rates had started in the 1950 at a relatively flat 10 percent, with a hump for the 15–19 age group. The curve shifted up in 1960s significantly for all age groups, particularly the younger cohorts. That process continued in the 1970s with the peak for ages 15–19 getting much more pronounced. The 1980s saw a major drop in LFP rate for all age groups, especially the younger ones. In fact, the participation curve fell entirely below its 1956 position. The difference between this pattern and the urban curve for the middle age groups is interesting and important. It shows that the decline in female LFP was a broad rural phenomenon. Since Islamization was not much of an issue in rural production, it further indicates that economic conditions must have been the key factors. In particular, it seems to reflect the smaller role of education and experience in rural production and the impact of worsening conditions for the carpet and handicraft industries owing to a disruption in trade and a shortage of raw materials during the Iran-Iraq War (Amuzegar 1997). In this respect, it is notable that with economic recovery after the later 1980s, the process of increased participation resumed, though this time the rise was larger for the 20–34 age group and the peak belonged to those 20 to 24 years old, as the younger cohort increased their school attendance.

Note that the highest LFP rate in any age group of women since the Revolution is about 23 percent for urban women 25 to 29 years old in 2006. This is still relatively low compared to participation rates in many other countries. However, as will see below, it is much more concentrated around women with higher skills and education. The participation rates shown in figures 3.3 and 3.4 are also much lower than those estimated based on SECH data by Salehi-Isfahani (2005b), who finds the countrywide LFP rate for women aged 25 to 64 to be 24.6 percent.

An alternative way of looking at the age-LFP relationship is to focus on the experiences of various cohorts. We do this separately for urban and rural areas in figures 3.5 and 3.6. Figure 3.5 shows that the generation of urban women born in the 1920s had its peak participation rate in the 1960s, when members of the cohort were in their 40s. The cohort born in the 1930s also peaked their LFP rate in the 1960s, when they were in their 30s. In 1970s, they withdrew from the market at a much earlier age than those born in the 1920s. The 1930s cohort was much better off, but was not much more educated than its predecessor, partly because of the economic and educational disruption as it came of age in the 1940s, owing to WWI and political turmoil. The next cohort born in the 1940s took a higher path, but a more important change was coming with the cohort born in the 1950s. That generation's LFP is likely to have continued to rise like other cohorts reaching their 30s. But the economic and cultural turmoil of the 1980s proved fateful for them, and their LFP rate dropped somewhat in that decade. Still, their presence in the labor market was responsible for the increase in the LFP rate of middle-aged urban women in the 1980s and 1990s. For the following cohorts born after 1960s, the LFP rate has continuously declined in their teen years and has increased in their 20s. Perhaps the most promising observation in this graph is that the generation born in the 1980s, now in its 20s, is participating in the labor market more than the 1950s generation did when it was the same age in the 1970s. It seems that the changes in education and social attitudes are enabling larger numbers of women to participate in labor markets and gain economic and personal independence.

Figure 3.6 shows the contrasting situation for rural cohorts of women born before the 1970s. Unlike their urban counterparts, they seem to have increased and decreased the LFP more or less together, regardless of age, based on the economic conditions prevailing at the time. There were, of course, higher participation rates among younger generations during the boom years of 1960s and 1970s, but those same groups lowered their participation sharply during the 1980s and returned to the labor market, though in muted ways, in the following decades. For the cohorts born in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s, the situation seems to be different: they seem to be acting increasingly similar to their urban peers, starting at a lower rate of LFP when they are teenagers and entering at a high rate when they reach their 20s. This may indicate a homogenization of the labor market for women as rural areas grow and gain access to better infrastructure and social services.

We now turn to the age structure of employment and unemployment among female labor-force participants. As we have seen earlier, unemployment rates rose from very low levels in 1956 to relatively large levels in 1976. Part of this was due to mislabeling of many seasonal workers, but correcting for that is still likely to show an increase in unemployment during 1966–1976. To explore this issue further and identify the role of age in female

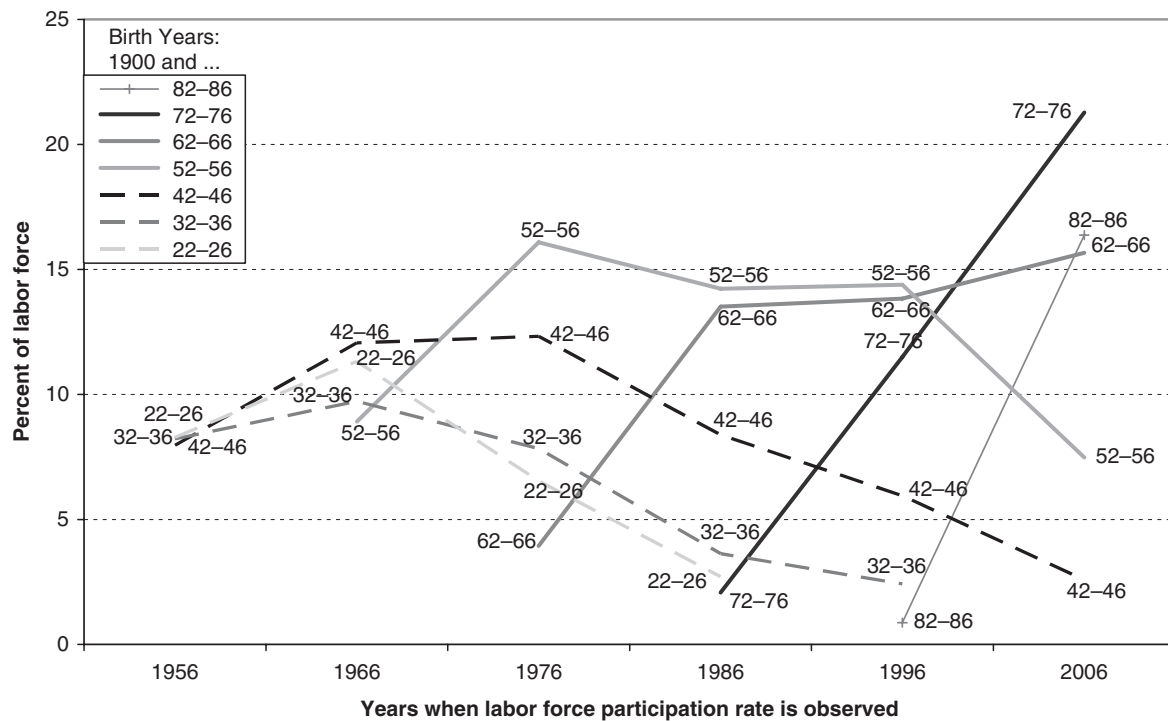


FIGURE 3.5. Profiles of labor force participation rates of urban women cohorts born in different decades.

Source: SCI.

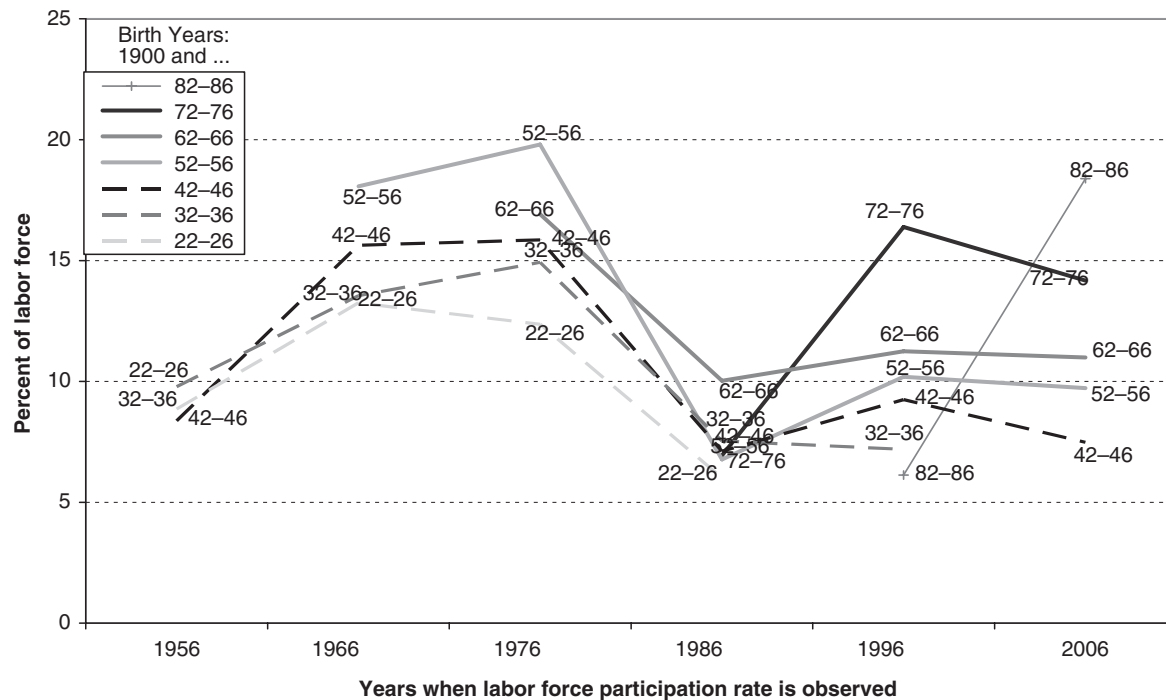


FIGURE 3.6. Profiles of labor force participation rates of rural women cohorts born in different decades.

Source: SCI.

employment and unemployment, in figures 3.7 and 3.8, we graph the shares of working-age females employed and in the labor force during 1966–1986 in urban and rural areas. The first notable fact in figure 3.7 is that the distance between LFP and employment lines for urban areas in 1966 and 1976 was quite small except for those below 25, reflecting the tight labor market in those years. The larger and almost uniform distance between the corresponding lines for rural areas shown in figure 3.8 is likely to be in part due to the inclusion of many seasonal workers among the unemployed. However, the increase in the distance for 1976 cannot easily be explained by this effect. Rather, it may have been caused by structural shifts induced by the oil boom that drastically lowered the prices of tradables and rendered agricultural and handicraft production unprofitable. In this regard, it is interesting to note that, despite the tighter labor in 1976 in urban areas that ended up lowering the overall male unemployment rate compared to 1966 (see table 3.7), rural male unemployment increased in that period from 11.2 to 12.6 percent. This increase was much smaller than the one experienced for rural women, for two reasons. First, before the Revolution, rural men migrated out much more than rural women, thus escaping unemployment more often. Second, men moved away from seasonal jobs in agriculture and left a bigger share of those jobs to be filled by women, leading to increased overcounting for unemployed women.

An examination of the LFP and employment curves for 1986 in figures 3.7 and 3.8 adds two new insights. First, the increase in female unemployment in the 1980s was a problem mainly for the younger entrants to the labor market in both rural and urban areas. Women above 30 did not face much unemployment; many had retired and those who had quit or lost their jobs had left the labor market altogether. Second, for women below 30 years of age, the pattern of participation in 1986 was rather similar to the 1976 pattern, but jobs had vanished in a major way and had led to high unemployment. In contrast, rural LFP and employment lines had shifted down more in tandem. In other words, compared to urban areas, the female labor supply in rural areas seems to have been far more responsive to job availability. This is likely to be due to opportunities in rural areas for work around home and in the fields that make rural women flexible labor suppliers, but do not get captured as employment in census data. Since the move out of the labor market was quite large in the 1980s, the low employment and LFP rates recorded in those years may be underestimates.

The LFP and employment patterns in urban and rural areas after the 1980s are depicted in figures 3.9 and 3.10. A key observation in these figures is that since the 1980s, in both urban and rural areas, unemployment has continued to be low for those 30 years and over. However, it has become an increasingly serious problem for the younger generations who have

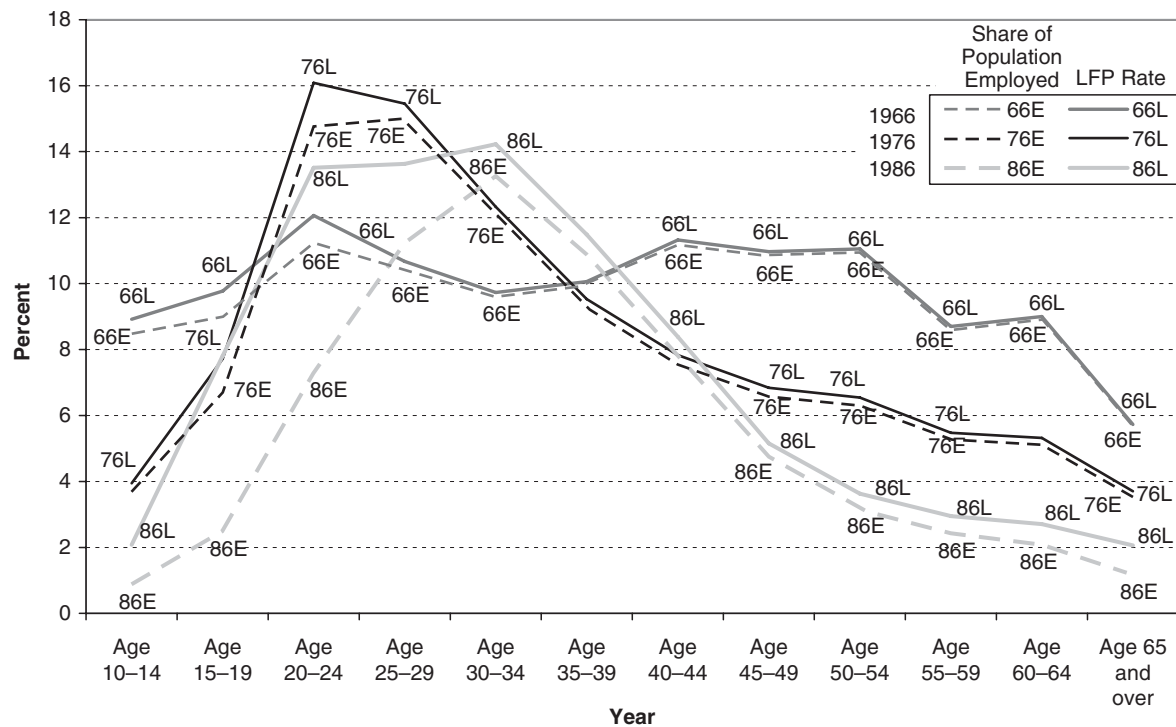


FIGURE 3.7. Age pattern of female employment and labor force participation rate, census years 1966–1986.

Source: SCL.

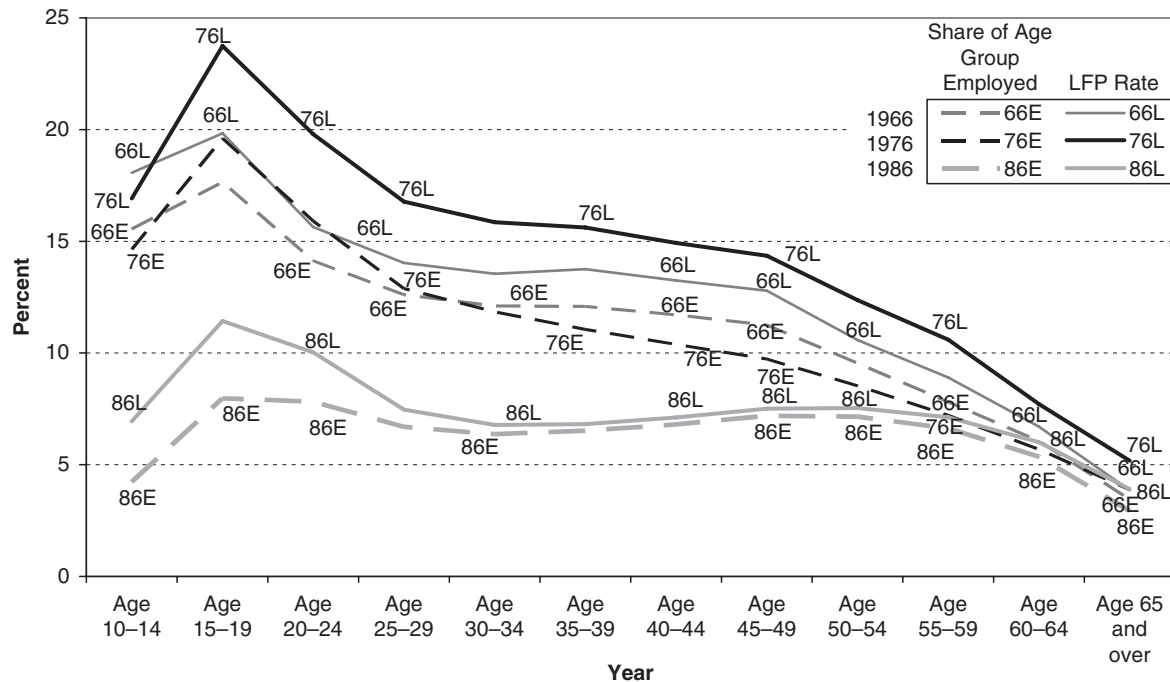


FIGURE 3.8. Age pattern of female employment and labor force participation rate in rural areas, census years 1966–1986.

Source: SCI.

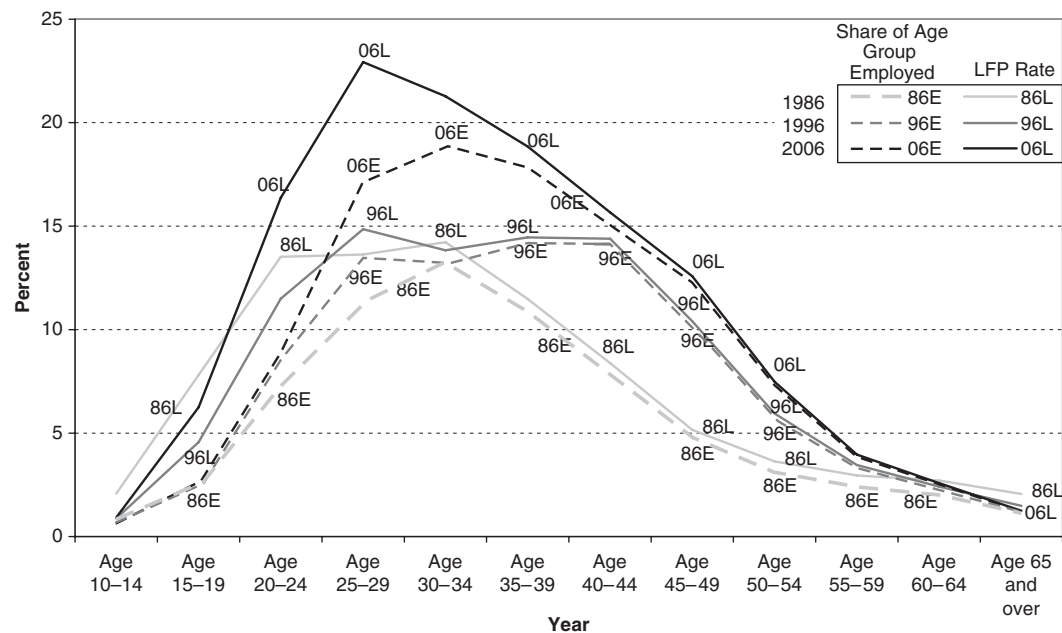


FIGURE 3.9. Age pattern of female employment rate in urban areas, census years 1986–2006.

Source: SCI.

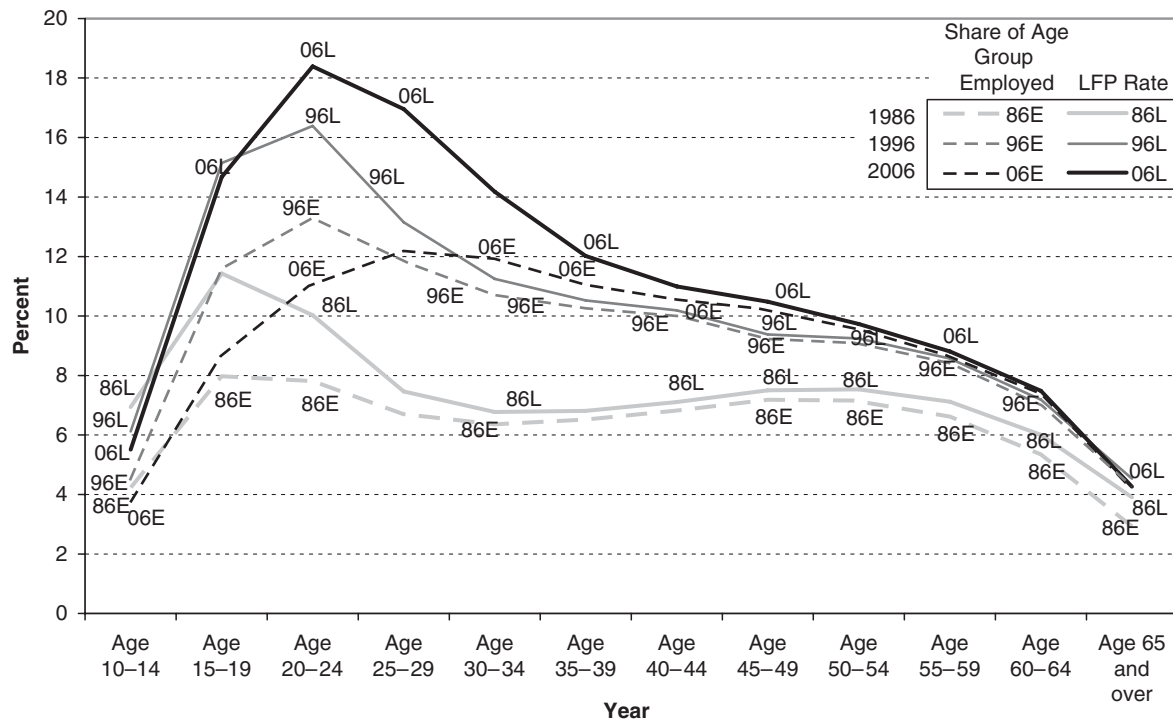


FIGURE 3.10. Age pattern of female employment and labor force participation rate in rural areas, census years 1986–2006.

Source: SCL.

entered the labor market in large numbers. In urban areas, job opportunities have expanded at fast rates, though not enough to keep up with the mass entry of new entrants. In rural areas, job opportunities have in fact shrunk for younger cohorts and, as a result, the ranks of the unemployed young women have swelled tremendously. The reason for this phenomenon seems to be a combination of two factors. One is the rising real exchange rate and increased foreign competition, as in the 1970s, which has led to the decline of rural carpet and handicraft industries (see figure 3.2). The other reason is related to a growing mismatch between the education and skills of young women in rural areas and the job options available to them. While the jobs are still largely low-pay manufacturing and agriculture positions, female job-market entrants are typically educated and seek more office work and service-sector positions (F. Moghadam 2007). This pattern seems to be driving a large migration of women from rural to urban areas, reversing the rise in the female-male ratio in rural areas that had been caused before the Revolution owing to massive male migration to urban areas (see the top rows of table 3.3). Interestingly, as we have noted earlier, Islamization seem to be facilitating this process, which should help lessen the mismatch problem in rural job markets for women.

A remarkable observation in the profiles examined above is that, for women who participated in the labor force in the 1950s and 1960s, retirement came quite late and those in their 50s and 60s remained as active as the younger generations. This is likely to have been because older women who sought jobs in those years mostly came from very low income families and had to support themselves. In the absence of adequate access to social security, pension, or safety nets, they had to continue working well into their old age. This situation began to change as the labor-market participants became more educated and managed to secure better jobs, especially in the public sector. The expansion of social security and rising incomes also provided the option for women to withdraw from the labor market. However, the biggest change came after the Revolution, when the government established special programs for the elderly, especially for women in rural areas, such as the Rajaii program funded by the government and managed by the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee (F. Moghadam 2004; Esfahani 2005). Since the Revolution, for most female employees retirement seems to come when they are in the 45–55 age range, as when they become eligible for retirement benefits and pensions.

To go beyond age structure and to control for some of the other factors affecting women's labor-force participation, we reconstruct the LFP rate and employed share figures using as the base population those identified in censuses as participants in the labor force or as homemakers, thus leaving out

TABLE 3.8. Female labor force participation versus homemaking (percent).

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
All country						
Share of labor force participants and homemakers in population	88.8	85.9	81.7	77.6	68.5	67.7
Participation rate	10.4	14.7	15.8	10.5	13.3	18.5
Share of working age population employed	10.3	13.4	13.2	7.8	11.5	14.2
Unemployment rate	0.3	8.7	16.4	25.5	13.4	23.3
Urban areas						
Share of labor force participants and homemakers in population	86.3	78.0	73.2	75.6	65.4	66.3
Participation rate	10.8	12.7	12.3	11.0	12.4	19.0
Share of working age population employed	10.7	12.3	11.6	7.8	10.9	14.7
Unemployment rate	0.5	3.8	5.9	29.1	12.5	22.5
Rural areas						
Share of labor force participants and homemakers in population	89.9	91.0	89.6	79.9	73.5	70.7
Participation rate	10.2	15.7	18.5	9.9	14.6	17.4
Share of working age population employed	10.2	14.0	14.5	7.9	12.5	12.9
Unemployment rate	0.3	10.9	21.7	20.6	14.3	25.5

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

the students, disabled, retired, and so on. The result is shown in table 3.8. The picture now changes, especially in light of 2006 census results. The new portrait shows that, based on our new measure, which excludes the “nonworking” population and focuses on work inside and outside the home, the female LFP rate had reached a high of 15.8 percent before the Revolution. It fell to a low of 10.5 percent in 1986, but has now surpassed 18.5 percent and stands much higher than its prerevolution levels. In other words, part of the decline in female LFP rate after the Revolution, and particularly its slow recovery, is attributable to the female population’s increased schooling and changes in the opportunities to retire or the inability to participate in the labor market. We examine the role of education in labor-market trends for women’s in the following section.

EDUCATION AND FEMALE LABOR FORCE

Schooling has been an important factor in the decline and slow recovery of women's LFP in the last three decades of the 20th century. To demonstrate the significance of this factor, in figure 3.11 we present the share of students in the female population aged 10 years and over. This share had been on the rise since 1930s, but it made a major jump and passed 10 percent in the 1970s, largely because of expanded education in urban areas. After the Revolution, the rate of female school attendance experienced a decline in urban areas and rose strongly in rural areas, such that the overall share of students to population increased. This is notable because, contrary to the observation made by Behdad and Nomani (2006: 130), it suggests that female schooling may have had an important impact on LFP rate in the 1980s, as it increased sharply in rural areas where the drop in LFP was particularly large.

The decline in the schooling of urban women may be related to the Iran-Iraq War during 1980–1988, when there were disruptions in the economy and many young women volunteered to support the effort. However, a more important factor seems to have been the closure of universities in the early 1980s because of the Islamic cultural revolution. This also explains why the drop in schooling had an urban focus, as universities are located in urban areas and rural women's education was more concentrated at primary and secondary levels rather than tertiary. It is interesting to note that, after the reopening of the universities and the end of the war, the number of women attending school rapidly increased again in both rural and urban areas during the late 1980s and first half of the 1990s. Of course, there was also a huge cohort of baby boomers born after the Revolution who grew to school age at that time. As a result of these factors, the share of female students in the population aged 10 years and over jumped from 16.6 percent in 1986 to 22.6 percent in 1996, offering an explanation for the slow rise of female LFP rate, as well as the lower unemployment rate during the 1990s. This trend, however, has reversed in a major way since 1996, as those students have graduated and many of them are now seeking jobs, as we have seen in figures 3.3 and 3.4.

The results of the female education effort in Iran can be seen in table 3.9. The first two rows of the table show that the female literacy rate has been rapidly increasing in Iran, especially among the employed. While almost 70 percent of employed women in 1976 were illiterate, that share dropped by half in 1986 to about 36 percent, confirming our earlier claim that the female jobs lost during 1976–1986 were largely those of unskilled and uneducated young women. That share was cut by more than half again to just over 12 percent during 1986–2006.

Secondary and tertiary education has also been expanding in parallel fashion, with higher education in particular accelerating in the past decade. More important, female employment has increasingly shifted toward educated groups. As table 3.9 shows, among employed women aged 10 years and over in 1976,

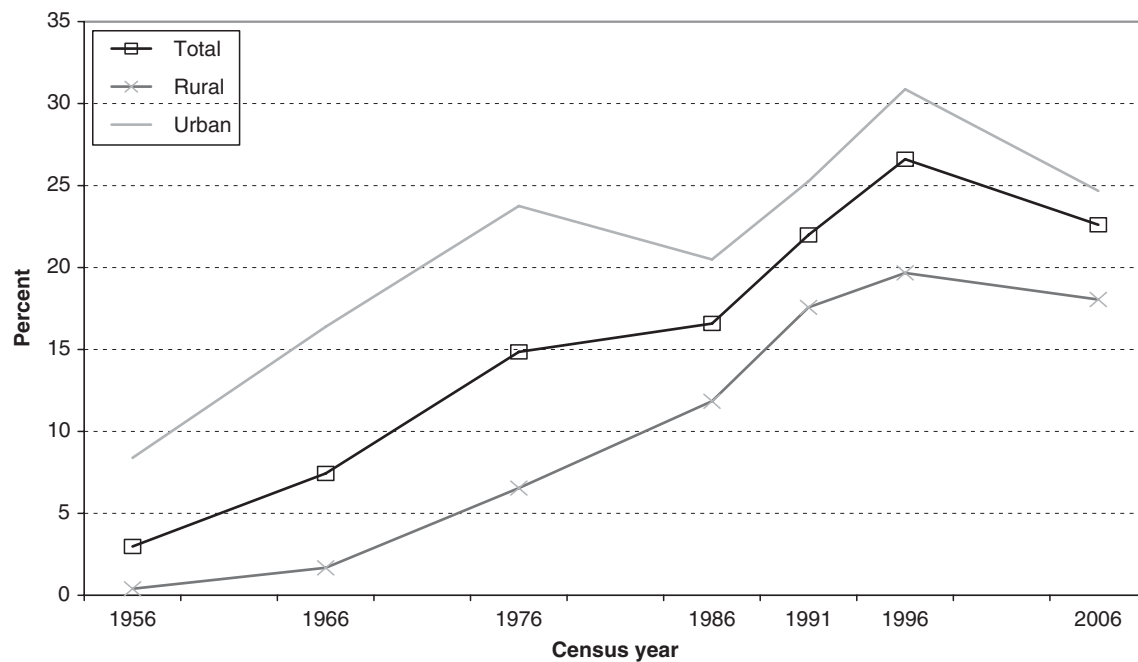


FIGURE 3.11. Share of students in female population age 10 years and over.

Source: SCI.

TABLE 3.9. Iranian women's educational attainment and employment.

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Literacy rate						
Female population 10 years and over	7.3	16.1	30.9	47.6	71.7	80.3
Employed female population 10 years and over	N/A	11.5	31.2	63.9	79.9	87.7
Share of women with secondary degree						
Female population 10 years and over	0.2	1.1	2.9	7.0	12.1	16.8
Employed female population 10 years and over	N/A	3.6	17.5	40.8	43.2	60.4
Share of women with higher education degree						
Female population 10 years and over	0.03	0.21	0.67	0.99	2.21	6.24
Employed female population 10 years and over	N/A	0.9	5.7	11.5	22.0	36.7
Female population 20 years and over	0.04	0.3	1.0	1.5	3.4	8.3
Employed female population 20 years and over	N/A	1.5	8.0	14.6	26.6	40.4
Share of men with higher education degree						
Male population 20 years and over	0.6	1.6	2.7	3.9	6.8	11.3
Employed male population 20 years and over	N/A	1.3	3.2	4.7	8.9	13.9
Share of women with higher education holding jobs	N/A	49.0	83.5	71.1	78.6	56.4

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

only 17.5 percent had a secondary degree and 5.2 percent had higher education degrees. By 1986, those shares had more than doubled to 40.8 and 11.5 percent, respectively, and in 2006 they reached 60.4 and 36.7 percent, respectively. For ages 20 and over, the share of women with higher degrees rose from about 8 in 1876 to 40.4 percent in 2006. By comparison, the corresponding shares for men have been much lower and have grown more slowly. Women now constitute well over 50 percent of university students and have been quickly catching up with men in terms of educational attainment (see the bottom rows of table 3.9). It is noteworthy that these census results are in sharp contrast with those derived by Salehi-Isfahani (2005b) from SECH data, suggesting that most of the increase in participation has come from less educated women. However,

our findings are consistent with his estimates of the large positive effects of education on LFP among Iranian women.

The increased education of women and their increased entry into the labor force has also had a favorable result with a visible decline in fertility rates since the late 1980s. As education and social services expanded, women lowered their fertility rates and found more time to attend school and join the labor force. Moreover, they have managed to help their children acquire better education, hence setting in motion a virtuous circle of increased human capital, lower fertility, and higher economic growth (Salehi-Isfahani 2005a).

The above observations highlight the increasing role of education for female employment in Iran. They suggest that, unlike the situation before the Revolution, schooling has become the key channel toward employment for Iranian women. Of course, not all educated women find employment. In fact, as the last row of table 3.9 indicates, the number of women with higher degrees who have found employment declined sharply between 1996 and 2006, as a mass of recent graduates has poured into the labor market. However, the fact that women's employment has been on the rise and that the unemployment rate has been low for those over 30 suggests that it is likely to be only a matter of time before the current cohort is placed. This outlook is further supported by the fact that the economy is shifting toward service activities, where educated women's skills and interests are more likely to match job possibilities and requirements. In the following section, we explore these issues further in the context of the occupational characteristics of female employment in Iran.

OCCUPATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE EMPLOYMENT

Census data suggest that women in Iran are not joining the pool of the world's cheap unskilled labor. In fact, they are moving away from that pattern. But in what types of work do they engage? To answer this question, we compiled the relevant data in tables 3.10 and 3.11.

The overall picture in table 3.10 indicates that, before the Revolution, employed women used to work mostly as industrial production and wage workers. Farming occupations came next, and professional and technical positions took up the third position. That situation changed dramatically after the Revolution, and in recent decades professional and technical jobs have come to dominate as the main occupations in which women find employment. For farming and industrial occupations, there was a switching of ranks, with farm jobs first becoming more important and then industrial ones. However, in the past decade, both occupations have lost their shares. As we have seen, this pattern was related to the temporary rise of agriculture in the 1980s and the decline of the carpet industry as a major employer of uneducated young women. It was also driven by the rise in female education and the expansion of the service

TABLE 3.10. Distribution of female employment by occupation.

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
All country	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations	0.00	0.05	0.11	0.16	2.35	3.36
Professional, technical, and related occupations	3.2	5.4	15.5	34.8	32.1	37.2
Administrative support occupations, including clerical	1.3	1.4	5.2	4.7	5.9	8.6
Service and sales occupations	19.9	0.6	6.2	4.4	4.4	8.4
Farming, forestry, and fishing occupations	27.4	20.6	18.7	26.7	14.4	11.6
Industrial production and transportation workers and simple laborers	47.6	63.6	52.9	23.4	37.2	26.9
Other, unspecified	0.7	1.7	1.4	5.9	3.6	3.8
Urban areas	N/A	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations	N/A	0.12	0.28	0.27	3.87	4.55
Professional, technical, and related occupations	N/A	13.2	36.9	59.9	52.8	49.3
Administrative support occupations, including clerical	N/A	3.7	13.5	8.6	10.0	11.5
Service and sales occupations	N/A	1.0	1.2	7.2	5.9	10.3
Farming, forestry, and fishing occupations	N/A	2.3	2.2	2.4	1.7	1.2
Industrial production and transportation workers and simple laborers	N/A	60.7	30.6	13.5	21.7	19.3
Other, unspecified	N/A	2.3	2.5	8.2	4.0	3.9
Rural areas	N/A	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Executive, administrative, and managerial occupations	N/A	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.40	0.57
Professional, technical, and related occupations	N/A	0.6	2.4	6.1	5.6	9.0
Administrative support occupations including clerical	N/A	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.6	1.7

(continued)

TABLE 3.10. (*continued*)

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Service and sales occupations	N/A	0.3	0.3	1.2	2.5	4.0
Farming, forestry, and fishing occupations	N/A	31.7	28.8	54.3	30.7	35.8
Industrial production and transportation workers and simple laborers	N/A	65.4	66.5	34.8	57.0	45.1
Other, unspecified	N/A	1.3	0.7	3.3	3.2	3.8

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

sector, where women find professional and technical occupations as educators and health-care and social service professionals. Indeed, the number of women in such occupations has been relatively high over the past four decades, rising from about 32 percent in 1966 to over 34 percent in 2006. The overall picture shows that female education has translated to some improvements in their work positions and the percentage of female workers in professional and technical occupations has increased. The percentage of women in executive and managerial positions has also been on the rise, though it remains relatively low. By 2006, women still held only 15 percent of such occupations. Administrative, clerical, and sales occupations are also gaining ground among jobs taken by women, but their shares are still rather small.

As one may expect, there is a major difference between women's occupations in rural and urban areas (table 3.10). In urban areas, the concentration of women's employment in professional and technically related jobs is much higher than for the national average. Rural women have been engaged far more in farming and industrial jobs. However, a remarkable fact is the emergence of such occupations in rural areas since the Revolution. Indeed, the data show a decline in the share of professional and technical occupations for urban women since 1986. But that is more than compensated for by the rise of such jobs for women in rural areas. This observation reflects the expansion of public services and the deeper penetration of the state in to the rural areas after the Revolution (more on this below).

Table 3.11 produces a picture of the relative positions of employed women in firms, by type ownership. The shares of women in total employment in each type of position are shown in figure 3.12. The salient facts about these graphs can be summarized as follows:

Unpaid family worker as an occupation for women had been rising sharply before the Revolution, and its share in figures for total female employment had

TABLE 3.11. Distribution of female employment by position categories.

Census year	1956	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Total country	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Employers	0.63	0.63	0.44	1.39	0.92	4.07
Self-employed	22.8	21.7	10.8	18.4	19.7	21.9
Private employees	53.3	47.2	26.6	10.1	14.1	22.5
Unpaid family workers	17.8	21.8	40.9	21.7	20.8	11.2
Total private	94.5	91.3	78.7	51.5	55.5	59.7
Public employees	5.4	6.2	20.3	41.3	39.6	37.3
Unspecified	0.1	1.0	1.0	7.2	4.5	3.0
Urban areas	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Employers	0.8	1.01	0.59	1.04	0.92	4.61
Self-employed	10.9	12.8	8.7	9.2	12.7	16.6
Private employees	72.5	59.5	29.8	7.8	13.1	25.3
Unpaid family workers	2.1	5.6	11.0	2.4	4.4	2.3
Total private	86.3	78.9	50.0	20.4	31.2	48.8
Public employees	13.5	17.6	48.6	70.0	63.2	48.6
Unspecified	0.2	1.2	1.4	9.6	5.2	2.6
Rural areas	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Employers	0.5	0.44	0.35	1.79	0.92	2.82
Self-employed	28.5	26.5	12.1	28.8	28.6	34.6
Private employees	44.1	41.3	24.6	12.8	15.6	15.9
Unpaid family workers	25.4	30.3	59.2	43.8	41.5	31.9
Total private	98.5	98.6	96.2	87.1	86.5	85.2
Public employees	1.4	0.5	3.0	8.5	9.3	10.9
Unspecified	0.1	1.0	0.8	4.4	3.5	3.9

Source: Data from the SCI Web site.

reached 40 percent in 1976. This pattern was particularly prevalent in rural areas. The trend has reversed since the Revolution, and the share has continued to drop. It is notable that this observation contradicts the result of SECH data showing increases in unpaid family work in recent years (Salehi-Isfahani 2005b). Although this type of employment remains relatively high in rural areas (over 30 percent), the massive urbanization of the labor force implies that relatively far fewer women are in that position nowadays than was the case even in the 1950s. Figure 3.12 further reveals that, before the Revolution, most of the increases in the number of unpaid family work were for women, as their share

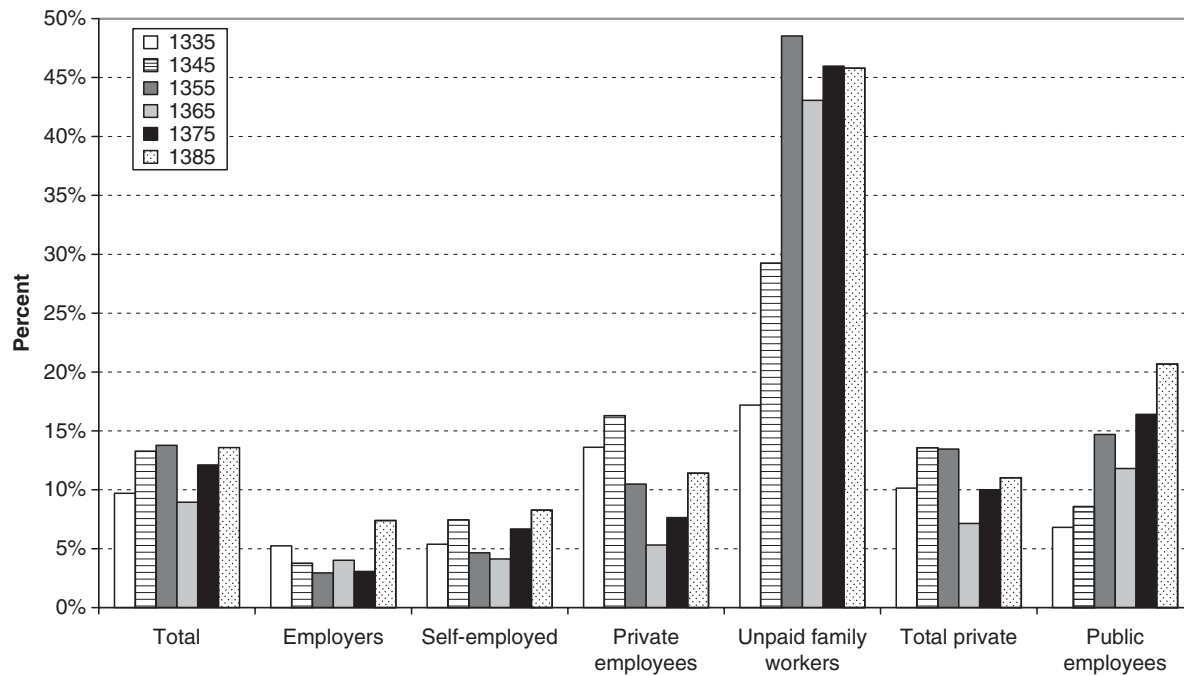


FIGURE 3.12. Countrywide share of women in employment by position categories.

Source: SCI.

in that type of position rose from about 18 percent in 1956 to about 50 percent in 1976. After dropping during 1976–1986, Their share stabilized at around 45 percent (in rural areas the share rose to 50 percent and in urban areas it dropped to about 30 percent).

Since the decline in unpaid family jobs was an important part of the decline in female LFP and employment after the Revolution, evaluating its costs and benefits warrants some attention. It is true that, as Behdad and Nomani (2006: 130) point out, unpaid family work is not unproductive, but its opportunity cost is not trivial, either. Such positions are typically given to teenagers at the cost of their education, personal development, and independence. The work experience and contribution to the family may have been worthwhile when those teenagers did not have educational or other options. However, with the expansion of educational and other public services, the lifetime costs of unpaid family work in manual labor positions are likely to exceed the output by a wide margin.

The share of women acting as employers has been low, but it has been rising over the past five decades, especially during 1996–2006, in both rural and urban areas. As figure 3.12 shows, among all employers (male and female), the share of women had declined before the Revolution and stabilized the two decades after the Revolution at about 3 percent in urban areas and 5 percent in rural areas. However, the census in 2006 shows that the share of women employers has jumped to about 7.5 percent in both rural and urban areas.

Self-employed women have made up over a fifth of total female employment, except in 1986 when the share seemed to have gone down dramatically to about 10 percent. In the past, most of these jobs have been in agriculture and manufacturing. As a result, the share has been much higher for rural women (30–35 percent) than for urban women (10–17 percent). The share was declining before the Revolution, but it increased afterwards in both rural and urban areas and reached its highest levels so far in 2006. This rise has been faster than the growth of total self-employment jobs in the country, for both men and women. As a result, the percentage of women women in self-employment positions has increased (see figure 3.12). Salehi-Isfahani (2005b) observes a similar trend using SECH data.

Women working as salary and wage employees in private firms made up a shrinking share of total female employment before the Revolution. This trend was followed by a sharp drop in the share after the Revolution, but it has been rising steadily since 1986 in both rural and urban areas. This is in contrast to the implications of SECH data analyzed by Salehi-Isfahani (2005b). The share of women in private employee positions has also been rising since the 1980s; however, it is still below its pre-Revolution peak in 1966 in both rural and urban areas.

Until the mid-1960s, employment in the public sector constituted no more than 7 or 8 percent of total female employment in Iran, with about 90 percent

in urban areas. At that time, 99 percent of rural female employment was in the private sector. The situation changed during 1966–1976, and women's share of public-sector employment rose to over 20 percent in the mid-1970s. The change accelerated in a major way after the Revolution, and the share went to over 44 percent in 1986, reaching 77 percent in urban areas and 9 percent in rural areas. This is particularly notable because it indicates that the decrease in female employment after the Revolution was largely a private-sector phenomenon. Indeed, in 1986, there were 4.3 time more female public-sector employees than in 1976 (246 thousand vs. 57 thousand), while total female employment had grown by only 33 percent (from 900,000 to 1.2 million). There was a significant decline in private-sector positions for women: 34 percent for self-employment, 25 percent in private-sector employee positions, and 7 percent in employer positions. The only rising job category for women in the private sector was unpaid family worker. However, it should be noted that the first decade of the Revolution was a time of sharp decline in private-sector employment and a swelling of public-sector ranks for men as well. In fact, the share of women in all public-sector jobs declined from about 15 percent in 1976 to about 12 percent in 1986 (figure 3.12).

Since 1986, the share of public-sector positions in total female employment has been gradually declining, reaching 38.5 in 2006. Interestingly, this has been only an urban phenomenon, where the female share of public-sector employment dropped to just below 50 percent in 2006. In rural areas, on the contrary, the share has been on the increase, rising above 11 percent in 2006. However, in both rural and urban areas, women have been taking a larger share of the public-sector jobs (figure 3.12). In 2006, the proportion of women among public-sector employees in urban, rural, and the economy as a whole stood at 22.5, 11, and 20.7 percent, respectively.

Despite the rise of private-sector employment for females since 1986, it still remains far below pre-Revolutionary levels. However, women have increased their presence among employers and the self-employed to levels far exceeding the pre-Revolution levels in both rural and urban areas.

CONCLUSION

Several points can be drawn from our analysis of Iran's census data. First, there has been a gradual shift of female employment away from agricultural and manufacturing sectors, especially the export-oriented carpet industry, and to the service sector, particularly education, health, and social services. This trend provides a good match between the economy's growth and women's increasing education and expanded job preferences. The trend is particularly notable because it is the opposite of what happens in many developing countries, where

economic growth has been brought on by channeling cheap female labor into manufacturing for exports. The contrary trend in Iran has been consistent with the country's economic growth because of a constellation of factors, particularly large oil revenues, a demographic transition, and rapid expansion of female education.

Second, there was a broad decline in female LFP and employment in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic revolution. In the literature, this has been widely attributed to the impact of Islamization. While it is true that many middle-class and elite women in urban areas were either forced or chose to leave their jobs, the effect seems to have been quantitatively small relative to the impact of disruptions in trade, which severely affected the industries that had served as main sources of employment for women before the Revolution. This view is supported by a host of evidence. In particular, the decline in female employment was much larger and broader in rural areas, especially in carpet and handicraft manufacturing activities, where Islamization was not as issue. Also, the reduction in female employment was entirely a private-sector phenomenon, public-sector employment of women increased more than fourfold.

Third, expansion of education played a major role in reducing female LFP in rural areas during 1980s and in both rural and urban areas in the 1990s. Islamization facilitated that process, and in this way may have had an indirect effect on LFP as well. However, in that role, it helped only to postpone the entry of women into the labor force, which is now being realized. Rising education has positively effected women's employment and has increased their employment in professional and technical jobs. Women have also been rising in managerial and executive ranks, though the overall percentage in those of women positions remains low. There remain some visible and some less visible (glass-ceiling) social and cultural barriers to their progress in those directions (Ghorbani and Tung 2007).

Fourth, although increased education for women is providing unique opportunities for economic growth in Iran for the coming decades, at present their entry into the labor force offers many policy challenges as well. The economy has so far been slow to create jobs for the large cohorts of postrevolution baby boomers. The private sector has been too weak to take advantage of the opportunities, and the government has lacked a coherent and effective policy to turn this potential source of rapid growth into an actual force. Increased oil revenues in the recent years have helped by allowing the government to spend more and finance both public and private investment. They have also shifted the economy in the direction of service-sector growth, which has helped reduce mismatches between jobs created and the education and aspirations of labor-market participants, especially educated women.

NOTES

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1. By “Islamization” we mean the effort by Islamists (i.e., those who view Islam not just as a voluntary religion, but also as a political and social system) to apply rules that they view as Islamic on society, groups, and individuals.

2. For example, using the SECH data, Salehi-Isfahani (2005b) finds the countrywide LFP rate for women ages 25–64 in 2001 to be 24.6 percent, which is far higher than the 14 percent one finds based on 2006 census data.

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Part II



SOCIETY

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WOMEN, RELIGION, AND POLITICAL AGENCY IN IRAN

Shahla Haeri

As one of the 13 women elected to the Sixth Majles, the so-called reformist parliament (2000–2004),¹ Elaheh Koulaee, a professor of political science at Tehran University, publicized her intention to replace her all-enveloping black chador—the “power suit” worn by women in the parliament—with the “Islamic veiling,” meaning a long overcoat, pants, and scarf.² There was an immediate hue and cry from some male politicians and journalists and from some women who threatened to harm her should she go through with her decision. Koulaee resisted pressures, insisted on sporting Islamic veiling, and prevailed. “Many of my friends told me that I was walking on a land mine,” she said in an interview. “I told them that I was willing to step on a mine to show that Islam does recognize the right of the individual, and that Islam rises above these kinds of oppressions and superstitions that are forced on people in the name of religion. I wanted to show that clothing doesn’t have to be a uniform. I, as an individual belonging to the generation of the Revolution with [progressive] ideals and beliefs regarding women’s rights in Islam, can never agree to these kinds of oppressions that force people to look alike.”³

“Before I was elected to the Sixth Majles,” said the former MP Fatemeh Haghighatjoo, “I strongly believed in a religious government (*hokumat-e dini*), but my experience of four years in the parliament convinced me that religion (*din*) and state (*dowlat*) must be separate. I am not talking about eliminating religion, but when a state uses religion as a means to an end, it alienates people from both the religion and the state.”⁴

On June 12, 2006, a small group of women and their male supporters gathered in a major square in Tehran to demand legal equality between the genders. Perceiving their demand as subversive, the state harshly broke up their peaceful congregation, using female police to “manhandle” the demonstrators. Some 73 people were arrested, 28 of whom were, significantly, the women’s male supporters.⁵ After a short detention, the majority of activists were conditionally

released, though their saga has continued. On March 4, 2007, many of the same women were arrested again, this time in anticipation of their planned ceremony for the upcoming International Women's Day on March 8.⁶ The activist women, in the meantime, had mobilized and launched a campaign to collect one million signatures in order to force the legislature to change the unequal and restrictive personal laws.⁷

During the summer of 2000, when President Mohammad Khatami was at the height of his popularity, I attended a session in a poor neighborhood in south Tehran regarding women's legal rights, organized by a local feminist activist.⁸ It was a hot summer day, and a large number of women—almost all in long black veils (*chador*) and some with children—had come to learn of their rights. The guest speaker was a woman lawyer who restricted her presentation to a formulaic recitation of the rules and regulations regarding marriage, divorce, and the like. Women began to fidget and talk among themselves. Finally a young woman in full black *chador* stood up and said, "Just tell me what my rights are when my husband beats me up, when he prevents me from leaving the house, not even allowing me to go and visit my mother!" The speaker apparently had no satisfactory answer. What was significant and enlightening to me was the degree to which these women, primarily from lower and working classes, wanted to find ways out of their daily conflicts and dilemmas. The fact that they had taken time in the middle of the day to come and listen to a woman lawyer underscores their heightened consciousness and the potential for their mobilization.

Women such as the ones mentioned above, whose political activities and engagement with institutions of power I will describe in the following pages, have done much to "refresh" the sociopolitical climate in Iran, to borrow a metaphor from Sohrab Sepehri.⁹ I believe, as do many others, that a robust and vibrant women's movement is emerging in the Islamic Republic of Iran despite renewed implementation of serious legal restrictions and discriminatory political practices.¹⁰ Although the women's movement as a whole may not yet have a publicly acknowledged leadership or a definite political structure, its influence has undeniably been felt by the religious hierarchy that controls the state. President Khatami's landslide election of 1997 is generally deemed a result of the active participation of women and youth.

The broader goal of this chapter is to show the relationships among religion, state, and women in Iran since the Revolution in 1979, thereby highlighting the growing women's awareness of and dissatisfaction with the injustices in their legal and political status and in their social relations. In the geopolitics of the Middle East, Iran provides a unique political case, argue Gheissari and Nasr (2006), in that the state's experimentation with Islamization during the past three decades seems to have, in fact, encouraged development of a dynamic and vibrant, if at times battered, democracy movement. The emerging women's

movement, not quite organized yet, forms a significant part of this larger move toward democracy in Iran.

Iranian women are, of course, far from monolithic, either in their ethnicity and class or in their aspirations, discourses, and objectives. Irrespective of their station in life, however, the family statutes and personal laws apply to them all. Legally, for example, women must secure their husbands' written permission in order to leave the country, regardless of their socioeconomic status and professional achievements. Likewise, they automatically lose custody of their children at the age of seven in the event of a divorce. Paradoxically, while the state has adamantly refused to amend gender laws, it has supported girls' education on a national scale (Howard 2002).¹¹ The overall female literacy rate is 77 percent, increasing to 97 percent for ages 15–24. Women constitute well over a 65 percent of the student body in the collages.¹² Given that the annual college entrance examination (*konkur*)¹³ is administered nationally, without any restrictions on gender or class, the high percentage of women in college is all the more significant. As Ashraf Geramizadegan, a feminist lawyer and editor of the monthly magazine *Hoquq-e Zanan* (Women's Rights) said to me, "women have conquered men's biggest stronghold"—that is, "the universities and other educational places."¹⁴ Conversely, however, women's educational achievements have not translated into comparable employment opportunities. At present there's a high level of dissatisfaction among women regarding their situation in Iran, a dissatisfaction that, not surprisingly, correlates with the high divorce rate, despite laws discriminating against women.¹⁵

How did Iranian women, who became the target of a punitive theocratic regime and were subjected to serious legal obstacles and socioreligious restrictions, emerge as a significant pressure group that can no longer be silenced or ignored? Understanding this paradox—or a multiplicity of paradoxes—is the subject of my ongoing research project. In this chapter I discuss how the development of structural incongruities and fundamental inconsistencies in the Islamic state's rhetoric and policies, be they legal/political, religious, or economic, have raised women's awareness regarding their legal and sociopolitical inequalities. On the one hand, the state lauds—ad infinitum—the "high status of women in Islam"; on the other hand, it has reinstated a restrictive and literal version of Shari'a law, limited women's professional and career options, and mandated that women wear the veil in public. Such essentially controlling and antidemocratic state policies have sharpened women's sense of injustice, made them aware of their political oppression and their legal subjugations, and exposed the state's patriarchal double standards and hypocrisies. These policies have also motivated women of different backgrounds, classes, and ethnicities to come together and search for common ground. Above all, the state's actions have prompted women to mobilize and take collective action.

The shifting political sands in Iran, it should be noted at the outset, often render analyses and interpretations tentative. Things are highly fluid in the country, changes are haphazard, and leaders are capricious. What one can do and say with impunity one day may be considered improper or even illegal another day, hence deemed inappropriate, dangerous, and even punishable. Political unpredictability, social fluidity, and authoritarian caprice form the larger context of the women's—and men's—activities and events that I describe in the following pages.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Feminist method is consciousness raising... the collective reconstruction of the meaning of women's social experience, as women live through it.

—Catherine MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*

Following the interest generated by my video documentary, *Mrs. President: Women and Political Leadership in Iran*,¹⁶ I have directed my research toward women's political agency and political leadership in Iran, looking at the articulation of religion, politics, and women's political mobilization in the public domain. I have conducted in-depth interviews with several prominent women advisers to former President Khatami, former members of the reformist Sixth Majles (2000–2004), high-ranking women in various ministries and offices, and journalists and academics. I have attended and observed exploratory and political meetings with women from the reformist political group Jebhe-ye Mosharekat (Participation Front), given lectures at major universities in Tehran, and attended political rallies and gatherings leading up to the presidential election of 2005.

The women I met at these meetings and gatherings, whether from secular or religious backgrounds, almost unanimously subscribe to the necessity for women's active political participation and mobilization in order to achieve gender equality. Despite some differences in political tactics, these women have few illusions; unless they join forces and find common ground, attempting to secure a foothold in this political institution would be a losing battle and their demands for legal and political equality would be derailed, undermined, or ignored by the religious state.¹⁷ Collaboration and cooperation among Iranian women activists challenge the assumption of neat boundaries between religious and secular, and point to the "imbrications of religious and secular feminisms" in the Middle East.¹⁸ My focus here is primarily on the experiences of women activists, politicians, and political leaders in Iran since the Revolution in 1979. Specifically, I concentrate on women representatives in the Sixth Majles, highlighting their experiences and their political discourses. These women are

active in politics while also raising other women's—and men's—consciousness and supporting political mobilization.

My perspective is that of cultural anthropology, and my methodological approach here is that of “fieldwork among equals”—by which I mean researching among women who are close to me in terms of class, profession, level of education, and the like. I developed this ethnographic approach while conducting research in Pakistan from 1991 to 1993. This kind of fieldwork involves “thick description,”¹⁹ multivocality, dialogues, and discussions. What emerges from this collaborative effort is what I have called “shared ethnography,” whereby social analyses and interpretations are prerogatives not only of the anthropologist but also of the women studied.²⁰

THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION: A NARRATIVE OF ISLAMIZATION

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 is often understood as an Islamic revolution. In framing the broader context of this chapter, I draw a distinction between the revolution of 1979 and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The popular revolution that overthrew the shah and the Islamic republic that was established subsequently are not necessarily one and the same, though the former quickly metamorphosed into the latter. The charismatic personality of Ayatollah Khomeini galvanized an overwhelming majority of Iranians to break through the frontiers of fear and to participate in those massive demonstrations against the shah. The overwhelming anti-shah popular uprising that led to the revolution of 1979, however, was by and large pluralistic and inclusive of diverse classes, ethnicities, genders, and religions (including Armenians and Jews).²¹

That the Iranian national uprising had religious coloring is not the point—after all, the overwhelming majority of Iranians are Shi'a Muslims. But the Revolution was not initially a religious revivalist movement; the Islamic Republic of Iran that was hoisted onto the state, as the Iran-Iraq War was raging, turned out to be ideological, puritanical, and exclusive. The eight-year war of attrition between Iran and Iraq not only consolidated the state power in the religious hierarchy but also gave it nationalist incentives to eliminate, force underground, or exile all those who demanded—either peacefully or violently—that the state remain true to the pluralist and populist ideals of the Revolution. The democracy movement, or the “Spring of Freedom,” as it was locally called, that had gained momentum toward the last few years of the shah's regime, and had found its voice with the Revolution, was crushed. Though subjugated and broken up, the opposition was not totally vanquished then. Ayatollah Khomeini consolidated his power as supreme leader and the Islamic Republic of Iran was well entrenched. The state's policies to cleanse (*paksazi*) society from all vestiges of Westernization and to create an Islamic moral community in its place were

poised to become reality. Now, twenty-nine years into the Revolution, the state's experimentation with Islamization—its determination to create an exclusively Islamic society and to impose strict Shi'i moral order—has developed multiple paradoxes.

To begin, the seemingly stable marriage of mosque and state is not an indication of a trouble-free union. While the religious hierarchy controls the state, neither the state nor the religious establishment is monolithic and neither speaks with one voice. In fact, since the presidential election of Mohammad Khatami in 1997, the long-maintained facade of clerical unity has all but collapsed, exposing some political, religious, and moral fault lines.

With the end of the eight-year Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, and the election of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani to the presidency in the same year, the so-called hard-liners or fundamentalists (*osulgarayan*) seemed to be losing their hold on power and their legitimacy was diminished. Rafsanjani started opening up the country to the outside world and granting some civil rights to the public. As Iran gradually emerged from its international isolation and embarked on greater interactions with its neighbors, many Iranian exiles returned home. Newspaper editorials and articles covered the spectrum of political opinions and took critical positions regarding social issues. Television and radio, however, remained firmly under state control. Emerging from years of fear and violence, the deprivation and oppression of a protracted war, and the punitive and puritanical policies of the state, the public found opportunities to demand accountability and ask for restoration of individual autonomy, civil liberties, human rights, women rights, and the like.

Khatami's presidential victory—much to the surprise of the powers that be—realized the popular and democratic demands.²² "For the first time in Iran's history," writes Vali Nasr, "democracy was at the center of political debate in Iran.... The particular focus on democracy, which was now tied in with the reform movement [associated with Khatami's government], was essential for the continuity and democracy, and for cultural maturity of the democratic movement."²³ The democracy movement in Iran, according to Nushin Ahmadi-Khorasani, a well-known feminist activist and the editor of the quarterly *Second Sex (Jens-e Dovvom)*,²⁴ was inclusive, consisting of "women's movement, students' movement, workers' movements, environmental pressure groups, religious reformist movements, ethnic and religious minorities, and [various other] parties and guilds."²⁵

Though enlightened, elegant, and dapper,²⁶ President Khatami thoroughly disappointed his supporters. Ultimately, he was unable, or as some would say unwilling, to implement the reform programs for which he was overwhelmingly elected. His discourse of democracy, his respect for pluralism, and his internationally acclaimed call for "dialogues among civilizations,"²⁷ nonetheless gradually became institutionalized in Iran and enjoyed popular support. Indeed, the

demand for democracy, rule of law, individual autonomy, and tolerance became so dominant a discourse that all seven presidential candidates in 2005 couched their campaign promises and slogans in the language of political reform, economic development, and respect for the rule of law, though for some of the contenders those efforts constituted cynical manipulation. Outgoing President Khatami did not miss a chance to draw attention to these dynamics, wishing perhaps to revive his vanishing legacy. He underlined the political currency of democratic discourse as one of the most significant accomplishments of his presidency.²⁸ Indeed, Mostafa Moin,²⁹ the heir apparent to Khatami and one of the front-runners in 2005, rallied his enthusiastic supporters in a huge demonstration, which I attended, at a large stadium in Tehran and ended his speech declaring dramatically, "The only salvation for Iranians and for the country is democracy, democracy, democracy."³⁰ Moin, aware of the crucial role that women played in the election of Khatami, and recognizing their growing demand for inclusion in political process, created a presidential team of three, which included himself, Elaheh Koulaee, and Mohammad-Reza Khatami, a physician and the outgoing president's younger brother. The latter, like Koulaee, was a member of the Sixth Majles, and both were disqualified from running for a second term by the Guardian Council. In protest, Koulaee and Khatami, along with a majority of the other disqualified MPs, organized an unprecedented sit-in (*tahasson*) in the parliament that lasted 26 days. Eventually, however, they failed either to gain much public support or to force the Guardian Council to change its decision, or to give its rationale for en masse rejection of over 200 sitting MPs.³¹

JUSTICE AND EQUALITY: THE WOMEN'S NARRATIVE

Women were kept hidden in the closet (pastu), with the weapon (harbeh), of religion. Religion was used to break religious superstition and taboos for women. Naturally they could not be returned [home] by the time the [Iran-Iraq] war was ended. The windows had been opened up.

—Zahra Nejadbahram, secretary, Political Committee of Iran
Women Journalists Association

Aware of the [feminist] international discourse, Iranian women learned to demand their rights after the revolution [of 1979].

—Ashraf Gramizadegan, lawyer and cochair, Iran Women
Journalists Association

The first step toward effective activism is awareness—coming to recognize oneself and one's friends/colleagues as capable participants.

—Martha Ackelsberg

The most visible symbol of the sociomoral order in the newly minted Islamic Republic of Iran was the veiled woman, who was forced to cover herself in a black chador or dark overcoat and scarf—that is, Islamic veiling—in public.³² Islamic religious law, Shari'a, was upheld as the law of the land, particularly regarding family and personal law, and the Family Protection Law (FPL) of 1967/1975 was hastily dismantled. The irony is that the earlier lawmakers, which included both religious scholars and secular lawyers, had looked into different sources of Shari'a law in order to propose alternative interpretations of family law.³³ Abolition of the FPL and reinstatement of Shi'i family law were aimed at rolling back the modest legal gains that had been made for women before the Revolution. Given the high level of participation by women in the political demonstrations before, during, and after the Revolution, and a general increase in female literacy, many women had become particular about their rights, however.

The politically persuasive calls for women to come into the public domain and protest against the shah—most vociferously articulated by Ayatollah Khomeini—did much to break old religious taboos, open new vistas for women, and raise women's consciousness. Religious events, such as the massacre of Hussein b. Ali (A.D. 680), the Prophet Muhammad's grandson and the Shi'i Third Imam, in Karbala, were given contemporary moral currency; and the leading religious women of Islam, such as Zeinab, who challenged the Umayyad Caliph for murdering her brother Hussein, were upheld as models of ideal womanhood to be emulated: loyal, politically engaged, and fearless to challenge injustice. Here, the unstated objective was to ease conservative male opposition to women's political participation and public appearance.

Huge numbers of women welcomed the chance to move out of the confinement of their homes, to appear in public and demonstrate alongside their male counterparts—with or without their male relatives' presence or permission.³⁴ Having consolidated power as an Islamic state, however, the government moved quickly to mandate veiling in public, though it was not until 1983 that a universal veiling law was enacted.³⁵ The irony of the state's blatantly discriminatory ordinance was not lost on many women; they learned painful lessons of patriarchal/state caprice when subsequently threatened with either wearing a scarf (*rousari*) or "getting beaten on the head" (*tousari*), as a prominent slogan made humiliatingly clear to them. Significant numbers of women were driven from their jobs (though the economic necessities of postwar Iran in the late 1980s and early 1990s compelled many women to go back into the job market), and their educational and professional avenues were restricted. Polygyny (a man's marrying several wives simultaneously), restricted under the FPL of 1967, was reinstated and in fact tacitly encouraged. Temporary marriage was lauded as one of the most brilliant laws of Islam, hence preferable to the immoral and "free" male-female relationships of the West.³⁶ All the while, justification for

and legitimization of such regressive changes were made with regard to three presumably immutable principles, namely the differences between men and women (nature), the divine plan for human society (religion), and Islamic Shari'a law.

By doing so, however, the religious state painted itself into corner with the logic of its own rhetoric. It stated, *ad infinitum*, the dictum that "Islam has raised women's status," yet it humiliated women by denying them a fair chance for self-determination. Wittingly or unwittingly, it seems, the state became instrumental in awakening women's sense of the injustice of their situation and of the unfairness of their second-class citizenship. The realities of women's restrictive lives, and the glaring discrepancy between men's and women's rights and privileges, made the legal and institutional injustice plain to women.

Although forced veiling faced vociferous objections from women, and continues to be resisted by many, in the long run the structure, function, and meaning of the public veiling was shifted from one of controlling and limiting women to legitimizing their public presence and political agency. Having no option, women claimed "ownership" of the veil and used it as a tactical tool for political action and professional performance. If at one point in Iranian history the unveiling of women released their creative energy to express themselves in poetry and novels,³⁷ then their revealing freed them to obtain education, enter professions, or become participating social actors in public—initially with state blessing. Their active public presence was now perceived to have received "purification" by having obeyed the religiously mandated modesty and veiling.

However, the state's punitive policies to enforce the Islamic veiling in public, to impose a strict religious identity on Iranians, particularly on women, and to segregate the sexes in public and regulate gender relations seemed to have had little success beating women and youth into submission.³⁸ This is not to say that women who object to the forced veiling can refuse to wear the veil in public—they have no choice there! "Disobedient" women get arrested, taken to the *komitehs* (neighborhood moral police and Revolutionary Guards stations), and given up to 74 lashes.³⁹ Nor does it mean that women can exercise legal autonomy to secure an equitable and just settlement in the event of divorce,⁴⁰ to obtain custody of their children, or to collect an inheritance. Legally, the status of women is restricted and their rights and options are limited.

But what it does mean is that many, particularly urban and educated women, have become aware of the inherent structural and ideological contradictions in the country's political system and its long history of gender injustice. Faced with an unyielding ideological state, many educated Iranian women, much like feminists in other societies and religious traditions, have become active on several fronts. While challenging the patriarchal monopoly on sacred knowledge by gaining expertise in the law and scripture, they have resisted obeying blindly the patriarchal traditions. They are no longer willing to silently bear

their second-class citizenship and accept rules and regulations that are clearly unjust. Additionally, Iranian feminists and activists have become sophisticated in global communications, in the uses of the Internet and cyberspace, to record and communicate their ideas and visions for a gender-balanced social order. Especially, cyberspace provides a forum for contests between women's determination to express their discontent and the state's determination to stifle it. Intolerant of dissent and abusive of women's legal and human rights, the state has consistently attempted to block these activist Web sites. But just as consistently, the women have moved their sites to other locations, sending out quick alerts to inform readers of the change.⁴¹

Nor are many feminists and activists willing to relinquish the domain of religion and spirituality to men. Millions of women find solace in religion, though not necessarily in the textual, formal, and legal interpretations and practices that have been filtered through patriarchal lenses.⁴² Besides, public veiling as presently practiced by many women and the youth in Iran's major urban centers, though perceived as a nuisance by some, particularly in the hot summer months, is not a major impediment to women's development, at least not any longer. In fact, many young Iranian women have used creativity and fashion to turn the requirement into a license to appear in public, particularly in large urban centers. And they do so in huge numbers, working in various professions and pursuing different sociopolitical goals. At the same time, many highly active and politically involved women observe veiling out of conviction and choice.

The major impediment to women's development and achievement of gender equality is not necessarily veiling. They are, as mentioned earlier, structural and legal, as women's agitations for equal legal and political rights reflect. Indeed, many Iranian women have become impatient with the incongruity between the state's rhetoric of respect for women and its action, between the model of ideal womanhood it holds up for them and the reality of denial of their basic rights—such as not being able to keep custody of their children in cases of divorce. They see themselves as educationally surpassing men in colleges and universities, yet limited in the job market and restricted from traveling abroad without their husbands' written permission. They question the state's demand for female modesty while it grants men legal permission for plural marriages. In short, women are growing increasingly frustrated with the unfair treatment they receive in legal, social, political, and economic spheres and with the discriminatory sociocultural practices that permeate their lives. Aware and alert, Iranian women activists and feminists have begun to clamor for the state to match its words with action, to help women realize the high status they are said to have had all along. Mobilizing their resources, Iranian women have pushed successive Iranian governments to face the illogic of its double standard, with more or less success. And this is a deepening dilemma facing the religious state in Iran now.⁴³

Inspired by the realization that knowledge is power, or *tavana bovad har keh dana bovad*, as a popular ancient Persian proverb has it, women have

empowered themselves with knowledge of the scripture, the *hadith*, and the Shari'a—the major sources that define their rights and responsibilities in Iran presently. The self-confidence (*khod-bavari*) women have gained in the process has enabled them not only to challenge some archaic traditions that have been imposed on them in the name of religion but also to use religion and progressive religious figures as a way of substantiating demands for gender equality and social change. Zahra Nejadbahram, mentioned at the beginning of this section, like many other women I interviewed believes that the social scene has been transformed so much, and women's expectations raised so drastically, that they can no longer be ignored, kept hidden, or intimidated out of public debate.⁴⁴

Likewise, Ashraf Borujerdi, a former deputy minister of interior in charge of social affairs and an adviser to former President Khatami, told me, "Women have reached a degree of social recognition that they can no longer be ignored. The end of the [Iran-Iraq] war, the expansion of communications, and the rhetoric of the state [Khatami's call for democracy and respect for law and individual rights] helped raise women's consciousness and expectations. Women had many demands, which were publicized through newspapers, nongovernmental organizations, women's associations and institutions, state organizations, and members of parliament, particularly the Sixth Majles."⁴⁵

Taking advantage of the more open political atmosphere during the Rafsanjani and Khatami's governments, women have engaged authorities and institutions of power on all fronts. They founded, funded, and worked collectively or individually in a variety of nongovernmental organizations, building up and strengthening civil society. They have published feminist magazines, newspapers, and periodicals; they write commentaries, exposing the state's discriminatory policies; they take issue with political and judicial decisions such as the stoning for adultery,⁴⁶ runaway girls, child abuse, and capital punishment for women who have intentionally or inadvertently murdered violent and abusive men. Women produce and direct films, teach at universities, perform and preach in all-women or mixed gatherings, and compete in car racing, golf tournaments, and polo matches.⁴⁷ In short, Iranian women have excelled in every educational, scientific, and artistic field that has been open to them. Collectively, they level present as well as potential challenges to the traditional male privileges and patriarchal power. In the words of Ashraf Borujerdi, "women have become a presence that can no longer be ignored."⁴⁸

IRANIAN WOMEN MOBILIZE

When you take action

You shed your fears

—Samad Behrangi

Iranian women's determination to celebrate the International Women's Day in the past few years demonstrates the feminists and activists' relentless struggle for equality and democratic rights.

On June 12, 2005, a group of women in Tehran came together to protest the state's breakup of their earlier gathering on International Women's Day, and to articulate their demand for equality and gender justice by holding a peaceful rally in one of the major parks in the city.⁴⁹ Their gathering, however, was abruptly interrupted by the police, who harassed, beat up, and arrested some of the participants.⁵⁰ Still, women persisted. With Simin Behbahani, the much loved and renowned elderly poet as their beacon, women began reciting poems and marched on. "This vision I never forget," said Behbahani later:⁵¹

Women began to move!
They sang as they walked.
Demanding their rights,
They sang as police brutalized them.
O women,
You who are the essence of life,
The days of your slavery are numbered.

The Iranian constitution upholds the right of peaceful assembly (Art. 27), though currently in order to hold a public meeting one needs a permit. Women's requests to hold public meetings, however, were systematically ignored or denied in the months preceding June 2005. Certain that a permit was not forthcoming, the women thus decided to act constitutionally and celebrate International Women's Day in a public arena. This, in the words of one of the organizers, was "itself a protest against the necessity to getting a permit."⁵² Although the rally ended in disarray, a few private meetings were held in Tehran and other major cities, during which women joined together to commemorate the day. In solidarity with the world community, International Women's Day is becoming a symbol of feminist activism in Iran.

Celebrating the day was not always hazardous in Iran, however. For the past few years, women, and some of their male supporters, have marked March 8 by organizing events in major cities in Iran. One of the most memorable events took place in March 2003, when Khatami was president. On that day, a group of professional Iranian women, covering the spectrum of religious and political beliefs and principles, organized a gathering of about 150 women and men in the open-air theater of a centrally located park in Tehran. But this was not the only gathering. At least six other organizations and associations of diverse political, religious, and cultural positions also held meetings to mark the day. What is remarkable is that men constituted at least half of the participants in these meetings. They joined in the celebrations, presented papers, and delivered speeches. They were generally supportive of women's demands,

though certainly some of these meetings featured lively discussions and debates between the genders.

Topics at the gatherings ranged from the plight of underage marriage to the then imminent U.S.-led war in Iraq, to an analysis of gender stereotypes in the Iranian media and in textbooks, to gender inequality in Iran, and to how feminism fits with Islam. Indeed, "Feminism and Islam" was the topic of a paper delivered by the former minister for culture and guidance, who spoke on behalf of his wife, Jamileh Kadivar, who was a member of the Sixth Majles and was traveling at the time.⁵³ The gathering also celebrated women's roles in and their contributions to history, art, literature, and religion. The group discussed violence against women and the necessity of signing the United Nations' (UN) Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discriminations against Women (CEDAW).⁵⁴ The latter topic had sparked intense—and interesting—debates and discussions in the parliament and in the national presses, which I will discuss shortly.

Such gatherings would not have been so remarkable had they not happened against the backdrop of the regime's ceaseless effort to discourage, even harass, women activists and their supporters. Within the narrative of Islamization, the state's argument has been, all along, that such gatherings are representative of the culture of imperialism, and hence are subversive and against the public good and the moral order. Above all, the Islamic state has tried hard to co-opt women by appropriating the terminology and language: "protecting women," "respect for women," "gender complementarity." Accordingly, in order to accommodate, and yet control and channel women's movements and activities, the state commemorates the birthday of Fatemeh, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, as a national woman's/mother's day. This day is nationally celebrated in Iran, and is reminiscent of the commercialism of Mother's Day in the United States, where children and students are encouraged to give gifts to their mothers and teachers. As is the case in the United States, the marketplace performs well in Iran.

DEBATING THE CONVENTION

One of the major bills that women MPs introduced in the Sixth Majles (2000–2004) regarded signing the aforementioned Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discriminations against Women (again, CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. The following account of the political debate in the parliament is offered here for its unprecedented clarity in presenting the feminist political agency and the challenge feminists MPs leveled against the power structure. It also shows the determination of some women political leaders to encourage a more woman-friendly reinterpretation of Shari'a.⁵⁵

Addressing the speaker of the parliament in December 2002, Fatemeh Khatami (no relation to President Khatami), a women representative from

Mashhad (northeastern Iran), admonishes the Sixth Majles for its slow pace regarding women's welfare. "The Majles has been in session for three years now," she says, "and the only bill before it is that of CEDAW, but even that has not yet been ratified." Referring to the protracted and ongoing debates regarding this bill, she continues, "We were hoping that this bill would be signed quickly. But all of a sudden we realized that, not only did the parliament not pay any attention to our demand, but that it removed its discussion from its agenda. Where can women defend their rights legitimately if not in the parliament?" she declares in exasperation. "Women constitute half of this country's population."⁵⁶

The speaker, Mehdi Karrubi, in turn replies—without a hint of irony—"After the victory of Iranian Revolution, women's situation has much improved. If we had progressed in other areas as much as we have done so regarding women's rights and welfare, the country would have been in a much better situation!"⁵⁷ Nonetheless, he promises to review the bill once the responsible committee members remove some of its "defects" and "ambiguities," by which he meant adding provisions and clauses that would make CEDAW compatible with the religious law, the Shari'a.

A second woman representative, this time from Tehran, Fatemeh Rakei,⁵⁸ a professor of linguistics at Al-Zahra University and a member of the Cultural Caucus and Women's Affair of the parliament, objects to the parliamentary demand of making CEDAW congruent with the religious law. She argues that this would make the bill too general—too vague. Rakei, sounding impatient with the parliament's apparent unwillingness to ratify the CEDAW, and with the generally slow pace of addressing and redressing the discriminatory laws regarding women, criticizes the legal system and finds it unjust. "Effectively," she says, "these laws are telling women 'get your daily maintenance (*nafaqeh*) and obey'—that is, shut up! Such presumptuousness about us women is no longer possible in our society and must change," she demands.⁵⁹

Aware of the diversity of views among the high-ranking religious scholars regarding women's rights in Iran and in Islam, Rakei astutely points out, "Given the differences of opinion among the jurists and the religious scholars regarding the Shari'a, if one were to add modifying clauses to the Convention, one would practically eliminate the effectiveness of the Convention." That, she finds, would be defeating the whole purpose of the Convention, which is to eliminate all forms of discriminations against women! Rakei goes on to say, "Much has changed in the world, and many changes have taken place in our lives, our thoughts, and our needs, and therefore some of the laws and regulations in the Shari'a must be reviewed and reinterpreted—laws such as divorce, witnessing, and criminal punishment." In other words, all forms of discrimination. To engage the Convention's critics legally, however, she suggests replacing the phrase "according to the Shari'a" with "according to Iranian

laws and regulations,” which in her view is based on Islamic Shari’a anyway, but with this difference the laws are clear and not contested by the political and religious elite. While signing the CEDAW will bring international recognition to Iran, she argues, the basis for legal change is located in “our progressive Shi’a jurisprudence,” which has historically proved to be open to adapting to social changes by exercising the right of independent judgment (*ijtihad*). Rakei expresses hope that before simmering women’s demands boil over, the opponents of the CEDAW bill—and others—realize the seriousness of the situation, change their opposition, and improve women’s rights and situations in Iran.

The issue of Iran’s signing the CEDAW was of concern to other feminists, activists, and journalists also. A woman journalist echoed Rakei’s objection in her talk on International Women’s Day 2003, and posited that if the CEDAW were to be made compatible with the Shari’a, then Iran should not sign the Convention. This, she argued, while buying international prestige for the state, would bring nothing new for women.

Although the Convention was ratified by the Sixth Majles, the Guardian Council rejected it; owing to the changes in the parliament, the Seventh Majles was unwilling to debate the issue again.⁶⁰ The power to approve or reject a bill on the basis of its compatibility with the Shari’a rests with the Guardian Council.⁶¹ But the parliamentary debates and the entire text of the CEDAW were printed in several newspapers and magazines, leaving the impression that perhaps Islam and Shi’ism as interpreted by the 12 Guardian Councilmen is in favor of all forms of discrimination against women!

In advancing such reasoning and criticism of the injustices against women, feminists and activists are not alone. They have the support of several grand ayatollahs. Women’s sustained campaign for gender justice seems to have finally fractured the seeming unanimity of religious beliefs and ideas regarding women and gender relations. “The women’s movement in Iran has been so strong,” argues Maryam Khorasani, a feminist activist, “that even the fundamentalists cannot distance themselves from the wave of intellectual demands for legal reform regarding women.”⁶² Several religious scholars and ayatollahs, including Ayatollah Yusef Sane’i, a former general prosecutor after the Revolution, and Ayatollah Mohammad-Kazem Musavi-Bojnurdi, a university professor, support women’s rights and gender equality. They do so, however, within a religious framework. Breaking rank with his conservative colleagues, Ayatollah Sane’i, whom I interviewed in Qom during the summer of 2005, finds the discriminatory laws in Iran as “unjust.”⁶³ In his view, “Islam is a religion of justice and is based on equality and compassion.”⁶⁴ Therefore, the lawmakers must address the prevalent gender injustices in Iran. “Why can’t a woman be a guardian of her own children?⁶⁵ To deprive her [of this] is to transgress her rights, to do injustice. And this is against Islam.”⁶⁶ Ayatollah Bojnurdi, whom I interviewed

in Tehran in the summer of 2004, points to the significance of putting time and space in historical context when balancing women's rights. He argues, "if at one time in history women were barred from having custody of their children because they were absent from the public domain [i.e., did not hold a job], now that they are everywhere, their rights should be renegotiated."⁶⁷

CONCLUSION

Women who entered the Fifth and the Sixth Majles became increasingly vocal regarding gender injustice and inequality.⁶⁸ Supported and prompted by networks of professional lawyers, activist, journalists, editors, newspapers, and grassroots organizations, women MPs demanded appropriate social and legal changes in women's status. For many of them their experiences as members of a reformist parliament have been educational and transformative. Subsequently, they have joined forces with other progressive women to raise women's consciousness, individually and collectively, by challenging the state, by voicing complaints and making demands, and by highlighting the social implications of gender oppression for the family and society. They are determined to further "refresh" the political climate in Iran.

The paradoxes of women's advancement in the pseudo-puritanical Islamic Republic of Iran emanate from the convergence of rigidity of the legal structure, the fluidity of the social situation, and the increase in women's literacy. Structurally, the religious state simultaneously hampers and helps gender causes in Iran. The government has provided universal education for women and has honored women's literary achievements with prizes; it has supported women's citizenship rights to elect and be elected to the parliament, and to participate in political institutions, however minimally. Yet an Iranian woman's status remains geared to her father's impulses and her husband's caprice; her rights are institutionally restricted and legally inferior, and her options for a profession are limited. Personal and family laws restrict a woman's right to autonomy and discriminate against her in cases of polygyny, divorce, custody of children, traveling abroad, and political leadership. Taking advantage of the educational opportunities, Iranian women have excelled in all fields and disciplines, and have translated into power the knowledge they have gained since 1979. They have organized and mobilized to agitate for social justice and gender equity systematically and persistently. The specificity of the Iranian women's movement, argues the feminist activist Maryam Khorasani, is its "postmodern . . . centerlessness" (*'adam-e tamarkoz*), in its being "more like the roots of a tree or interconnected networks on the Internet that function horizontally" rather than its being a "hierarchical and pyramidal [patriarchal] classic [political] movement." Accordingly, she rejects the view—predominantly male—that denies the existence of a women's movement in Iran.⁶⁹ Likewise,

Elaheh Koulaee believes that “women’s movement in Iran has emerged from the accumulated women’s demands and is continually expanding.”⁷⁰ Iranian women and feminists have come a long way since the revolution of 1979, and they have achieved a political presence that can no longer be silenced, ignored, or reversed. Acknowledging the uphill battle and the difficulties ahead, many women I have met are positive about prospects for a growing—and strengthening—women’s movement in Iran, and for a concerted effect by women—and their male supporters—to influence parliamentary politics and state policies.

NOTES

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1. The Sixth Majles came to be known as reformist because of the considerable number of supporters of the reformist platform of President Mohammad Khatami, who won the presidential election of 1997.

2. The concept of Islamic veiling was popularized by the Islamic Republic of Iran and has come to mean a combination of long and loose overcoat and pants, and a large scarf to cover a woman’s hair. In the past three decades, however, Islamic veiling has gone through several metamorphoses in terms of color (from dark and drab to bright and pastel), form (from long and loose to tight and conspicuous), and size (from wide and all-hair covering to narrow and highlighted-hair revealing). Paradoxically, the state finds its own invention inferior to the traditional long black veil; the latter is ranked as “the best *hijab*,” hence the “power” inherent in this form of veiling and the vociferous objections of some high-ranking religious clerics and conservative MPs to Koulaee’s wish to replace the black chador with the Islamic veiling. For the same reason, but conversely, Masumeh Ebtekar replaced her Islamic veil with the all-enveloping black chador when President Khatami elevated her to an advisory cabinet post.

3. See Shahla Sherkat (2005), p. 4; personal interview, summer 2004, Tehran.

4. Personal interview, summer 2004. Koulaee and Haghighatjoo are both from highly religious backgrounds and grew up wearing the long black veil. Both have a Ph.D. Elaheh Koulaee (b. 1956) is an expert on Iran-Russia relations and the Caucasus. She gained national prominence not only for her scholarly work but also for her vocal support of women’s rights in the Sixth Majles. She has continued to be highly active in politics; in addition to teaching at Tehran University, she is the treasurer of the reformist Participation Front (Jebhe-ye Mosharekat), and in coordination with other feminist activists, she is active in mobilizing women. She views among her achievements in the Sixth Majles the creation of a women’s caucus and its lobbying efforts to have women included in the parliament’s leadership committees—something missing in the Seventh Majles. Reminiscent of the controversial 1984 U.S. vice-presidential debate between George H. W. Bush and Geraldine Ferraro, Koulaee publicly chastised then foreign minister Kamal Kharrazi for his patronizing comments and his attitude toward her in the parliament. Koulaee believes that

ideology rather than rationality governs the decision making in Iran, specifically among the elite. Dictatorship is institutionalized at the state level, she says, and thinks that Iranian society also suffers culturally from the patriarchal dictatorship. She believes that while women's awareness and consciousness have been raised, men's progress on gender issues has been slow, and that while women are considerably more aware of their rights now, the legal structure has remained oppressive (see Sherkat [2005], pp. 3–16). I interviewed her extensively in the summer of 2004 and during her campaign for the presidential candidacy of Mostafa Moin in the summer of 2005. During the short seven days of the presidential campaign in the summer of 2005 she crisscrossed the country to take Moin's message of democracy, civil society, human rights, and rule of law to the public. Fatemeh Haghighatjoo (b. 1969) was one of the youngest 13 women representatives in the Sixth Majles. She wasted no time distinguishing herself as one of the most articulate and outspoken members of the parliament. And she paid for it. Several cases were brought against her, though because of her parliamentary immunity she was not imprisoned. Haghighatjoo completed her Ph.D. in counseling after leaving the parliament. I interviewed her extensively in the summer of 2004 and again in 2005. See also Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2004).

5. This demonstration was organized to commemorate the anniversary of an earlier demonstration in June 2005 that was also harshly suppressed. Because of its timing with the presidential election of 2005, the demonstration had attracted much international attention. Among a large number of personalities who came to Iran to observe was Sean Penn, who had gone to Iran as a reporter for the *San Francisco Chronicle*. See SF Gate at www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2005/08/22/DDGJUEAF041.DTL.

6. See the Rooz Web site at www.roozonline.com/english/archives/2007/03/003305.php.

7. This campaign is a creative and brilliant strategy that I have discussed in a forthcoming paper to be published in a book by the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology Publications. The campaign demands include:

- A. Banning of polygamy (note: anthropologically speaking, *polygamy* means "plural marriage," whether practiced by men or women; *polygyny* describes a situation in which a man marries several women simultaneously)
- B. Equal right to divorce
- C. Equal child custody rights for mothers and fathers
- D. Equal rights in marriage (women's right to choose her own employment, travel freely, etc.)
- E. Increase in the legal age of children to 18 years of age (currently girls are viewed as adults at 9 years of age and boys at 15 years of age, making them eligible to be tried as adults; Ebrahimi 2004: 40)
- F. Equal value placed on women's testimony in court
- G. Elimination of temporary work contracts, which proportionately and negatively impact women; see further www.we4change.org/ and www.wechange.info/english/

8. The issue of whether to use the term "feminism" and "feminist" was hotly debated by Iranian supporters of women's rights in the 1990s. Currently, both terms have found currency in public discourses and have entered the vocabulary of Iranians. As is the case in the United States, however, the terms carry pejorative connotations. Depending on the context and one's perspective, either positive or negative connotations may apply.

9. Sohrab Sepehri (1928–1980), one of the most widely acclaimed poets in present-day Iran, took poetic license to express his sense of disillusionment with politics and politicians in the following haiku:

In place of men of politics
 Plant trees
 To refresh the air!

In Persian, *Ja-ye mardan-e siasat / Beneshanid derakht / Ta hava tazeh shaved*.

10. Much is written on the emerging women's movement in Iran. For Persian material, refer to the ongoing debates in several issues of monthly magazines such as *Zanan* (Women), particularly issues from the late 1990s. Note: as this chapter was going to press, word came that *Zanan's* license was revoked and it became a banned publication. See also *Hoquq-e Zanan* (Women's Rights) and *Jens-e Dovvom* (Second Sex). For English sources, see Hamed Shahidian (2002), Afsaneh Najmabadi (1998), Haideh Moghissi (1996), Nayereh Tohidi (2001), Parvin Paidar (1995), and Hamideh Sedghi (2007). For earlier studies on the women's movement in Iran, see Eliz Sanasarian (1982) and Janet Afary (1996), among others.

11. See the UNICEF Web site at www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iran_statistics.html#1. See also www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iran.html.

12. See Golnar Mehran, "Gender and Education in Iran," at the UNESCO Web site, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001468/146809e.pdf>. See also www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iran_statistics.html#15; and World Bank, <http://devdata.worldbank.org/genderstats/genderRpt.asp?rpt=profile&cty=IRN,Iran,%20Islamic%20Rep.&hm=home>.

13. *Konkur* is a Persian loan word derived from the French *concours général*, referring to the highly competitive annual nationwide exams for university entrance.

14. Personal communication, Tehran, January 10, 2006. She is also the executive director of the Iran Women Journalists Association, or AROZA (see the association's Web site at www.aroza.ir/). On another occasion (January 15, 2006) I interviewed her in the company of five other members of AROZA.

15. See the *Bad Jens* (Iranian feminist newsletter) Web site at www.badjens.com/second-edition/divorce.htm.

16. Distributed by Films for Humanities and Sciences in 2002; see www.films.com.

17. On January 2007 I attended a gathering of Iranian women activists in Tehran. These women had come to discuss the parameters for drawing up a national "Women's Declaration" (*Manshur-e Zanan*). Those in attendance came from different age groups and represented all classes, professions, political and religious backgrounds.

18. See Margo Badran (2002).

19. Borrowing the concept of "thick description" from Gilbert Ryle, Clifford Geertz views thick description as the "object of anthropology" and argues that "Doing ethnography is like trying to read . . . a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behavior." See Geertz (1973), p. 10.

20. See Haeri (2002), introduction and p. 406.

21. See Roya Hakakian's *Journey from the Land of No: A Girlhood Caught in Revolutionary Iran* (2004). "A memoir of an adolescent Jewish girl's coming-of-age during the Iranian Revolution." See her Web site: www.royahakakian.com/buzz.html. See also Marjane Satrapi's autobiography, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2004/2005), also about growing up in the Islamic Republic of Iran; and Shirin Ebadi (with Azadeh Moaveni), *Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope* (2007).

22. "The Epic of the Second of Khordad" is how Khatami's supporters have consistently regarded his unexpected 1997 presidential victory. Khatami's epic victory was upstaged only by the "miracle" of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's surprise victory in 2005 identified as such—and upstaged—by the latter's supporters.

23. See Nasr, *Sharq* 706, 2006, for Persian; for English, see Gheissari and Nasr (2004, 2006). The Iranian daily newspaper *Sharq*, banned since late 2006, published a series of articles in which issues of democracy, human rights, peace with Iran's neighbors, and tolerance within the country were addressed in 706, February 25, 2006.

24. The name of this journal obviously is a tribute to Simone de Beauvoir and her classic book, *The Second Sex*. It also expresses the reality of women's second-class citizenship in Iran. *Second Sex* was meant to be a quarterly, but because of its controversial and feminist content, Ahmadi-Khorasani was forced to publish it as a book, which involved her having to go to the Ministry of Guidance to get permission to publish each issue. *Second Sex* ceased publication in 2001, after its 10th issue.

25. See Ahmadi-Khorasani on the following Web site: www.irwomwn.com/news.php?id=492.

26. See N. Haeri (2005).

27. "Dialogue among civilizations," in Khatami's words, is "an ethical perspective, is in fact an invitation to discard what might be termed the power oriented will, in favor of a love oriented one. In this case, the result of dialogue will be empathy and compassion. And the interlocutors will primarily be thinkers, leaders, artists and all benevolent intellectuals who are the true representatives of their respective cultures and civilizations." Khatami's call for dialogue among civilizations was adopted by the UN in November 1998. See the Web site of the Foundation for Dialogue among Civilizations at www.dialoguefoundation.org/?Lang=en&Page=33-01.

28. See reformist or progressive newspapers such as *Sharq* (banned in 2006) and *E'temad*, *E'temad-e Melli*, Iran for June 2005 issues.

29. Moin's candidacy was initially rejected by the Guardian Council, but was subsequently approved when supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, responding to agitation by Moin's supporters, persuaded the council to reconsider its decision.

30. In January 2006, I attended a meeting between Moin and a large number of journalists. He was there to introduce his newly established Democratic Front, to hear the journalists' comments and views, and to explore strategies for launching his new political initiative. He stressed that the guiding principles of his organization were the twin pillars of democracy and human rights. What was readily noticeable at this meeting was the presence of many young women journalists—well over one-third of the group—who did not hesitate to ask pertinent questions and to challenge Moin's apparently unwarranted optimistic political observations and assertions.

31. See Alinejad (2004), pp. 25–31.

32. The mandatory act of public veiling imposed by the Islamic state, and its punitive strategies to implement the policy, seems to be a delayed retaliatory response to Reza Shah Pahlavi's (r. 1925–1941) mandatory Unveiling Act of 1936, also implemented forcefully and punitively.

33. See Hinchcliff (1968), pp. 516–517; Esposito (1982).

34. Mahnaz Afkhami, the secretary general of the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI or *Sazman-e Zanan-e Iran*; 1970–1979) and minister of women's affairs (1976–1978) under the shah, also credits the WOI for the huge presence of women in public and for their active participation in demonstrations. In her view, the WOI had created and maintained an active women's network across the country, organizing meetings for women and raising their consciousness regarding their rights (as per personal interview). See also Afkhami (1994), pp. 16–20.

35. See Sedghi (2007).

36. See Haeri (1989).

37. See Milani (1992).

38. Of Iran's nearly 70 million population, over one-third is between the ages of 14 and 24; see Statistical Center of Iran (Markaz-e Amar-e Iran), www.sci.org.ir/portal/faces/public/sci/sci.negahbeiran/sci.Population, accessed August 12, 2008.

39. But then the boundaries of proper Islamic veiling are continuously contested and subverted by young women and men, particularly in large cities such as Tehran, Isfahan, and Shiraz. Young men and women systematically and ceaselessly use their bodies as a site of resistance and they flaunt their individuality by stylishly improvising on the mandatory Islamic veiling.

40. Divorce, of course, may take place by mutual consent; some wealthier women may hire a lawyer to negotiate a more agreeable settlement. Still, if the man refuses to divorce—especially if the divorce is initiated by the wife—the outcome can be unpredictable, prolonged, and costly.

41. See, for example, the following Web sites, accessed at different times during 2007 and 2008: Madreseh-ye Feministi at <http://feministschool.org>; Women's Field at <http://meydaan.org/>; Change for Equality at www.change4equality.net/; www.we4change/English; and Zanestan at <http://zanestan.blogspot.com/>.

42. See Leila Ahmed's (1999) cogent discussion regarding the distinctions and differences between formal/patriarchal Islam and informal/women Islam.

43. One way of dealing with this dilemma is to support women and associations that reflect the state's agenda and, conversely, to prevent women—and men—reformists or independents from assuming a position of public power and authority. Caught off guard by the landslide victory of the reformists MPs elected to the Sixth Majles, the Guardian Council disqualified en masse a majority of moderate and reformist men and women from standing for parliamentary election again in 2004. The present crop of women MPs in the Seventh Majles have rejected many, if not all, of the progressive changes that were initiated or implemented by the reformist women MPs in the Sixth and Fifth Majles.

44. Zahra Nejadbahram, personal interview, January 3, 2006, Tehran.

45. Ashraf Borujerdi, personal interview, January 4, 2006, Tehran.

46. On the campaign against stoning, see Sadr (2002), pp. 11–13.

47. See the cover and articles in *Zanan* 127, pp. 2–6, for women and polo; *Zanan* 116, pp. 9–13, for women and car racing; and *Zanan* 110, pp. 24–25, for women and golf.

48. Personal interview, January 4, 2006, Tehran.

49. The events of June, 12, 2006, and March 4, 2007, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter have their origins in these earlier women's demonstrations and shows of discontent.

50. Some of the battered and arrested women have filed lawsuits against the police for maltreatment. Their cases are still pending; the police have denied physical abuse.

51. Simin Behbahani, describing her participation in and observation of the women's interrupted demonstration on June 12, 2005, in Tehran. For translations of her poetry, see *A Cup of Sin: Selected Poem by Simin Behbahani* (1999).

52. See the Rooz Web site at <http://roozonline.com/01newsstory/014543.shtml>.

53. As of 2006, Jamileh Kadivar was the chair of the Iran Women Journalists Association (AROZA); see www.aroza.ir/.

54. CEDAW, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, is described by the CEDAW Web site "as an international bill of rights for women. Consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination." The Convention defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women,

irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field"; see also www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/.

55. Women MPs in the Sixth Majles drew on a vast network of journalists, lawyers, activists, and others to prepare their speeches and make their legal and political arguments. Ashraf Geramizadegan, mentioned earlier, was one of the most influential of these sources.

56. See *Zanan* 97, March 2002, p. 20.

57. *Ibid.*

58. Fatemeh Rakei, also a poet, comes from a middle-class background. Although not everyone in her family is veiled, as she told me in an interview in summer of 2006, she has voluntarily decided to observe veiling. For an interview with her regarding Iranian women, see the Iran Web site at www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=18605.

59. For some background information, see Ardalan (2002); available at the *Bad Jens* Web site at www.badjens.com/fifthedition/Joining.htm.

60. See *Zanan* 97, March 2002, p. 20. Unlike MPs such as Rakei and Koulaee, the women representatives in the Seventh Majles give full allegiance to their hard-liner party bosses and uphold the party platform. The latter have attempted to turn back the clock and reverse the changes women achieved in the Sixth Majles, including the CEDAW. Fatemeh Alia's response is representative. She was asked to explain some of the shortcomings of CEDAW. She answered, "Iran is concerned about various issues of the mentioned convention. CEDAW undermines the traditional family structure, which is much respected in our society. The preamble states, 'A change in the traditional role of men as well as the role of women in society and in the family is needed to achieve full equality between men and women.' This requires states to 'Modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices based on stereotyped roles for men and women.' This Convention denies any distinctions between men and women. It defines discrimination in its own words as 'any distinction on the basis of sex,' in 'any field.' This is to say, it ignores differences between the roles, rights, and obligations of men and women in the natural world. The convention also states that governments should 'ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.' This sort of rhetoric also includes open access to abortion services. Abortion, of course, is only one of the contradictions between Islamic law and the Convention. Countries that have ratified CEDAW will also be obliged to welcome sexual relations out of wedlock, which Islam prohibits because of the harm it does to the society. The Islamic tradition of *hijab* frees women from being perceived primarily as sexual instruments and helps cleanse the society of promiscuity. A healthy and vigorous society is considered essential in Islam for individuals to be able to nurture and develop their abilities. Societies which promote women as sexual objects also have a horrendous rate of violence toward women. The wisdom behind this dress code is to minimize sexual enticement and degradation in society as much as possible for both men and women.... Islam allows polygamy for men whereas there is no such law for women. Certain circumstances require such remedial laws to be introduced in the society. Due to conditions like war, the total number of women sometimes exceeds the number of men. At such times, the society must resolve the dilemma of caring for women who have the right of marriage, emotional support and welfare. In these circumstances polygamy is the only just solution." See the Iran Defence Web site at www.irandefence.net/archive/index.php/t-25392.html. Fereshteh Sasani, an adviser to the minister of the interior, similarly argues that the CEDAW serves men's need and supports them rather than women; see the AROZA Web site at www.aroza.ir/site/article77.html.

61. The Guardian Council rejected most of the 33 bills that women introduced in the Sixth Majles, all on the grounds that they were incompatible with the Shari'a law. See www.amnestyusa.org/news/document.do?id=ENGMDE130242006.

62. See the Focus on Iranian Women Web site at www.irwomen.com/news.php?id=253.

63. I interviewed Ayatollah Sane'i in Qom regarding temporary marriage. He is one of the few ayatollahs who are against the legality of temporary marriage. For more detailed discussions of the differences between his interpretations of the Qur'an and the Prophetic Traditions (*hadith*) and the Shari'a, as currently applied by the Islamic Republic of Iran, see Karimi-Majd (2003) and Mir-Hosseini (1999).

64. See Karimi-Majd (2003), pp. 2–7.

65. Until recently, according to Shari'a law, girls up until the age of seven and boys until two would stay in the custody of their mother in cases of divorce, at which time their custody would automatically pass to their fathers. The Sixth Majles succeeded in increasing the age for boys to seven; see Ebrahimi (2004), pp. 40–42.

66. Karimi-Majd (2003); *ibid*.

67. Personal communication, summer 2004, Tehran.

68. For a brief report on the activities of women in the Fifth Majles, see Ebrahimi (1999), pp. 3–13; and Tariqi (1999), pp. 14–16.

69. See the Focus on Iranian Women Web site at www.irwomwn.com/news.php?id=253. Shadi Sadr (2006), a young and courageous lawyer/activist, borrows the metaphor of *zorouf-e mortabet* (interconnected containers) from liquid physics to describe the form and substance of women's movements in Iran.

70. See Sherkat (2005), p. 15.

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WHO WILL CATCH ME IF I FALL?
HEALTH AND THE INFRASTRUCTURE OF RISK
FOR URBAN YOUNG IRANIANS

Pardis Mahdavi

Of the approximately 12 million people who reside in Tehran, it is estimated that nine million are under the age of 30. Contemporary urban young adults, who constitute almost two-thirds of Iran's population, have a higher rate of social mobility than those of previous generations; they are also relatively better educated and widely underemployed.¹ At the same time, many among the youth are dissatisfied with the current establishment. Today, the Islamic republic is a country in transition, as much in political and socioeconomic terms as in demographic. In postrevolutionary and post-Khomeini Iran, a significant number of people are under the age of 30, making them children of the Revolution (born either during or after the Revolution of 1979). As a theocracy, the Islamic republic complies by Shari'a law, which mandates that women and men interact only minimally before marriage and that women be covered in "proper" Islamic dress (arguably a cloak from head to toe, covering the body). In accordance with the Shari'a, sex before marriage—and for women, extramarital sex—results in harsh punishment.

In the outwardly religious and conservative world of the Islamic republic, significant numbers of urban young people are skeptical, disaffected, or openly resentful of the values underpinning the Islamic revolution and subsequent change. The regime has effectively stifled political opposition; previous attempts by young people to express their aspirations and criticisms have been met with suppression, social control, and violence. There is little appetite among some urban young Iranians to engage in overt political activism or protest. Distressed by the traumas of revolution, an eight-year war with Iraq, and decades of theocracy, it could be argued that Iranians no longer wish to risk bloodshed to achieve the changes they desire.

Social behaviors (such as style of dress, youth congregations, and interactions with members of the opposite sex) seem to be expressive of their experiments

with and aspirations toward political and sociocultural change. More than half of those whom I interviewed during my fieldwork specifically characterized their behavior as part of a larger “sexual and social revolution.” In this chapter, I focus on the intersection of sexuality and politics in postrevolutionary Iran as manifested in the context of metropolitan Tehran and the consequences and outcomes that urban Iranian youth risk as a result of their sexual and social behaviors.

Aside from an emphasis on style and appearance, the daily routines and experiences of many of Tehran’s youth can serve here to illuminate the social context of what they refer to as their sexual revolution (*enqelab-e-jensi*). For instance, young people go about their daily activities and interact with others in different ways, but they share many things in common as well. Many of them envision themselves as part of a sexual and social revolution—a movement that attacks the very moral fabric that the government has woven and maintains as legitimization of its power. I focus here on some of the risks and consequences of their sexual and social actions and explore the notion of risk as these young people see them. I demonstrate that, for many young people in Tehran, social risks outweigh viral risks, owing to a social climate that carries heavier punishment for social and sexual behaviors deemed “un-Islamic” and “immoral”; I also factor into this risk equation the prevalence of gossip among community and family members, which has the potential to ruin reputations.

Then, I assess the overall level of knowledge concerning physical health risks among Tehran’s youth, and I move on to a discussion of ways in which youth view sex education. I also present improvements in the education system that the youth would like to see. I end with a description of some of the reactions that an older generation of parents and providers—sex educators, counselors at drop-in centers, doctors (mostly gynecologists), and social workers—in Tehran have had to these developments.

METHODOLOGY

Most of my interviews took place during fieldwork in Iran in the summers of 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2007. My first two visits were more journalistic in nature and served to secure access into the subculture that I continued to study regarding research on broader aspects of cultural change in Iran. The bulk of my ethnographic data were collected during 2004 and 2005; however, I subsequently continued to conduct online fieldwork. The nature of my qualitative, ethnographic fieldwork focused on participant observation (on which I relied heavily), focus groups, and in-depth interviews. I employed participant observation at Internet cafes, public parks, shopping malls, parties, gyms, dance classes, in private homes, and at local squares where young people tend to gather. I also spent time in various Persian chat rooms and was a member of Orkut, an online community. I also volunteered at two drop-in centers and

one needle exchange, I gave a seminar at Tehran University, and I conducted archival work at the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education. I also continued to do online research about the culture of young adults on a weekly basis by reading Iranian blogs, spending time in chat rooms, instant messaging with informants in Iran, and closely monitoring the newest in Iranian pop culture including music, videos, and new online publications.

My fieldwork consisted of conducting 103 face-to-face in-depth qualitative interviews with urban youth of Tehran (18–25 age group), both men and women of varying socioeconomic classes, but with an emphasis on the youth residing in certain sample areas (i.e., parts of northern and northwestern and northeastern Tehran, which are mostly, but not exclusively, inhabited by middle- and upper-middle-class residents). In addition I have done 43 online interviews with students from Tehran University (in the form of e-mail or instant messaging). I also collected 35 sexual history surveys, which I designed in collaboration with two colleagues, an anthropologist and a psychologist, from Tehran University. These questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of university students across three universities in Tehran;² and I ran six focus groups that contained both men and women, each comprising between six and eight young people. Additionally, I interviewed and observed 20 care providers, including doctors (mostly gynecologists), nurses, counselors, and teachers. While conducting participant observation online, I was careful to introduce myself as an anthropologist, though I also indicated my age, gender, and background. Throughout this process, I was acutely aware that my position as a single Iranian-American young woman, close to their age, would shape my interactions with my informants. Some felt that because I was from “the other shores” (*oun taraf-e ab*), I was not likely to judge them and would be less apt to inform on them or tell someone who might know them. Others were fascinated by me, feeling that my status as an Iranian American allowed me deeper insights, and this fascination proved to be mutually beneficial.

I should further emphasize that the samples I describe throughout this chapter are taken from Tehran, thus they are all from *urban* young adults who, for the most part, belong to a cultural milieu that is secular, with middle- and upper-middle-class identity and self-image. I therefore refer to them as members of the secular upper middle class. This notion of class, however, is complicated, given the shifting class structures and the phenomenon of social mobility in postrevolutionary Iran. Many of the young adults and their families with whom I interacted could be considered upper or middle class in financial terms, owing to the neighborhoods in Tehran in which they live and in view of their familial income and lifestyle. However, many older Iranians with whom I spoke would say that, though some of these families are *economically* upper class, intellectually or culturally they have lower-class backgrounds and possibly have lower levels of education.

The notion of class is continuously changing in Iran, and thus, I can only approximate the socioeconomic level of many of my informants. This guess-timation was based often on the neighborhood in which these young adults resided. The city of Tehran has a somewhat straightforward layout (north and south are easily found using the topography of the mountains); being associated with the northern part of town indicates upper-class ties and milieu, while the farther south one lives, the lower the identity of one's class base. In fact, the phrase used to describe members of the lower class in Tehran is *pa'in shahri* (from the lower part of town). Residing in the North West district of Shahrak-e-Gharb indicates middle- and upper-middle-class base, as does living in the northeast part of town, in prime areas such as Niyavaran, Kamraniyeh, and Farmaniye. Residing in the middle areas of town indicates lower-middle-class status, and sometimes, owing to the high concentration of universities in this area, living there can also point to affiliation with the academic system, thus rendering an intellectually upper-class association, but not a monetary one.³

All of this is further complicated, however, by the fact that young people are highly mobile, with plenty of free time because of job insecurity and a high level of unemployment. Add to this the fact that the young adults who make up the particular culture that I describe (urban, middle- or upper-middle-class, often seemingly consumerist, "flashy," and idle) are the model for young adults of other classes and subgroups who imitate them and seek to become accepted into the group.

Many young adults of lower classes seek to emulate the styles and behaviors enacted by members of the "fashionable youth," and they find themselves coming to different parts of town where they can seek out and observe these young adults. Conversely, the trendy young adults who make up this culture—that is, those who would be characterized as "infatuated with the West" (*gharbzadeh*) on the grounds of their social circle and distinct physical appearance and style, find themselves frequenting lower-class neighborhoods in search of sexual partners who will give them anonymity. In short, there is much movement among the youth of Tehran and considerable interaction across these changing class lines. Therefore, it is difficult to argue with certainty that all of my informants were of one socioeconomic group or another.

I am interested in this particular group of young people, however, because social movements have often been both initiated by and manifested in certain groups and subcultures within a wider spectrum of social classes before they have spread to other groups. In Tehran, as in other large Iranian cities such as Mashhad and Shiraz, we can see some evidence of this trickle-down effect as young people have changed their physical appearances and social stances. It is interesting to note and question, though, why it is that members of this age group are rebelling as hard as they are, and why the government is so interested and yet threatened by them. During the presidential elections of 2005,

it was this group of young people whom most presidential candidates tried to lobby—including former President Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani especially solicited young people, specifically those who drove certain kinds of cars (such as sport hatchbacks) popular with youth and who dressed in a certain way (such as headbands bearing Rafsanjani's name printed in transliteration). Additionally, he set up outdoor sound-bite opportunities and music venues to attract young people in hopes of gaining their support. So, whether it's the Islamists who appeal to this group of "fashionable youth" for support or other young people in the country who try to imitate them, the importance of this group is gaining momentum. In sum, they are a prominent group with a distinctive style of sexual, social, and cultural change that may be viewed as setting trends for youth throughout the nation.

THE CURRENT LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE

One of the biggest challenges in assessing sex education, abortion and contraception rates, and the transmission of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) is the paucity of qualitative research on these sensitive issues in Iran. There are no formal research organizations in Iran that systematically record contraceptive use or HIV and STI transmission among *unmarried* young adults, as premarital sex is both illegal according to Shari'a and a social taboo. Thus I had to rely on often conflicting statistics from the UN, the Ministries of Health and Education, and the Center for Disease Management in Tehran, which often provide figures based on limited research in specific towns or parts of towns. In fact, owing to the sensitivity of discussing high-risk behavior, many individuals who are at risk for health problems constitute a hidden population that is reluctant to participate in studies conducted by the government or that might not trust researchers and thus would not provide honest answers. Therefore, the accuracy of data collected by government statistical centers has been questioned by members of the international community, such as the United Nations (UN) or Human Rights Watch. Similarly, laws and regulations about abortion and contraception, though broadly based on the Shari'a law, are often open to diverse interpretations based on whether members of the parliament and lawmakers follow conservative or reformist interpretations of Islam at the time.

Currently, formal codified knowledge about sexuality and sex education is passed to young people in mosques or during religious instruction. Young girls receive puberty education at the onset of menstruation in most public schools in Tehran; however, education about contraception and family planning is provided only when young adults have entered into a marital contract. Today, the government requires couples seeking a marriage license to participate in mandatory prenuptial counseling classes (according to an enactment in 2000, the

first of its kind). In order to receive an officially certified form documenting readiness for marriage, couples must now show proof that they have attended at least one of these one-hour sessions on contraception. The classes, as will be discussed later, have been altogether successful and won Iran the award for family planning from the UN Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) in 2002. But this mode of sex education rests on the assumption that young people are not having premarital sex, and thus they have no need for sex education until they are about to be married, which is simply not the case according to my informants and as observed in my research. This is perhaps one reason sex-education efforts on the part of Iranian officials have failed: they are too late in providing young people with the education they need *before* marriage, when they begin to be sexually active.

Misconceptions and Fears about Sexuality

Yes, we here in Iran, we do know the condom, we know what it looks like, but we don't know what to do with it, see? It's like driving a nice car. Yes, we know what the good cars are, and there are a select few of us who can get our hands on these nice cars, but do we know how to drive these nice cars? No! With sex it's the same; we know there is this thing called a condom, and supposedly we have nice ones, but we just don't know what to do with them. We need education.

—Houman, 20, university student

Many of the young people I spoke with were grappling with fears and misconceptions about their sexualities and sexualized bodies. While some experienced confusion about sexual practices and specific sexual acts, most were misinformed about HIV, STIs, and contraception. Many of them had never had an outlet in which to talk about their concerns and questions and were carrying heavy burdens of confusion for some time. For some, these fears and misconceptions were stress-producing, and they indicated that one of their biggest problems was not having the knowledge that could help them overcome these anxieties and feelings of guilt.

DISCOURSE ON SEXUAL DESIRE “I remember that there was this doctor friend of our family who said that it's bad to have sex every day, really bad. He said that too much sex is unhealthy,” Katayoun, a 24-year-old housewife, told me one afternoon. She looked very worried as she relayed this information to me and quickly added, “Is this true?”

I was not sure how to respond to her question so I asked her if she remembered what specifically the doctor had said was bad about “too much sex.” “He just said that it's bad, that there is something wrong with people who want to have sex every day,” she stopped and drew in her breath before continuing. “But

I like to have sex every day, and I'm so scared that I'm going to get really sick. Can you help me?" she begged. I told her that there was nothing "unhealthy" about her sexual appetite. She seemed so relieved when I told her that, and a few weeks later called to thank me.

Many of my other informants expressed similar pangs of guilt owing to their desire to have sex often. "I heard that you can become incapable of having babies if you have sex too often," Asana, a 20-year-old university student, once told me. "I'm scared, too, because I love sex, but I also want to have babies some day. Plus now I'm getting serious with my boyfriend, and I think we are going to get married. I'm scared that I should probably tell him that I may not be able to have babies and that I've had a lot of sex before him," she said at the point of tears. "It's not true," I consoled her. I told her that safe sex even in abundance would not result in infertility.

Her friend, Sara, also 20 and a midwife in training, was surprised at this news. "I didn't know that," she began. "But I did always think that the amount I want to have sex is bad and makes me dirty [makes her feel like she is doing something wrong or is promiscuous]," she said. Many of the young women I spoke with talked about "feeling dirty" or "sluttish" because of their desire for having frequent sex. For some of them, this feeling had been ingrained in them by family members, or more often by their boyfriends.

"My boyfriend was inadequate," Sormeh, a 21-year-old Tehran "party-hopper" told me. "So he would make me feel bad for wanting sex. For a long time I felt like I was sick, like there was something wrong with me because I loved sex," she described. "But then, I realized, it was *his* problem, not mine. I'm not sick, and my new partners really enjoy my cravings."

Misinformation about HIV/AIDS

The data on HIV and STIs vary depending on the source. All sources agree, however, that there is a need for further research in this area and that, given the sensitivity of this topic in contemporary Iran, much of the data currently presented may not be accurate.

While there are some data about the spread of HIV, data concerning STI (also referred to as sexually transmitted diseases, or STDs) rates remain virtually nonexistent. According to a 1998 report on Iran by the World Health Organization (WHO), "there has been a significant increase of total numbers of reported STD cases in the country during the period of 1995 to 1998."⁴ In the WHO's report candidiasis, trichomoniasis, chlamydia, and gonorrhea⁵ were identified as the four main causes that account for over 60 percent of total diagnosed cases. When assessing STI syndromes, they noted that in 2003 the incidence of young persons (men and women) reporting urethral discharge was 1.96 per 10,000 people surveyed, and for those reporting genital ulcers,

8.4 per 10,000 people surveyed. Other data on STI rates, transmission, and resources for treatment are unavailable, further highlighting the importance of ethnographic research in this area, as well as a need for further sex education of Tehran's youth about sexual and reproductive health risks and decision making. Further discussion on the current providers and resources for treatment is offered later in this chapter.

The first case of HIV in Iran was reported in 1986, and by the end of 2004 there were officially 9,800 HIV-positive cases and 374 cases of AIDS.⁶ However, the WHO and UNAIDS place the estimate of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA is the acronym for this) in Iran at the end of 2004 at 31,000 with a low estimate of 10,000 and a high estimate of 61,000.⁷ This marked discrepancy between the actual numbers of cases and the estimated number of cases speaks to the need for further screening and research in this area. WHO and UNAIDS researchers are currently trying to create screening mechanisms in order to have an estimate based on in-country research. According to the UNAIDS/WHO fact sheet, "based on the reported data, the HIV epidemic in the Islamic Republic of Iran appears to be accelerating at an alarming trend."⁸ Both the WHO and the Ministry of Health in Iran agree that the primary means of transmission of HIV remains injection drug use. In a country with over two million officially registered drug addicts⁹ and over 300,000 identified injection drug users,¹⁰ most HIV centers (such as WHO and the Center for Disease Management) agree that up to 60 percent of registered cases contracted the disease through shared needles.

The WHO/UNAIDS fact sheet adds that there have also been huge outbreaks among injection drug users in prisons. However, it is acknowledged that at least 35 percent of HIV-positive cases contracted the disease sexually. Prior to 1997, the government did not wish to accept Iran's growing HIV problem. During the late 1990s and in recent years, however, the government, perhaps prompted by the reformist president Khatami, changed its stance and began to issue policies and secure fatwas encouraging HIV research and looked favorably to fund public media campaigns. In 2003 the government initiated a program toward legalizing needle exchanges, making Iran one of the first countries to do so in the region. In its final report on the HIV/AIDS situation in Iran, the government-sponsored Center for Disease Management stated that "due to the paucity of research in Iran on high risk behaviors, little is known about potential points of entry for HIV and about behaviors that may influence the rate at which HIV may spread and take hold within specific subpopulations, their HIV/AIDS awareness has not been studied as well."¹¹

In a country where high value is placed on "proper" and "moral" behavior, admitting a disease whose mode of transmission is primarily through unprotected sex and intravenous drug use is difficult. For many years the government refused to comment on the incidence of HIV in Iran, and researchers

interested in this topic were discouraged from investigating the issue. Since 2003, however, because the government has accepted that there may be a rising HIV rate, researchers are now permitted to study the epidemic, and there are now a few testing centers throughout Tehran (though very few outside the capital); several hospitals have opened their doors to HIV and AIDS patients. It is still very difficult to find testing centers, however, and the hospitals and clinics that have been established to serve HIV patients are overcrowded and underfunded. While some providers and doctors have become more open to working with HIV/AIDS patients, HIV-positive people are still highly stigmatized by the community and face difficulties in getting the services they need because some of them have been exiled or stigmatized by their communities and families and many have lost their jobs.

DISCOURSE ON AIDS/HIV It is not surprising that my informants had plenty of misconceptions about HIV/AIDS. While most did not know the difference between HIV and AIDS, many were confused about modes of transmission. These confusions led to anxieties on their part about going to the dentist, the hairdresser, or the swimming pool. During my fieldwork in Tehran I researched how information about HIV was disseminated. The few times it was alluded to, either on the radio, in magazines, or on billboards, the discussion or the messages were mainly centered on drug users and HIV.

Whenever I brought up the topic of HIV in a focus group, it caused intense discussion accompanied by much discomfort. "There is no information out there telling us what we should be doing, why and how," complained Majid, a 21-year-old seminarian from Mashhad. "There could be all these infected people around us and we don't even know it," he exclaimed, causing unease among the other members of the focus group. "They could go to the dentist or hairdresser and they might not know they have AIDS, and what if the dentist there uses the same stuff on us that he used on the AIDS guy?"

Another member of the group added that she did not even really know what HIV was, only AIDS, and asked me to explain the difference. When I did, many people in the group were surprised, as they did not know either. "There isn't any information here," she repeated. "People don't know what AIDS is, people like me (who are supposedly educated), don't even know what HIV is. It's weird, though, because they think it's out there somewhere, [but] that it's not our problem," she added.

Another member of the group, a young man, raised his hand and began to speak slowly. "AIDS scares me," he said as some of the others nodded. "But, to tell you the truth, [there is something else that] I'm scared of more than the disease," he said as everyone leaned in closer to listen to him. "There was an article in the paper about this guy who went to the hospital and said he had AIDS. The hospital refused him, too. Apparently his family had kicked him out of the house and

now, he had no place to go.” As he told this story I noticed people in the room shifting uncomfortably in their seats. “So, I sometimes think, well, if I have it, I’d rather not know and just die; it might be easier that way than living such a hard life,” he added. At this, there was uproar, and everyone began talking at once.

Overall, my informants seemed to be split between thinking it wasn’t a real threat in Iran, or it was only a problem for drug users, and being very afraid that they might be susceptible to it from the dentist, hairdresser, or swimming pool. One couple I interviewed spanned both views. While Yasi, a 22-year-old waitress, believed that AIDS was not a real problem, her boyfriend, Hamid, a 23-year-old electrical engineer, felt that he was highly susceptible to it. “Yeah, I’ve seen a few billboards with AIDS stuff on them, but I didn’t think it was a real problem here in Iran—more like a thing that happens in Africa,” Yasi told me. Her boyfriend quickly grabbed her wrist and shook his head. “No, *azizam* [lit. my darling]. I heard that the dentist and the hairdresser can give it to you, and that it’s a real problem here in Iran,” he explained. “In the last five years it’s become a problem and some people are starting to talk about it, but, it’s like, to be honest, Pardis, we have so many other problems that AIDS, well ...,” he was interrupted by his girlfriend. “AIDS isn’t a big problem,” she interjected. “No, it is a problem, but we have other problems that seem more pressing, like dealing with the *komiteh* [moral police],” Hamid added.

Many of my informants believed that the primary means of HIV transmission was from the dentist or hairdresser. “What do I know about AIDS?” said Nazanin, a 23-year-old photographer. “I know it’s a bad disease, a very bad one that you have to protect yourself from. And it’s not just from sex that you get it; you’re likely to get it from the dentist or the hairdresser, too,” she added. Another young man added swimming pools to his list of how HIV is transmitted. “It’s a bad disease, AIDS, but I can’t explain what the disease really is,” commented Behrad, 23 years old. “I know that some people have AIDS and some do not. While you can get it from sex, you also get it from the dentist, the hairdresser, or sometimes swimming pools,” he said matter-of-factly. He then smiled, puffed out his chest, and added, “That’s why I don’t swim in public swimming pools!”

Others believed rumors that HIV was solely a disease of drug users or prison convicts. “Only drug users have AIDS,” said Hatef, an 18-year-old coffee shop attendant. “I feel confident that I’m not going to get it, and I know lots about AIDS,” he explained. When I asked him about his level of knowledge and whether he was aware that HIV was transmitted sexually, he shook his head. “It comes through blood,” he began. “Some people will tell you that it comes from sexual relations, but it’s not really from that; it’s mostly from heroin users, from them who often stick dirty needles into their veins,” he said stopping to look at me before continuing. I looked up from my notes and nodded, indicating that he could continue. “And also it comes from prisons specifically—that’s where it

is mostly spread. They don't have needles, and they are forced to share needles, and it is easily spread. Then they come home and spread it to their friends, and when they go back to prison it continues. This is the most normal way AIDS is spread," he finished proudly.

He wanted to know if I was impressed with his knowledge about HIV and if I understood now why he didn't feel at risk. I was not sure how to respond, and as I sat there quietly trying to figure out what to say to him, he spoke up again. "I don't do drugs with needles, so I'm all good," he added. Again, I did not know whether it was appropriate to step out of my role as an anthropologist and become an activist and educator, or whether I should try to process the information he had given me and focus my attention on the interview. This situation came up more than once, so I decided that, at the end of each interview, I would spend a few minutes talking to my informants about any gaps in their knowledge that they wanted filled and oftentimes correcting their misinformation. I also began carrying around fact sheets and pamphlets that I had picked up from the various drop-in centers (which unmarried young adults were not comfortable frequenting), as well as information from the health-care providers I had interviewed. This information was often new to my informants, so I would also refer them to the nearest drop-in center, hoping that they would go there to seek out further information.

Most of my informants told me that the process of getting tested for HIV or STIs was too risky, frightening, and difficult for them. Reraj, the 23-year-old medical student, explained to me that none of his friends had ever been tested, nor would they ever want to be tested.

"Why not?" I asked him.

"Well, they don't really want to know," he responded. I then repeated my question.

"Look, they just don't care. They either think that they don't have it because they feel fine, or they figure, what's the point if they have it they are going to die anyways, right? Why make your last years difficult? Just keep your reputation, getting sick is less serious," Reraj explained.

Maryam, a 23-year-old computer technician, alluded to Reraj's statements. "Getting tested here isn't really popular. I mean, I'm sure it's expensive, and it's just too scary," she explained. Though I told her that there were centers where free testing was available, she reminded me that while the testing was free and voluntary, that it was not anonymous. She told me that she didn't know anyone who had been tested, and when I asked her why she thought this was, she responded, "Well, it's just too much, and how scary! But I mean, what is the difference? You are still going to die, [so] it might as well die ignorant, right?"

I asked her what she found most fearful about HIV.

"It's so scary here, the way they tell it; it's the way they give the stories to us that's a problem. They tell us you will die quickly if you have it; you will die

for sure, they say. Then they say you will lose your friends and family, no one will want to associate with you. They paint a very bleak picture, so it's like, we'd rather just not know, you know?" she explained, her voice trembling. Maryam, like many of my informants, was uneasy in discussing the HIV issue; therefore I tried to be responsive and did not press her any further.

Many of my informants said that they were afraid of being tested because they were worried more about the societal consequences of having HIV than the health hazards. As indicated above, while there are several drop-in centers that perform free voluntary testing and counseling, there currently exist no anonymous HIV testing centers throughout the country. There are some voluntary testing centers, and an HIV test is a mandatory prerequisite for obtaining a marriage license; however, there is no prenatal testing. Some young people said that their biggest fears about contracting HIV would be familial and community rejection, not to mention bringing shame to the family.

But while many said that they were worried about being exposed to HIV, most did not indicate a willingness to do anything to minimize their risk. Those who had decided that HIV came from dentists or hairdressers had found ways to put their minds at ease about these modes of transmission, and those who believed it came solely from injection drug use or prisons felt that by "staying out of trouble" that they were somehow safe. While for some, their misconceptions about the disease made them feel at ease, others felt more anxiety at not being equipped with the right information to make informed choices.

DISCOURSE ON SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are highly prevalent among Iranian young adults, as indicated earlier in this chapter, but they are "highly understudied" according to Dr. M. Sadeghi, a gynecologist in midtown Tehran. Most of my informants who did not have personal experience with STIs, or did not know of a friend who had contracted one, could not name a single STI, and many of them did not know what STIs were or how they were transmitted. The few who did boast some knowledge of STIs often were misinformed.

"You mostly get these sexual diseases from women," explained Khodi, a 24-year-old soldier. "I know about them, sure, but it's women who carry them, so if you go with the right women, you won't get sick," he explained to me. Another young woman, Leila, a 20-year-old urban planning student alluded to Khodi's statements in her concerns about STIs.

"I don't know a lot about STIs, I admit it, but the one thing I do know is that women suffer from these diseases more—that it's tougher on us," she explained. When I asked her how she thought women contracted STIs, she responded, "You don't necessarily get it from an infected person; sometimes you get it from bacteria, just from interacting with someone else. But I guess there are certain things you can do to curb them, right?" she asked. Though Leila was

worried about the fact that women were more susceptible to contracting STIs, she revealed that she didn't take any measures to protect herself.

"Look, I don't know much about STIs but I heard that they mostly come from outside the country, but if you are strong, athletic, and eat well like me, you won't get them," said Hossein, a 23-year-old military officer in training. Hossein was confident that he was not at risk for STIs because of his lifestyle. Though he told me that he regularly engages in unprotected sex with multiple partners, he added that because he "took care of himself" he was not worried about being at risk for contracting an STI.

Most of my informants indicated virtually no knowledge about STIs and could not even explain how they were transmitted. A few informants alluded to urinary tract infections and having to treat those with home remedies, but this was largely an issue not discussed among the young people with whom I interacted. Many were concerned about HIV and/or pregnancy, but very few reported any concerns about STIs and even fewer reported experience with any STIs. My informants also indicated (and I observed) that there is no information distributed about STIs and no public education campaigns referencing them, either. As indicated above and earlier in this chapter, this highlights a need for further research into this area, which has been virtually ignored. Few of the sex education campaigns in the past or the ones being designed for the future refer to the presence of STIs, and there is currently, to my knowledge, no qualitative research being conducted on this important area of concern.

DISCOURSE ON SEX EDUCATION Many of my informants noted that their friends were their primary source of information about sexuality, though some informants reported public billboards, advertising campaigns, and public television and radio broadcasts as venues from which they received information. During the summer of 2007, I saw many television specials about HIV, heard radio stories about STIs and HIV, and saw several billboards about these subjects. Though there were no references to condoms or condom usage, the fact that there is some information now being distributed through public avenues is notable and indicates a discourse shift.

Though several informants received some of their information from television or radio, the majority of young people with whom I spoke referenced their friends. "Everything I know, I know from my friends," began Hatef, the 18-year-old coffee shop attendant. "Before my friends, I didn't know anything about sex; they explained things to me. At first I didn't believe the things they were saying, but then I learned that they were right—that's how it really was," he explained.

Sonya, a 24-year-old painter whose paintings I was observing at Tehran's Museum of Contemporary Art, also described her friends as being the primary source for information and the only forum in which she felt comfortable asking questions about sex. "I think that there are so many things about sex that

are mysterious," she said. "There were so many more things in the beginning that I just didn't know and I had to learn on my own from my friends. But thank goodness for my friends; they are the only people I can speak comfortably about sex with," she added.

Reraj and Shirin, both 23-year-old medical students, indicated on separate occasions that their friends relied on them to transmit their knowledge about sex and sexuality. "My friends at school depend on me for their information about sex," noted Reraj proudly. "It's hard 'cause I don't know that much either—like in medical school they don't teach us how to turn a girl on, but my buddies think that I have all the answers, but I don't!" Reraj said he often felt pressure to disseminate information that he did not have, and he noted that more extensive sex education in schools would help young people not to rely exclusively on word of mouth for information.

Shirin agreed with this when she described that she was the one member of her girlfriends' group who was responsible for giving the women the information about sex, and for often obtaining contraceptive materials. "I don't like having to play this role necessarily, but I'll do it," she said. "It's just that I don't have a clue about a lot of this stuff, and to tell you the truth, sometimes I have to make stuff up, but I know that this isn't good—but what can we do? It's not like we have proper sex education," she said referring to an earlier statement she had made to me about the need for formalized, standardized sex education at the high school level.

While most of the information about sex and sexuality is transmitted through word of mouth, some of my informants noted that they have received some information from television programs, especially satellite television programs. "If I really want to learn about sex, I like to learn it from the television. I always have," explained Khodi, 23 years old. "When I was a kid there was this program called *Tutti-Frutti* (a popular television show), and the women in this show would take off their clothes. That's how I first started learning about the female body," he said with a smile. "Now I watch the Persian Music Channel and I listen to your American rap. That gives me all the information I need to know about sex; *do you get it (mifahmi)?*"

Nilufar, a 19-year-old university student, also described television programming as a primary source of information about sex, though she referred to domestic television programs. "A lot of the information I get about diseases like AIDS is from this television program hosted by a doctor on Channel 2," she explained. "The other night, there was a special where they were talking to AIDS patients—you know, people who have AIDS—and the people on the show were sad and embarrassed and stuff, but that was the first time I ever saw someone who has AIDS," she said.

Several other informants indicated that in the past two years (since 2005) there has been an increase in programs about HIV/AIDS on the Islamic

republic's radio and television network (*Seda va Sima*). This new development, in and of itself, is an indicator of the depth of the discourse shift, wherein public television and radio stations are now talking about sex, STIs, and HIV—topics that would previously have been considered taboo.

Asana and Sara also noted that television programs were useful avenues for information, especially the interactive programs broadcast from Los Angeles, where people around the world were able to call in and ask questions about a variety of issues. "She doesn't really talk a lot about actual sex, but Dr. Farnoudy's show is a good place to learn about people's emotional problems," explained Sara, referring to the California-based Iranian psychologist, Nehzat Farnoudy, who has her own show on one of Los Angeles's more popular Iranian stations. "Yeah, and you can call and ask her for relationship advice," added Asana. "She is great, we all love her, but she doesn't educate us on a lot of aspects about sex," interjected Sara. "That's what we need—a sex education channel that we can call in to! Can you set that up for us?"

Minimizing the Risks

The success of the family planning program in Iran is evidenced by the fact that it has been hailed as a role model for other countries. It has been greatly successful in producing a decline from over six children per woman in the mid-1980s to 2.1 in 2000.¹² Additionally, the contraceptive prevalence rate rose from 37 percent in 1976 to about 75 percent in 2000. This included a rise in rural areas from 20 percent in 1976 to 72 percent in 2000, and in urban areas from 54 percent to 82 percent.¹³ This success has come at a great cost to the government, however. Prior to 1989 there had been no specific line in the Iranian budget for family planning activities. Between 1991 and 1992, approximately 13 billion rials had been allocated to the program; by 1993, the budget had grown to 16.8 billion rials.¹⁴ In 2000, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education provided 75 percent of all family planning services.

It is important to note that most of the efforts made toward improving the family planning program in Iran have taken place in the last two decades. Immediately following the Revolution, much of the family planning system that was under the old regime disintegrated. The new government adopted a policy advocating early marriage and large families, reducing the minimum legal age for marriage to nine years old for women and 12 years old for boys.¹⁵ In addition to this pronatalist position of the government (meaning that the government was encouraging its citizens to have more children), the war with Iraq fueled the desire for a rapid growth rate, as Ayatollah Khomeini pushed to bolster the ranks of the "soldiers for Islam," aiming for "an army of 20 million."¹⁶

Additionally, the shah's family planning system was denounced as part of his Westernization efforts. During this postrevolutionary period, the rate of

children per women jumped from 6.3 in 1976 to 7.0 in 1986.¹⁷ Even though contraceptive use (as long as it did not hurt the mother or child) was not illegal, did not include abortion, and was often not opposed by married women or their husbands, many suppliers of contraceptives were closed down. Those that were not closed quickly ran out of contraceptive supplies and replacements were not procured, leading to shortages.

The IUD and sterilization methods were officially suspended until 1980, when Dr. Moatamedi requested and received a fatwa from Imam Khomeini allowing them to be used with the consent of the couple as long as it did not expose them to harm. However, the issue of sterilization was still under much debate after this fatwa and was therefore not made available. Imam Khomeini later issued a statement saying that any devices that did not harm women physically or make them sterile were permissible (1985).¹⁸

Meanwhile, the universal rationing system that was introduced as a means to guarantee equal access to basic necessities also encouraged higher fertility. The rationing system included everything from property ownership to basic food items, to modern consumer goods, and goods were distributed on a per capita basis—that is, larger families were entitled to a large share of both basic commodities and modern consumer items;¹⁹ families with more than five children were given a free plot of land.

It was not until December 1989 and early 1990 that the government officially changed its position regarding family planning, though beginning in 1988 free contraceptives were available through the primary health care system (only to married couples, however). The new plan was deemed the National Birth Control Policy, and it included an intensive campaign to persuade the public of the need for family planning. Messages were sent through newspaper reports, television spots, and Friday prayer speeches.²⁰ This was supported by a three-day Seminar on Population and Development held in Mashhad in September 1988, at which the announcement was made that the population growth rate was too high and the fatwa regarding family planning was reiterated. In December 1988, the high Judicial Council declared that “there is no Islamic barrier to family planning.”²¹

By 1986, the Iranian population had reached nearly 50 million, an increase of 14 million in the time span of a decade.²² The family planning program had three declared goals: (a) encourage women to space their pregnancies three to four years apart; (b) discourage pregnancy among women younger than 18 and older than 35; and (c) limit family size to three children.²³ In 1990, the Council of Ministers created the Birth Limitation Council, with the duty of increasing contraceptive prevalence among married women and decreasing the total fertility rate, birth rate, and population growth rate. This meant a mass campaign of education programs, including the construction of billboards throughout the country with slogans such as *Owlad-e Kamtar, Zendegei-ye*

Behtar (lit. "Fewer Children, Better Life"); increased access to a wider variety of contraceptives; and research on aspects of family planning services. In 1991, a separate Directorship of Population and Family Planning was established to oversee the delivery of family planning services within the primary health-care network. The system included all forms of modern contraceptives supplied free of charge to married couples.²⁴

In 1993, a Family Planning Bill removed most of the economic incentives for having large families. Many of the allowances to large families were canceled, as well as several benefits for children, which began to provide for only the first three children in a family. Other aspects of the 1993 Family Planning Bill included measures such as decreased guaranteed time off for maternity leave for female workers and other privileges in the labor law; cutting the subsidies for day care for female employees; and cutting subsidies for health insurance premiums on fourth or higher ordered children.²⁵ As part of the second social, economic, and cultural plan of the Iranian government (1994–1999), the family planning program was fully integrated into the primary health-care system.

In addition to typical modern methods of birth control, Iran also allows both tubal ligation (a procedure whereby women's fallopian tubes are severed, colloquially known as getting ones tubes tied, thereby prohibiting any future conception) and vasectomy. In 1992, the pill was the most frequently used modern method (64 percent), followed by the IUD in urban areas (21 percent) and tubal ligation in rural areas (18 percent). In 1992, 57 percent of modern contraceptives were supplied through public hospitals, health centers, health houses, and pharmacies. The remainder were supplied by the public sector. However, in 1996, 30 percent of pill users did not know how to use them correctly.²⁶ Failure of the contraceptive in use was the most commonly cited reason for unwanted pregnancies among the 5.2 percent of married women between the ages of 15 and 49 who were pregnant in 2000, showing that there is still some educational work concerning contraception that needs to be undertaken by the government.²⁷

There is no doubting the success of the family planning program in Iran. There is, however, some doubt that the government will be able to continue to afford such an extensive program. This is questionable because, within the next ten years, the number of reproductive-age women in Iran will grow by more than 20 percent. Iran, however, has been hailed as progressive in its family planning system, particularly for its region of the world. One of the Middle East's largest condom factories operates in Iran. The country is in the process of expanding its services to couples with emergency contraceptive needs, and while the legality of limiting abortion to only married women is debatable, postabortion care is part of the primary health-care system.²⁸

While Iran must be applauded for its efforts in the family planning arena, the many unmet needs of an increasing portion of Iran's population must also

be acknowledged. None of these services is offered to unmarried women, and many married women do not feel comfortable demanding information or resources on family planning owing to fear of social stigma. Officially, statistics show that only about 7.6 percent of all women have an unmet need for family planning in Iran;²⁹ however, my qualitative research shows that this number is higher than official statistics indicate because many unmarried young women are hesitant to come forward out of fear of stigmatization and punishment from the morality police or their family members. That is, they would prefer to avoid pregnancy but are not using any form of family planning.

DISCOURSE ON CONTRACEPTION For many young adults, the ways they choose to grapple with the risks of pregnancy and disease often put them at higher risk. The false sense of security they create for themselves, either by using coitus interruptus, anal sex, or just “being sure of your partner,” has in fact often made them more vulnerable to disease and has also reduced the likelihood of their going to a physician for regular testing or protection. Less than 10 percent of my informants indicated ever using a condom, and this condom usage was not 100 percent of the time. When I asked the men why their condom usage was so low, responses included: “I don’t need them because I’m sure of my partner,” “They are hard to get,” “They are too expensive,” “I don’t know how to [use them],” and “It’s just too awkward.” When I asked the women why less than 10 percent of them used oral contraceptives, their responses included: “The pill makes me fat,” “We can’t get them, we’re not supposed [to buy them] if we’re single” (social taboo rather than law), “It makes me moody,” “I don’t know where to get them,” and “I’m too embarrassed that someone in my family will find them.”

Many of my informants felt shy and awkward when discussing condoms and condom usage. This was especially true during focus groups. When I asked one of my first focus groups the question about why they don’t use condoms, the room went silent for several minutes. Finally, a 19-year-old young man bravely started to speak. When he did, he alluded to multiple issues that were later described in more depth by many of my informants. “Look, people don’t use them so much here. It’s not an easy issue to talk about here, as you may have noticed,” he said looking around at the other members of the group. I asked him to continue.

Well, it’s just that it’s not part of our culture. Also, remember, a girl who is willing to sell herself for 10 tumans or less obviously doesn’t value her life that much that she would actively go out and buy condoms. First of all, they aren’t cheap from what I hear, and then it’s just that the thought probably wouldn’t enter her mind. If she is the type of person, and I’ve met these kinds of people, they go with like two guys in the mornings, two guys in the afternoons, and two in the evening. You think a girl like that with a million guys on her mind is going to go out and

buy condoms? You see what I'm saying? There is only one thing on their minds.

Though this particular young man conflated many of the issues that other informants would later tease apart, he did provide an introduction into the way some young people see condoms. This young man and several others seemed to view condoms as something dirty that only certain types of "bad" women would use. Therefore, by not using them, and in many cases refusing to discuss them, they distinguished themselves from "those kinds of people."

Gypsy, a 21-year-old university student and ex-Web blogger, alluded to this theme as well. "You see, using condoms in Iran is different," he began.

With your girlfriend, you can't use condoms—it's in a way, like, well, you know, weird or dirty—you just can't. Like, for example, let's say you are going to take her virginity; well, like you know if it's her first time, or something, well, that's different, a whole different thing. You just can't use them. Like I said, I sometimes use condoms, but with a girl who I started out not using condoms with, I'm not going to all of a sudden start using condoms again, you know? It's just, it depends on the type of girl you are with.

Gypsy's response to this issue had been surprising to me. This concept of condoms as dirty repeated itself, and one of my key informants, who often reminded me that I was bringing up a sensitive topic in a culture that was not used to discussing contraception and family planning so openly, explained: "Let me tell you that condoms, that the condom issue, is *hanuz ja nayoftadeh* [lit. "not yet fallen into place," not yet accepted] here in Iran. People really don't like it." Sharareh, a 25-year-old English teacher, responded when I asked her what she thought the reasons for this might be: "They don't like how it feels, or it's not a good option." She added: "The condom *ja nayoftadeh* that's one issue, but another issue is that you would have to go and buy the condom from the pharmacy; and, well, you have seen yourself that Tehran can be a very small place and people know each other. So the kids—my friends, too—are afraid to go to the pharmacy and buy condoms or even pills because they think they might see someone they know, or the pharmacist may tell their parents or something like that. The main thing is that it's hard; it's hard to buy them and hard to use them. Our life here is hard—why add this to that?" Sharareh stressed that because condoms were not a culturally accepted phenomenon, many of the women she knew were not comfortable even discussing condom usage among their friends, let alone with their partners.

Nazgol, a 19-year-old student at Azad University, in Tehran, alluded to this when discussing her lack of condom use with me. "Look, it's not like I actively *don't* want to use them—you know, *them*," she emphasized. Throughout the interview she avoided even saying the word "condom," which goes by its English

name rather than the Persian slang, which used to be *caput*. "It's just a matter of 'I don't want to be the one bringing the issue up. I don't want to have to talk about it, it's just not me,'" she explained. Another student from Azad University, Azita, also age 19, seconded Nazgol's statements. "Look, those things, condoms, they are just *khashen* [awkward, uncomfortable]," she explained, making a face. "They are gross, and icky. Not the kind of things that 'good Iranian women' bring up," she added.

Alireza, a 24-year-old salesman in the northern part of town, commented on this phenomenon. Alireza had spent part of his life in the United States and had moved back to Iran in 2001 to work in the family business. "You know, if you ask me, Iran is going to end up with a really high AIDS rate 'cause no one here uses condoms," he began, lowering his voice when saying the word "AIDS."

It's strange; it's like they get offended if you even ask or try to use one, they [women] say, "Who do you think I am, a prostitute?" or like "D'you think I'm sick or something?" or "Don't you trust me?" Yeah, trust is a big thing here. But how are we supposed to trust these women? There is this one girl, okay? She wants to sleep with me, but over the past two months I have seen her ten times out with probably ten different guys! Can you believe it? Like, it's becoming a joke at this point. Yesterday I went for lunch at this restaurant in the middle of town. I had taken this client there for lunch, and then as soon as I sat down, she sat down at the table next to us with yet another guy! Her eyes caught mine, and we both actually laughed. Am I really supposed to trust a girl like that? For fun or dating, okay. But to have sex without a condom, no way!

Alireza indicated that he preferred to use condoms with women he didn't know, but he revealed that, with his steady girlfriend, they had never used them. Two of my male informants also noted that they "sometimes" used condoms, especially with women they didn't "know" or "trust." "Usually when I have a steady girlfriend, I don't use them," explained Hossein, a 23-year-old military officer in training. "But if I decide to go out one night, and I see some girl, someone I don't know too well, if it's like this, then maybe I'll use [condoms]. But even then, I can't say that I do that every time. I know it's really bad, but, yeah, that's the truth," he admitted.

Another friend of Hossein's, Massoud, 24 years old and an air force pilot in training, indicated that he, too, uses condoms only when he is at a party and drunk and about to sleep with someone other than his girlfriend. "When I was younger, I started having sex when I was like thirteen or fourteen, and back then we didn't know what condoms were, so that wasn't my fault. But now, well, I guess I'm just not used to them, but when I'm pretty drunk I use them," he told me.

I stopped taking notes and looked at him. I found it odd that he would only remember to use condoms when he was drunk, as most young people in

the United States whom I knew claimed that they would forget to use a condom when alcohol was involved.³⁰ "When you're drunk, you use them?" I asked incredulously.

"You bet," he said smiling. "So when do you *not* use them?" I asked.

"When I'm not drunk or when I'm with my girlfriend," he responded. Massoud then began describing his girlfriend, but left me confused until our next interview, when he explained his reasoning further. Later he told me that the reason he uses condoms when intoxicated is that when he is sober, he is able to control himself to the point where he can use coitus interruptus, or "the pull-out method" (in colloquial Persian, *tamum nemikonam*—lit. "I don't finish"). Accordingly when he is drunk, he does not have the same level of control.

Many of my informants also indicated that the process and price of obtaining condoms were simply too cumbersome and high. If one is unmarried, stigma, gossip, and chastising pharmacists make it difficult to purchase condoms; many drugstore salespersons do ask for proof of marriage lessons before selling the condoms, though it is not strictly illegal for unmarried people to purchase them. Many drugstore personnel take it upon themselves to be morality enforcers. For young people who are married, it is legal to purchase condoms, but many, especially women, indicate that the price, both monetarily and with regard to potentially tarnished reputations, was simply too high. In countries such as the United States, where there is significantly less stigma in purchasing condoms, and they are distributed for free on many college campuses, young people are hesitant to procure them. But in an environment such as Iran, where premarital sex is punishable and tarnished reputations carry risk of social exclusion, purchasing condoms is near impossible for unmarried young adults.

Two of my female informants said that they preferred not to buy the condoms and saw this action as "a man's job." Rana, a 23-year-old housewife who has been married for two years, believes, "It's really something the guy has to buy, not something that I am supposed to deal with. I don't think women should have to worry about these things, because it's one of those things where a girl just has to ask if the guy has it or not," she explained. I then asked her what would happen if a young man did not have a condom. "Well, then you just have to be going with a guy you trust like your boyfriend or husband," she answered nonchalantly.

This response corresponds with many of the comments made by young men about being "with people you can trust" as being a risk-reduction measure. Naghmeh, another 23-year-old housewife and part-time beautician, preferred condoms to other methods of family planning but echoed Rana's sentiments. "Well, condoms, I guess we sometimes use them, but we really don't like them," she complained. When I asked her what she didn't like about them, she talked about the process of purchasing them. "It's really something that he should do, not me. I hate doing it, but I sometimes have to, and let me tell you, Pardis, it's a hard process," she said, lowering her voice to hushed tones.

I asked her if she bought them at a local drugstore. “No!” she exclaimed. “Not a drugstore around here, but one in the southern part of town, where no one will see me!” she exclaimed. I found this interesting, given that she is married; I couldn’t exactly understand why she was embarrassed to be seen buying condoms. “Because I’m the *girl*!” she shouted. “It’s not supposed to be my job, but I do it. I go there and there is always a different selection. But, I tell you, you never know what exactly you’re going to get when you open the box,” she explained, leaning in even closer.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes, I mean sometimes they are good, but sometimes you get ones that are studded or have strange patterns on them, and those I don’t like at all. I hate them actually; they make me feel dirty and are super uncomfortable,” she added. Naghmeh again expressed the sentiments of many of my married female informants who felt that using condoms, buying them, or in some cases even discussing them made them feel “dirty” or like “bad Iranian women.”

Sara, an unmarried 22-year-old university student, reiterated Naghmeh’s feelings that she did not want to risk being seen by family members or gossiping friends while purchasing condoms at the drugstore, especially because of her single status. “My whole family goes to, like, the three main pharmacies in this neighborhood,” she said. “Can you imagine if I were caught by my parents or someone found out that I was out buying condoms?! I’d be thrown out of my parents’ house, that’s for sure!”

DISCOURSE ON THE PILL While a select few of my informants felt that contraceptive pills were a good and easy option for family planning, most of them complained that “the pill” made them gain weight, become sensitive, have mood swings, and develop bad skin. It was for this reason that most of them revealed they were not on an oral birth control regimen, and many said that they had no interest in this option.

One of the biggest challenges in talking to my informants about oral contraceptives was their confusion about what this category encompassed. Often the informants would indicate that they used “the pill” as a primary means of contraception, but I would later realize that when they referred to “the pill” they actually meant the “morning-after pill,” or emergency contraception. Another major problem that my female informants faced was lack of knowledge about how to properly take oral contraceptives, both birth control pills and emergency contraception. Some of the women created emergency contraception concoctions for themselves and then faced health consequences, such as internal bleeding or infertility, afterwards.

Sepideh, a 22-year-old musician and waitress at Darband (an area located in the foothills of northern Tehran lined with teahouses and fruit stands), described her experience with homemade emergency contraception: “Look, I

can't get my own pills, okay? It's not as easy as you think," she told me her voice suddenly taking a somewhat hostile tone.

"Oh, but you're on the pill, then?" I asked.

"No," she explained. "I'm not *on* the pill, I sometimes *take* pills—you know, after sex. Do you understand (*mifahmi*)? I take them maybe that night or perhaps the morning after," she said, her tone softening a bit. I then asked her if she took a special set of emergency contraceptive pills or if they were birth control pills that were supposed to be taken as part of a monthly regimen.

"I don't know what you are talking about. I get my cousin's pills; they come in a box with a bunch of them, and then I take a few after sex if the guy has, you know, come inside me," she responded. Sepideh did not seem worried about the fact that she was self-prescribing oral contraceptives.

"Have you ever been to a doctor? Like a gynecologist?" I asked her.

"Why? What for? I'm not sick, and it's under control," she responded. Sepideh alluded to a theme brought up by many of my female informants who believed that they did not need to see a doctor unless they were very sick. The idea of routine checkups or preventive medicine was not a part of their discourse.

One of my earliest, most vivid experiences in Iran, on my first visit in 2000, was an example of homemade contraception. I was waken in the night to the shrieks of a friend of mine who had called from her boyfriend's house and who was sobbing so hard I could barely understand her. When she calmed down, she told me she was very sick and needed my help. "What happened?" I asked her. She then explained to me that after having sex with her boyfriend, during which he failed to use their favored method of coitus interruptus, she had secretly crept into her sister's room and stolen a box of birth control pills from her medicine cabinet. Then, after a short consultation with her boyfriend, she ingested all 28 pills in the packet and was now violently ill. She begged me for advice, but outside of telling her to go to the doctor, I had very little insight into what she should now do. I did, however, take the opportunity to tell her that this was not the proper method of using oral contraceptives, and I followed up later with an explanation of the intricacies of family planning to her and a group of her friends. Luckily, she was fine and sick only for a day or two following her ingesting of such a high level of hormones. She now tells me she uses her own story to educate her friends about the importance of being informed.

Nazanin, the 23-year-old photographer who expressed a distaste for condoms, also expressed a disliking for being on a daily oral contraceptive regimen. "Take them every day?!" she exclaimed. "No, I prefer to take them only on the mornings after I've had sex. This seems to me the best way for me," she explained.

I asked her about her aversion to taking the pill on a regular basis. "Well, once for a while I was taking the birth control pill, but I didn't like it cause I got heavy and cranky, so I stopped and decided not to do this anymore," she responded. Nazanin seemed to feel that taking emergency contraception occasionally (hers

was also a self-prescribed dose of orthotricyclin, a popular oral contraceptive pill meant to be taken on a daily basis) was a better alternative to being on the pill permanently.

Nazanin was not the only one of my female informants to complain of the negative side effects of oral contraceptives. In fact, most of the women I asked about oral contraceptives cited these negative side effects in their reasoning either for going off the pill or for not starting in the first place. Naghmeh, the 23-year-old housewife/beautician, complained that “I hate the pill ‘cause it made me fat! I used to be on the pill, but, you know, it made me big, it made me gain a lot of weight right here,” she said putting her hands on her hips and then extending them out to the sides to indicate growth in their size. “My bottom half just grew enormous, so I went off it,” she explained. Naghmeh was able to access oral contraceptives more easily because she was married and noted that she had only learned about their proper usage in the mandatory prenuptial counseling course she had taken a few years ago.

DISCOURSE ON COITUS INTERRUPTUS AND TRUST By far the response that I received most often to questions on prevention, contraception, and protection was coitus interruptus, or the pull-out method. Some referred to this as “being careful.” Others often cited “being sure of your partner” in response to questions of disease prevention. This was the most popular way of preventing pregnancy and disease, according to all of my sexually active informants. Even those informants who used condoms or other contraceptives did not do so when they were “sure of their partner” or “sure of themselves,” as in the case of young men who were confident that they would be able to “pull out in time.”

“I don’t take pills, I don’t do anything special, I’m just careful,” Leila, 20 years old, explained to me. “Natural methods—those are the options we’ve been given here. So we’re careful,” she added. Soraya, a 22-year-old university student and midwife in training, had the response of “being careful” when I asked her about her personal contraception choices. “So, wait, what do you do for protection?” I asked her, wanting to make sure that I had understood her correctly.

“Well, I’m careful,” she said shyly.

“Oh, you mean the pull-out method,” I added.

“Yes, I won’t let a guy come inside me—that’s what we do.” I was a bit surprised given Soraya’s decision to be involved in reproductive health as a profession.

“But, this doesn’t always work, plus there are diseases, too,” I protested.

“Well, the guys I go with aren’t the type to go around with a lot of women, so it’s okay,” she explained.

It seemed as though young women and men had created an ideal “type” of person whom one could have unprotected sex with, and they were perfectly comfortable with this notion. Nazgol, a 19-year-old student was very matter-of-fact when

she told me that her primary means of prevention is “being sure of herself and her partner.” When I told her that this did not always prevent the transmission of disease or pregnancy, she just shrugged and said she felt comfortable with her choice in family planning. “I am sure of what I’m doing,” she told me very seriously.

“Well, what prevention methods do your friends use?” I asked her.

“Well, pull-out. That’s just how it’s done here. Soon you will realize that.”

Virtually all of the sexually active young men I interviewed indicated using coitus interruptus as a primary means of contraception at one time or another. This, combined with “being sure of their partners” and “sure of themselves and their own skills,” seemed to put them at ease. “When I’m sure of my partner, I don’t use condoms. That’s it really, nothing more to it than that,” explained Hossein, the 23-year-old military officer in training, when I asked him about his contraception preferences. “With this kind of thing, you just have to be careful. That’s the primary means of family planning,” he added.

Hossein’s friend and fellow military officer in training, Behzad, echoed his friend’s sentiments when I interviewed him alone later that day. “See, in Iran, do you know what we all use for pregnancy prevention?” he asked me. At this point I felt I knew the answer, but wanted to hear him give his opinion, so I shook my head. “Natural methods, you know? Pulling out. Me? I never come inside a girl; I’m good like that,” he emphasized proudly.

This seemed to be a skill that men worked toward perfecting, and then when they achieved their goal, they were not shy about boasting. I then went back to my interview with Massoud, the 24-year-old playboy who had told me that he used condoms only when he was drunk. I remember that his main reasoning was that he could not control himself, or “be sure of himself” when drunk. He also used the phrase “sure of my partner” repeatedly in our interview.

P So, when do you *not* use a condom, since you are saying that you *do* use them when drunk?

M Only when I’m sure of my partner.

P How is it that one becomes “sure of their partner”?

M Of my partner? When I have some knowledge of them, when I know who they were with and who they were not with.

P How can you know and be trusting of your partner? Especially given that you tell me you sleep with 12 people a month?!

M Well, because I am very comfortable, and my partner is very comfortable with me, so it’s all good.

For many of my informants, reliance on coitus interruptus was attributed to their lack of knowledge of other options, and many indicated this to me at different times. “Before I met you, I had no idea what a diaphragm was,” one

informant told me, while others noted that they had been led to believe that relying on the “pull-out method” was quite safe. “You can’t get pregnant from doing it from behind, or from pulling out, right?” Nassim, a 24-year-old housewife asked me. When I told her she could, she like many other informants who were astounded at this revelation told me, “You see, these are things they don’t tell us in Iran. We talk about sex, yes, that’s an improvement, but we don’t talk about risk, health, and taking care of ourselves,” she sighed. Later that week she invited me to offer informal sex education classes for her and her female friends at her house once a week. I gladly accepted.

CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Abortion

Prior to 1973, any form of induced abortion was illegal in Iran except to save the life of the pregnant woman, provided she was married. At no point in the nation’s history has abortion for any reason been legal for unmarried women, and self-administered abortions have also been historically illegal. In 1973, Article 182 of the Penal Code referenced self-induced abortion in noting, “A woman who took or employed any kind of medication or substance resulting in an abortion except on the orders of a physician was subject to up to three years of imprisonment.”³¹ Under Article 183 of the Penal Code, which was in place by 1974, “a medical worker or person acting as such who performed an abortion was subject to three to ten years forced labor unless it could be proved that the action had taken place to save the life of the mother.”³²

Following this, in 1976 the Penal Code was changed to permit a physician to perform an abortion if (a) the couple was able to provide evidence of social or medico-social grounds for an abortion; (b) the abortion was performed during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy; (c) written permission of the parents was obtained (even for married women); and (d) there was no danger to the health of the mother from the procedure. In the event that the abortion was requested on the grounds that the pregnant woman or her husband was insane, the law required written permission of the legal guardian of the insane partner. For a woman in the process of suing for a divorce, the consent of her husband was required if the fetus was legally considered to be his responsibility. In the case of an abortion performed for medical purposes, including cases in which the child would be born with an incurable disease, the physician had to obtain the endorsed opinion of two other qualified physicians. In such cases, the written consent of the woman alone was considered to be sufficient. The law also required that abortions be performed in a fully equipped hospital or clinic.³³

After the 1979 revolution, abortion was made illegal on most grounds, except to save the mother’s life. Under the Penal Code of 1991, which was revised

based on a reformist interpretation of Islamic law, abortion was reclassified as a lesser crime involving bodily injury, which in turn was punishable by three to ten years in prison, accompanied by payment of “blood money” (*diyeh*) or compensation paid to the “victim” or, in the case of the “victim’s” death, to the relatives—in these instances, to the father of the fetus.

In early 2005, prompted by a law instated by former reformist president Khatami in 2003, the Iranian parliament voted to liberalize the country’s abortion laws. Under the proposed law, a pregnancy for a married woman (only) could be terminated in the first four months if the fetus was mentally or physically handicapped. This was said to be in accordance with recent interpretations of Islamic law that hold that a fetus does not have a soul until it is 120 days (some say 17 weeks) old. Under this new law, both sets of parents of the married couple are required to give their consent and three doctors have to confirm that the fetus is damaged.³⁴ This was the way that abortion services had been proposed during Khatami’s rule; however, the proposed law, passed by the Iranian parliament, was rejected by the Guardian Council, who reported that “it is against Shari’a to abort children who would inflict a financial burden on the parents after birth due to mental or physical handicap.”³⁵

Currently, all abortions are strictly illegal except those to save the mother’s life or if the fetus is diagnosed with thalassemia, and these must take place under three months. However, many illegal abortions are performed by doctors in Tehran, and unmarried young people continue to make use of self-administered medications to induce abortions (though, as mentioned, there is no research to speak to the numbers of young people doing this). Self-administered abortions are major complaints of the physicians in Tehran with whom I spoke in 2004 and 2005, who argue that they often have to treat young people in emergency situations when problems arise from these abortions.

Whenever I asked my informants what they saw as the biggest challenges or risks in their lives, most of the women, and some of the men, mentioned abortion. By 2005, this response was more common (compared to the summer of 2002, when none of the young people I spoke with had unplanned pregnancies on their minds) than the traditional version of “being caught” by the morality police.

When I asked one informant—Rana (23), an unemployed young woman living in northern Tehran—about her experiences with private doctors who provide illegal abortions, she said that it was relatively easy to find a doctor who would perform an abortion, and she was highly satisfied with the level of service she received.

R Yeah, I had an abortion.

P And was that abortion easy?

R Well, in terms of pain, no, it wasn’t, it hurt. But other than that, it was good. They did it in an office.

P Was the office easy to find?

R Oh, yes, very easy to find.

P And is it expensive?

R Well, yes, and it's gotten more expensive. But you know, it was okay, I handled it.

While Rana emphasized that she was happy with the attention and care she received before, during, and after her abortion, she indicated that it was one of the biggest challenges and risks in her life. She revealed to me later in the interview that she often worries that she will not be able to conceive when she and her husband are ready to have children. She worries that God will punish her by making her infertile, yet she refuses even after the difficult emotional experiences following her abortion to take contraceptive pills or use condoms.

Two other informants (both married women) indicated that they were so comfortable with finding private abortion doctors in Tehran that they use abortions as a form of contraception. Sonia, a 25-year-old mother of two, told me one afternoon that after having two boys only one year apart, she was ready to stop having children. When I asked her about her method of contraception, she said, "suction" (actually using the English word). I looked at her in a confused way until she explained that "suction" was the slang they used for abortion.

That was the day I learned the many different ways in which women in Tehran refer to abortions. Sonia told me that she had already had two abortions and was planning a third. At her announcement, the other ladies we were dining with whirled around in their seats to look at Sonia. "Well, don't look so shocked ladies, I can't keep having kids. I'm not exactly the motherly type, now am I?" she asked rhetorically. After seeing Sonia speak comfortably about her abortion experiences, four other women in the group began to tell their abortion stories as well. They all described receiving the "suction" at various points in their marriages when they felt that they were not ready for children, either financially or emotionally.

Though it is not clear how many young women in Tehran have the same perspective as Rana or Sonia, or have gone through the same experiences, I did speak to seven other women who had undergone abortions (sometimes very complicated procedures) who were now still not using contraception. This was an interesting and complicated result, and I often asked them why they did not use protection, especially after having gone through the difficult experience of an abortion. They explained to me that the social risks of procuring contraceptives were too high (people might see them and say they are "bad" women, or they might be harassed by members of the morality police), and they added that negotiating condom use with their partners was often so challenging that they "gave up the fight," as they would tell me.

SELF-ADMINISTERED ABORTIONS Women who had undergone abortion procedures by doctors described emotional challenges (suffering from guilt) and often physical challenges (there are still health risks especially for late-term abortions). However, the young women who did not have access to expensive doctors (owing to financial reasons or fear because of their unmarried status) described the challenges they faced as much more pronounced. Ten of the young women I interviewed described the difficult choices they grappled with when facing an unwanted pregnancy. Some of these women were unmarried and from prominent religious or political families, and thus they indicated great levels of trepidation even when discussing matters related to abortions.

"Abortion is super-high here, but let me tell you—there are more illegal abortions, I mean self-abortions, and they [women] do them in strange ways," explained Mandana, a 24-year-old English teacher, when I asked her about the subject of abortion. "Like, right behind the mosques, the Haram-e Imam Reza (Holy Shrine of [the Eight Shi'ite] Imam Reza, in Mashhad) even! Just back there, there are places that sell various abortion stuff like pills or shots, or other things, and sometimes the mullahs go there and buy them and give them out to their women." Mandana stopped and looked at me, as if waiting for me to say something. She often would use this language of conspiracy, taking every opportunity she had to blame things on religious figures, and I often wondered if she was serious in these accusations or if she was half-joking. She hated my skepticism, so I had learned to keep my mouth shut and let her speak.

When I didn't laugh or make any comment, Mandana continued: "Otherwise, the young people themselves go and buy them. And there are these shots that they use for cows, for animals, to induce cow abortions, and they give these to the women! I'm serious, Pardis, I know people who have used them. And it's like the shots, they use these so that the girl aborts quickly, but the problem is that it's not that simple." Mandana sighed and looked at me. Her face was usually cheerful and her lips naturally curved into a smile, but when discussing this topic, she became quite serious and morose. It wasn't until a year later that I would find out that one of her cousins, a young woman she was very close to, had employed this method to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy and now faced serious health problems. Ever since then, many of Mandana's friends had become more apprehensive about these kinds of abortion methods.

When I asked Mandana about the use of doctors for abortions, she explained that doctors didn't always perform abortions in the most medically safe way. "Well, sometimes the doctors have come to the girl's house to perform the abortion there," she began, her eyes darkening as she spoke. "The doctors will come and then they have to do it on a bed, and there aren't any really safe health resources there. They have a bed, but it's not so sterile. They have nothing at their homes sometimes, and if something goes wrong, well, there is nothing anyone can do about it," she explained.

When I asked her about the possibility of going to doctor's offices or clinics for these procedures, she told me that she didn't know of anyone who had gone to a doctor's office for an abortion because it was too expensive, and because they had heard that increasingly doctors are not wanting to risk their reputations to perform these illegal operations; even though sometimes they are performed in private homes, in Iran, walls have eyes and watchful neighbors regularly turn one another in to the morality police.

"Here, it's hard to get rid of the baby," began Leila, an unmarried, 23-year-old art student at Tehran University. "Well, I mean you can get rid of it, like I did, but it's tough and you have to go to scary places. Many doctors don't do it, and you can't tell your parents. Basically it's difficult to find information on what to do to get rid of it." Leila then described to me the process she had gone through, which led her to eventually procure an injection (the actual composition and ingredients of which she still doesn't know) from a black-market dealer who brought it to her boyfriend's home one afternoon. Leila told me that she is from an extremely religious family, and indicated that her father was a famous ayatollah. She noted that, to this day, she feels conflicted about her decision, but her parents have no knowledge of the difficult events that transpired in her life during the summer of 2003.

Leila was hesitant to tell me her story, but then decided that she wanted to "get it out" and talk to me about it. "First, when we found out I was pregnant—well, my first instinct was to kill myself," she started. "I mean, given who my father is—oh, and by the way, he would kill me if he ever found out," she cautioned leaning in to me so that her voice was almost a whisper. "Well, so I found out I was pregnant last summer, right? And so, well, we faced a bad situation, my boyfriend and me." Leila shifted in her seat as she told the story, stopping toward the end to wipe a tear from her cheek.

Well, it was difficult, but we went to a few doctors. When they saw my name, they refused to do it. It was terrible; everywhere we went, the doctors refused me, maybe 'cause of my dad. Anyways, things were getting desperate; most of the doctors we knew had turned us away, and other doctors who had been recommended to us, we couldn't afford. Mind you, I was totally uncomfortable asking for money from my parents. Well, anyways, finally I turned to my friends to ask for advice. Some of them told me that there are these pills or injections that you can get from Naser Khosrow Avenue—you know, behind the big mosque outside the bazaar? I was embarrassed to go down there and buy stuff, so I sent my boyfriend to check it out. He took one look at the alleyway and refused. We decided to call someone to deliver the stuff to my boyfriend's house one day, when his parents were out of town visiting Shomal [the northern region of Iran by the Caspian Sea].

So, some guy on a motorbike came and delivered a mysterious shot. My boyfriend injected me with it and I became very ill. I was sick for days. When my parents called asking me where I was, I told them that I had gone out of town with my friends. It was terrible.

Leila had spent seven days hiding and resting in her boyfriend's bedroom. She recalled her experience with a great deal of sorrow. She told me that the worst part of it was not the sickness she felt after the injection but, rather, the sense of guilt that has plagued her to this day. She felt horrible about lying to her parents, and she had a great deal of anxiety and fear that what she had done to her body would have long-term consequences. Leila told me that many women of her sister's age (early 30s), who had used these methods to end unwanted pregnancies, now faced problems of infertility.³⁶ She recounted the story of her best friend's sister, who at the age of 27 was ready to have her first child, but because she had used abortion-inducing drugs believed she would no longer be able to conceive. Her friend's current husband, who could not understand the situation, was now filing for a divorce, claiming that an infertile woman is a "damaged woman" (in Persian, a pejorative colloquial term used to refer to a woman's infertility). "This is my biggest fear," Leila said as her eyes began to fill with tears. "That one day, I will want that baby back."

It is unclear what the nature of the market for animal abortions is; however, it seems as though selling these concoctions on the black market has become very popular. One afternoon in the summer of 2004, I attempted to purchase one of these shots from Naser-Khosrow Avenue, the alleys of which I had been told were filled with black-market goods and specifically pharmaceutical concoctions. I took down the address of the exact alleyway that was known to sell "solutions to pregnancy problems," as one of my informants described it. That afternoon I walked around the area until I found the alleyway, marked by a man selling candy and chocolates at the entrance. I walked up to the candy-seller, and just as I had been instructed by my informants, asked him where I could find a solution to my pregnancy problem. "Hello, sir," I said, looking over my shoulder to make sure no one was following me. The man looked up from his newspaper and nodded at me. "I have a problem that I want to get rid of," I quickly said, trying to speak in correct Persian so that none of my American accent would come through. The man looked up at me for another instant, then turned his attention back to his paper.

"Say please [*kharesh bekon*]," he gruffly mumbled. I was insulted, standing in the alleyway, nervous about being followed, with beads of sweat running down my neck and palms. "Please," I added.

"Today, go to the third gentleman on the left. He has lollipops out in front of his *dakkeh* [small shop]," he said, again not looking up from his paper. I thanked the "candy man" and went looking for the man with the lollipops. He

was relatively easy to spot because the candies he sold were wrapped in bright colors. When I walked up to the stand, the man was sucking on one of his own lollipops and filling in a crossword puzzle.

"Hello, Sir, *khasteh nabashi*" (lit. "hope you are not tired," a formality used in greetings to denote an acknowledgment that the person is hardworking). I began again, wondering if he would have the same attitude as the candy man "goon" at the head of the alley. "Hello, Sister [*khwahar*]," he said brightly, "how can I help you?" I took a deep breath and once again checked to make sure no one was around me.

"I'm pregnant and I want not to be," I quickly said, trying to be as convincing as possible.

"No problem, Sister, just wait a moment," he replied calmly. I waited for what seemed like an eternity, until the man came back with a bottle of pills and what looked like a vial of liquid. "Do you prefer the pills or the injection?" he asked me.

At this point, I wasn't sure what to say. I hadn't really thought it through because I just wanted to see how easy it was to obtain these goods. "The pills," I found myself saying.

"Very good, then," he said taking out a few pills from the bottle, putting them into a smaller bottle, and handing them to me. "That'll be thirty tumans [shorthand for 30,000 tumans, equivalent to approximately US\$32], please," he said handing me the smaller bottle, which I quickly put in my purse. I handed him the money and left. I was once again surprised at how easily a woman could buy these unknown pills or liquid injection and how little information about the substance of these pills was actually known.

It is unclear how many women are receiving abortions in doctors' offices and how many are electing other solutions to the problem. One thing that is clear from casual conversations I had with young women regarding the subject of abortion, as well as insights from doctors who ended up treating them, is that many young people choosing this method to end unwanted pregnancies are now suffering tremendously, on emotional and often physical levels. The most glaring problem is the criminalization of abortion, which needs to be addressed given the rising number of unwanted pregnancies in Iran.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

While many young adults were unaware of what a sexually transmitted infection (STI) was, let alone the names of STIs and their modes of transmission, a few of my informants admitted to having been diagnosed with what they later found out was an STI, while others described friends who had had this experience.

"It was so painful," recalled Laleh, a 25-year-old housewife describing her first urinary tract infection. "It was only a year after I was married, and I got

these horrible pains when I wanted to go to the bathroom! Then I would get stuck in there for hours.” Laleh and her group of friends regularly referred to their urinary tract infections, or “burnings” as they called them, as their worst STIs. Whenever I asked them about their experiences with STIs, they could talk only about these “burnings.”

“That’s the worst disease you can get from sex, and for the longest time I didn’t know it was from sex. I just thought I ate something or it was my clothes,” Laleh continued. “It wasn’t until two years and three burning episodes later that I realized I had an STI,” she added. As Laleh described this in front of a group of six or seven young women, many of the women nodded, indicating that they had experienced this as well.

“It’s really the worst,” added another young woman. “You feel as though God is punishing you for enjoying too much sex.”

Another young woman, Shadi, a 23-year-old housewife, described her experience with gonorrhea, or *souzak*. “Yes, I know what STIs are, unfortunately,” she told me. “I didn’t for a long time, but then I found out I had one—this is before I got married,” she said stopping to look at my face for reactions. When I showed none, she continued. “I had *souzak*—I don’t know what you call it in English—but that’s what I had, and it was terrible.” She stopped again and looked at my tape recorder, then at me.

“Would you like me to turn it off?” I asked her. She paused, and then shook her head. Readjusting her headscarf, she continued. “I trust you,” she said before continuing. “It was sad, but luckily my mom supported me and took me to the doctor to get it taken care of. I was really fortunate because it happened and got taken care of before I got married, and so I never even had to tell my husband,” she explained. Shadi seemed relieved that the process was over, but still somewhat scarred by the experience, as she was keen to switch topics after this short explanation.

Two of the young men I interviewed indicated experiences with other STIs, one through his own struggle with genital herpes and another through his friend’s fight against hepatitis. Both young men did not know about STIs before their own infections, and both reiterated that it was something that should be talked about in schools and with other young adults. Seppand, a 22-year-old university student whose first sexual encounter was in a car, later told me that he had contracted genital herpes from a girl (he referred to her as a prostitute) that he and his friends had picked up in his car.

“Yes, I know the name of an STI—herpes, how about that one?” he said with a biting tone. “You wanna know how come I know that one?” he angrily asked. I nodded. “Because I have it! Forever, apparently, but I don’t let it ruin me,” he calmly added.

“How did you get it, do you know?” I asked him.

He leaned in to me, took my digital recorder in his hand, and began talking in a hushed voice into the recorder, his lips millimeters away from the device, talking as if it were a handheld microphone. "From a whore [*jendeh*], that's how. That's how I got it. We picked her up, and she was good, and we took turns with her, but as far as I know, I'm the only one who got sick," he whispered into my recorder. I asked him if he was sure it had been this particular sexual encounter that had exposed him to herpes.

"Of course! Duh! Everyone knows you get these diseases from whores! My cousin says I got what I deserved," he said. I started to point out that these "whores" must have contracted the disease in some way, as women are not walking disease carriers and that this was a problematic way of looking at women, but then I stopped when I realized that he probably did not want to hear my rhetoric at this point.

"How did you know you had herpes?" I asked.

"Cause my dick [*kir*] broke out in these sores, you know? At first I thought it was acne. When my brother saw it, he said it was just acne or a rash, but when it persisted, I finally went to a doctor at school," he described, motioning to his penis. "It wasn't great; the doctor told me I had committed a sin and this disease was my punishment. I think he was stupid, but I'm still dealing with it," he lamented.

Saman, a 20-year-old university student, told me about how his best friend from school had contracted hepatitis from a girl they knew from school. "To tell you the truth, I do know about STIs because my best friend has hepatitis," he said. "He slept with this girl from school who was kind of slutty, and we think that's how he got it—hepatitis is an STI, right?" he asked me.

"Yes, it can be passed sexually or through intravenous drug use," I answered.

"Well, yeah, he doesn't put needles in his arms, so he definitely got it from her, but there aren't any real visible signs, right?" I looked at him, debating whether or not to launch into a full description of the different forms of hepatitis and their symptoms. "To tell you the truth," he said before I could make up my mind, "I don't know much about hepatitis or other STIs. It's really bad. You should come talk to all of us, or there should be a way for us to find out about this other than from our friends." I nodded and told him I would always be available for information, and I referred him to one of the drop-in centers; I also fished a pamphlet about sexual and reproductive health out of my bag and handed it to him.

"Another thing I have to admit," Saman added, interrupting me as I was describing one of the clinics in his part of town, "I don't even know how to protect myself from it. I have the fear of God, seriously, that I'll get one of these diseases, but I don't even *do* anything about it," he admitted.

THE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVES

In the course of my fieldwork in 2004 and 2005, I located several drop-in centers and areas, organized and managed by the government, where young people could receive free counseling about sex, drugs, and harm reduction. Most of these were used by young married couples who had also taken their pre-nuptial counseling at these sites. Though the counselors were very open minded, and indicated that they were willing to distribute information to unmarried young people, none of my unmarried informants knew about these centers or counselors, and the few who did felt uneasy about visiting them for fear of being punished for engaging in premarital sexual relations. In fact, there was a paradoxical gap between the providers and the young people whom they were trying to serve: the young adults were skeptical of the providers or were uninformed of this option, and the providers were frustrated at having to serve young people only after it was "too late," according to them.

Triangular Clinics, HIV/STI Treatment Centers, and Drug Treatment Centers

There are many triangular clinics in urban areas throughout Iran. Tehran is home to five such centers, three of which I visited routinely during my time in Tehran in 2004. According to the Ministry of Health and several counselors and nurses at these clinics, the centers refer to themselves as "triangular clinics" because they provide three kinds of service: (a) STI testing and treatment; (b) HIV/AIDS testing, treatment, counseling, and housing; and (c) harm-reduction materials and methadone maintenance for drug users. I was also told that they are considered triangular clinics because they provide services for three types of people: (a) drug users, (b) prostitutes or sex workers, and (c) ex-convicts.

These clinics, which looked somewhat similar to hospitals and psychiatric treatment wards, were overcrowded and underfunded, according to their staff. The head of one clinic, a Dr. Ruzbakhsh (whose name has been changed here at his request), reported that most of his clients came from the lower classes and poorer parts of town. When I asked him why this was the case, he told me that for these people the triangular clinics have become a last resort of sorts. "Those who can afford not to come here, do not," he explained. "If you can afford a private doctor, that is where you are going to go because, as you can see, it's not exactly a nice place to hang out," he said pointing to the waiting room filled with wailing women in chadors and convulsing men begging for more methadone or needles.

When I asked him to describe the STI patients, he told me that "so many people in Tehran have STIs because they are having a lot of sex, but without any information about it." He walked over to his desk and pulled out a large box

of condoms. "It's because they don't use these," he emphasized, holding up a condom. "And they are afraid to come and get them from me. But I would give a condom to anyone who asks for one—they shouldn't be afraid," he explained, handing me a condom. I then asked him to describe the demographic range of his patients who had tested positive for an STI.

"Most of them come from the lower classes, and most of them are unmarried," he said. I was surprised because, at that point I still believed that the changes in sexual behavior that were occurring were mostly among the middle and upper classes.

"But, I thought that they tended not to have as much sex before marriage," I protested.

"Kids will be kids. Everyone is having sex, but it's the poor kids who end up in here," he said.

"Why?" I pressed.

"Because the rich kids either can afford doctors or will figure out how to prevent or treat the disease. Oh, but another thing that you should remember is that the poor kids tend to come from more religious families, and so when they have the sex, then they feel guilty about it so they come and get tested. So the more poor kids come in for testing, the more are diagnosed. I think that's what you call a public health phenomenon."³⁷

Dr. Naser (whose name has also been changed here to protect his identity), an epidemiologist who runs a needle exchange/harm-reduction/methadone maintenance program called Persepolis, had a rough estimate of the breakdown of HIV-positive patients. Though the mandate of Persepolis is not necessarily to treat HIV-positive or STI patients, Dr. Naser has been conducting research on the prevalence of HIV and hepatitis C among the drug users who use their facilities. Out of a random sample of 900 street drug injectors, they found that 25 percent were HIV positive and 75 percent were hepatitis C positive.³⁸ Dr. Naser says that they dispense over 1,000 methadone tablets per day. "We are sustaining them and trying to help them," he added. "But we can't really treat them. We have outreach workers and a counseling group for PLWHA [People Living with HIV/AIDS], but we are highly understaffed and overcrowded," he explained as we pushed our way through the smoke-filled waiting room that takes up most of the first floor of the clinic.

Dr. Naser said that most of his patients were men between the ages of 16 and 40, and in my three visits to his clinic I did not see one female. As he took me into the room where the methadone is dispensed, the young men in the waiting room began to stare at me and follow me. As they made rude remarks about me, Dr. Naser shuffled me (and my two male journalist friends, who had come along with me) into his office and closed the door. "This is no place for a lady," he said to me.

"So you don't really serve women?" I asked him half jokingly.

"We would like to serve more women; we would like to serve more people, if you can believe it!" he said enthusiastically. "There are so many people we can't reach, but we want to, and we want young people to come here, to learn. We want to do prevention and education. But you see, we need money," he said lowering his voice. When I asked him if he gets some money from the government, he shook his head, then quickly added, "But we did get a fatwa passed promoting harm reduction!"³⁹

All of these providers agreed that their services were underfunded and that there was a need to increase their services and reach out to youth. Dr. Naser noted that radio and television are good vehicles and that sex educators can use these means to reach their target population. He also stressed the need to build up the peer-education component of sex education and indicated a willingness to join a coalition to train young peer educators.

Dr. Roozbakhsh and several of the other staff members at the triangular clinics lamented the fact that young people do not use their services regularly. They believe that there is a need to do more outreach so that young people are aware of the resources available to them through venues such as the clinics or the counseling and drop-in centers. Indeed, all of the providers and counselors I spoke with expressed awareness of the gap between themselves and the population they were trying to serve, and all clamored for more information and advice on how best to close this gap.

The Physicians—Gynecologists and Psychiatrists

The first gynecologist I interviewed, Dr. Sadeqi (whose name has been changed here at his request), a man in his late fifties, admittedly has been performing illegal abortions for over 20 years. "I'm a doctor who does a lot of abortions, it's true. Some people call me the abortion doctor. I've been doing this so long that it seems that even the mollahs trust me," he said by way of introduction.

Several of my informants referred me to Dr. Sadeqi as the doctor who had performed abortions on them. I had heard he was lively, open, and honest, and his introduction only confirmed these rumors. "As you know, *khanum* [lit. lady], we don't have a handle on our nation's youth, especially on their health," he explained, closing the door of his office tightly to make sure no sound would escape. "Our kids are in trouble. Sex is happening behind closed doors, fourteen-year-olds are coming in here asking for abortions, third-year medical students are coming back for multiple abortions because they can't stop sleeping around, and AIDS and infections are on the rise," he lectured. "I don't think that there is any place in the world—well, at least any place in the Muslim world—where the abortion rate is so high," he added.

When I asked him what percentage of his patients who came in requesting abortions were unmarried, he responded, "Over 60 percent! No, actually, I would say even 70 percent are unmarried. But the ones that come to me, they are the lucky ones," he said while looking straight at me over his spectacles.

Out of every hundred girls who need an abortion, only five of them end up on a doctor's table at some point. Most of them, sadly, are scared, and so they try to handle this problem on their own. As you know—well, I don't know whether you do or don't know—but there are these injections sold on the black market at Naser-Khosrow Avenue. They are injections intended for animals, filled with prostadine and they aren't more than ten tumans.⁴⁰ They use these dangerous drugs for self-abortioning, and then have many problems. Many of them try to deal with these problems on their own, and then end up sick for life. Some get over their fears and go to the hospital or come to see me. The really brave ones, and the ones who can afford it, come to me to begin with. But sadly, I am not doing enough abortions compared to those that are needed.

I then asked Dr. Sadeqi why he thought the abortion rate was so high among urban Iranian young adults. He was quick to answer this question, as though it had been a common topic of discussion. "Simply because the kids here are going crazy, you know? They are all, I would say 90 percent of them, are depressed, and so they turn to sex. It's a tough life here," he said, wiping the sweat from his brow.

"What I'm wondering is, if these kids are having so much sex, why don't they just use condoms or birth control pills—this might help them, right?" I asked after a long pause. He again shook his head.

"There is a climate of fear in this country, *khanum*! Kids are scared, even of their own parents. They are afraid that one day their parents may find their pills or condoms, and then it's all over," he responded.

"But aren't they more afraid of getting pregnant, or at least of no longer being a virgin?" I asked.

"With the virginity thing, well, first of all, I am here to report to you that I do at least eight hymen reconstructions a week. Now, but for those who aren't getting them, a lot of them don't realize that their future husbands will realize that they aren't virgins. They think, 'Oh, well, I'll deal with it then,'" he explained. I asked him to expand on this.

Well, I'll tell you, a lot of them don't really know what they are doing and a lot of them have friends who say, "Don't worry, they'll never know." And then some of them, the parents who are wanting a certain girl as their future daughter-in-law, will bring them to me, or one of my

colleagues, and ask us to certify that they are virgins. Now, I'm telling you, me and my colleagues, regardless of whether these girls are really virgins or not, we tell the parents that they are. Then for the girls who aren't virgins—which is most of them—I take them aside and tell them what to do on their wedding night so blood is shed on the sheet. I have a lot of very religious families come in here, so I know how it is. I tell the girls that the night of the wedding, they should squeeze a small razor between their thighs—sometimes I give these to them myself—and then it will bleed.

I was very surprised to hear that the doctors were often so helpful to the young people and commended him for his actions. “And they trust you? The young people, I mean. They trust you to do abortions and to help them with virginity issues?” I asked incredulously.

“Sometimes, because I'm their doctor, they have no choice but to trust me. But a lot of them don't. I can't tell you how many of my patients come in here and give me incorrect names and information, but what can we do? They need a service and we provide it,” he said. Dr. Sadeghi added that he thought trust was a big problem among the youth population and believed that many of them, in fact, do not trust their doctors, especially female doctors. “We need to lessen this climate of fear and distrust,” he concluded.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

The sexual revolution in cotemporary Iran, as described by many of my informants, is not solely centred on casual sex, multiple partners, or group sex. Rather, the sexual revolution they believe they are engaging in is also about changing sexual discourse, pushing beyond the limits of restrictions on social behavior (such as style of dress, youth congregation, drinking, and dancing), and attacking the basis of morality upon which the regime governs its citizens. This study aims to assess and explain the sexual and cultural revolution that youth in Tehran claim to be participating in.

Throughout my time in Iran (the summers of 2000, 2002, 2005, and 2007 and the duration of 2004), I heard a multitude of young people use the expression “sexual revolution” in reference to the changes that are taking place in Tehran. Key informants reminded me that wearing tight *mantow* (from the French *manteau*, referring to the topcoat outfit tolerated for women not wearing the chador) and headscarves that revealed the highlights in their hair was more than a fashion statement—and more than being part of a global youth culture. They emphasized that changes in style were about codes and about speaking to a regime that hears and sees these signals. Their attempts to embody a sexual revolution, they told me, were their way of speaking back to the regime, to the

morality police who had made them suffer for so long, and to other potential new members of the evolving sexual revolution.

During my time in the field in 2004 and 2005, I struggled with whether changes in fashion (which are external indicators of the sexual revolution, according to my informants) and sexuality could be revolutionary. I wondered if wearing a Gucci headscarf, drinking a martini, and having multiple boyfriends and girlfriends was about opposing the Islamic republic, or about wanting to be like the characters in American television series and MTV music television videos. Certainly, some of my informants purchased and displayed designer outfits in order to “fit in” with their friends or because they saw themselves as part of an affluent and stylish elite. Several informants told me that they wore makeup or highlighted their hair because they liked how it made them look; they emphasized that it made them more desirable.

Most of my informants repeatedly told me, however, that as they layered on their makeup before going to class—in order to outwit morality police who would insist on wiping their faces before allowing them to enter school grounds—that wearing makeup or certain types of Islamic dress was also about making a statement. Many of the goods that Tehran youth demanded were being sold on the black market, which made them desirable. If these goods were openly sold and easily accessible, they would no longer be seen as symbolic of a changing young-adult culture. For example, one informant made reference to certain kinds of sneakers. She said that because running shoes like those made by Nike or Adidas⁴² were only sold on the black market, these were among the most desirable. She emphasized that the sneakers were more eye-catching to the morality police than plain sneakers sold in the bazaars across the city. “But,” she added, “I don’t think they look that nice. Once they are copied and available everywhere, no one will want them.” Thus the black market itself creates a certain economy that is folded into young people’s social revolution.

Throughout my fieldwork I also struggled to understand the changes in sexual and social behavior and their significance. After several years of research, it became apparent to me that the changes were not ephemeral and that they have meaning and significance both to informants and to the regime (and to the morality police, who obsessively patrol, police, and punish). Many key informants reminded me that because wearing a DKNY headscarf or being in a car with their boyfriends could get them arrested, the headscarf was more than a label and their boyfriends were more than passing amusements; these behaviors were a threat to the social and moral order affecting all aspects of life in the Islamic republic.

My fieldwork also raised numerous questions. I continue to struggle with the impact, meaning, and future of this sexual revolution in Iran. The changes taking place among the urban youth in Iran are varied and complex. The young people seem to be using their bodies to make social and political statements

against what they view as a repressive regime. However, although the young adults have made great strides in attaining greater social freedom, and have secured more attention from the authorities, the battle between Tehran youth and the conservative forces in the government continues to rage. Owing to the risks that often accompany defiant social behavior, most of the battle injuries in this struggle will be felt by the youth unless education and information are disseminated to them quickly.

This chapter has attempted to show the challenges that young adults face in putting forth what they call their sexual revolution, as well as the implications of their sexual behavior. The focus of my discussion has been on some of the consequences of their sexual and social enactments, presenting the notion of risk as young people see it. I have also included the providers' perspectives, as I have the reactions of an older generation of parents across contemporary Tehran. These providers include sex educators, counselors at drop-in centers, doctors (mostly OB-GYNs), and social workers.

My extensive discussions with young adults and providers have illuminated three major issues: (a) the need to bridge the gap between providers and young people; (b) the need to find new ways of distributing information to young people, such as the Internet or satellite television, that can take into consideration their concerns about the social and viral risks they are exposed to; and (c) the need to find ways of expanding resources to this underserved population.

NOTES

1. For Iran's demographic changes and social mobility, see Esposito and Ramazani (2001) and Amuzegar (2004). For university enrollments and women's percentage among college graduates, see Joseph and Najmabadi (2005). For high rates of unemployment and underemployment, see Basmanji (2006) and Amuzegar (2004). However, according to Amuzegar, "statistics on Iran's employment and unemployment are the flimsiest, least reliable and most contested of all basic indicators," p. 4 I believe that many of the statistical figures on Iran, including those on health, marriage status, and population and family planning, are also not very accurate, which makes it difficult to provide baseline statistics.

2. The universities surveyed included Tehran University, Azad University, and Masih-e Daneshvari University.

3. For an urban study of Tehran, see Hourcade and Habibi (2007).

4. See the World Bank Study on the Iran National Health Account. Available at www.who.int/nha/docs/en/Iran_NHA_report_english.pdf.

5. As per all common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) worldwide.

6. As per the Center for Disease Management (2004).

7. As per the UN AIDS Organization (2006).

8. Ibid.; see link above.

9. In Iran, it is permissible to register as a drug addict, and the recently approved harm-reduction program (2003) provides methadone treatment and needle exchange for registered drug users. This figure of two million is based on the numbers of Iranians attending needle-exchange and harm-reduction clinics. It is also important to note that one reason

drug use is so high in Iran is that the country is close geographically to Afghanistan, a major opium-producing nation. Owing to Iran's being along a drug-trafficking route, opium and heroin are affordable—they actually cost less than cigarettes or chewing gum in most parts of the country. Additionally, these opiates are more available to young people than are alcohol and are more affordable, thus many people choose to use opiates as a substitute for alcohol.

10. Based on a survey of street drug users, combined with data from needle exchanges throughout the country, research conducted by the Persepolis Harm Reduction Center, with information included in an unpublished report, communicated in an interview on June 2, 2005.

11. Center for Disease Management (2004).

12. Abbasi-Shavazi, Mehryar, Jones, and McDonald (2001).

13. Ibid.

14. Aghajanian and Merhyar (1999).

15. Abbasi-Shavazi (2001).

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Abbasi-Shavazi, Mehryar, Jones, and McDonald (2001), pp. 25–46.

20. Boonstra (2001).

21. Abbasi-Shavazi, Mehryar, Jones, and McDonald (2001), pp. 25–46.

22. Boonstra (2001).

23. Aghajanian and Mehryar (1999).

24. Ibid.

25. Islamic Republic of Iran (1994).

26. Aghajanian and Mehryar (1999).

27. Roudi-Fahimi (2005).

28. Ibid.

29. Ahmadi and Iranmahboob (2005).

30. Bearman and Burns (1998).

31. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2001).

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Harrison (2005).

35. Ibid.

36. Abbasi-Shavazi (2001).

37. Interview with Dr. Ruzbakhsh (pseudonym), June 10, 2005, Tehran.

38. For data on their studies, see www.iranharmreduction.net.

39. Ibid.; interview with Dr. Naser (pseudonym), June 20, 2005, Tehran.

40. Dr. Sadeqi (pseudonym) was referring to 10,000 tumans, equivalent to about US\$10 in 2005, when this interview was conducted.

41. Interview with Dr. Sadeqi (pseudonym), June 28, 2005, Tehran.

42. Popular sneaker brands in the United States, Europe, and Iran.

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FROM PUNISHMENT TO HARM REDUCTION:
RESECTULARIZATION OF ADDICTION
IN CONTEMPORARY IRAN

Amir Arsalan Afkhami

Narcotics abuse and trafficking in Iran has been one of the country's most vexing problems in the 20th century. Iranians have a long history of using psychoactive substances—it's the birthplace of wine, for example. Later, opium came to play an integral part in Iran's social and economic fabric. Historian Rudi Mathee's recent comprehensive work on the pre-20th-century history of psychoactive substances in Iran quotes a 17th-century Dutch resident of Iran as crediting drugs for providing Iranians with *damagh*—"[it] gave them a 'kick,' got them into a good mood."¹ But whereas the pre-20th-century Iranian relationship with drugs can be characterized as a *longue durée* of unhampered consumption and lack of aggressive interdiction, the 20th century ushered in a new phase: a period when drug use was criminalized and abuse of opiates, especially, became firmly ensconced in the paradigm of illness and disease. With the globalization that accompanied its industrial revolution, Iran's policy-makers, physicians, and cultural interlocutors began to see substance abuse through an international lens—in this case, the Euro-American perspective of Western modalities to effectively control and treat substance abuse. Iranian modernizers during the early Pahlavi period increasingly characterized opiate abuse as a barrier preventing the country's progress and as a sign of the previous dynasty's decadence and decay.

Iran's policies toward narcotics in the 20th century are a fascinating reflection of the country's shifting sociopolitical landscape. This chapter examines these policy changes beginning with a predominant strategy of control, interdiction, and criminalization in mid-century to an increasingly treatment-oriented medical paradigm in the 1970s, to a severe punitive-focused policy in the post-revolutionary era. Following the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the ascent of the Islamic government, the treatment of substance abuse was increasingly seen to be outside the previous medical paradigm. In accordance with the regime's new

standards of morality drawn along Islamic religious precepts, stringent antidrug campaigns were launched that included fining addicts, imprisonment, physical punishment, and even the death penalty for serious offenders. No longer benefiting from government support, substance-abuse specialists in the medical community were marginalized and treatment centers closed. Despite these measures—and in tandem with the Iran-Iraq War, political repression, and a deteriorating economy—the drug problem continued to grow, with the number of addicts increasing exponentially. Faced with complete failure of its revolutionary policies toward narcotic abuse, and faced with an emerging AIDS epidemic, the Islamic republic increasingly embraced a pragmatic approach to its narcotics problem. This new reasoning focused on secular medical realities and was consistent with the demographics and patterns of drug use in the country.

EARLY STRUGGLES WITH NARCOTICS

The cultivation of opium was one of the largest and most lucrative aspects of the traditional Iranian agrarian economy from the mid-19th century onward. In 1917–1918, for example, although production had dropped owing to drought and the vagaries of war, exports of opium nonetheless stood at a striking 749,482 pounds.² Use of opium in Iran at the dawn of World War I had been widespread, and addicts numbered in the hundreds of thousands. In 1914, it was estimated that the municipality of Tehran alone had 25,000 opium addicts out of a population of 250,000.³ With the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 and the now widespread use of hypodermic needles, Iranians were introduced to intravenous opiate abuse, which grew to epidemic proportions. This new scourge would change the country's destiny well into the 21st century. The Iranian Sanitary Council, precursor to the Iranian Ministry of Health founded in the 1930s, had a strong response to illegal opiate sales at this time, and its actions would foreshadow Iran's harsh laws of the future: "The Commission after the reading of a letter from the Governor of Neyshabur regarding the use of intravenous injection of morphine in cafes and opium dens, has discussed measures which seem most practical and easiest to apply to stop this abuse. She proposes to write to the Governor of Neyshabur to take the following measures: punish the perpetrators with expensive fines and prison, all individuals who provide morphine without a physician's prescription."⁴ It was partly as a result of the emergence of opiate-based pharmaceuticals, such as morphine, that the Iranian Sanitary Council prompted the Iranian National Assembly to pass the pharmacy licensing laws. An estimation in 1923–1924 concluded that 609,166 pounds of opium were consumed in Iran proper.⁵ Certain localities were notorious for their considerable consumption, such as the city of Kerman. In 1925, it was estimated that out of a population of 60,000, Kerman had over 25,000 addicts.⁶

Even among the nonaddicts, opium was periodically used as a sedative tonic, as was tobacco. An observer in Iran at this time noted: "In a country where doctors are few and far between, opium is a great solace to people in pain or attacked by malaria."⁷ This was particularly true for rural people, who lacked access to trained physicians and instead had to rely on household remedies or traditional practitioners. Traditional Iranian physicians, or *hakims*, readily prescribed and dispensed opium when challenged by an illness that they could not treat.⁸ The use of opium was so ingrained in the culture that it was not unusual for mothers to puff opium smoke into their babies' faces to calm them, put them to sleep, or relieve them of simple teething pains.⁹ More important, in times of famine Iranian opium consumption skyrocketed, since it was the cheapest and most readily available crop, as well as the best means available for relieving the stomach cramps associated with acute hunger.

SUPPLY-REDUCTION POLICIES AND THE OPIUM CROP BAN

In 1928, the Iranian parliament ratified a bill giving the opium monopoly to the government, and the new law provided heavy penalties for the illegal use and distribution of the substance. Four years later, the Iranian government became a signatory to the International Convention for Limiting the Manufacture and Regulating the distribution of Narcotic Drugs, signed at Geneva on July 13, 1931. By 1938, poppy cultivation was banned in 25 districts of the country. However, a decree by the Iranian Council of Ministers calling for a complete ban on the opium crop was not ratified by the parliament; a compromise was reached whereby Iran, recognized as a limited producer by the Commission on Narcotic Drugs, allowed limited cultivation. Iran's health minister, Jahanshah Saleh, realized the deleterious influence of opium production on Iran's international image and campaigned aggressively for a complete end to the cultivation of opium in Iran. Despite initial opposition from the landowners' lobby in the Iranian parliament and senate, a law banning the farming and use of opium was passed by both houses on October 7, 1955.¹⁰ The law forbade the cultivation of opium poppies, the recreational use of opium in cafés and hotels, and the import of paraphernalia for smoking opium; the law also placed a general prohibition on the use of all narcotics. Stiff penalties were imposed on offenders, and addicts were required to report to centers designated by the Ministry of Health for treatment. Moreover, the government, through the Agricultural Bank, provided long-term credit and technical help to farmers who were hardest hit by the ban.

The magnitude of this undertaking was remarkable, since at this time 1/350th of the arable land in Iran was devoted to the cultivation of opium and the total opium harvest varied between 700 and 1,200 tons annually. It was also estimated that Iran had over 1.5 million to 2 million opium addicts out of a population of 19 million.¹¹ Two years after the implementation of the law,

Iran was successful in eradicating the bulk of its opium production. However, authorities continued to have difficulty preventing the flow of drugs into the country, particularly from Pakistan and Afghanistan. As a result, while native stocks plummeted, illegal imports increased. Moreover, the country was ill prepared to treat the large number of addicts in the country, and only 40,000 were thought to have sought treatment in government hospitals over a two-year period following implementation of the law.¹²

DETOXIFICATION AND MEDICALIZATION OF ADDICTION

What started as a trickle of illegal cross-border narcotic smuggling quickly turned into a torrent, and by the 1960s imported heroin made its appearance among Iran's well-to-do. The heroin vogue in the print and picture media at this time was thought to have contributed to this new phenomenon; however, it's likely the easy transport of this smaller and more potent substance across borders contributed to heroin's low cost and rapid popularity. Heroin addicts and abusers numbered in the 10,000s by the end of the decade.¹³ While opium addiction was widespread across a broad demographic profile of users, heroin addicts in Iran were usually limited to the larger cities such as Tehran and fell within the 20- to 30-year-old age group. By 1969 the Iranian government conceded that the complete ban on opium had failed and had actually exacerbated Iran's narcotic problem. As a result, the parliament passed a law allowing for limited cultivation of the opium poppy for internal use by registered addicts over 60 years of age who were deemed too medically unstable to be detoxified. By 1972 there were 100,000 registered opium addicts.¹⁴ Notably, this period in Iran also saw a rise in the popularity of cannabis. Traditionally, marijuana use was limited to religious ascetics and those on the lower rungs of society, but by the late 1960s its popularity was marked among Iran's university students, who sought it for its "pleasure or to increase sociability."¹⁵

The infrastructure for treating addicts in the early 1970s remained limited. In Tehran only a 125-bed government-funded addiction hospital provided methadone detoxification services for voluntarily admitted patients who had undergone the long waiting list. The mainstay of treatment continued to be detoxification rather than maintenance and harm-reduction interventions for addicts. In a seminar on public health, it was noted that "several different methods for the prevention of relapse have been and are being studied. Some of these methods are obviously fruitless, others are very costly and giving methadone or any other narcotic on a continuous basis does not constitute true treatment."¹⁶ However, with time a growing consensus no longer viewed detoxification as the panacea for Iran's mounting addiction epidemic.

Prevention and rehabilitation of addicts became central pillars of an emerging treatment paradigm. One arm of this approach was based on the legal

distribution of opiates, but emphasis was also placed on the decriminalization of addiction and primary prevention through education, primarily by increasing awareness of the erosive influences of narcotics. Expert lectures to professional groups were encouraged and drug education programs were promoted in pedagogic curriculums. There was also recognition of the need to increase the training of personnel in the fields of mental health and addiction.¹⁷ Additionally, realizing the important psychiatric comorbidities associated with addiction, mental health policy-makers in Iran began to focus on the functional improvement of narcotic users: "Drug addiction is not the perversity of an evil character; it is the consequence of psychic and personal crises with the myriad influences of the victim's social, economic, genetic and cultural background."¹⁸ Increasingly, addiction was viewed as a chronic disease, firmly rooted in biology and the patient's mental health. Treatments began to include health and social welfare components in addition to pharmacology and supportive therapy. Emphasis was placed on understanding the character of the addict and focusing on reestablishing him as a "productive member of society."¹⁹

Plans were implemented for the establishment of four rehabilitation centers in Yaftabad (in Tehran), Rezaiyeh (Orumiyeh), Kermanshah, and Mashhad. The goal of these institutions was to provide education, job training, vocational counseling, and physical rehabilitation to the addict. These centers were enmeshed with the detoxification clinics, as exemplified by the Kermanshah center, which was built on a 50,000-square-meter site and contained 15 detoxification units, each holding 15 beds. The centers would include an assessment unit, occupational and industrial therapy, a medical and physiotherapy department, and a department of recreation and education.²⁰

In the mid-1970s, Iran spent 5 percent of its gross domestic product on health, and about 50 percent of this spending included out-of-pocket expenditures by the population.²¹ Despite the windfall profits from oil production in the 1970s, Iran continued to be unable to meet its need for physicians and inpatient treatment facilities to achieve the ambitious detoxification and treatment goals that had been set for its burgeoning addict population. In 1974 there was only one hospital in Tehran specializing in the treatment of drug addiction, with a mere 120 certified psychiatrists throughout the country. This infrastructure could also not deal with the growing relapse rates among those who were treated.²² That year the National Iranian Society for Rehabilitation of the Disabled (NISRD) took charge of the treatment and rehabilitation of addicts. To address the lack of manpower and facilities, the Iranian government supported one of Iran's first outpatient pilot treatment projects. From August 1973 to April 1975, the study enrolled 533 addicts in the rapidly growing industrial city of Shiraz. Dispensing methadone, a synthetic opioid, or Iranian-manufactured "opium pills" that contained 80 milligrams of opium extract and chlorpromazine, a potent antipsychotic, the program gradually detoxified patients over a

period of 40 to 60 days. About 37 percent of the patients who entered the program were successfully treated. The success of this program laid the foundation for an expanded methadone-maintenance program in the country.²³

The Ramsar Medical Congress of 1975 focused on the growing challenge of narcotic addiction for the medical community in Iran. Discussions addressed the successful results of pilot outpatient detoxification and rehabilitation, and the congress resolved that outpatient treatment was the most desirable and practical method of treating addicts. The congress also called for implementation of centers by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in all local NISRD offices.²⁴ The need for expanded outpatient manpower led, in 1977, to establishment of a number of educational initiatives, including the Center for Education Residency, which had the objective of coordinating educational, research, and therapeutic activities among all psychiatric units and centers in the country. The center was also to expand psychiatric and clinical psychology services through development of human resources with specializations in the fields of psychiatry and psychiatric nursing at the master's-degree level.

THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION AND THE "MORALIZATION" OF ADDICTION

The 1979 revolution changed the landscape of Iran's antinarcotics regime. In the months following the fall of the shah, policing was inadequate. A number of officials who had worked closely with international drug-enforcement agencies, and had been trained in the latest law-enforcement techniques, "disappeared": it is assumed they were executed or had simply not returned to the government after the initial chaos of the Revolution. Political appointees, unprofessional and inexperienced in international policing efforts, replaced them. These factors removed the barriers preventing the transport of opium and heroin from Southwest Asia through Iran, making the country one of the most important transit points for narcotics into Europe and North America.²⁵ In Iran, "heroin and opium were the only commodities that became inexpensive and plentiful" during the dearth that characterized the early days of the Revolution.²⁶ The ban on alcohol, worsening unemployment, and the breakdown of political control amplified the rate of narcotic abuse. The flight of Iran's professional class also contributed to the erosion of Iran's medical infrastructure, which made these services unable to respond to the emerging crisis.

According to government figures at this time, over three million people were addicts (one in 12). Despite the continued rise in the number of drug users, the new authorities shut down NISRD offices that had been delivering treatment to this population. With the theocratic regime of Ayatollah Khomeini gaining control over social and legal matters, a new narcotics policy quickly followed suit. The notorious Ayatollah Sadeq Khalkhali, who had presided over the Revolution's secret trials and was responsible for executing hundreds of the

previous regime's officials and military officers, headed the country's new anti-narcotics campaign. The Islamic government's clerical poles of power approved of his leadership, despite opposition by Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, Iran's ostensibly technocratic president at the time.²⁷ As chief investigator and head of a special antinarcotics force known as the "hit squad," Khalkhali ensured that individuals caught in possession of drugs received fines, imprisonment, corporal punishment, and even execution.

In a crowded Tehran courtroom, five frightened defendants faced the empty bench. The judge, a scowling, bearded figure who was also acting as prosecutor, circled behind them and cursed, "I shall exterminate you vermin!" Then, without permitting a word to be spoken in their defense, he meted out the sentences. "Those two—execution," he barked. "This one—life imprisonment. The other two—100 lashes each." As Islamic guards led out the two men to be whipped, the judge called out after them, "Remember, every lash must draw blood." With that five-minute trial, Ayatullah Sadegh Khalkhali, Iran's notorious "hanging judge," dispensed summary justice to five more accused drug traffickers. In just six weeks, Khalkhali's firing squads have executed 120 convicted opium and heroin dealers.²⁸

Although Khalkhali felt that his measures against traffickers had been "200 percent" successful,²⁹ his aggressive campaign was brought to a halt by the Iran-Iraq War, which diverted attention and resources away from his counter-narcotic endeavors. The religio-legal debates among the religious leadership on whether an unarmed smuggler deserved capital punishment as a result of being *mohareb ba Khoda* ("at war with God") or merely deserved the lesser charge of being *mufsid fil-arz* ("[one who spreads] corruption on earth"), which is not necessarily punishable by death, also hampered Khalkhali's aggressive campaign.³⁰ However, arrests and public executions of drug dealers continued to be carried out by revolutionary authorities, coupled with widespread public-awareness programs about the dangers of addiction.³¹ Even more rehabilitation centers and detoxification wards in hospitals were closed as the Iran-Iraq War commenced. Health-care administrators who hospitalized addicts risked demotion or dismissal. As a prelude to the policy instituted later in the decade, a number of detoxification "camps" were established to keep narcotic abusers confined until they gave up the habit. By 1983 a number of "cramped and squalid" rehabilitation centers were inaugurated by the State Welfare Organization, and these only received addicts who were directed there by the courts.³²

These paltry efforts did little to stem the tide of addiction in Iran, particularly the explosion of heroin use. With the Iran-Iraq cease-fire in August 1988, attention was turned again to the country's soaring addiction problems. In 1989, the Islamic Republic New Agency reported that members of neighborhood Islamic

revolutionary committees had taken over the drug-fighting effort from the police. In the same year, as part of an attempt to “stamp out” opium and heroin abuse in the country, 55,000 addicts were arrested and sent to labor camps in desolate areas of several provinces. In addition, 150,000 registered drug addicts followed.³³

Conditions at these camps were punishing. Addicts were interred for periods ranging from six months to a year, and they were forced to do dangerous labor, including laying land mines along drug-smuggling routs on the Iran-Pakistan border. Rather than being a solution to the drug problem, the labor camps became areas where less malignant drug users (i.e., opium smokers) learned the more malignant methods of abusing narcotics (i.e., intravenous drug delivery), further adding to the soaring numbers of heroin addicts and the accompanying blood-borne infections such as hepatitis C and, later, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) transmitted through shared needles in these camps.³⁴ As a result, the camps were disbanded and their populations shifted into Iran’s prison system.

In addition, a new antinarcotic law was adopted in January 1989 that, once again, mandated the death penalty for possession of even small quantities of heroin. This legislation was seen as a cornerstone of Iran’s security program, and as a means of forestalling any debates on the Islamic legality of executing smugglers, the newly inaugurated Expediency Council pushed for rapid ratification of the law in parliament.³⁵ Additionally, the Drug Control Headquarters (DCH), which coordinated the police’s drug-related activities with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Ministries of Intelligence and Security, was placed under the direct supervision of the office of the president of the Islamic republic, the minister of health, and the president of the Islamic republic’s broadcasting network. Additionally, assets confiscated from drug traffickers were used to finance the DCH.³⁶

Under the new law, the death sentence became mandatory for anyone caught carrying little more than an ounce of heroin, morphine, codeine, or methadone or for smuggling more than 11 pounds of any narcotic. Moreover, any person found responsible for causing another’s addiction faced a 20-year prison sentence.³⁷ The government hoped to use the threat of capital punishment to induce heroin addicts to register with the authorities and receive help.³⁸ Just before this law went into effect, 17 drug smugglers were executed by hanging, over 1,000 people were arrested, and scores more were killed in shootouts with security forces.³⁹ By the end of 1989, Iran had killed more than a thousand drug smugglers and dealers.⁴⁰

IRAN’S POROUS EASTERN FRONTIER AND THE UNABATED NARCOTICS TRAFFIC

Throughout the 1980s, Iran had to face a flood of heroin from across its eastern frontier. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the subsequent

Central Intelligence Agency aid to the Afghan *mujahedin* in their fight against the Soviet occupation, expanded opium production in Afghanistan, while its supply link with heroin laboratories in neighboring Pakistan provided the fledgling rebel movement with money and arms. The conflict also connected previously isolated Afghanistan with the global narcotics market.⁴¹ Iran's rugged and tribal eastern frontier with Pakistan became a major transit route for the flow of narcotics westward. Because of the inhospitable terrain, Baluch tribesmen with strong interclan loyalties who inhabited the area became effective narcotics conveyors. Some Baluch tribesmen even kept a family on the Iranian side and another one across the border in Pakistan. These tribesmen had been smuggling among these three countries for centuries; consecutive years of drought made smuggling their only means of earning a living.⁴² It was reported that the more "untamed" parts of the Iran-Pakistan border even held arms bazaars where tanks were displayed for sale.⁴³

Throughout the 1980s, *mujahedin* leaders and poppy growers collaborated with Pakistan's military officials to coordinate the inflow of arms supplies and the outflow of drugs. Peshawar became a smuggling hub, and much of this relationship persisted when the Taliban regime consolidated power in Afghanistan. In 2001 it was determined that over 90 percent of the heroin on British streets originated in Afghanistan, this despite the ban on opium production issued by the Taliban leader, Mullah Omar.⁴⁴

Iran used a number of methods to block the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan and Pakistan, including 260 kilometers of static defenses such as concrete dams blocking mountain passes, antivehicle berms, trenches, minefields, forts, and mountain towers—measures that cost the Iranian government upwards of US\$800 million.⁴⁵ By 1999, 100,000 police officers, army troops, and Revolutionary Guardsmen were engaged in Iran's attempt to strop the trafficking of drugs. However, none of these measures seemed to abate the flow, despite the strengthened border defenses. An increasingly violent campaign waged on Iran's frontier had claimed the lives of 2,800 members of the Iranian security forces in clashes with smugglers.⁴⁶

HARM REDUCTION AND THE RESECTARIZATION OF ADDICTION TREATMENT IN IRAN

By the 1990s, Iranian officials realized that supply-reduction policies focused on the criminalization of drug use were not working. Drug offenders made up over 60 percent of the country's prison population. In addition, the flow of narcotics into Iran continued unabated. Opium was becoming cheaper and more accessible to an increasingly poverty-stricken population. For example, from

1990 to 1999, the real price of opium in Tehran declined by two-thirds when adjusted against inflation.⁴⁷ A growing number of addicts were shifting away from smoking—the traditional delivery method for opiates—to intravenous injection.

In 1998, it was estimated that Iran had as many as two million drug users, of which almost a third had been using intravenous injection (IVDU) at some stage in their addiction. Most IVDUs reported that the lower costs of heroin, in addition to growing physiological tolerance to traditional opiates, was responsible for their behavior shift.⁴⁸ In the year 2000, a gram of heroin reportedly could be purchased on the street for as little as US\$3 or \$4.⁴⁹ This disastrous shift to intravenous use was also linked to high unemployment rate among the working population of which approximately half were in the 15-to-29-year age group.⁵⁰ Particularly vexing to the Iranian authorities was the fact that IVDU behaviors were also being acquired in the very prisons where incarcerated addicts were expected to kick the habit. Making matters worse, over 70 percent of IVDUs in prisons shared needles, making them susceptible to blood-borne pathogens including staphylococcal and streptococcal infections at the injection sites (usually veins in the arms, legs, and groin) and other more virulent microbes such as HIV and hepatitis C.

Contagions were particularly marked in Iranian prisons owing to the difficulty in obtaining paraphernalia, leading not only to sharing unhygienic needles but even causing some addicts to resort to handmade needles and droppers.⁵¹ “According to Peiman, a former inmate and intravenous drug user at the Qezel Hesar prison near Tehran, home to 10,000 prisoners, getting heroin inside was easy.... He recalled how after 28 years of addiction, using up to five grams of heroin a day, he found himself in jail under Iran’s strict laws on drug abuse. During his incarceration, things went from bad to worse and, like many other addicts, he too became HIV positive.”⁵² As a result of this malignant shift, drug-related deaths in Iran began to increase, from 717 deaths in 1996 to 1,000 deaths by the year 2000.⁵³

With its judicial system and its prisons swamped, and the medical infrastructure overextended, the Islamic republic changed its approach once again. It placed renewed emphasis on curbing demand, while maintaining a proactive military and policing policy against traffickers on the country’s eastern border. By 2002, Mohammad Fallah, Iran’s drug czar and head of its DCH, admitted that about 50 percent of his budget was allocated to demand-reduction activities, including a series of hard-hitting TV advertisements and informational campaigns in the schools and universities. Additionally, the Iranian government increasingly enlisted the support of nongovernmental organizations in its drug war.⁵⁴

Politicians in Iran were slowly recognizing that addiction is a disease and that adequate treatment might stop the flow of narcotics into the country.

Fallah articulated this growing consensus in 2001: "As long as people don't want to change, nothing will work [to slow the flood of narcotics]. That is fundamental. But we have begun to revise our past policies. Maybe in the future we will change the prison law as well."⁵⁵ As early as 1994, Iran had started outpatient treatment centers in all of its 28 provinces and the government did not oppose the foundation of *Mo'tadan-e Gom-nam* (Narcotic Anonymous, or NA) soon thereafter.⁵⁶ Returning Iranian expatriates who had attended NA 12-step programs in California and had achieved sobriety reportedly founded the Iranian chapter of NA. In a short span of time the group quickly established liaison with Iranian provincial *sazman-e behzisti* (welfare organization), and openly advertised meetings on its notice boards. In an apparent shift in Iranian policy on the separation of sexes in public forums, NA assemblies included a mixed audience.⁵⁷

Abstinence-based residential centers were also founded throughout the country, mainly focusing on court-mandated treatment of heroin abusers. By 1999 an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 addicts were referred to these residential centers, with an average stay of two to six months.⁵⁸ Outpatient clinics, closed at the outset of the Revolution, were reopened. These clinics offered the less effective clonidine detoxification modality, but nevertheless demand for the clinics grew rapidly, with over a hundred new clinics established with a combined capacity to treat 100,000 patients by the year 2000.⁵⁹

By the late 1990s, with its narcotic interdiction policy in tatters and racked by corruption, the Iranian government desperately sought the most effective models for drug treatment and encouraged partnership with institutional and nonprofit agencies in the United States and other countries.⁶⁰ This new willingness to solicit foreign expertise, particularly from the United States, ran parallel to the election of Mohammad Khatami to the Iranian presidency in 1997 and his more pragmatic foreign policy stance relative to his predecessors. Khatami's focus on the exchange of ideas, and especially of "opening a dialogue with the United States," sanctioned this change.⁶¹ In addition, Khatami and his policymakers recognized that only an international effort could address the narcotic trafficking out of Afghanistan.⁶² Khatami's election mandate to establish a civil society and transparent government affairs also opened the way for allegations of official involvement in Iran's drug trade. Mahmoud Alizadeh Tabatabai, who had served in the Drug Control Headquarters under presidents Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Khatami, declared that profits from the narcotics trade "went to certain places that were connected with sources of power, and we were unable to deal with them."⁶³ Additionally, there was widespread belief among political activists that what was perceived as the government's insufficient response to the country's drug problem was part of a larger, nefarious plot to keep the restive Iranian population docile: "I believe this is the policy of the state, to make all the youth addicted," said Hamid Motallebi, 22, a police

officer on duty in a south Tehran park almost overrun by junkies sleeping on the grass or staggering like zombies. "It's the lack of policy and management. If they could create enough jobs, enough entertainment, why would people turn to drugs?"⁶⁴

A Rapid Situation Assessment (RSA) of drug abuse was carried out in 1998 by the State Welfare Organization supported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, which estimated the total number of drug users at two million, with 1.2 million as dependent users and 800,000 as abusers or recreational users. What made this study particularly worrisome for Iranians was that 16 percent of the interviewees had injected drugs in the month prior to the interview and about 22 percent had used drugs intravenously at some point in their lives, making them susceptible to blood-borne pathogens.⁶⁵ A grave sense of urgency pervaded Iranian policy-making circles, with the specter of a growing HIV epidemic among drug users and Iran's prison population. Having ignored the illness for two decades, the Islamic republic was now facing an alarming 25 percent HIV infection rate among its heroin users.⁶⁶ The government feared that the outbreak would make its way into the general population—a situation that would shake the moral foundations upon which the Islamic republic built its legitimacy. The need for international cooperation was acute: a generation of substance-abuse specialists had either left the country or retired from service, and the psychiatric curriculum in Iranian medical schools and its residency training programs suffered from a lack of instruction in the treatment of substance abuse.

A younger generation of psychiatrists and university professors from Iran trained in treating substance abuse, in partnership with academic institutions and institutes in the United States, such as Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Baron Edmund de Rothschild Chemical Dependency Institute at Beth Israel Medical Center in New York, began introducing cutting-edge treatments and research protocols.⁶⁷ Richard Schottenfeld, professor of psychiatry at Yale University, was able to obtain a waiver from U.S. sanctions on Iran to carry out a study there that was financed by the National Institutes of Drug Abuse and that included methadone maintenance and the newer buprenorphine modalities of drug treatment.⁶⁸

Initially strapped for money and supplies, Iranian psychiatrists sought to shift intravenous drug users to less malignant forms of chemical dependence, such as smoking opium. However, over time, with increasing government investment and international collaboration, the Iranian National Center for Addiction Studies (INCAS) was established. This institution conducts cutting-edge research on methadone maintenance therapy, shifting IV drug users to oral methadone pills and studying the long-term effects of these treatments. Additionally, the neuropsychiatric laboratory at INCAS, supplied with a

functional magnetic resonance imager (fMRI), leads research in the neurological aspects of addiction, including the biological mechanisms of craving, the neurological characteristics of hallucinations, and risk-taking behaviors among addicts.⁶⁹

With this new approach, Iranian psychiatrists began to have a greater presence in international substance-abuse programs, especially at meetings sponsored by the National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. In 2000, Iran began its first pilot methadone project in a psychiatric hospital, and in 2002 the country opened a major outpatient methadone-maintenance program in Tehran. Satisfied with the work done at these sites, the Ministry of Health drafted national guidelines for methadone treatment and began supporting private centers directed by general practitioners that offered methadone and buprenorphine maintenance along with detoxification and abstinence-based treatment.⁷⁰

The Marvdasht clinic in Shiraz is an example of this new primary-care clinic-based treatment paradigm. This facility not only meets the general medical needs of its patient population but it also provides pharmacotherapy for opioid dependence. In addition, the clinic operates a drop-in center for drug users between 8:30 A.M. and 7 P.M. daily. Between 1999 and 2002, 3,000 patients attended the clinic, of which 50 percent were general medical patients, 40 percent were noninjecting drug users, and 10 percent were injection users.⁷¹ Today, more than 600 private centers operate nationwide, and treatment also extends to the prison population. In 2003, Iranian prison authorities began an HIV prevention program, with prison clinics providing methadone maintenance and HIV education and prevention services.⁷²

Other measures in this realm include a network of some 60 community-based drop-in centers that provide basic health care, comprehensive psychosocial services including educating patients on HIV risk factors, condoms, and clean needles and syringes. An executive order in January 2005 expressed the government's support for needle-exchange programs. Increased advocacy from nongovernmental and civil society groups, further cooperation between the Ministry of Health and the prison department health authorities, and the education of senior policy-makers regarding HIV prevention and intravenous drug users are all elements that have been instrumental in allowing the secular harm-reduction paradigm in the treatment of drug abusers to take hold in Iran.⁷³

CONCLUSION

Iran's policy toward illicit drugs and drug addiction in the 20th century has undergone a dizzyingly circular, and at times contradictory, route. In the late 1970s, the leaders of the Islamic revolution disregarded the Pahlavi era's failed

attempts at strict interdiction and its relative success with treatment-centered modalities. In the 1980s and early 1990s, these leaders embarked on an ill-fated zero-tolerance policy toward addiction, with drug users characterized as social and religious deviants deserving the worse punishment sanctioned in the Koran. Rather than curbing drug abuse, this religious-centered approach led to an explosion of addiction and the emergence of an HIV epidemic in Iran, which also threatened the moral foundation of the republic.

This crisis led to a complete turnaround in drug policy. During the past decade, Iran's harm-reduction policy can be aptly characterized as a secularization of a previously moralized approach to the treatment of substance abuse. This change is an indicator of the plasticity of the Islamic republic's governing system, which is willing to embrace pragmatic views when faced with existential crises. It is notable that this flexibility to embrace secular attitudes to solving the substance-abuse problem was not limited to the liberal spectrum of the Islamic system. Rather, even the more conservative elements of the regime were willing to put aside their religious convictions in favor of ensuring the survival of the Islamic system in Iran. In January 2005, for example, Ayatollah Mohammad Esma'il Shoushtari, the justice minister responsible for closing more than 100 newspapers and imprisoning political opponents, instructed prosecutors to ignore the punitive judicial laws and defer to the health ministry in combating the emerging drug-related hepatitis and AIDS epidemics.⁷⁴ When news reached Iran of a bill pending in the U.S. Congress that called for the incarceration of Americans who failed to report marijuana dealers, a substance-abuse psychiatrist ironically remarked that "sometimes I think the Ayatollahs are more liberal."⁷⁵

Despite progress in the government's approach, the future of drug-addiction treatment in Iran appears bleak. The medicalization of substance abuse and maintenance therapy will do little more than contain the steady growth of addiction in the country. To effectively counter the narcotics problem, this secular process must transcend the medical realm and penetrate the social fabric of the Islamic republic. With the lack of jobs, entertainment, and social outlets, a restless and hopeless Iranian youth will continue to look to drugs for solace and escape from the realities of a restrictive life. As a result, addiction, with its accompanying HIV epidemic, will likely continue to grow.

NOTES

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IRAN'S NEW SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

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Iran witnessed significant progress in scientific research and activity during the 1995–2005 period. By way of comparison, Iran lost considerable scientific ground in the region during the 1982–1992 period following the Revolution (see table 7.1); the country's total scientific production collapsed to an average of 100 published articles a year in internationally recognized journals. But by the next decade, Iran began to recover its good position with respect to research in other Middle Eastern countries. For example, the number of scientific publications coming out of Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Iran for the 1993–2002 period was, respectively, 44,549, 22,577, 14,242, 9,477, and 5,776.¹ These figures for the decade do not show, however, that Iran's contribution to mainstream scientific inquiry in the year 2002 (2,224) exceeded that of Saudi Arabia (1,611), as well as that of Pakistan (788). The 2002 figures for Turkey are 9,548 articles; for Egypt, 2,815.² And in the year 2006 Iran's scientific production was 6,748 articles, compared to 3,591 in Egypt and 17,916 in Turkey, thus surpassing Egypt.³

Contrary to the dominant view, even among Iranian society, these research papers are not vestiges of the previous regime. Most of those who are producing the new scholarly papers are young or relatively young, and they belong to the second or even third generation after the Revolution. Their ages are between 25 and 45, and their fathers are either retired or work with them to promote scientific research, mostly in management. The scientific institutions where they work are either new (such as the Institute for Theoretical Physics and Mathematics) or are extensions of older ones (such as the Universities of Shiraz or Sharif).

What are the characteristics of this new generation? First, these scientists are concentrated in more or less a few scientific institutes, some of which were founded after the Revolution—for example, the Zanjan Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences, and the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics

TABLE 7.1. Number of ISI-recognized scientific publications, 1975–2005.

Year	Number of ISI-recognized scientific publications
1975	305
1976	375
1977	406
1978	450
1979	398
1980	384
1981	295
1982	173
1983	140
1984	139
1985	111
1986	157
1987	161
1988	151
1989	158
1990	173
1991	240
1992	281
1993	309
1994	400
1995	528
1996	574
1997	665
1998	876
1999	1,103
2000	1,318
2001	1,440
2002	1,872
2003	2,782
2004	3,822
2005	5,423

Source: Shapour Etemad, Yahya Emami, Masoud Mehrabi, *Mainstream Research in Iran 1970–2003*, Tehran: National Research Institute for Science Policy, 2004; Ali-Akbar Saburi, Najmeh Porsasan, “Towlid-e elmi-ye Iran dar sal-e 1385” (Iran’s Scientific Output in 2006), *Rahyaf* 37, spring and summer 2006.

and Mathematics (IPM) in Tehran⁴—and some others were founded under the Imperial regime, such as Sharif University of Technology (formerly Arya-Mehr University of Technology), Tehran University, and Shiraz University. (See tables 7.2 and 7.3 for the ratio of published articles to number of scholars; Zanjan Institute is the best with 1,261 and IPM ranks third with 765.) The fact is that most of the new scientific elite in Iran are people who have studied in Iran and completed their Ph.D.s under people who were educated in Western countries; in turn, they now educate a new generation whose connections to the outside world are made mostly after they have achieved their Ph.D.s.

TABLE 7.2. Number of ISI-recognized articles and their proportion to total number in the top 20 universities and scientific centers in Iran, 2003.

University	Number of articles	Percent of total number
Tehran University	312	11.2%
Sharif University of Technology	229	8.2%
Tarbiat Modarres University	225	8.1%
Tehran University Medical School	207	7.4%
Shiraz University	197	7.1%
Shahid Besheshti Medical School	170	6.1%
Amir Kabir University	155	5.6%
Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics (IPM)	146	5.2%
Industrial University of Isfahan	124	4.5%
Azad University	103	3.7%
Tabriz University	95	3.4%
Bu-Ali Sina University	86	3.1%
Razi University	86	3.1%
Iran's University of Science and Industry	83	3%
Shiraz University Medical School	81	2.9%
Isfahan University	80	2.9%
Ferdowsi University	72	2.6%
Gilan University	56	2%
Zanjan Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences	53	1.9%
Khwajeh-Nasir University	44	1.6%
Total	2,604	93.6%

Source: Shapour Etemad, Yahya Emami, and Masoud Mehrabi, *Mainstream Research in Iran 1970–2003*, Tehran: National Research Institute for Science Policy, 2004.

TABLE 7.3. Number of articles published by scholars in the top 10 universities in Iran, 2003.

University	Number of articles produced
Zanjan Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences	1,261
Sharif University of Technology	784
Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics (IPM)	765
Bu-Ali Sina University	601
Beheshti University Medical School	576
Kashan University	534
Tehran University Medical School	478
Shiraz University	464
Razi University	415
Kurdistan University	363

Source: Shapour Etemad, Yahya Emami, and Masoud Mehrabi, *Mainstream Research in Iran 1970–2003*, Tehran: National Research Institute for Science Policy, 2004.

Second, this new generation of scholars and scientists traces its interest in scientific research to the Ph.D. studies offered in the universities from 1989–1990 onwards. In their interviews, these scholars invariably mention this crucial event that changed their lives; probably for the first time in Iran’s history, science has played a crucial role in building the careers of its citizens.

In this chapter, I discuss the tormented history of scientific production in Iran during and after the Islamic revolution of 1979, its ups and downs, the negative aspects of the cultural revolution in the Iranian universities in the first half of the 1980s, and the underlying antielitist ideology that led, in the first decade of the Revolution, to the decline of scientific activity in Iran.

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The initial years after the Revolution were catastrophic for the scientific community and, more generally, for all scholarly work in Iran. The cultural revolution that occurred at the beginning of the 1980s led to the expulsion of many scientists from the university (the so-called cleansing, or *pak-sazi*), the exodus of many scientists to Western countries, the quashing of scientific inquiry in many fields—those dubbed as useless or elitist (*taghouti*, lit. idol-worshiping) in the hard sciences and anti-Islamic in the social sciences—and regression in

almost all areas of research.⁵ The universities were closed (for three years in general, two years for medical schools), the Islamic associations in the universities assumed power, and suspicion was cast on professors as being only lukewarm revolutionaries or even counter-revolutionaries.⁶ Many scientists were forced to work in fields unrelated to their specialties, mainly teaching and consulting, even after the universities were opened in the second half of the 1980s. These events caused the universities to regress in general and in scientific activity in particular.⁷

The effects of the long war with Iraq (1980–1988) and the concurrent brain drain resulting from repressions during the cultural revolution show the decline in scientific research compared to the shah's time. During this transitional period, a group of mathematicians and physicists, the latter mostly consisting of theoretical physicists, gathered in weekly sessions they called the "Tuesday Gatherings" in Tehran University's Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics (IPM). Central figures in this group were the mathematicians Gholam-Reza Khosrowshahi and Hossein Ziai (who later moved to the United States) and the physicists Farhad Ardalan, Firouz Partovi, Hesameddin Arfai, Siavash Shahshahani, and Reza Mansouri.

The group had formed earlier in Babolsar, in northern Iran, during the last years of the shah's regime; they were assembled as a scientific elite, working apart from the busy megalopolis of Tehran, with top tools and generous financial means at their disposal for their scholarly work. After the Islamic revolution, the group was disbanded, and many of them left Iran for Western countries, while others went back to Tehran and still others abandoned scientific research and began working in industry. Among those who went to Tehran, some joined the Atomic Energy Organization, where they could keep on with their research. In the throes of the cultural revolution, the Atomic Energy Organization provided a safe haven, free from the general turmoil of the universities.

This group of physicists organized weekly discussions (on Tuesdays), concerning their work, at a time when scientific research was generally regarded as useless in solving the real problems of society. Many of the interviewees mention this time of meetings and discussions either as formative for their careers or having rekindled the flame of scientific research, in spite of a difficult daily life. They became even stronger in their will to keep on with their scientific research, in spite of a difficult economic situation. Particularly, the strong wills of Ardalan, Partovi, and Arfai are cited as crucial in fighting the prevailing atmosphere and convincing a new generation to pursue scientific activity in Iran.

The major event marking the advent of a new scientific community in Iran was, from the perspective of the interviewees for this chapter, the authorization by then minister of science Mohammad Farhadi for the universities to initiate Ph.D. programs in 1367–1368 (1998–1999). But before this could be achieved, the physicists had to organize the Ph.D. courses and lectures. Reza Mansouri,

who had arrived in Iran not long before the Revolution, received his Ph.D. in theoretical physics in Vienna, Austria. He played a major role in convincing Ardalan, Arfai, and the others that they had the necessary means to offer a Ph.D. program. Under the shah, candidates for Ph.D.s used to leave Iran to study in the United States or Europe. Now that this was no longer an option for students, owing to a lack of scholarships and a high currency exchange rate, Mansouri saw the only alternative as a homegrown Ph.D. program.

This was one of the paradoxes of the Revolution: it destroyed the old system of education, causing an immediate regression in scientific activity, but it gave others the opportunity to introduce ideas that could initiate new scientific work. The decision to offer a Ph.D. program had two opposing results. On the one hand, it opened the universities to underqualified Ph.D. candidates who ultimately saturated the field. For example, many universities, such as the Teachers Training University, or Tarbiat Modarres, exploited the opportunity and delivered Ph.D.s to a new elite that could never have received them under normal circumstances, from good universities. On the other hand, this administrative decision allowed gifted and hardworking students to reach high levels in their respective fields. In fact, we see the results of this in today's increased scientific research activity.

Once the idea of a Ph.D. program was put forward, the Ministry of Science accepted it and the changes began to occur. The Revolution was a movement against elitist views and for egalitarianism, at least in its first years. Yet the physicists and mathematicians who acted on behalf of the new Ph.D.s shared a single idea: excellence in their respective fields, even though that might be considered elitist by some. They wanted to reach to an international standard for both themselves and their students. They did not share the revolutionary view of equality from below—that is, a common level of performance in all fields. They asked for recognition of their hard work and scientific gifts—even though this idea ran contrary to revolutionary ideals. Eventually, they institutionalized their ideas of excellence, in spite of revolutionary reluctance and sometimes even in opposition to it.

The group chose many ways in which to implement its plans. One was to reactivate the Physics Association, an institution founded some half-century earlier, in the 1930s, for active discussions and as a way of sharing discoveries. They enriched the Persian language by adding modern scientific words and using them in their lectures and publications, thereby extending the language of Iran to embrace current scientific vocabulary. (Before, high-level physics was taught mainly in English.) The new Center for Academic Press (*Markaz-e Nashr-e Daneshgahi*) provided a means for publishing their articles in periodicals that linked science with industry and made excellence in science a matter of pride and prestige for Iranians. The *Journal of Physics* was initiated in 1984, giving a new forum to the group, particularly its youngest members.

The regime that followed the Revolution had disassembled the scientific institutions of many of the newer universities. At Hamedan University (which under the shah was supposed to become an elite university), most of its high-level scientific staff had migrated to the West; staff at the new Institute for Bio-Chemistry and Bio-Physics followed suit. But the nucleus of physicists at Sharif University of Technology stayed on and was able to promote some scientific activity, eventually institutionalizing it through Ph.D. courses, as just mentioned. They were not discouraged by the revolutionary excesses and believed in their value to Iran as a scientific elite. Unfortunately, Shiraz University, one of the best in Iran, suffered a mass exodus of its scientific staff and an inability of its remaining members to promote some common attitude and activity. The Iran-Iraq War helped matters somewhat, as the development of tanks, planes, and other technical aspects of warfare needed the participation of scientists. This helped promote a positive image of physicists and chemists and also provided some financial aid, though evidence suggests that the Ministry of Construction Jihad (*Jahad-e Sazandegi*) was not active in this respect, limiting itself to matters such as road construction and village clinics.

This group of physicists became a primary actor in those days. Its cultural homogeneity (they all believed in excellence in science) and its will to promote meritocracy were paramount any negotiations with the Ministry of Science, among various groups. Likewise, the physicists and mathematicians gathered students who had different motivations. Some were sincere revolutionaries who thought that Islamic Iran needed autonomy from the West, including scientific autonomy. Though often intransigent, and sometimes even intolerant, toward the university's scientific staff, they worked hard to become good physicists, chemists, and mathematicians as well. The students even sometimes helped implement "revolutionary" measures at the institution that went against some of their professors, but all the while they shared the faculty's passion for excellence.

Other students had nationalist tendencies, with the goal of helping Iran become a full-fledged nation by incorporating the discoveries and achievements of the West to build a home-based scientific community. Still others showed individual goals, such as to get their Ph.D.s and move to the West. Since they could not study outside of Iran, they wanted to reach an academic level that would lead to a job in the West, mainly the United States.

Regardless of their motivation, the new students needed up-to-date laboratories and solid basic facilities to perform experiments. Fortunately, theoretical physicists, such as those in the Tuesday Group, were less dependent on expensive laboratories than colleagues in some of the experimental fields; the same held for those in mathematics, since laboratories aren't needed to become a good mathematician. All physicists and mathematicians need is current journals and the opportunity to work continuously on chosen subjects.

As chemistry students can usually manage with cheap laboratory facilities, this situation helped promote research in that field as well.

The students and their tutors were, for different reasons, idealists: they looked for ways to promote science. Some wanted to prove the possibility of simultaneously being a good revolutionary and a good scientist; some insisted on being good Muslim Iranians, capable of reconciling science and revolutionary ideals. They all accepted hardships and deprivations to stay true to their principles, and the result was a nucleus of individuals who, in less than a decade, have achieved good scientific results in their fields and have recognized themselves as a group with specific needs and interests, within a society where revolutionary ideals have become meaningless for many. Some of these new achievers grew disillusioned with the passage of time—the revolutionary utopia that they envisioned was not only unrealizable but also produced later generations that do not share that idealism and are more concerned with individual achievement and in acquiring consumer goods. Some of the early Ph.D. candidates have become exclusive scientists; in postrevolutionary Iran, they look for institutional protection to ensure themselves and their students salaries high enough to allow them to do their research without supplementing their income with outside work. Indeed, for many, dedication to scientific careers has replaced revolutionary activism.

THE NEW INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

During the 1990s, certain influential people in the country's political elite began to support the academics; this support was not from one political group, such as the Reformists or the Conservatives; it cut across the political spectrum. At this point, the new institutions were either old ones with new directives and improved financial and material means (such as better laboratories and better salaries) or entirely new ones built almost *sur mesure*, to promote scientific research. Among the latter, the Institute for Studies in Theoretical Physics and Mathematics (IPM) and the Zanzan Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences can be regarded as particularly important.

The Institute for Theoretical Physics and Mathematics

In physics and mathematics, the IPM plays a major role in Iran today. An independent institution devoted to research in mathematics and theoretical physics, it was founded in 1367 (1988–1989).⁸ Since then, Mohammad-Javad Larijani has been its head, an influential conservative political figure in Iran. Larijani had studied physics and mathematics in the United States, but did not finish his Ph.D.; he returned to Iran to help in the Islamic Revolution. With his political connections he is able to “protect” the Institute, cut through red tape,

and provide good facilities and financial resources. From the 1990s to 2005, an assistant professor in Tehran would begin with a salary of 250,000 tumans per month (around US\$300), which was barely enough to rent a flat in the city; most assistant professors had to hold down a part-time job as well, such as teaching at another university in Tehran or in the provinces. At IPM, as a way of encouraging scientists to focus on academic activities, on average they received 600,000 to 700,000 tumans per month, almost three times the normal salary. Larijani achieved this through “tricks” such as having faculty participate in scientific projects at the institute and/or working extra time. In 2000–2001, there were 17 scientific members at the Institute—2 women and 15 men—and among them, 15 were Ph.D. holders. By 2004, IPM had 30 scientific staff members, some of them postdoctoral fellows who stayed two or three years, the rest permanent members. Since 2005, the government has increased the salaries of university scholars to more than twice that of assistant professors, and this has ensured that IPM stays well ahead of other higher institutions in retaining its research staff.

Many ongoing projects connect IPM to foreign research institutions, particularly to the Mathematical Laboratory in Orsay, France, McGill in Canada, King's College in England, and others in the Netherlands. Besides its own research, IPM fulfills another social and scientific function: reestablishing links with the Iranian diaspora of scholars and scientists in Western countries. As many of those who left Iran did so, not for political or ideological reasons, but because they wanted to continue their scientific work. Now they can cultivate links with Iranian scientists through institutions such as IPM. Indeed, as some of these scientists still have close ties with IPM's founders, the Institute is quite comfortable soliciting them for scientific information. Also, IPM finances research performed by Iranian scientists in the West who agree to recognize IPM sponsorship when have their papers published.

On the whole, interviews with some members of the IPM reveal how deeply conscious they are of the achievements of their young scientists. They are not necessarily optimistic about the prospects for more scientific research in Iran, but they recognize how much has been achieved in the last decade with regard to scientific activity in the country, at least in their field. This opinion is held independently of any attitude toward the current political regime. In a way, both optimists and pessimists are on common ground on one topic: some major decisions made after the Revolution have led to progress in three fields: mathematics, theoretical physics, and chemistry.

Taking the usual measurement of scientific activity (the number of papers published in renowned scientific journals and the frequency with which they are referenced by fellow scientists), we see that the volume of scientific publication declined considerably during the first decade after the Revolution. Subsequently, at least in the three aforementioned fields (theoretical physics,

mathematics, and chemistry), there has been renewed publication, and after more than a decade, there is notable progress in these fields. For example, in the field of mathematics, nine articles appeared in international journals in 1981, and there were 20 in physics; by 2000, the average number of articles was 68 in mathematics and 112 in physics. In comparison to achievements during the previous regime, this increase has been far more important.

Unfortunately, more critical than the number of papers produced by IPM researchers is the consciousness of this new generation of scientists. Many are anxious about their future and their prospects for the coming years. Some aspire to leave Iran for jobs elsewhere. But many also express confidence in the future of their scientific life in Iran and its possible institutionalization. One way IPM extends help to its members is by offering the chance for them to participate in international conferences or to complete their research residency (for up to a year or sometimes even more) in a Western country.

Likewise, IPM tries to draw its expatriates back to Iran. Many of those who left the country did so after they had already earned their Ph.D.s and have returned to Iran.⁹ Far more students left Iran in order to obtain their Ph.D.s, and according to the deputy director of the Institute, attracting these brilliant scientists is a major focus of the institution; once they find an outstanding mathematician or physicist, even before he or she has earned the Ph.D., they offer an affiliation with the Institute.

Zanjan Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences

Another major establishment where physical, chemical, and mathematical research is carried out is the Zanjan Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences (Daneshgah-e Tahsilat-e Takmili-ye Olum-e Payeh-ye Zanjan), which is a center for Graduate Studies. Situated in the city of Zanjan, more than three hundred kilometers (approximately 186 miles) northwest of Tehran, this center was founded in 1992 and combines research and teaching. It offers Ph.D.s in mathematics, physics, and chemistry, and has over 141 students in those fields.

The generation of scientists following the Revolution, which was educated mostly by members of the informal Tuesday Group, is now assuming the task of training the next generation of scientists. Interviews with the members at this center revealed how deeply some of them are involved in their scientific activities. The distance to Tehran, and the fact that the small scientific community lives in campus housing provided by the center, makes interactions among the group intense; many researchers work late during the night with the Ph.D. students who can reach them easily, as they live only a few blocks away.

There is, on the whole, no relationship with the town of Zanjan, only a few kilometers away from the center. The fact that this center is far from the capital protects it from the money-driven mentality of many Tehran residents. Since

salaries are quite high according to Iranian standards (approximately three times the normal salary of an assistant professor in other universities), and accommodation is cheap, most of the staff's time is devoted to research. However, this does not prevent some of the faculty members from deeply resenting their tenuous situation.

THE RIFTS BETWEEN SCIENTISTS

Two major groups have emerged among scientists at these institutions. The first group consists of those who are reasonably optimistic about the prospects of research in Iran in general and, in particular, about their future in the country. The second group is scientists who are critical of the current policies regarding scientific work and denounce a situation where research has not been institutionalized.

There is another cleavage among the scientists, too. There are those who believe that scientific activity can be promoted in Iran only by building ivory towers, with policies that differ from those prevailing in the rest of the academic system. The opposing group denounces this elitist attitude and believes that real research can be performed only on a large scale.

They all continue to operate within the existing academic system; nevertheless, some contend that the entire academic system has to be restructured and rebuilt. One idea is that Iranian academia is paralyzed with a heavy bureaucracy, a gerontocracy of people who do not care about research, and a student body that is not qualified to become competent scientists. The first group is considered elitist by the second, whereas the second is perceived by the first as being driven by populism and is unwilling to acknowledge the realities of Iranian society.

This antagonism cuts across the decision-making circles, not only on the intermediate level (such as at the centers and universities) but also on a higher level, meaning the government ministries, such as the Ministry of Science, the Ministry of Culture, and the Ministry of Industry. This dividing line goes back to the early days of the Islamic revolution, when the ideologically motivated Islamist students—the so-called *maktabi* (doctrinaire), *enqelabi* (revolutionary), or *mote'ahhed* (committed)—made life difficult for senior professors as they sought to realize their Islamic utopia. More than 20 years after the Revolution, some of these academics have become good scientists, with distinguished scholarly records and high numbers of scientific publications, but they remain deeply distressed by the twists and turns of the Revolution. Many resent the fact that the bureaucracy of the previous regime has survived and, in many respects, has become worse. They find the prevailing attitude nonscientific, even antiscientific, and they do not believe anymore in the lofty ideals of the Revolution.

But one major aspect of the Islamic revolution has remained paramount: a preoccupation with making it possible for the downtrodden (*mostaz'afin*) to receive the benefits of Islam. The second generation of scientists is bitter about

prevailing opportunism at all levels of society, and they find almost all the scientific institutions (in particular the old and venerable ones such as Tehran University) as stumbling blocks in the way of achieving progress in science as well as improving the welfare of society.

Linked with attitudes about the elitism of scientific research is another major concern: the usefulness of high-level research for Iranian society in general. Some brilliant scientists question the justification for “aristocratic” research. One pessimistically minded chemist told me scornfully that, in a country where acetone cannot be found easily to clean laboratory instruments, performing high-level scientific research profits only the industrialized, privileged world. Some radical scientists questioned the wisdom of rarified research such as on string theory, which, in their view, is luxury research without relevance to the needs of Iran.

The academics are divided along another major idea, as well: those who are egoistically minded and those who are altruistically inclined. For the first group, the major concern is the individual and his or her social and economic success. They look to scientific research as a way to achieve national, even international, recognition, which also ends up with economic well-being. The opposing group is mainly concerned with the progress of society as a whole, and looks to science as a means of achieving this end. For them, science should be at the service of the population; the more subjective needs of the scientist come second. In particular, the altruistic group is concerned with the mindset of third-generation scientists who are not moved by ideals and do not consider their debt to society as important. They believe that this new generation is insensitive to problems other than their own and therefore is not ready to endure the hardships involved in promoting more research (unlike the first and second generations, who suffered for the sake of research).

In summary, one finds at least three issues that separate the elite scientists in Iran:

- Whether there should be ivory tower research, or it should be done within the university at large
- Whether scientists should pursue research for the pure sake of gaining knowledge, or should confine themselves to “useful” research that helps meet the needs of the country
- Whether scientists should become examples of rational thinking and be models for others in serving society, or should fulfill their own aspirations and ambitions to achieve prominence in their field

The Generational Problem

A major distinctive feature underlined by the interviewees is the differences in mindsets among the first, second, and third generations of scientists following

the Islamic revolution. According to those of the first and second generations, the third generation is individualist and egoistic, without any ideals, and above all more concerned about its personal well-being than with the collective scientific progress of the nation. For the third generation, the problem is that it suffers the consequences of expensive living conditions in a money-oriented society that makes normal living almost impossible. They further point out that the first and second generations benefited from formerly low prices for goods and housing, that they now have good salaries because of seniority, and they had the opportunity to save so as to be unaffected by high inflation and high living costs.

One fact disturbs the older generations of scientists: the ease with which the newest generation emigrates to the West. Many young, bright scientists finish their studies in the elite universities of Sharif, Tehran, or Amir-Kabir and then find positions in Western universities, sometimes via Internet connections, and leave Iran. Of course, contend some interviewees, not all of these young scientists remain in the West; some return to Iran. Nevertheless, the brain drain remains a preoccupying problem. Emigration is not based so much on dissatisfaction with the cultural or political values in Iran,¹⁰ as on economic grounds and desire for free time. To survive economically, the younger scientists have to teach many hours (sometimes up to 20 or more) or take on consulting jobs in order to maintain a normal standard of living.

The second, or middle, generation has another perception of the reality. They denounce these shortcomings of the young, which are greater than a generation ago. They call into question the idealism of their fathers, preferring pragmatic values and realism toward solving the country's social problems. Scientific values are shared by many, but they refuse to give them top priority. The right to a decent life seems to be the common language of the two newer generations. In this way, they both avoid allegiance to revolutionary tenets, on the one hand, and lean toward ideals that do not take into account human weaknesses, on the other hand.

Science, as such, has been transmitted as a value in and of itself. Many younger scientists who joined the university as assistant professors live now in lower-middle-class districts of Tehran rather than the middle-class neighborhoods of earlier scientists. They accept this situation, but not out of a belief in the value of scientific achievement. Their economic situation is less satisfactory than that of scientists during the Revolution, made obvious as the general population partakes, at least partially, of the wealth achieved from oil revenues.

Science is no longer a matter of faith, but something that is internalized in the ordinary lives of researchers, as something that is self-evident in its positive values. The generation of the Revolution was able to sacrifice for the sake of utopian ideals. The new generation of scientists seeks comfort, yet many still take to heart the importance that Iran's scientific achievement keep pace with the world's while also realizing its internal goals.

The first generation was secular, and most of its members had studied abroad, in the United States or England, France, and Germany. On the whole, they were insensitive to revolutionary ideals and even less inclined to any mix of religion and science. The second generation was students involved in anti-shah demonstrations, who identified with revolutionary ideals—at least in the first years after the Revolution. Among the latter, some were Islamic activists and some expressed a quest for “Islamic science,” before this ideology met the hard realities of daily life. In the decade that followed, some of these second-generation students became good scientists. They called into question their ideological tenets, either because they saw the poor results of the “Islamization of knowledge” in the university or because of personal contacts with the West—in some cases, travel to Western countries in pursuit of Ph.D.s.

This generation of hard-liners, revolutionaries, and Islamic radicals was followed by another generation, this one mostly either apolitical or inclined toward reform (such as the people once associated with former president Khatami), or with a strong sense of personal achievement and individual freedom. The evolution of this second generation into one marked by a more moderate and balanced view of politics—and the advent of a third generation of nonutopians and individualists—makes a mutual understanding of science easier to grasp than during the effervescent revolutionary period. Indeed, during that time, revolutionary-minded students showed no tolerance of elder scholars. Now, there’s a consensus on the requisites of scientific research and the necessity to separate science and politicized religion.

The important issue here is that early protagonists were not driven by ideology. The figures who established the Ph.D. courses and founded the scientific institutes were secular individuals who sought the advancement of science and chose to play the political game to achieve those goals. The second generation was more inclined toward activism, wishing to promote science as a way to ensure Iran’s autonomy vis-à-vis the West. They even helped purge the secular professors from the university, with a utopian picture of a home-based science serving both Iran and Islam. However, as mentioned, many of these idealists have learned to cultivate a more balanced picture of the West. One claimed that his stay in CERN (Conseil Européen pour la Recherche Nucléaire, located between France and Switzerland) for a year taught him a lot, including the ability to think of the scientific community as transnational and transreligious, founded on rules of honesty and performance whose results could be accepted by all faiths. Still, many express the malaise that came when they stayed abroad too long. In a way, those scientists who stayed in Iran for ideological (Islamic) reasons now share the same goal as those who left Iran: to maintain Iran’s level of research on an international level.

The Subjective Problems of the Scientists

The major problems for Iran's scientists are more cultural and political than economic.¹¹ Two sets of problems are often mentioned: the first, a bureaucratic system that prevents them from devoting much of their time to research; the second, a cultural life in which scholars are treated as second-class citizens. Inherent in these problems is a changing sense of identity, or scientific mindset, that places them in a respected position within the wider community.

On politics and bureaucracy, the way scientists look at Iranian society is not exclusively related to their field of competence. Some mention the shortcomings of the political system in dealing with the global problems of science. Some find fault with the way social problems are handled at the medium range—at the level of the technocrats who fix the budget for research or even the heads of the universities who give prominence to their own group or clientele to the detriment of the others.¹² Most of them are too closely involved in their field to engage in political activities, with all the inherent risks. Some are critical of the social and political situation without any specific political stance.

Criticism is sharp toward society as such—its culture, the way people handle their problems at the micro-level—in daily life. The political elite is criticized for its corruption and shortcomings, but almost all scientists interviewed refuse to get involved in politics and even the most radical ones believe that only education can have an impact on the society and change it toward a more open one. For many of them, politics is not of prime importance, particularly since the “failure” of the reformists since 1997.¹³

One scientist mentioned off the record, which shows the intensity of the general feeling of insecurity with the political system, that it is painful for him to see someone reproach his wife for allegedly being inadequately veiled. Another scientist, religiously minded, pointed out that “some sycophantic Muslims” have replaced the genuine Islamic norms with “rigid and puritanical rules” in the name of Islam.

On the whole, though, what seems to have discouraged many scientists, religious and secular alike, is a political and cultural system that does not recognize scientists as a kind of “moral aristocracy,” in a society where official practices turn out to be against science and progress. That is why many of the interviewees cite their personal attachment to science and list their individual motivation as reasons they do scientific research rather than other, more economically rewarding activities. Many stress the fact that, in order to fight the pervasive materialism present today in Iranian society, they renounce the urge to accumulate wealth. In this way, they develop immunity to the daily temptations of money and widespread recognition. Many do succeed, but still lack respect from the others, particularly the authorities.

The policies of the government during the last decade to encourage research (such as awarding prizes for excellence to high-level scientists, promoted by the Ministry of Science and the president of the republic) have had an ambiguous effect. According to the interviewees, the government has given opportunities to those who seek cheap compensation, leaving aside genuine scientists who refuse to play the game. In the same vein, public recognition by the authorities is felt to be double edged: on the one hand, it gives a positive picture to scientific work and to those who perform it; on the other hand, it pushes to the forefront opportunists who know how to exploit the situation, leaving aside genuine scientists who refuse the exhibitionism and self-exposure.

Bound up in identity for Iran's scientists is their relationship to family, often considered in two different ways. For some, multiple ties within the culturally extended family (versus the nuclear family) can be prohibitive factors for the advancement of scientific activity. For example, news of the death of a remote family member invariably entails participating in various funeral ceremonies, which take time away from work. The same applies to marriages and other social occasions. To perform scientific activities, one must set limits on these social and cultural activities. For these scientists, the solution is to become more individually minded, for the sake of science. For others, these cultural activities do not interfere with their scientific performance. On the contrary, they contend that such obligations provide a distinctive sense of identity that is often absent in the West.

The motives behind the scientific performance are different as well, but the majority responds to two related reasons. The first is what might be called the problem-solving attitude; the second is recognition by the scientific community worldwide. The problem solver finds intrinsic pleasure in uncovering solutions to problems that challenge his or her capacity. It is a positive self-assertion in the face of a problem that represents the *persona* of the scientist. The second reason given for scientific work is the fame and recognition that comes with the citations, the publications of one's writings in solid scientific journals. It would appear that mathematicians and theoretical physicists are particularly driven by the aesthetic beauty of their mental tasks, especially when proved (for instance, a mathematical theorem). But on the whole, motivations are personal (problem solving or aesthetic) or social (peer recognition), and only rarely economic, in spite of the difficulties that young scientists face in the Iranian society.

The fact that the Zanzan Institute for Advanced Studies in Basic Sciences is far from Tehran has multiple blessings, according to one of its members. It is far from Tehran (and therefore cheaper overall), it is situated in a provincial town (therefore the number of times that one needs to go from one place to another is reduced), it is within an enclave—that is, the university campus and the dormitories are in the outskirts of town (and therefore, it is

a self-sufficient scientific community), and most notably, it is far from the money-oriented mentality of Tehran.

The intermingling of social and public views with personal ones shows that a scientific mentality, or mindset, had become part of the identity of scientists at high levels in Iran. In this respect, one might speak of a scientific community that has emerged in the last decade and that was absent before the Revolution. To clarify, during the shah's regime there were brilliant scientists, but their activities were at best individually motivated and not grounded in any kind of collective identity of the scientific community.

The interviewees, independent of their political opinions on the Islamic revolution, believed that a new phenomenon had set in during the last ten years following the initiation of Ph.D. programs, on the one hand, and the foundation of research institutes, on the other. However, the extent of that change, as well as its nature, is still a matter of dispute. Nevertheless, the fact that there has been a positive step toward constructing a scientific community seems indisputable among those who are at the top in physics, mathematics, or chemistry. The interviews with the rank-and-file scientists in these fields show that they are much more pessimistic, but the most dedicated ones recognize change for the better, contesting sometimes its institutionalization, on the one hand, and its depth, on the other.

A major problem facing scientists, particularly those who do experimental research, is the failure to establish links with industry. Some justify keeping the distance between science and industry by claiming that science, even the most abstract kind, will ultimately have applications for industry and those can be pursued later on. Also, scientists tend to blame industry, where engineers despise or ignore scientists. Other scientists are guilt ridden when they do team with industry, feeling that they are working more for industry than for their own research. On the whole, there is general unease among scientists about their relationship with industry and also with the impression of some failure on the part of their vocations, particularly among chemists and physicists.

THE DEFINITION OF A SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Let us take as an operational or practical definition of "scientific community" a group that has the following characteristics: (a) a consciousness of itself as being moved by scientific ideals; (b) an achievement-oriented perspective (it gives as a definition of the "self" its capacity to act for the advancement of science); (c) science as its fundamental value, defined in an intersubjective way; (d) a relationship between the members of the community that is based on scientific values;¹⁴ (e) a defense against the outside world when there is a conflict related to norms or values involving the appreciation of scientific statements; and (f) a consensus within the same scientific paradigm as to truth, doubtfulness, and falsehoods concerning scientific statements.¹⁵

Bearing this definition in mind, how do top scientists in Iran consider their own scientific community? Does it exist or does it not? If it does exist, what are its problems? The answers to these questions are, at best, multiple. For many scientists, there is no scientific community in Iran—there are only single persons who work and produce scientific knowledge, without backing from colleagues or a “community.” They say that not only is there no such community, but some point out that there could never be one, considering the dreadful situation science faces in the country and the Mafia-like relationships between the elites and society. In other words, not only doesn’t a scientific community exist in Iran, but it is utterly impossible to ever exist under the prevailing cultural and economic conditions. These are the embittered or desperate scientists speaking.

For a second group, there are the premises to having a scientific community in Iran, but the community is fragile and would need institutional backing to become full-fledged. To gain strength in times such as this, the infant scientific community needs steady support from those in power, which is lacking most of the time. Therefore, many concede that the expression “scientific community” is a misnomer, in that there is more than a collection of disconnected individuals in scientific fields but less than a true community. One of the problems that keep this budding group from solidifying is that its members usually do not engage in common scientific research, owing to an inability or reluctance to do so. This is partly because the institutes do not recognize the results of individual work on a par with that of research teams.

For a third group of those surveyed, there is only ambiguity. Like the second group, they recognize that there are more than single individuals working in science; also, they cite times when there is at least minimal readiness to work together. They also acknowledge the existence of scientists who share common scientific values and interests. Yet they do not fully accept the idea of a real scientific community in Iran. They do not feel proud of it and they lack any notion of a future-oriented scientific group whose identity build and expand over time.

Considering these three attitudes, one can say that, at best, scientists are ambivalent about the existence of a community and, at worst, they flatly deny its existence. Those who deny are a minority, however. The majority see reasons to believe in it, even without being sure of its stability or future, in Iran and in the region, compared to the scientific communities of the United States or Western Europe (very few refer to Japan or to South Korea, or even China—the model being the West).

Many scientists in the interviews underlined the lack of cooperation among colleagues, perhaps because of mutual distrust and perhaps as a result of historical background. They deplore the fact that, instead of cooperating with each other, Iranians are prone to criticism and selfish individualism, which prohibit any constructive attitudes toward “working together.” Their results in

individual fields, such as mathematics, are encouraging, but when it comes to branches of knowledge in which they must work collectively, they simply lack the confidence to engage in joint projects.¹⁶

With the above conclusion in mind, one should recognize the nucleus of an incipient scientific community at least in the fields of theoretical physics, mathematics, and chemistry. This is due to Iran's postwar policies, particularly some major decisions that opened up the way for development of young scientists, especially the decision to establish the Ph.D. programs, to build institutes devoted to science, and to encourage scientists to produce papers and do research. These policies have been viewed as counterproductive by some of the interviewees (producing weak Ph.D. candidates because the most elementary requisites are not available). But before the Islamic revolution, there was only one major scientific community in Iran: that related to medical research. Now there are at least mini-communities in the aforementioned fields.¹⁷

Major Differences within the Incipient Scientific Community

The classic distinction between the two kinds of scientists is those who practice theoretical sciences and those who work the applied sciences. Their attitudes conceivably are different, particularly in Iran, for specific reasons. Those in the theoretical branches of knowledge usually do not heed too closely to possible applications of their knowledge to solve any concrete problems, whereas those in the applied sciences are concerned with applying their knowledge to solving the problems of daily living. In Iran many scientists choose the theoretical branches; they do not want to have the constant preoccupation with conceiving of useful applications or the difficulty of obtaining and maintaining expensive equipment. In this way, they ignore the deficient laboratories, the inadequate resources. In contrast, the applied scientists expressed not only concern in the interviews but also anxiety about surmounting the obstacles inherent in the application of their knowledge to related technological areas.

Within the applied sciences, each field has its own peculiarities. In chemistry, according to the researchers, it is much easier to undertake empirical work than in other fields; therefore, the number of journal publications produced is high and competition is stiff. Another reason explaining this good performance in chemistry is Iran's long history with this discipline. More generally, in Islamic societies chemistry has been highly praised, and not necessarily strictly for scientific reasons.

In genetics, which is a rather recent science, especially in Iran, the relevant equipment is very expensive and U.S. sanctions keep American products from being shipped to Iran except indirectly, which makes it two to three times more expensive. In genetics, therefore, it is much easier to do research on computer simulations. In fact, Iranian students and researchers seem to be fairly good at computer simulation and much work is being done in this field. On the other

hand, Iranians have good opportunities for joint research ventures with the outside world (including the West) because they can access DNA samples that are much more difficult to obtain in the West. (Laws governing genetic engineering do not yet exist in countries like Iran.)

Many young neuroscience researchers believe that they can compensate for their lack of suitable laboratories and the scarcity of resources by doubling their enthusiasm and endurance against all odds.¹⁸ Likewise, in the scientific work of agriculture, plant diseases are local problems and so the research centers have become fairly well known for their work on plant viruses—for example, Razi Institute in Karaj or the Agricultural Department of Shiraz University.

This situation does not hold true for mechanical engineering, whose scientists resent the lack of adequate means and ties to the outside world, including the West, but also China, India, and Pakistan. The engineers bemoan the fact that industry in Iran ignores their capacity to solve problems and prefers to direct its inquiries to foreign suppliers.

Generally speaking, in the applied fields there is a scarcity of resources, including suitable laboratories, due in part to the U.S. and European—and, more generally, the remaining industrialized nations—embargo against Iran. But another factor is Tehran itself, which, owing to its political and economic position in the country, takes the lion's share of money for research. Outside the capital, there is frustration at the lack of resources or attention. For example, at Shiraz University the researchers at the Center for Chemistry bitterly complain about the unequal distribution of resources, claiming their center to be the most prominent in their field, with the highest number of publications submitted to international journals. Also in Shiraz, in the Agricultural Center, scholars stress the fact that they are not treated on a par with those in the capital. This feeling of disparity exists in other parts of the country, as well.

Aside from the division between the applied and theoretical fields of knowledge, cultural factors divide scientists, particularly on the general prospects for increased scientific knowledge in Iran. As already mentioned, social and political attitudes are not entirely determined by the field of knowledge. Radicals (those who reject the prevailing system without engaging in political activity) can be found in almost all branches of science. What is important to note is that the general attitude toward society is not based on scientific competence but, rather, on broader issues like the prevailing culture within the family, the degree of secularization, the scale of indignation toward the corruption of the Nomenklatura, and the attitude toward the culture within the society.

IRANIAN SCIENTISTS AND THE GLOBAL SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

Do Iran's scientists believe in the existence of a worldwide scientific community? And, if so, do they consider themselves members of that community, actually

or potentially? The answers to these questions are unambiguous, in theory: there is a scientific community in the world for the overwhelming majority of respondents who believe to be members of that community, despite their ability to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their fields. However, this scientific community is viewed in different ways. Many believe it is based on scientific pursuit, disinterestedness, and achievement. Some in Iran believe that it is dominated by powerful vested interests in the industrial and technological spheres.

The responses were intriguing. One scientist said that, in his field, many others in the world community of scientists refused to cite his results because of his Iranian citizenship; another one mentioned that a Chinese scientist would be treated with more respect by Westerners than would an Iranian with the same qualifications. A third believed that the institution that worked most notably on his topic had an "Israeli bias," and therefore his work was not cited; still, he said that Jewish scientists treated his work fairly. Another respondent mentioned his good relationships with other scholars, Jewish or not. Those who worked in the applied fields felt that U.S. sanctions had cost them large amounts of money—up to three times the value of the products they had to import via other means. And some complained about the power relations within the world's scientific community and the inability of Iranians to claim a fair share of it.

Many deplored the marginal position that Iran holds in the world scientific community, and the marginalization of Iranian scientists worldwide, irrespective of their achievements. Being Iranian means, from their point of view, being looked at suspiciously—at best as *quantité négligeable* and at worst as terrorists. One scientist bemoaned the fact that he could not express publicly, in scientific assemblies, that he worked on "explosives" lest he be treated as contributing to terrorism. Another felt that being Iranian was considered a negative by Western colleagues; in a letter of support, his tutor said: "although Mr. . . . is Iranian, he is still one of the best in his branch!"

Iranian scientists endure many symbolic wounds. They are not naïve about the national, international, religious, and ethnic tensions that cut across the scientific community, but none says that he would forfeit being Iranian or give up membership in the world scientific community. The consensus is that membership in the world scientific community is necessary to survive as a scientist, and one has to contribute to its expansion of knowledge. Obviously, the scientific community is not free from prejudice and interest groups, but the future lies in membership by the Iranians nonetheless. And this view is shared by secular and religious scientists alike. The dividing line between leftist and fundamentalist scientists that existed in the heyday of the Islamic revolution and into the 1990s has simply waned.

The necessity not only to be a member of the international scientific community but also to host other scientists, irrespective of nationality, religion,

or political position, is now the common denominator for almost all Iranian scientists. Religion, nationality, and political views are considered strictly personal, and are not allowed to interfere with scientific activity as such. This is a major change, compared to two decades ago when imperialism was considered to be at the root of all international initiatives on science.

What is sensitive here is, as mentioned earlier, whether a scientific community exists in Iran. If so, then its relationship to the world scientific community is one of inferiority. That is, the Iranian scientific community does not provide its members with the confidence to counter the prejudices they confront from those who are biased against Iran. As a consequence, there is no pride in being a member of a scientific community in Iran so that one can also proudly claim a collective identity in the world.

Another anguishing and frustrating problem for Iranian scientists is the speed with which scientific knowledge is progressing worldwide, without their being able to follow the changes, owing to the rejection of Iran by the Western countries, in particular the United States.

Now, of those who deny the existence of a scientific community in Iran, they sometimes have a dramatic view of themselves and their relationship to the world scientific community. Since they exist only as individuals, with good scientific knowledge, they have, in a way, no future: operating independently, they disappear once their scientific achievements have ended. This utterly pessimistic view is held by a minority, and not necessarily those who with the lowest level of achievements. Some top scientists in Iran (in terms of their number of publications in internationally journals) fit this category.

Generally speaking, there is no connection between pessimism or optimism and scientific achievement: some of the most pessimistically minded are also the most brilliant. Their achievements are not, in this case, grounded in a collective vision but in an aesthetic or individual justification of their genius. Being "alone" or "misunderstood" seems to afford some self-confidence to those who need to be different from others in order to achieve prominence.

Iran's relationship with the world scientific community is almost always a comparison to the West, notably the United States and other more developed Western countries. This comparison has an ambivalent result. In one way, it induces intensive work and deep involvement in scientific creativity: Iranians have to be among the best in the world in order to prove our membership in the world scientific community, where we are not always welcomed as Iranians. But in the other way, there is a permanent "unhappy consciousness": since one side of the comparison is always so high, to be equal to it is difficult, if not impossible.

For example, in none of the interviews did the scholars compare Iran to Pakistan, Turkey, or other countries with comparable levels of economic development. The result is that, in the back of their minds, the Iranian scientists have

a looming sense of failure. The West incites high levels of scientific achievement, but at the same time it causes anguish when goals are unattainable. A country closer in stature to Iran (like Turkey, Malaysia, or even South Korea or Thailand) is simply ignored, in most cases, to the profit of Europe or even the United States. Few scientists go beyond this "unhappy consciousness" and set themselves the goal of proving that they can achieve honorable results with poor means. In one of the interviews, a bright scholar who currently works with an international physicist from France said: "I try to show that we, as Iranians, can achieve notable results, and if we don't earn Nobel Prizes, it is due to the lack of the means and our marginal position in the world. But, still, we can prove that we are as good as the best scientists in the West with our poor instruments and our shabby laboratories."

This is the Iranian paradox: on the one hand, its scientists aim at attaining very high scientific achievements in comparison to the West; on the other, when they do achieve scientific excellence, it is as individuals or they refer to their Iranian citizenship only as a mythical idea. They lack the medium term—the national scientific community—to relate their scientific self to the world scientific community. In other words, between the self and the world, there is no mediation. The Indians have this mediation, being members of the Indian scientific community and relating through it to the world scientific community; the Japanese do as well. The Iranians are Iranians, are individuals, and are members of the world scientific community, but are not simultaneously members of the Iranian scientific community. In summary, prominent Iranian scientists are welcome in the West as individuals (they can work in the scientific institutions of the West), but the Iranian scientific community, in its infancy, is seen as susceptible to work for terrorism and therefore considered suspicious. These two factors (the semiexistence of an Iranian scientific community and its image as suspicious by the West) contribute to the "unhappy consciousness" of Iranian scientists.

THE MISSING LINK BETWEEN SCIENCE AND THE DISJUNCTIVE SELF-IMAGE

The main preoccupation of pure scientists (i.e., theoretical physicists and mathematicians) is the attainment of scientific excellence and the building of a new Iranian scientific community through which they can link with the world scientific community. Although this group has no explicit certainty about the existence of a national scientific community, there is hope and certainly positive grounds upon which it can build its goals. Among the applied scientists, however, the problem is more complicated. They do not know how to achieve concrete goals, how to make them work, and how to build ties with industry so that their research is meaningful. In their minds, science cannot

be disconnected from its application, and application possible only within the industrial and technological framework.

Many applied scientists contend that this is almost impossible. They cite the mutual distrust in Iran between the scientific world and the technological one. Industry does not take seriously the scientific people because it assumes they are unable to solve the technological problems that industry faces. The scientists consider Iran's industry too primitive to be worth serious consideration and without a common language with which to communicate. As mentioned earlier, when industry needs expert opinion or meets a real problem, it automatically looks to foreign companies for the solution, a choice based partly on prejudice, partly on the benefits derived from contracts in foreign currencies, and partly on bribery and corruption. The result is that scientists are left alone.

This missing link between industry and applied science creates a double feeling of alienation. On the one hand, there is the alienation the Iranian scientific community feels owing to the lack of connection with industry, which would tie the technological world to the university. On the other hand, there is the alienation from applied scientists in the world scientific community. Without technological ties, it is almost impossible for the scientists to perform the many experiments that could lend prominence to Iranian applied sciences in the world scientific community.

Though the pure scientists have problems linking their self-image to the world scientific community, the problem is more acute for the applied scientists. They deplore a supplementary role, with no objective connection between science and industry. But this also hinders the construction of an Iranian scientific community. In a way, industry in Iran has prevented the formation an Iranian scientific community in the applied fields, largely through its allegiance to foreign companies and its insensitivity to the competence and knowledge within its borders. This missing link makes the self-image of the Iranian applied scientist even more alienated than the pure scientist. Pessimism is, therefore, deeply entrenched in their psyche. They feel more helpless than their counterparts in pure science.

Other problems complicate the task of building one's self-image in the world of applied science. Physics, mathematics, and even chemistry (as alchemy) are traditional fields that hold their place in Iran's collective memory.¹⁹ No so, the applied sciences. Likewise, an egoistic culture prevails in the applied sciences, which results in a lack of cooperation among scientists. Almost all scientists, pure or applied, recognize this lack of cooperation; they complain about the extreme difficulty getting Iranians to work together. Some offer explanations, referring to an institutional framework in Iran in which collective work bring less prestige and financial reward. Others mention the exclusivist attitude based on internalized tyranny, a despotic attitude excluding all those not in a position

to impose their view (you are either at the top and impose your view by denying participation to others, or you are subservient and accept your inferiority with false humility). Whether one is at the top or at the bottom, the result is a lack of cooperation and an atomized individualism that prevents real progress.

This view was defended by one or two scientists. In sciences like mathematics, a lack of cooperation does not induce difficulty because mathematics is a field of individualists and cooperation involves the exchange of published documents rather than close work to produce joint knowledge. The same holds true, more or less, for theoretical physics, contend some applied physicists; coauthorship is often limited to a few people (though the theoretical physicists with whom we discussed this issue denied its pertinence). In the applied field, scientists say this is not so. Sometimes many people are needed to make progress possible. And in this respect, the absence of a culture of cooperation is a real obstacle. This pessimistic perception of a culture of noncooperation seems contradicted by the increased number of scientific articles published as joint ventures between Iranian and non-Iranian scientists between 2001 and 2005.²⁰

There is a gap between a perception of the self and the other (the so-called culture of "lack of cooperation"), and the reality in which Iranians show a normal ability to cooperate with others if favorable institutional conditions are provided. Still, this perception, similar to social misperceptions in general, become part of the reality by creating a suspicious attitude toward others, similar to what we generally term a self-fulfilling prophecy. This observation can be generalized: the subjective perception of the self by most of the scientists seems to be at odds with their objective reality; that is, they believe they are unable to cooperate with their counterparts, whereas they seem to do it rather well. They believe mostly not to have a scientific community in Iran (or to have it only marginally), whereas the achievements in some scientific fields seem remarkable. They feel pessimistic about their future and the future of science in Iran, whereas (even under populist President Ahmadinejad after 2005) their achievements seem to be on the increase. There are historical explanations of the rift between what they are and what they believe to be, but perhaps in that respect they are simply members of Iran's new alienated middle class.

The missing or weak ties between science and industry, on the one hand, and those between science and technology, on the other, are deep concerns among those in the applied sciences in Iran. Some go as far as to deny any progress in science in Iran during the last decades, owing to this missing link. They also go so far as to give a purely utilitarian definition of science; if science is not useful to the society that finances it, it is a superficial involvement or a foreign one—a science that is useful only to the Western world, reinforcing the arguments of those who criticize Iran's lack of an "indigenous" science.

The utilitarian view of science portrays the new scientific community as a parasite within Iranian society. Accordingly, if scientists produce knowledge

that does not solve the problems of society, this kind of science is of no value and, therefore, society should stop financing it. Indeed, applied scientists are more prone to this type of thinking; the world scientific community, therefore, is a structure of domination that induces scientists in the third world to work for the sake of the West. For the small minority who holds this radical point of view, the world scientific community is a myth, designed to alienate Iranian scholars from the actual needs of their society. In summary, it is obvious that scientists in the applied sciences have more problems than those in the pure sciences. They are more pessimistic and their problems are more acute.

Happy Exceptions

In a few cases, links between Iran's scientific community and the international one are established through the research centers, which operate within the university system, as well as through other scientific bodies (for instance, IPM or the Atomic Energy Organization). In order to function in this capacity the centers have to display a few characteristics. First, they need to be able to give a collective identity to their members (unfortunately, this is not generally the case), they need to provide their members with a sense of cooperation and friendship, they need to encourage an ideal of scientific honesty by which their members will abide, and they need to ensure their existence through recruitment policies that do not call into question their existence.

In at least three cases, the matter of identity has been empirically tested. In the case of IPM and the Zanjan postgraduate center, large financial support has granted them a *de facto* special status, which includes better monthly salaries through subsidies, a high level of investment in laboratories and libraries, and special "protection" for the organization in the case of IPM (the conservative Mohammad-Javad Larijani is in charge and wields his considerable influence).

The chemistry department at the University of Shiraz is unique, in the sense that its financial resources are rather modest, its scientific staff enjoys no special privileges, and it by no means is protected by an influential person or group. According to the staff, there are about 30 persons who do research in chemistry; their rate of publication is among the highest in Iran,²¹ and they have, in the last decade, enrolled over 120 master's and Ph.D. students. The department's identity is that of a cohesive scientific group that claims, with good reasons, to have overcome the "cultural trait" of being unable to perform teamwork research. Its members attribute this success to the founders of the department in the 1960s: they were respectful of their students, pushed them toward research, instilled them with mutual trust and the ideal of collective work, and above all taught them scientific honesty. Indeed, all the scientists interviewed from the department attributed their scientific cooperation to the generosity of these founding figures.²²

Another factor they the scientists suggested is the disinterestedness of the department members, who surrendered self-interest in the name of group success. Since the majority of them were recruited a few years after the Islamic revolution, they shared long relationships at the university. Newcomers would undergo a period of transition that led them to adopt the goal of group research. On top of it, decision making in the department (not in the university) follows a democratic procedure, with the director elected by the staff and consensus through negotiation determining decisions, which they subsequently all honor.

But this department is atypical, and since it does not enjoy any special protection from an influential political person, it has major difficulties recruiting high-level new members, as it cannot offer commensurate salaries. And since it forbids external activities by the staff, many potential applicants prefer to go to universities with superior financial incentives. In other words, the main threat to this department's existence is its inability to renew its scientific staff by recruiting top researchers. Indeed, there is a crisis simmering.²³ In 2003, the department had only one female Ph.D., a chemist with a scientific score and numerous publications in international journals. Her husband, also in the department, has been able to stay on despite his low salary because of the wife's additional income. However, this is not the case for most of the scientists, who must make do with one salary since their wives do not have salaried jobs.

At these centers, group identity replaces the national scientific identity that's missing elsewhere. Another high-level scholar, who has written many articles, uses them to defend the collective view of scientific activity. This scholar is religiously minded; he was a political activist during the Islamic revolution, but his attitude now is less radical. He is one of the major spokesmen for his secular group, as a religious figure, he represents someone who has diversified the group's cultural features and occasionally intervenes among religious circles on its behalf. But his feelings are typical; in the interviews, each member claimed to find a group identity that prevents feeling alone, that gives pride and encourages better achievement.

Members of these centers do not show the malaise that most of Iran's scientists do. They do not feel rejected, marginalized, or ignored—or worse, betrayed by the political decision makers. But, still, many believe that they do not enjoy the recognition that they deserve; their requests for scientific instruments are most often ignored, and they suspect that most research subsidies go to Tehran institutions while those in the provinces are forgotten. They agree that there are people in high positions who do not understand the importance of scientific institutions.

CRITICISMS AND PROPOSALS

Almost all those who portray the scientific situation in Iran, including its bottlenecks and its impediments, propose reforms that could change the situation for the

better. The proposals cover a large array of solutions, from decentralization to state-sponsored policy. They are more or less realistic, some calling for local improvements, others for global change. Only one group has no proposals: the radically embittered scientists. For them, who constitute a small minority, there is no solution to the present ills of a society where everything is corrupt from top to bottom.

Most scientists have well-thought-out solutions, but often they are contradictory. Some favor complete intervention by the state, others want a civil scientific society in which power and politics play a minor role. Markedly, the proposed reforms reflect the scientists' fields of research. Consistently, however, their proposed reforms are symptomatic of the malaise: the obstacles standing in the way of scientific progress.

Many proposals display the different attitudes of scientists towards Iranian traditions. Iranian and Islamic traditions are respectful of science, and therefore most people look at them with deference. However, to promote more scientific activity, people need to be taught to respect scientists and their scientific achievements as well.

The scientists are impatient with the slow rate of reform and would like to quicken it in order to keep pace with the outside world, notably the West and particularly the United States. Many see the main problem as the Iranian cities, in particular Tehran. They contend that a profit-seeking mentality pushes people in the cities to speculate on property, gold, or other commodities, and that this mindset blocks investment in productive scientific activity. The proposals for changing this situation come across as remedies for a materialistic mentality, almost utopian.

Some suggestions are more realistic. In one case, a researcher proposed that, in every field, a scientific group meet and make recommendations, via the Ministry of Science, for decisions being made by the country's political leaders that would ensure the future of science. Another proposal was to end the centralized role of the Ministry of Science and leave scientists to determine individually their own needs and the means to finance them. The university would then become a private institution, able to provide financial support through tuition, much like the American model.

Alas, these reform proposals lack originality. They are merely ways of expressing a desire to improve the situation. Mostly, they reflect the large part scientists would like to take in changing the country for the better. They also show that there is a shadow scientific community somehow at work, thinking about solutions for the ills that prevent this community from coming together.

Religion and Ethics

Among the scientists, some have an activist past: they were students at the time of the Revolution, during which they adopted a utopian credo. But now they

have a totally different attitude. They no longer reject "Western" science and very few are suspicious of the international scientific institutions. Among those who are practicing Muslims, the separation of religion and scientific activity seems to be a given.

Practicing Muslims have a mixed attitude toward science. For some, scientific activity is autonomous from religious preoccupations. They characterize themselves as both true Muslims and genuine scientists, without seeing any conflicts between the two realms. But these people are a minority. The majority attempt to reconcile the two realms by claiming that faith is for handling daily problems and frees their minds for scientific activity. Furthermore, they see the aim of science as creating the perfect world promised by God; belief makes their scientific activity more meaningful.

In some cases, a mystical attitude exists: Creation displays its values through science, the universe is full of mysteries, science contributes to decipher these mysteries and disclose the hidden harmony within the cosmos. The path chosen by scientists offers them an explanation for their personal feelings toward the world. For example, one scientist claims to have chosen the earth sciences as his field because there is a way back to the earth after death, and the cosmos is made of this earth, which we should study for the sake of laying bare its beauty and mystery. A more prosaic explanation was offered by another for his study of earth science: his keen interest in mountain climbing and his urge to see the beauties of nature. One's degree of secularization does not intervene in scientific activity, but for most practicing Muslims, science is the continuation of their worship of God.

As mentioned in earlier sections of this chapter, being on the scientific staff of a university is not rewarding economically. This situation can open up questions of ethics and outlook on life itself. Family squabbles over money, and often the need to seek additional sources of income, put a strain on the scientists.²⁴ Some view their choice of career as a tradeoff, with some required sacrifice for the sake of mental balance; others compensate with mystical introversion, resorting to Sufism or other internalized limit on personal desires in the name of ethics. Those who are religiously minded try to find some Islamic justification to their relative privation. Others find moral grounds, renouncing consumerism in exchange for the spiritual contentment of science.

Scientific activity, for most of those interviewed, was intractable need characterized by fights with the family to perform it. Some believe that eventually they will be forced to abandon, at least partly, their scientific activities in order to satisfy the needs of their families. By example, one chemist said that he set aside 80 percent of his time to experimentation and the rest to earning money, but expected in the future to change that to a fifty-fifty ratio for the sake of the family. The comparison with the West is remarkable. There, the scientists say, scholars achieve at least a middle-class

standard of living and do not have to work overtime to provide adequate means for the family.

The Gender Issue

The gender issue in the sciences is acute. Very few women from the revolutionary period have achieved scientific prominence in their field.²⁵ Even in this study of scientists, except three cases, all the interviewees were men. There are numerous women working in branches of the sciences in universities such as Al-Zahra, but on the whole they cannot be considered part of the scientific elite, with a high number of scientific publications. But a real change in the gender situation will occur with the new generation.

In many scientific fields, young girls achieve a high level of research, and in fields like mathematics, physics, and chemistry—and even those reputed as exclusively masculine like the earth sciences and mining studies—women are making headway. In the earth sciences, for example, up to 20 percent of the students are women; in mining studies, women may not be taking part in direct mining activities, but they are involved in project planning and related research. In the other branches as well, women are present even at the Ph.D. level, though not without some difficulties. The main obstacle for women is still the fact that earning a Ph.D. requires a long time, up into a person's 30s. And although many changes are occurring for women in Iranian society, many of them are reluctant to pursue an advanced degree; family and a more or less traditional social structure prevent them from devoting their activity to full-time research. Some scientists reported that their wives were in the same branch of science but taught school or other activities that did not claim as much time away from home. Generally speaking, women with Ph.D.s in the hard sciences will be more prominent in the next generation.

CONCLUSION

There is strong empirical evidence for the birth of a scientific community in Iran. First, the recent achievements in many scientific fields have been remarkable; in chemistry, mathematics, theoretical physics, and even some branches of genetics, studies show activity that compares favorably with the rest of the world.²⁶ Second, members of Iran's science institutes and universities appear to be deeply rooted in Iran, its culture and its people. They express estrangement from the current political structure, yet prefer this situation to the revolutionary turmoil of earlier years.

The scientific community in Iran is divided, in many respects. Very few believe that there has been a regression in scientific activity compared to the

past, be it the revolutionary past or the prerevolutionary one. Almost all believe that progress has been made, yet it has been slow compared to major countries in the world. The identity problem that emerges for Iran's scientists leaves them without pride; instead, they feel as if working in a vacuum, as if the headway that has been made is purely accidental, not the result of a scientific community in its infancy. There is little information about their achievements in the media.

In spite of its dubious existence, this scientific community has the features of the civil society: communicative action is highly praised, although a lack of cooperation is also claimed; there's recognition of the need to relate to the outside world, yet suspicion and insecurity mark any attempts to do so;²⁷ although finances are distributed unevenly, the gaps are not perceived as unbridgeable; there are contentious issues among its members, yet common beliefs hold sway; there are some conflicts of interest and lax work among some researchers, but these are denounced by others.

The ambivalence felt by Iran's scientists induces pessimism, most of the time without endangering scientific efficacy. But there is a deep need for this community to be proud of itself; not being recognized induces a feeling of homelessness. It leads the scientists to claim the inability of Iranians to work together and to elevate joint scientific objectives over personal ones. Being identified as potentially dangerous or terrorist by many in other countries adds to the frustration of working in a country whose theocratic structure and revolutionary guidelines prevent full integration into the world scientific community.

Still, the achievements have been remarkable. The creativity of Iranian society, not only in the scientific field but also in the arts, literature, and philosophy, are testimony to the vitality of a society inventing new forms of pluralism amid political stalemate. The new scientific mind displays as much scholarly capacity as its ability to think in terms different from those imposed by the ruling theocracy. The new proponents of art, science, and philosophy peacefully question the pronouncements of a political system based on an exclusive vision of what is sacred and how society should function. By submitting the activities of the mind to scientific methods (and not theological tenets) within a rejuvenated body social, scientists can contribute to the long-term political and cultural awakening of an open Iranian society.

NOTES

This research is based on data gathered on the publications of scholars and scientists in the hard sciences (except the medical sciences) and on interviews with two distinct groups of researchers: those recognized as high-level scientists (based on the number of publications in distinguished international journals) and those identified by peers as having played a prominent role in scientific activities in postrevolutionary Iran. I am grateful to Shapour Etemad,

Masoud Mehrabi, and Mohammad-Amin Ghaneirad, who participated in this research, and to Reza Mansouri, who provided facilities and valuable information.

1. See Institute for Scientific Information (ISI), also known as Thomson Scientific, *Essential Science Indicator*, ISI Web of Knowledge, available at <http://scientific.thomsonreuters.com/isi/>.

2. See Shapour Etemad, Yahya Emami, and Masoud Mehrabi, *Mainstream Research in Iran 1970–2003*, Tehran: National Research Institute for Science Policy, 2004.

3. This has been confirmed by statistics for the year 2005, when the number of scientific publications, according to ISI norms, reached 5,423, still lagging behind Turkey, according to Ali-Akbar Saburi and Najmeh Pursasan, "Towlid-e elmi-ye Iran dar sal-e 1385" (Iran's scientific output in 2006), *Rahyaf* 37, spring/summer 2006, pp. 49–52. See also Abdolreza Nowruzi Chakoli and Hamzehali Nurmohammadi, *Evaluation of Scientific Production in Iran and the Region in 2005 and 2006*, Tehran: National Research Institute for Science Policy, fall 1386 (2007).

4. The IPM and the Zanjan Institute are among the best in terms of their scientists producing the largest number of articles published and the ratio of articles published to the total number of scholars, in spite of the fact that they are newcomers on the scientific landscape in Iran. (Both were founded after the Islamic revolution.)

5. From their highest number in 1979 (398 publications), they dropped to 173 in 1982, 140 in 1983, 139 in 1984, and 111 in 1985; see table 7.1. Bear in mind that the results of the cultural revolution were evident a few years later in the numbers of scientific publications, as there is usually a time lapse between submission and publication of one to three or four years.

6. For an account of a university in western Iran during the Islamic revolution, see Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Crise de l'université dans la révolution iranienne," *Peuples Méditerranéens, Mediterranean Peoples* 13, 1980, pp. 3–30; Ci-devants techoncrates (pseudonym), *Peuples Méditerranéens, Mediterranean Peoples* 29, 1984, pp. 105–116. For a more general account, see Farhad Khosrokhavar, *L'anthropologie de la révolution iranienne*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987.

7. See Farhad Khosrokhavar and M. Amin Ghaneirad, "Iran's new scientific community," *Iranian Studies* 39(2), June 2006, pp. 253–267; Farhad Khosrokhavar, Shapour Etemad, and Masoud Mehrabi, "Report on science in post-revolutionary Iran—part I: Emergence of a scientific community?" *Critique* 13(2), 2004, pp. 209–224; Farhad Khosrokhavar, Shapour Etemad, and Masoud Mehrabi, "Report on science in post-revolutionary Iran—part II: Problems of identity," *Critique* 13(3), 2004, pp. 225–249.

8. See Sh. Etemad, A Heydari, M. Sarbloki, and M. Mehrdad, *Tahqiqat va arzyabi-ye an: Pajouheshgah-e danesh-ha-ye bonyadi* ([Scientific] Research and its Evaluation: A Case Study of the Institute for Basic Sciences), *Akhbar* 9(1), spring 2002, pp. 59–71; Masoud Mehrabi, *Mo'assesat-e Pajouheshi-ye Keshvar* (Iran's Research Institutions), Tehran: Ministry of Sciences and Technology, 2000; Shapour Etemad, *Sakhtar-e Elm va Teknoloji dar Iran va Jahan* (The Structure of Science and Technology in Iran and in the World), Tehran: Nahs-re Markaz, 1999.

9. Data confirmed by Reza Mansouri, deputy minister of science until 2005, interview May 2003, Tehran. See Mansouri's optimistic views on the future of research in Iran in Reza Mansouri, *Iran, 1427: Azm-e Melli Bara-ye Towse'eh-ye Elmi va Farhangi* (Iran, 2048: The National Will for the Implementation of Scientific and Cultural Development), 3rd ed., Tehran: Tarh-e Naw, 2001.

10. Very few interviewees complained about religious values impeding their daily life and only one explicitly referred to it. This is not due to fear of speaking out, as many voiced harsh criticism of the government and society. But those with strong secular backgrounds who

could not manage to live any longer in the country for cultural reasons had already left. The new generation seeks, at least up to now, a liberal interpretation of religion within the prevailing framework rather than to rupture it.

11. This observation, based on interviews done before 2005, when salaries of the academic scientific staff were substantially increased by the Khatami government, is even more to the point now.

12. One major physicist at Tehran University expressed his anger at the hierarchy of his institution, directed at the president of the university as well as at deans who refused to give prominence to scientific research because of their own interests or their ignorance of scientific research as such.

13. In 1997, in a sweeping victory, the reformist Mohammad Khatami was elected president, increasing hopes of political and cultural reforms. The results, in political terms, were far below expectations. Yet many scientists view Khatami's failure to open the political system as having had a minor effect on their activities. A few are much more critical of him.

14. See Robert Merton, *The Sociology of Science*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973.

15. See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

16. Some contend that this statement can be extended to other fields, particularly in the arts. Accordingly, Iranians are good at individual sports such as wrestling and in literary activities such as writing novels or making movies, but not in collective activities.

17. At the time of this chapter, one-third of the 100 projected two-hour interviews had already been completed, particularly with mathematicians, theoretical physicists, and chemists. The remaining interviews will deal with other branches of scientific knowledge.

18. For a brief account, see Alison Abbott, "Iranian neuroscience: The brains trust of Tehran," *Nature* 435, May 19, 2005, pp. 264–265.

19. See Reza Mansouri, "How an obsolete concept of science impedes the development of Islamic countries: The example of Iran," unpublished paper, Sharif University of Technology, Department of Physics, June 2007.

20. In 2001, around 49 articles were published jointly with American colleagues, 75 with English colleagues, and 59 with Canadian. In 2002, the numbers increased, respectively, to 115, 89, and 81. In 2003, they reached, respectively, 190, 110, and 120; see Etemad, Emami, and Mehrabi, *Mainstream Research*, p. 28. In 2005, the numbers increased to 240 articles with U.S. colleagues, 220 with Canadian, and 210 with English. In 2004, the Iranian contribution was 0.36 percent of the total published articles and it increased to 0.42 percent. These numbers have a very small margin of error, owing to curves; see Saburi and Pursasan, "Towlid-e elmi," pp. 49–52.

21. In 2003, Shiraz University's Department of Chemistry had the highest number of articles published on that subject in Iran (53 articles), as opposed to 49 at Tarbiat Modarres University, 38 at Bou-Ali Sina University, and 31 at Tehran University; see Etemad, Emami, and Mehrabi, *Mainstream Research*, p. 38.

22. Seven scientists were formally interviewed and there were discussions with four others.

23. This problem has been partially solved with the increased salaries of the university staff since 2005.

24. Since the sharp increase in salaries in 2005, this problem is not as acute as before, although two-digit inflation takes its toll.

25. Between 1989 and 1996, the number of women full professors rose from 21 (out of 661, or 3 percent of the total) to 39 (out of 844, or 4.6 percent). But the number of women

associate professors rose from 44 (out of 1150, 3.8 percent) to 119 (out of 1,666, or 7 percent) and the number of women assistant professors rose from 376 (out of 5,327, or 7 percent) to 1,323 (out of 9,267, or 14 percent); see Moluk al-Sadat Beheshti, "Zan va pajuhesh: Talash bara-ye afzayesh-e fa'aliyat-ha-ye elmi-ye zanan-e Iran" (Woman and Research: Efforts to Increase Women's Scientific Activities in Iran), *Rahyaf* 37, spring/summer 2006, pp. 1–5.

26. See, for instance, David A. King, "The scientific impact of nations," *Nature* 430, July 15, 2004, pp. 311–316. In this research, comparisons were made among 31 countries (the comparator group), including the G8 group and the 15 countries of the European Union prior to 2004 accession (EU15). The countries were Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, India, Iran, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Singapore, Spain, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The group accounted for more than 98 percent of the world's highly cited papers, defined by ISI as the most cited 1 percent by field and year of publication. The world's remaining 162 countries contributed less than 2 percent total. The Islamic countries were represented only by Iran at 30th, despite the high GDP of many of them and the prominence of some of their citizens, such as Nobel Prize winners Abdus Salam (physics, 1979) and Ahmed Zewail (chemistry, 1999).

27. It is true that some scientists denounce the fact that, as Iranians, they are mistrusted by scientists who undervalue or disregard their value because of Iranian nationality.

Part III



POLITICS

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CONSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF CURRENT POLITICAL DEBATES IN IRAN

Saïd Amir Arjomand

This chapter follows my earlier survey of the first two decades of constitutional development in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Arjomand 2001). In that first work, I highlighted the significance of Ayatollah Khomeini's constitutional measures in the last year and a half of his life—namely his constitutionalization of the “absolute mandate of the jurist.” The events began in January 1988, with a letter to then president Seyyed Ali Khamenei, stating that government in the form of a God-given absolute mandate (*velayat-e motlaq*) was “the most important of the divine commandments and has priority over all derivative divine commandments.... [It is] one of the primary commandments of Islam and has priority over all derivative commandments, even over prayer, fasting and pilgrimage to Mecca”¹ (Khomeini 1999b, 11: 459–460). This ruling was followed by a decree creating the Council for the Determination of the Interest of the Islamic Order—Majma'-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam-e Eslami, hereafter the Expediency Council—a month later² (Khomeini 1999b, 11: 465). Ayatollah Abdol-Karim Musavi-Ardabili, the president of the Supreme Judiciary Council, hailed its creation as “the most important of all the achievements of the revolution”³ (Schirazi 1997, 236).

In April 1989, shortly before his death, Khomeini ordered the revision of the constitution of 1989 with regard to seven specific items, including the issue of leadership and constitutional recognition of the new Expediency Council. The Council for the Revision of the Constitution (Showra-ye Baznegari-ye Qanun-e Asasi), thus constituted, was given two months to complete its task. It did not assume any general constituent powers, but rather saw its scope limited to those items in Khomeini's authorization (Constitutional Proceedings [1989] 1990, 1: 164).

It is worth recalling the details of Khomeini's final legal revolution because the subsequent constitutional developments in Iran are not intelligible without them. It is also necessary to recall that the embodiment of an Islamist ideology

in a Shari'a-based constitution was a major goal of the Islamic revolution in 1979. This made the 1979 constitution an ideological constitution; that is, Islam was put into place as the dominant ideology in the constitutional documents, being explicitly recognized as the constitution's ideological base in the Preamble to the Fundamental Law of 1979 (Arjomand 1992b: 46). The Shari'a, which had been cited in Iran's first (nonideological) constitution as limiting the legislative powers (Supplement of 1907 to the Fundamental Law, esp. Article 2), and then faded into desuetude in subsequent Iranian constitutional law, came back with a vengeance to swallow the modernized state and its constitution. An appendix of traditions (*hadiths*) pertaining to the most important articles in the constitution demonstrates that the 1979 constitution was partially derived from the Shari'a; for example, its Article 4 declares that all laws must be based on Islamic standards (i.e., norms of the Shari'a), and that any laws found inconsistent with those standards are null and void, including the constitution itself (see Arjomand 1992a for further details).

An ideological constitution, if it is to be more than a piece of paper, needs an organ or collective body to protect it. The critical function of nullifying all proposed and existing laws found inconsistent with the Shari'a was given to the six clerical jurists of the Guardian Council. The Guardian Council was thus destined to become what Hans Kelsen (1928) in the late 1920s had called "the Guardian of the Constitution"; it has since then performed that function of protecting the ideological foundation of Iran's constitution.

Khomeini died on June 3, 1989. The Assembly of Leadership Experts met the following morning and elected President Khamenei as Khomeini's successor, the supreme leader of the Islamic republic. Except for that of Imam, all of Khomeini's political titles were transferred to Khamenei. This was, perhaps, the most remarkably smooth succession in the history of world revolutions. The swift election of Khamenei was unconstitutional, however, as he did not have the rank of *marja'iyat*, as required by Article 107 of the 1979 constitution, which was still in force at the time.⁴

The constitutional amendments of 1989 removed the qualification of *marja'iyat* and strengthened the power of the Assembly of Leadership Experts. Article 109 expanded the assembly's power to dismiss the supreme leader—no longer just for incapacitation, but also "if it should become apparent that he had lacked one of the qualifications from the beginning."⁵ The Expediency Council was also recognized as the advisory arm of the Assembly of Leadership Experts and given the authority to determine major state policies. This meant reception of the Sunni principle of *maslahat*, which had been firmly rejected by the Shi'i tradition, and amounted to what I call the "Sunnitization of Shi'ism"⁶ (Arjomand 2001). With the traditional dualism of religious and political authority now replaced by theocratic monism, the supreme leader of the Islamic republic assumed a position similar to the Ottoman sultan as the

Caliph: (a) he legitimized the entire apparatus of the state and all public law as Islamic; and (b) he could legislate on the basis of expediency and public interest. There is, however, a significant difference: Iran's conciliar institutionalization of legislative authority in the supreme jurist made possible by the distinctly clericalist Shi'i heritage and embodied in the Expediency Council and the Assembly of Leadership Experts.

THE CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF CLERICAL CONCILIARISM

The constitutional politics of the first decade of the Islamic republic centered on two issues: radical depreciation of the traditional Shi'i institution of *marja'yyat-e taqlid* to make room for the new theory of theocratic government; and increasing centralization of authority in the postrevolutionary state. The transition from Khomeini's charismatic rule to a system of collective conciliar rule by the clerical elite set the parameters for the constitutional politics that would dominate the second decade in Iran.

In particular, the conciliar institutionalization of hierocratic authority in the 1980s set the stage for the clerical constitutional politics of the 1990s. The first half of the decade was, in fact, marked by a clash of the state-based, newly institutionalized political authority of the clerical elite and the traditional *madrasa*-based authority of the *maraje'-e taqlid*. This clash was highlighted by the successive deaths of three grand ayatollahs—Khoi, in August 1992, Golpaygani in December 1993, and Araki at the end of November 1994. The crisis produced by the death of these sources of imitation revealed the structural fault line in the regime (Bakhash 1995). The head of the Judiciary, Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, and other clerical supporters of theocratic monism attempted to unify the two offices in the supreme leader of the republic, but they failed (Buchta 1995; Gieling 1997).

It is in the statement of Khamenei's promoters in the first days of December 1994 that we see references to the Imamate of Khamenei in their attempt to transfer the title of Imam to him (Gieling 1997: 780–782). The title was sporadically used in the next three years, but it slowly disappeared with the rise of Khatami's reform movement in 1997. Incidentally, the *marja'yyat* crisis had repercussions beyond Iran; it resulted in a split between the Lebanese Hezbollah's spiritual guide, Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, who opted for Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani, and its political leader, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, who depended on aid from Iran and had chosen Khamenei⁷ (Buchta 1995: 459–460). This split, in turn, impacted Khamenei's curious and otherwise inexplicable decision to decline the position of *marja'yyat* in Iran while accepting it for the Shi'a outside of Iran; Nasrallah, predictably, was appointed his representative in Lebanon. The amended constitution of 1989, as I have

noted, “resulted in a new dualism of political and religious authority, representing a compromise between traditional and innovative principles, between *marja’iyyat* and *velayat-e faqih*” (Arjomand 1992a: 158). This compromise proved stable and survived the failed attempt to establish Khomeini as sole *marja’*. Thus, the clerical conciliar system can be viewed as the constitutional framework of post-Khomeini Iran, and so this chapter on recent constitutional developments examines its major organs and actions.

Today, the Guardian Council remains the government’s most important organ, but the Expediency Council and the Assembly of Leadership Experts are also central. Furthermore, the system of government extends beyond these councils to the judiciary and the Special Court for Clerics, which is directly responsible to the country’s supreme leader. The constitution of 1979 gave the Guardian Council the power to supervise presidential and Majles elections.⁸ This incidental feature based on the French model—supervision of elections—suggested to Iran’s ruling elite that the Guardian Council was an instrument of political control after the death of Khomeini and the end of his charismatic leadership. It is true that, even under Khomeini, the Guardian Council was an instrument of political control during the institutionalization of clerical domination.⁹

Also, from the beginning the Guardian Council interpreted its supervisory power to mean the vetting of candidates for the Majles, the qualifications of whom the constitution had not specified. But while about 15 percent of Majles candidates were rejected while Khomeini was alive, that figure jumped to over 25 percent for the Fourth Majles and to over 33 percent for the Fifth Majles after Khomeini’s death (Malekhamadi 1999). In 1991, two years after Khomeini’s death, and in anticipation of serving the function of political control in the elections for the Fifth Majles, the Guardian Council interpreted Article 98 of the constitution to assert that “the supervision...is approbationary (*estesvabi*) and applies to all stages of the electoral process, including the approval or rejection of the qualification of the candidates” (cited in Madani 1995: 509 and Alinaqi 1999: 8). The formula was adopted by an amendment to the electoral law in July 1995 (Hashemi 1996, 2: 315). The Guardian Council, under fire from Khatami and the reformists, was forced to restrain its rejection of candidates for the 2000 elections (see later section of this chapter); but in 2004 it again rejected nearly a third of the 8,200 candidates, including 88 incumbent Majles deputies. Thus, expansion of the Guardian Council’s supervisory jurisdiction amounted to cancellation of political rights for Iranian citizens (Alinaqi 1999: 87). With this arbitrary and blatant abuse of the council’s supervisory power, as one newspaper put it, the eligibility to run for election was “no longer a right but a privilege” (cited in Schirazi 1997: 89).

Furthermore, a new gatekeeping function for the selection of the clerical elite was given to the clerical jurists of the Guardian Council. The constitutional

amendments of 1989 explicitly awarded supervision of the elections for the Assembly of Leadership Experts to the Guardian Council (Article 99), while a law passed by the Assembly of Leadership Experts in July 1990 transferred the determination of candidates' requisite level of *ijtihad* to the Guardian Council¹⁰ (Hashemi 1996, 2: 53–54). The council used these broader powers to disqualify over one-third of the candidates for the parliament in 1990 and over one-half of them for the 1998 elections.

It can be stated categorically that the Guardian Council made no contributions to institution-building in Iran. The main reason for its failure in this regard is the absence of a written jurisprudence remotely comparable to the jurisprudence of other constitutional courts (or, say, the Supreme Court of the United States).¹¹ This failure has gone hand in hand with the increasing politicization of judicial review, which preceded the politicization of the judiciary and the use of courts as instruments of political repression. The council interpreted its supervisory function for elections as power to reject candidates for all elected offices, including the presidency, without giving reasons, as is also usually the case when the council vetoes legislation. This situation seriously overloaded the functions of the Guardian Council and overwhelmed its functions of judicial review and determination of legislation's conformity with Islamic standards. In fact, it is quite clear that, since 2000, the overall effect of the Guardian Council on institution-building has been negative: paralyzing legislation and nearly destroying the Majles as an institution. This has been accomplished largely by the council's blanket extension of inconsistencies in applying the Shari'a to such items as the government's annual budget (Arjomand 2001).

Nor has the Guardian Council shown any concern for eliminating the abundant internal contradictions in the constitution. One obvious contradiction is between the Shari'a and the principle of equality for all citizens before ordinary state laws. This inconsistency is the basis for the vast majority of complaints made by members of religious minorities to the president's Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution.¹² Nor is this problem resolved through the secondary mechanism of Shi'i jurisprudence (Arjomand 2007).

It goes without saying that removing the contradictions between Iranian law and international law is even further from the increasingly politicized concerns of the Guardian Council. What I have in mind here is the fact that gruesome Shari'a punishments are obvious violations of human rights as defined by international standards, which outlaw cruel and inhumane punishment. In January 2002, the Guardian Council vetoed as contrary to the Shari'a bills that were found to be at variance, according to the January 11, 2002, issue of *Ettela'at*, with the "governmental orders of the Leader, the orders of the late Imam, and even the regulations of the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution." And in January 2003, it rejected a Majles bill that would have banned torture on the grounds that it contravened the internal regulations (*a'in-nameh*) of state

prisons! A year later, the head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, unexpectedly intervened with a statement that torture was forbidden in Islam, and the reformist Sixth Majles, in its last days, quickly exploited this by incorporating Shahrudi's statement into its amended bill, which, as reported by the *New York Times* on May 9, 2004, then passed by the Guardian Council!

The Expediency Council—the other major clerically dominated organ of the regime—has outgrown the confines of Khomeini's original terms of institution, which stipulated that it “not become a power alongside the other [three] Powers,” and has even outgrown its expanded capacities as included in the constitutional amendments of 1989. The Expediency Council is now a legislative body of major importance. But unlike the Guardian Council, the Expediency Council is under no obligation to return legislation it has changed to any other government body for review. It began its independent law-making activities immediately by modifying legislation other than that subject to dispute between the Guardian Council and the Majles. In fact, in the Expediency Council's first four years, these reviewable legislative items amounted to less than one-third of its enactments. Nevertheless, according to the Guardian Council's interpretation of the constitution on October 15, 1993, “no legislative organ has the right to annul or rescind an enactment of the Expediency Council” (Hashemi 1996, 2: 659).

Notable instances of legislation enacted by the Expediency Council include an April 1991 law establishing a high disciplinary court for judges, the introduction of alimony, the appointment of female judges in November 1992 (which paved the way for the April 1995 amendment to allow the appointment of women as judges), the July 1994 law for military courts, and the May 1995 law for governmental punishment concerning smuggling and foreign currency (Hashemi 1996, 2: 467, 648–659). But the legislative powers of the Expediency Council came under attack after the reformist victory in the parliamentary elections of 2000. By May 2002, however, the Expediency Council responded to an article in the reformist newspaper *Nowruz*, which had cited instances of its legislation as unconstitutional, by reaffirming their constitutionality—and its legislative power. According to the May 29, 2002, issue of *Nowruz*, the Expediency Council cited Clause 8 of the amended Article 110 of the constitution which gave it the power of “solving the difficulties of the regime that cannot be solved through ordinary channels.”¹³

The Assembly of Leadership Experts has limited legislative power, which it can exercise independently of the supreme leader, unlike the Expediency Council. As Javadi-Amoli (1998: 12) rightly points out. The critical importance of the Assembly of Leadership Experts was demonstrated in its swift choice of Khomeini's successor. In its internal regulations passed in 1983 (Articles 1 and 19), the assembly set up a seven-man investigation committee to supervise the conditions and comportment of the supreme leader on a continuous basis.

This committee was further given responsibility for “supervising the administrative organization of Leadership in coordination with the Leader” (Hashemi 1996, 2: 59–60; see also Madani 1988–91, 2: 99–115). With its enhanced powers of dismissal, and the mechanism for continuous vigil via the investigation committee, the Assembly of Leadership Experts has become an influential organ in the collective conciliar clerical rule.

The Expediency Council’s investigative committee held regular meetings throughout the year and upgraded itself to a regular advisory body to the supreme leader (Amini 1998: 108). Its secretariat has, furthermore, assumed the role of strengthening the intellectual foundations of the theocratic (*vela’i*) regime; to that end, he began publishing a quarterly, *Hokumat-e Eslami*, in 1996 (Amini 1998: 118–120). In 1997, the committee advised the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, to reconstitute the Expediency Council under the retiring president, Hashemi-Rafsanjani, with the mandate to offer advice on major policies and thus implement the amended Article 110 of the constitution (Arjomand 2001: 324). It is interesting that, when the supreme leader and the head of the judiciary were vying with President Khatami for control of plans for reform and reorganization (see later section of this chapter), the Assembly of Leadership Experts passed its own four-point reform program at its 2001 general session. The first and most important point in this program was to upgrade its capability to “carry out the function of investigation and supervision.” The other three points included greater involvement in domestic and foreign policies, and the defense of the *velayat-e faqih* as a form of “meritocracy in the Islamic political regime” against those who would, as reported by *Ettela’at* on September 7, 2001, offer “Western democracy” and, “under the pretext of realizing liberalism and democratic methods, manipulate and transform religious values.”

Perhaps the most intriguing recent constitutional developments are those concerning the judiciary. One of the aims of the 1989 constitutional revision was to centralize the judiciary powers, and to that end the Supreme Judiciary Council was replaced by a single head of the judiciary, a *mojtahed* appointed by the supreme leader for a five-year term (amended Article 157). The point of this was, among other things, to reorganize the judiciary and implement the functions enumerated in Article 156 (amended Article 158), which included “supervision over the proper execution of laws” and “measures to prevent the occurrence of crime and to reform criminals.”

There was important legislation to Islamicize the public law of the republic during Khomeini’s lifetime, and those changes included a new criminal law that incorporated the *hodud* and *qesas* provisions of the Shari’a. This law has been in effect, with periodic modifications, since 1982. Other instances of substantive Islamicization include the 1983 rent law and 1988 law for punishment of speculation and hoarding (*ehtekar*) (Schirazi 1997: 191–198). The jurisdiction of the revolutionary courts was regulated by another law of 1983.

The chief justice of the Supreme Judiciary Council under Khomeini, Ayatollah Musavi-Ardabili, sought to rationalize the chaos that arose largely from the new Islamic criminal law and the verdicts of the revolutionary courts. In accordance with Article 161 of the constitution, the Supreme Judiciary Council used the prerevolutionary law of June 1949 regarding the uniformity of judicial process, with its added clauses of July–August 1958, as the basis for rulings that were binding on all of the courts.¹⁴ This modest measure of successful Islamicization of the law, however, stands in sharp contrast to the failure of effective Islamicization of the judiciary.

This was especially the case during the subsequent decade, 1989–1999, when Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi held the newly created position of head of the judiciary. Because the judiciary faced a chronic shortage of religious jurists and a mounting backlog of cases, the June 4, 1994, Law of General and Revolutionary Courts abolished the position of prosecutor and the appeal system in an attempt to revert to the Kadi courts as prescribed in the Shari'a. The resulting chaos has been generally acknowledged. The new head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, declared the judiciary to be a wreck (*viraneh*), 70 years behind other institutions, and, as reported in *Ettela'at* on November 23, 1999, he promised major reforms and reorganization.¹⁵

The second head of the judiciary, the Iraqi-born Ayatollah Hashemi-Shahrudi, known in Iraq as Mahmud al-Hashimi, was a disciple of the martyred reform jurist Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (d. 1980). Shahrudi wasted no time in asserting himself, against the wishes of reformist President Khatami, as head of the judiciary, by claiming that reform was the concern of all the three branches of government and that he had as good a claim as the president for supervising the rule of law and the observance of the constitution.¹⁶ He launched his program for "judiciary development" (*towse'eh-ye qaza'i*), insisting, according to *Ettela'at*, June 28, 2000, that it had not been patterned after Western systems of justice.

A weeklong gathering beginning on March 21, 2001, celebrated the change. The term "judiciary development," although clearly inspired by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP; Baratinia 2002: 68), was predictably purported to be "a slogan arisen from the text of the pure Mohammadan Islam!" (Zakeri 2002: 21). Shahrudi's definition of "judicial development" in his opening statement at the gathering, however, had as little to do with the UNDP as it did with pure Mohammadan Islam. Instead, he termed it "judiciary empowerment," in line with the current global expansion of judiciary power but with particular reference to Article 156 of the Iranian constitution.

Having categorically stated that "development means empowerment," Shahrudi took the phrase to mean the growth of judicial power to the fullest extent allowed by a somewhat expansive interpretation of the constitution (2001, 2: 22). He accordingly maintained that the judiciary has not one but two

constitutional axes: the obvious administration of justice, and the supervision of the proper rule of law, the latter of which not only hadn't been evident but in fact had been completely neglected. This supervisory function was taken to mean the power of constitutional interpretation and judicial review to ensure the constitutionality of laws and of administrative regulations (2: 15–16).

Shahroudi's claim to judicial review is unprecedented in Iran's civil law system, even after its postrevolutionary Islamicization. It is based on an expansive interpretation of the abovementioned Article 156; of Articles 161, 167, and 170 concerning the legality of Islamic standards and uniform judicial process; and of Articles 173 and 174, which set up, respectively, a high administrative court and a national inspectorate under the supervision of the head of the judiciary. He also hinted at the unconstitutionality of the ordinary law implementing Article 173 because of its failure to conform to Shahroudi's constitutional interpretation of the provisions for judicial empowerment. (2: 30–40). It is interesting to note that, in his statement on judiciary empowerment, Shahroudi did not fail to note that the head of judiciary is responsible only to the theocratic monarch (*vali-ye amr*), and not to the Majles or the president; and that the Majles has no power of interpellation over him or any judge of official or the judiciary (2: 35).

Shahroudi also put forward an expansive interpretation of the third clause of Article 156, on "measures to prevent the occurrence of crime." Noting that it has no parallel in other constitutions of the world, Shahroudi nevertheless made reference to this function of prevention of wrongdoing before it formally appeared in his program for judiciary empowerment (2: 28–29; 3: 40–43). Already on October 12, 2000, *Ettela'a* reported that he wanted his national inspectorate to develop intelligence and information-gathering capabilities to fight economic corruption.¹⁷ But the true utility of this empowering judicial interpretation was the justification for suppression of the press by the courts as measures intended to forestall sedition, as reported in *Ettela'a* on April 3, 2001.

With regard to judiciary reorganization, Shahroudi sought the direct support of the Expediency Council (2000) to reintroduce the separation of courts into divisions for criminal (*keyfari*), family and personal status (*madani*), and civil and commercial (*hoquqi*) matters; he also sought to differentiate the offices of judge and prosecutor, of specialized courts, and an appellate system (2001, 3: 52). The law reestablishing the lower (*dadsara*) and appellate courts passed the Majles in the spring of 2002. It is worth noting, however, that Shahroudi's conception of judiciary organization is a managerial one, with an administrative hierarchy in which judges are subject to the authority of district and provincial directors (*modiran*)—a far cry from the traditional autonomy of the Kadi court.

In addition, Shahroudi had at his disposal a high disciplinary court for judges to discipline other judges, just as the supreme leader disciplined the

clerics, presumably modeled after the parallel Special Court for Clerics (see later section of this chapter). Nor did Ayatollah Shahrudi fail to remind the directors of these branches of the judiciary that they were “representatives of the Supreme Jurist and the theocratic monarch” (2: 37–38, 55).

Furthermore, Shahrudi emphasized the importance of specialized consultation within the judiciary and instituted regular sessions of expert judges in towns and provincial capitals to answer questions and requests for guidance by the courts under their jurisdiction. The first sessions, dealing with problems in criminal law arising from the new Islamic penal code and laws and regulations of the revolutionary courts, were held in district branches of the Ministry of Justice on the last days of the week during 2000–2002. The procedures for judges published (Mo’avenat 2002–2003) suggest that a bureaucratic mechanism was put into place and that the sessions contributed to the rationalization of legal process.

Shahrudi also strengthened the legal office (*edareh-ye hoquqi*) of the judiciary and instituted a Research Center in Jurisprudence (Markaz-e Tahqiqat-e Feqhi) to answer enquiries from the courts and provincial branches of the Ministry of Justice. The center draws on the rulings (or fatwas) of the seven designated “sources of imitation,” including the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, but does so alongside the rulings of other living *maraje’* as well as those of the late ayatollahs Khomeini and Khoi and the classics of Shi’i jurisprudence, such as Hurr al-Ameli’s *Wasa’il al-Shi’a*.

This Research Center, like the legal office of the Ministry of Justice, follows Article 167 of the constitution, consistently upholding the priority of ordinary laws over Shi’i jurisprudence. Any resort to the latter is thus residual, along the lines provided for by the Egyptian Civil Code of 1948 and the Afghan Constitution of 2004. Furthermore, Shi’i law is usually inconclusive, as the fatwas presented to supplement ordinary laws are often contradictory and categorical instructions seem to be provided only when there is also a pertinent positive law (Markaz-e 2002c, 2002d). Indeed, the latter seems to make the fatwas redundant. For example, four out of five fatwas produced in response to the question of whether women can be judges according to the Shari’a gave a negative answer, but these were overruled by the legal office of the judiciary, which cited an ordinary law of 1995–1996 on the appointment of women as judges (Markaz-e 2002a: 209–211; see also Arjomand 2007 for further details).

Finally, the clerical conciliar system required political control of the clerical class, for whose disciplining Khomeini had set up in June 1987 the Special Court for Clerics. The court had been set up to try Seyyed Mehdi Hashemi and his associates,¹⁸ with Hojjat al-Eslams Fallahian and Razini as prosecutor and Shari’a judge, respectively (Khomeini 1999b, 11: 329–330). Khamenei as the new supreme leader approved the regulations for this court in August 1990.

The Special Court for Clerics was organized into a court system independent of the judiciary and under the direct control of the supreme leader; a second branch was added to it a few months later. Not only was the special prosecutor responsible solely to the supreme leader, but the bylaws of the court were issued by the supreme leader to emphasize its total independence—not only from the judiciary but also from the legislative powers (Daryabari 2004: 35, 97, 201–202, 223–224). The Special Court for Clerics can discipline members of the clerical profession not only for commission of misdeeds but also for omissions and failures to fulfill their duties; all its prosecutors are appointed by the supreme leader (Daryabari 2004: 238–240).

CONSTITUTIONAL DEBATES UNDER PRESIDENT KHATAMI AND THE FAILURE OF HIS REFORM MOVEMENT

The constitutional politics during the Khatami's presidency, 1997–2005, were characterized by a different set of contradictions. The pattern was set earlier in the clash of principles of legitimacy underlying the (divine) mandate of the jurist and the (democratic) mandate of an elected president and legislature. The people were finally drawn into the constitutional debates during Khatami's period. Nevertheless, in this new phase, too, the parameters of Iranian constitutional development had been set by the contradictory principles of the constitution—namely, the mandate of the jurist, the rule of law, and participatory representative government. The contradictions among these heterogeneous principles of political order account for the confrontations between the country's supreme leader, or clerical monarch, and its elected president. The supreme leader stood for the first principle, and aligned with him were the conservative clerics who had come to power as a result of the Islamic revolution and who controlled the revolution-generated organizations, foundations, and foundation-supported unofficial vigilante groups, the judiciary, and the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards. The president stood for the last two principles, fused in his new political discourse on the rule of law cum civil society cum political development through participation; aligned with him were the technocrats, the reformists, and the excluded clerics and disenfranchised middle classes.

Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, it may be recalled, had been forced to resign his post in July 1992 as minister of Islamic culture and guidance because of his liberalism and his relaxation of press censorship. In his letter of resignation, he condemned the restrictions on freedom of thought and expression and advocated pluralism and toleration of oppositional views. After his landslide 1997 presidential victory, he appointed Ataollah Mohajerani as minister of culture and Islamic guidance,¹⁹ and through him removed many of the restrictions on the press. A popular pro-Khatami press immediately flourished. But before

long, a number of these newspapers were closed down by the clerical judges *seriatim*, while their editorial staffs were given licenses by the Ministry of Culture to start new newspapers. This new press spread Khatami's liberal political discourse and his neologisms, such as "civil society" (*jame'eh-ye madani*), "legality" (*qanun-mandi*), and "citizens" (*shahrivandan*), used in his inaugural speech. To these expressions were soon added others: "pluralism," as opposed to "monopolism," "law-orientedness" (*qanun-gara'i*), and a fresh "reading" (*qera'at*) of Islam. The leading reformist intellectual, Abdolkarim Soroush, even put forward the idea of religious pluralism.

On the opposing front, the clerical establishment, the regime's ablest jurists, responded to the initiative of the secretariat of the Assembly of Leadership Experts by elaborating a theocratic constitutional theory and reinforcing the absolute mandate of the jurist as its foundations. The most cogent argument was developed by Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi-Amoli, who followed in the footsteps of Sheikh Ali al-Karaki, the jurist instrumental in the establishment, in the early 16th century, of Shi'ism as the state religion of Iran (Arjomand 2003). To firm up the authority of the office of the supreme jurist, now that it had to survive Khomeini's charismatic authority, Javadi-Amoli based his otherwise rigorously traditionalist political philosophy on a key neologism, "legal personality" (*shakhsiyyat-e hoquqi*).²⁰ He recognized that the weakest link in Khomeini's chain of argument was its extension of the traditional authority of the jurist in matters pertaining to *hisba* (such as that over an orphan or a mentally deficient person without a guardian) to general authority to govern. Indeed, this was the mandate's Achilles' heel, targeted in "all the attacks on *velayat-e faqih* by writers inside and abroad" (Javadi-Amoli 1996: 59). Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli tried to dissociate the two categories of authority, and argued that the authority of the Infallible Prophet and Imams as rulers of the community of believers be transferred to the jurist. To Javadi-Amoli, the office of the jurist constituted a "legal personality" and was the logical transformation of the "real personality" of the Infallibles required by the occultation of the last of them, the Twelfth Imam (Javadi-Amoli 1996: 56–60). He did not omit rhetorical use of the logically redundant *velayat-e takvini* (creative authority), whose true holder is God, to suggest the divine nature of theocratic government by the jurist on behalf of the transcendent God²¹ (Javadi-Amoli 1996: 57). Nor did he omit refutation of the interpretation of authority as "deputyship" (*vekalat*) of the people, put forth by Mehdi Haeri-Yazdi, the son of the founder of Qom's center for religious learning, who was residing in London.²²

Contrasting arguments for the legitimacy of the mandate of the jurist were offered by ayatollahs Mohammad Momen, Lotfollah Safi, and Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi. Mo'men did not avoid using the term *saltanat*, which commonly means "monarchy," in references to the ruling authority, and he stated that "the same monarchy which pertains to the Imam or God is also for

the jurists, and society must obey the decisions made by the one in authority (*vali-ye amr*)” (Momen 1997: 11). Nevertheless, he did not consider belief in the *velayat-e faqih* a matter of doctrine, as it pertains to secular (*‘orfi*) matters (Momen 1997: 8–9). Safi’s position was the most traditional. Though stating that “any law passed by [the jurists] and any government that takes shape under their supervision stems from the authority of the [Infallible, Twelfth] Imam” (Safi 1997: 12), he derived this legitimacy from the “general vicegerency” of the jurists, on the basis of a decree purportedly issued by the Hidden Imam (Momen 1997: 13–14). Typically outdoing all his colleagues, Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi stated that “obedience to the Supreme Jurist is also incumbent upon the Muslims living in non-Muslim countries, whether or not they have pledged allegiance to him” (1996: 93).

One of the immediate results of Khatami’s presidency was a reexamination of the absolute mandate as the fundamental principle of order in the Islamic republic. In November 1997, two disgruntled senior ayatollahs, who had been pushed aside by the present leadership after a very long association with the regime, spoke out against the supreme leader. Ayatollah Montazeri and Ayatollah Azari-Qomi, the latter of whom died in 1999, openly challenged the supreme leader and the principle of his leadership on the basis of the mandate of the jurist. Montazeri also published a booklet, “Popular Government and the Constitution” (*Hokumat-e Mardomi va Qanun-e Asasi*), in which he refuted the idea of the absolute mandate of the jurist and the authority of the jurists of the Guardian Council to reject candidates for elected office. This open expression of dissent within the clerical elite broke the ice and enabled lay groups opposed to the principle of clerical rule to voice their opposition as well. Various organizations issued proclamations in support of Ayatollah Montazeri, and the idea that the office of the supreme leader be made elective and for a limited term was publicly discussed. The taboo on the discussion and questioning of the principle of theocratic government was broken.

The president, for his part, staked his claim as guardian of the constitution. One of the few features of the French model, upon which the draft constitution was based, that had been retained by the Assembly of Leadership Experts, and was not altered in the revision of 1989, makes implementation of the constitution the responsibility of the president. Khatami used this surviving presidential prerogative as an instrument for promoting the rule of law. Exercising this authority according to Article 113 of the constitution, in December 1997 he appointed a Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution and for constitutional supervision.²³ The reformist leader Sa’id Hajjarian immediately hailed the creation of the commission as an instrument of political reconstruction and of badly needed constitutional interpretation and development, in preference to a constitutional court under discussion by the judiciary, which would presumably be clerically controlled (Hajjarian 2000: 478–486).

The opposition's reaction to Khatami's liberalism and the reform movement was led by Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi, who had trained clericalist hard-liners at the Haqqani School in Qom, and who gave a series of lectures that were published by the Organization for Islamic Propaganda in the spring and fall of 1998. Mesbah-Yazdi defended the *velayat-e faqih* as theocratic monism working against the current "cultural conspiracy" to corrupt the younger generation with advocacy of the separation of religion and politics, liberalism, and democracy (Mesbah-Yazdi 1996, 1: 37–48). He characterized reformism as eclectic or syncretistic (*elteqati*) thought, and fulminated against pluralism and tolerance (2: 142–144). He stated categorically that "the acceptance of Islam as the law governing society is in no way compatible with the acceptance of democracy in legislation" (2: 154–155). A year or so later, Hojjat al-Eslam Ali-Akbar Mohtashamipour, who had joined the reformist camp, invoked Khomeini's approval of the splitting of the Association of Militant Clergy into two organizations to defend "pluralism" (*chand-seda'i*) within the clerical community against Yazdi (Mohtashamipour 2000a: 27–43), while also warning Mesbah-Yazdi against creating a crisis and spreading "Kharijite violence" (44–66).

One of Ayatollah Montazeri's students, Hojjat al-Eslam Mohsen Kadivar, who also belonged to the reform movement and was completing a doctoral thesis in philosophy, had written a book on different approaches to government in Shi'i jurisprudence (Kadivar 1998), which presented Khomeini's theory, hitherto officially considered the only Shi'i view of government, as one view among eight recognized Shi'i views of the state. In 1998, he took a bold step beyond Montazeri's, and in *Hokumat-e vela'i*, or government based on the "absolute appointive authority of the jurists," he offered an explicit critique of Khomeini's theory and refutation of the legal arguments for the validity of official doctrine in theocratic government (Kadivar 1998: 13). The book consisted of two roughly equal parts, with the first tracing the progressive extension of authority to the jurists, from judiciary competence to the right to rule, and from authority over special categories of persons (such as the insane and orphans), as specified by the policing (*hisba*) rules of the sacred law, which Kadivar accepted, to authority over people in general, as in the absolute mandate of the jurist, which he rejected (102–103, 124, 132–133). This was followed with an interesting account of the politics of the incorporation of the theory into the fundamental law of 1979. The second part of the book was a painstaking, often abstruse refutation of the "traditional" and "rational" bases of the official doctrine in terms of traditional Shi'i jurisprudence. Kadivar had no difficulty reminding his readers that, before Khomeini's ideological revolution, the traditional Shi'i interpretation of the Koran's "those in authority" (4: 59) referred strictly to the 12 Infallible Imams (Arjomand 1988: 117–118). He further pointed out that, by clear implication, the authoritative Shi'i interpretation requiring "absolute obedience to the fallible [as declared by proponents of the absolute mandate

of the jurist] is reprehensible" (Kadivar 1998: 71). Kadivar's position was the authoritative traditional Shi'i interpretation of another, equally important Koranic verse (9: 71), which includes the plural of *vali*, implied "the general authority of the believers" (*velayat-e 'omumi-ye mo'menin*), which should be "the basis for the political philosophy of Islam during the occultation of the Infallible [Imam]" (Kadivar 1998: 75).

Kadivar's theory remained strictly within the bounds of Shi'i jurisprudence and offered no hermeneutic questioning—as had been put forward by, for example, Mohammad Mojtabeh-Shabestari and Abolkarim Soroush—of the Shi'i jurisprudence itself as a historically contingent discipline (Arjomand 2002). The fact that it did not meet this higher critical standard, however, should not blind us to its serious implications for the legitimacy of theocratic government. Nor should it be forgotten that the reformists avoided challenging the mandate of the jurist frontally.

Before Ayatollah Montazeri spoke out, Behzad Nabavi, a pro-reform politician, had prevaricated on the term "absolute," while Sa'id Hajjarian had distinguished between the "good" and the "bad" defenses of the mandate, resting his hope on the delineation in the constitution between "the principles of theocracy and [those of] democracy in the Islamic regime" (Hajjarian 2000: 194–204, 256–258). Even after Montazeri's outburst, Hajjarian approached the issue only obliquely and defensively when, toward the end of 1997, the conservative newspaper *Resalat* put forward the views of the devotees' "melting into the Mandate" (*zowb dar velayat*) those who wanted theocratic society in place of the reformers' civil society (Hajjarian 2000: 541–545). Again, Hajjarian had put his faith in the constitution as "the national covenant (*mithaq-e melli*) and the guarantee of the legitimacy of the Islamic regime." Only in January 2000, in a short editorial entitled "Autocracy, Hierocracy [*"rabbani-salari"*] and Democracy," did Hajjarian confront theocracy directly by taking on Ayatollah Amoli's assertion that, in its selection of the most qualified jurist, the Assembly of Leadership Experts was responsible to God and not to the people.

From 2000 onward, the focus of the constitutional debate shifted away from the legitimacy of the absolute mandate and toward the four-way contest among the executive, legislative, judiciary powers, and organs of clerical control. But there is an unexpected epilogue to that debate after a break of some five years. In a striking interview with the Iran Students News Agency on February 1, 2005, just as he had begun contemplating the run for the presidency again, former president Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani minimized the significance of the *velayat-e faqih*, considering the office instead as an indirectly elective one that derives its legitimacy, like everything else in Iran, from the will of the people and their allegiance *bay'a(t)*.

Rafsanjani thus highlighted the favorite Sunni trope of *bay'a(t)* as a bestowal of sovereignty by the people on the ruler, while rejecting the peculiarly Shi'i

claim for the legitimacy of theocratic rule as a continuation of that of the Holy Imam in the Preamble to and Article 5 of the 1979 constitution. His primary intention in making that striking statement was to suggest democratization in order to win the reformist vote, but incidentally it also confirms the increasing Sunnization of political thought in the Islamic republic mentioned earlier in this chapter.²⁴

Participation in government had been a major component of Khatami's idea of political development, and he considered the election of village, town, and provincial councils, which had been envisioned in the constitution of 1979, as "the most evident channel for participation." (Arjomand 2001: 329) The law of providing for the organization of and election to the councils had eventually been passed, in December 1996, and Khatami promised to have these people elected. The elections took place in February 1999, as Khatami had promised, and that gave his supporters another landslide victory with over four-fifths of the popular vote. On the anniversary of his now epic presidential victory, Khatami addressed some 107,000 elected members of village and town councils in Tehran, again emphasizing the importance of political development and the need to struggle for "consolidation of Islamic democracy and popular government (*mardom-salari*)." He noted that sacred terms such as "revolution," "freedom," "Islam," and "leadership" were not the monopoly of any one group (cited in Arjomand 2001: 329). The supreme leader was pointedly absent, and his message was read by [the director of his bureau]. In the course of that first year of Khatami's, the councils elected some 718 mayors and were slowly defining their functions in relation to central government (Arjomand 2005: 508).

The subsequent general failure of Khatami's reforms tarnished this remarkable achievement, however. The reformists failed to maintain their control in the next council elections, in February 2003, and this was the first signal of the public's general disenchantment with Khatami and his reformists. The turnout outside of the major cities was not insignificant (about 50 percent for all of Iran), partly because the Ministry of the Interior stood its ground and candidates were not vetted by the Guardian Council; quite a few reformists seem to have been elected in smaller places. But the drop in participation in the big cities was sharp, with less than one-third of voters turning out (a historic low, even though the official count of Tehran's votes has never been made public). The municipal council of Tehran went entirely to the pro-Khamenei hard-liners, with Mahmoud Ahmadinejad elected mayor. As several people told a researcher, "What can we expect from local councilors, when even the president of the country is stymied from pursuing his agenda?" It cannot be said that the reformists looked after the councils. In fact, in their typical inattention and disarray, the reformist Majles passed the 2003 Tax Amalgamation Law, which removed what little financial autonomy the councils had (Tajbakhsh 2003: 2).

The central paradox in Khatami's presidency nearly from the start was that the judiciary had increasingly become an instrument of political control under Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi. The judiciary showed no hesitation to use the courts for the political purpose of embarrassing the president and the reformists. In January 1999, however, Khatami had insisted on the arrest of some officials in the Ministry of Information (read "Intelligence"), including the powerful deputy minister, Sa'id Emami (alias Eslami), for the murders of several writers and liberal politicians. The Islamic reactionary response to this early step toward establishing the rule of law was sharp. A group calling itself the Devotees of the Pure Mohammadan Islam (Feda'iyān-e Eslām-e Nab-e Mohammadi) announced that its judiciary unit, consisting of three judges, had condemned several "hypocritical persons" who had insulted the theocratic regime (*nezam-e vela'i*) to death as "corruptors on earth" (Baqi 2000: 48–50). Some of the conservative ayatollahs were said to have issued fatwas justifying the killings.

Even the supreme jurist became alarmed at the prospect of anarchy and uncontrollable challenges to the authority of the state, and he reined in hard-liner Mesbah-Yazdi, who consonantly preached "forbidding the evil" without the approval of government.²⁵ The reformist Ayatollah Musavi Arbadili, meanwhile, declared any such fatwas invalid. Hojjat al-Eslām Mohsen Kadivar, mentioned earlier as a young, prominent reformist cleric who had written a detailed refutation of Khomeini's theory of theocratic government, delivered a speech in Isfahan in which he declared terrorism forbidden by the sacred law (Shari'a).

Kadivar was arrested at the end of February 1999, and his trial by the Special Court for Clerics became a *cause célèbre*. The national press and student associations protested that the court was unconstitutional, and that the trial was in violation of the International Human Rights Convention signed by the government of Iran, which disallows special courts for special classes of persons. The Commission for Islamic Human Rights sought to intervene on behalf of the accused, while the head of the judiciary defended the legitimacy of the Special Court for Clerics on the grounds of its approval by the late Imam Khomeini as supreme jurist and its jurisdiction with reference to Articles 110 and 112 of the constitution pertaining to leadership. On April 19, 1999, the Special Court for Clerics sentenced Kadivar to 18 months in prison. The court continued its political activism unabashed, and its closure of the newspaper *Salam* provoked student riots in July 1999. Emboldened by the suppression of the student riots, the court proceeded to close *Khordad* as well, and to try its editor, former interior minister Abdollah Nuri; Nuri was sentenced to five years in prison.

The Nuri trial was divisive and caused the two organized clerical political groups to fail in their attempt to coordinate their campaigns against the pro-Khatami electoral coalition (Arjomand 2001). The power of the clerical jurists

of the Guardian Council to approve candidates for all elected offices, too, was first effectively challenged at this time by the disqualified clerical or clerically endorsed candidates. In April 1999, the Ministry of the Interior announced it was preparing legislation to deprive jurists of the Guardian Council from this supervisory power, which had no basis in the constitution. The supreme leader retorted by endorsing the supervisory power of the jurists of the Guardian Council, according to the May 20, 1999, edition of *Ettela'at*. Meanwhile, President Khatami was standing firm. He dismayed the conservative Ayatollah Mahdavi-Kani by affirming, in no lesser a place than Khomeini's mausoleum, that every principle of Islam, including the unity of God (*tawhid*), was capable of different readings (see *Ettela'at*, October 27, 1999). Nevertheless, the vigorously contested supervisory power of the clerical jurists of the Guardian Council was reconfirmed by the conservatives in the Majles in the aftermath of the student riots, and the jurists did not shy away from disqualifying some 668 candidates for the February 2000 national elections, or from annulling a few elections for seats won by reformists. Yet the percentage of candidates disqualified was under 10 percent, the lowest in the history of the Islamic republic. This relative restraint can be attributed to constant pressure from the Ministry of the Interior, which organized the local electoral boards and insisted on the rights of the rejected to hearings, and from the president. Following public requests that he intervene as the protector of the constitution and require its implementation, Khatami met with the jurists of the Guardian Council, and even had one of them use the new political vocabulary of the rule of law. According to *Ettela'at*, January 7, 2000, Ayatollah Reza Ostadi stated that the Guardian Council would welcome the advice on acting "lawfully" (*qanun-madari*).

The relative retreat by the Guardian Council allowed the reformist movement to reach its peak by capturing the Sixth Majles in 2000. Sa'id Hajjarian and the president's brother, Mohammad-Reza Khatami, organized a group to encourage popular participation and took the name of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (Jebheh-ye Mosharekat-e Iran-e Eslami). It was but one of 18 political groups that had formed the Khordad 2 coalition in mid-November 1999, but it did far better in the landslide February 2000 elections than its other members. As the majority party in the Sixth Majles, the Participation Front immediately declared its intention to dismantle the Special Court for Clerics and the approbationary veto power of the Guardian Council.

At this point, Khamenei, undaunted by the success of Khatami and his reformist allies, reversed the retreat of the Guardian Council and with determination stemmed the tide of reformism after the near-fatal shooting of Hajjarian on the eve of the Persian New Year (March 2000). To preempt Khatami's anticorruption initiative and those of his newly elected reformist supporters in the Sixth Majles, Khamenei issued a decree urging cooperation by the three powers, especially the executive and the judiciary powers, in an extensive

anticorruption campaign.²⁶ This gave the new head of the judiciary the opportunity to join the Iranian constitutional politics. He responded by announcing his judicial reforms under the umbrella of “judiciary development.” The Expediency Council, too, began to consider concentrating on judicial affairs in July 2000, including responsibility for certain “governmental ordinances.”²⁷ Then, on August 6, 2000, the supreme leader bluntly ordered the new Majles to stop its deliberations on the press law. Hojjat al-Eslam Mehdi Karrubi, a cleric whom the reformists had deferentially elected Majles speaker, showed his true allegiance by confirming the authority of the supreme leader, as the *vali-ye faqih*, to issue a “governmental ordinance” (*hokm-e hokumati*) to the Majles. He defended the action as the constitutional exercise of the absolute mandate of the jurist. Two days later, Karrubi reaffirmed this prerogative by pointing out that another “governmental ordinance” had “solved” the problem of recounting the votes in the second round of elections in Tehran. In retrospect, this was the Majles’s second and last chance to challenge the surreptitiously expanding system of conciliar clerical ruler by provoking a major constitutional crisis. It did not rise to the admittedly daunting challenge and so was doomed to further humiliation.

Having begrudgingly obeyed Khamenei’s governmental ordinance and interrupted its debate on the press bill in August, and knowing the stiffened posture of the Guardian Council, the reformists in the Sixth Majles instead used their power to interpret ordinary laws according to Article 73 of the constitution, and passed binding interpretations of three clauses of the existing press law. These were promptly rejected by the Guardian Council as being contrary to sacred law (*Shari’a*)—according to *Ettela’at*, November 13, 2000, the first notably because it contravened Khamenei’s governmental ordinance of three months earlier! This generated a heated debate in defense of the Majles as the sole legitimate organ of legislation. The dispute over its power of interpreting ordinary laws was referred to the Expediency Council, which shelved the issue indefinitely. A few months later, in April 2001, according to *Ettela’at*, April 16, 2001, two reformist Majles committee chairmen desperately sought extraconstitutional support in the form of fatwas from two reformist grand ayatollahs. And a month later, as reported in *Ettela’at* on May 14, 2001, one of them, Hojjat al-Eslam Seyyed Naser Qavami, who was chairman of the Judiciary Committee of the Majles, expressed his frustration at the Expediency Council’s inaction and maintained that the Guardian Council had no constitutional power to reject the parliamentary interpretations of ordinary laws. The Majles proceeded to pass yet another statutory interpretation on electoral law (see *Ettela’at*, June 1, 2001), which in due course was rejected by the Guardian Council and passed up to the Expediency Council. The result of this protracted, contentious debate between the Majles and the Guardian Council was, as usual, a stalemate.

In 2001, the Majles tried to use its power to confirm lay members of the Guardian Council proposed by the head of the judiciary. On August 8, 2001, however, with the backing of the supreme leader, the Expediency Council ruled that if the judiciary's nominees failed to obtain confirmation in the Majles in the first round, those with the highest plurality of votes in the second round would be appointed to the Guardian Council. The rejected candidates were confirmed retroactively on a plurality of votes, with many of the reformist deputies turning in blank votes in protest. Two years later, in November 2003, the head of the judiciary proposed two other candidates, including a notorious mobster of the Helpers of the Party of God, who were rejected by the Majles for failing to obtain a majority. (Majles speaker Karrubi explained that the supreme leader had changed his mind on the subject.) The Guardian Council did not insist on its newly acquired constitutional prerogative. It had chosen a different battlefield.

The reformist movement had so far not been the primary victim of the new power politics, as it was of the negative legislative power of the Guardian Council, but turned against it because of its obvious antidemocratic nature and as its frustration with the council's blockage of legislation mounted. On September 1, 2002, the president introduced a bill to curb the Guardian Council's power of approbatory supervision, which was vetoed. The Majles passed amendments to the electoral law with the same effect in March 2003. Khatami threatened to resign or put the bills to referendum. But the Expediency Council let its position be known by quadrupling the Guardian Council's budget at a meeting on March 15, which Khatami and Majles speaker Karrubi walked out of. That the Guardian Council would reject these attempts to restrict its power was a foregone conclusion. What the reformists had not expected, however, was that the Guardian Council would also punish 87 incumbent reformist deputies by depriving them of their parliamentary seats. The multiplied budget was used, among other things, to increase the number of Guardian Council inspectors in anticipation of the coming elections in February 2004. The Guardian Council let it be known that "approbatory supervision" would henceforth mean practicing continuous supervision or vetting a candidate's competency at any time (Arjomand 2005: 515).

Meanwhile, there had been a major confrontation between the heads of the executive and judiciary powers. At the end of November 2000, the president had used the third anniversary of the establishment of his Commission for the Implementation of the Constitution to complain that he lacked sufficient constitutional power to carry out reforms, while the commission's annual report, presented by its chair, Hossein Mehrpour, cited violation of nine articles of the constitution, including those concerning the security of life and property, freedom of opinion, choice of profession, due process, prohibition of torture, and the press. The head of the judiciary, Shahrudi, issued a sharp

reaction the following day. According to *Ettela'at*, November 28 and 29, 2000, he claimed that dealing with complaints about violations of the constitution was the prerogative of the judiciary, and he announced that a law establishing a constitutional court was being prepared and would soon be sent to the Majles.²⁸ As the judiciary continued its harassment of the reformist Majles deputies in 2001, the president issued a warning to the head of the judiciary "of constitutional violation" of the parliamentary immunity of two convicted reformist deputies, on the basis of Article 113 of the constitution and Article 15 of the 1986 Law of Presidential Jurisdiction and Responsibilities. Ayatollah Shahrudi rejected it and, as reported in *Ettela'at* on October 10, 12, and 16, 2001, insisted on expanding the judiciary as a constitutional requirement. The reformist Mohsen Armin, the Majles second deputy speaker, asserted that the judiciary was under obligation to deal with the president's constitutional warning (see *Ettela'at*, October 18, 2001). The conservatives disingenuously suggested that the dispute between the president and the head of the judiciary be referred to the Guardian Council, while Mohammad Reza Khatami, the president's brother and the Majles first deputy speaker and chairman of its Committee for the Implementation of Article 90 (which included hearing complaints against the judiciary), threatened a national referendum on increasing the power of the president and on parliamentary immunity. The president simply reiterated that his was the second highest position in the Islamic republic and that the implementation of the constitution was his responsibility (see *Ettela'at*, October 22 and 24, 2001).

In January, as noted in the *New York Times*, January 9, 2002, the judiciary even denied the request of Chairman Mehrpur of the Presidential Constitutional Commission to visit dissident political prisoners. In his last endeavor at reform, Khatami did not dare augment the power of the commission to counter Shahrudi's assertiveness, and their duel thus ended in stalemate.

This endeavor finally took the form of introducing, in September 2002, the long-awaited bill to increase the powers of the president as the guardian of the constitution, as announced in Khatami's second inaugural speech. The bill was passed by the Majles, but needless to say it was promptly rejected by the Guardian Council. It was, in any case, ill-conceived and too timid to make a significant difference. The reformists missed the opportunity to make the first step toward a form of judicial review under the aegis of the president, which was technically possible by couching the bill in administrative rather than judicial terms.²⁹ The proposed presidential commission was given the power of "inspection" to determine violations of the constitution, but it was not explicitly given jurisdiction to hear cases of human rights violations. Obliquely, and at the end, the president was given the power to provide a budget for compensating victims of human rights violations!

GROWTH IN THE EXTRACONSTITUTIONAL POWER OF THE SUPREME LEADER

This survey of recent constitutional trends would be incomplete without mentioning a counter-trend regarding the constitutionalization of clerical authority. The supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, had been replacing Hashemi-Rafsanjani's men with his own since the mid-1990s. While firmly retaining his control over the Revolutionary Guards and its Mobilizational (Basij) militia under President Khatami, the supreme leader's men were put in charge of the politicized courts charged with the suppression of the press and harassment of the reformists. The constitutional theocracy was thus imperceptibly being turned into a system of personal rule by the supreme leader, with increasing politicization of the judiciary and ad hoc infiltration of various governmental bodies. The victory of the hard-liners in the 2004 Majles elections, many of whom were the supreme leader's men in the security and mobilization apparatus, extended Ayatollah Khamenei's agglomeration of personal power to the Majles. The election in June 2005 of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, with the backing of the security and mobilization apparatus controlled by the supreme leader, can be seen as the culmination of this growth in extraconstitutional power. It remains to be seen if this development will mark the end of the trend.

The supreme leader has been engaged in a constant balancing act, shifting his weight now toward the new men under his control and now back to the old clerical elite. The hard-liners, formerly Khamenei's men, may well prove unruly, with the Majles and presidency as additional power bases, but they have so far remained divided among themselves and thus have not caused serious problems. The supreme leader seemed confident enough of his standing to let the Guardian Council bar any reformist comeback in the Majles elections of March 2008.

The most unruly new man so far has been President Ahmadinejad, who has sought to claim the direct blessing of the Hidden Imam and to cultivate popularity with his program of economic populism and assertive foreign policies. It is interesting to note that his most significant act of defiance of the supreme leader to date has had a constitutional basis. That is, control of foreign policy through the Supreme National Security Council has been part of the supreme leader's expanded extraconstitutional power. He had chosen Hasan Rowhani as its chairman until 2005, and Ali Larijani after August 2005, even though Article 176 of the constitution names the president as the council's chairman. On October 20, 2007, President Ahmadinejad asserted his constitutional prerogative and replaced Larijani with one of his own men, Sa'id Jalili. Khamenei was forced to fall back on his more modest constitutional powers and immediately appointed Larijani as one of his two representatives on the Supreme National Security Council. That way, Larijani as a more competent negotiator appeared

side by side with Jalili at the October 24, 2007, nuclear negotiations meeting with the European Union Foreign Minister Xavier Solana (Centre for Iranian Studies 2007).

NOTES

1. A few days later, President Khamenei took it upon himself to enunciate the new principle of the absolute mandate and its implications:

The commandments of the ruling jurist (*vali-ye faqih*) are primary commandments and are like the commandments of God. . . . The regulations of the Islamic Republic are Islamic regulations, and obedience to them is incumbent. . . . [They are all] governmental ordinances (*ahkam-e hokumati*) of the ruling jurist. . . . In reality, it is because of the legitimacy of the Mandate [of the Jurist] that they all acquire legitimacy. . . . The Mandate of the Jurist is like the soul in the body of the regime. I will go further and say that the validity of the Constitution, which is the basis, standard and framework of all laws, is due to its acceptance and confirmation by the ruling jurist. Otherwise, what right do fifty or sixty or a hundred experts have . . . ? What right do the majority of people have to ratify a Constitution and make it binding on all the people? (cited in Arjomand 2001: 310)

2. A few years earlier, in 1983, Khomeini had been prevailed upon to act as the supreme jurist to break the deadlock between the Guardian Council and the Majles, and he had entrusted the determination of "secondary ordinances" in secular matters, which were in effect based on *maslahat* (public interest), to the Majles with a majority of two-thirds (Khomeini 1999a, 6: 227).

3. Musavi-Ardabili was right in considering this resolution of the decade-long constitutional crisis, which had pitted the Guardian Council against the Majles, revolutionary. Creating the Expediency Council solved the problem of inadequate and insignificant political provisions in the Shi'i jurisprudence against revolutionary claims that Shi'i Islam is a total way of life and total ideology. This lack of jurisprudence was undoubtedly a consequence of the fact that Shi'i sacred law (Shari'a) had hitherto been a jurists' law and not the state law or "the law of the land." Khomeini's statements on the absolute mandate of the jurist represented the logical conclusion of his earlier attempts to modernize Shi'i jurisprudence by making it more practical. It crowned the revolutionary transformation of Shi'i law from a formalist "jurists' law" into the public law of the Iranian state by institutionalizing the legislative authority of the supreme jurist and establishing the Expediency Council as its bureaucratic organ. This solution, however, meant that state law triumphed over Shi'i jurisprudence, and it made the theocratic state highly authoritarian. The modern state thus got the better of the hierocracy that sought to swallow it (Arjomand 1993). On the paradoxes and dialectics of the transformation of Shi'i jurisprudence into state law, and of the juristic authority of the *mojtaheds* into *velayat-e faqih*, see Arjomand (1993) and Mohammadi (1998: 299–318).

4. The revision of the Iranian constitution was completed at full speed, but the revised constitution that eliminated that requirement according to Khomeini's explicit instruction was approved by referendum, held alongside the presidential election, almost two months later, on July 28, 1989 (Khomeini 1999b, 11: 695).

5. This new formulation appears to give the Assembly of Leadership Experts virtually unrestricted latitude in view of the fact that the qualifications include not only jurisprudential

competence but also a “correct political and social perspective, administrative and managerial competence, courage and adequate power for leadership” (Amended Article 111 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran).

6. The core element of this Sunnitization has been the attempt to find Islamic legitimacy for the new category of “governmental ordinances,” hand in hand with adoption of the *maslahat* (public interest) as the criterion for legitimate nonjuristic rulings of the supreme jurist/supreme leader. The close connection between *maslahat* and “governmental ordinances” is the subject of the seventh volume of papers published for the Khomeini Centennial, as indicated by its title: *Ahkam-e hokumati va maslahat*. Khomeini’s followers drew extensively on Sunni sources to repair deficiencies in Shi’i public law, including such Sunni concepts as *bay’a[t]*, or allegiance to the Caliph (Khomeini 1999a, 7: esp. 211–227, 322–323).

7. Khamenei’s statement (cited in Buchta 1995: 470) that he had reached this decision because there were many qualified *maraje’* in Iran but not outside of Iran, thus making him indispensable, was patently incorrect, as demonstrated by the acclamation of Ali Sistani and three other grand ayatollahs in Iraq. It also ignored the failed attempt by his supporters to de-legitimize *marja’iyyat* after the establishment of the mandate of the jurist (see also Gieling 1997). It is also worth noting that the clerical promoters of Khamenei in Iran (the Association of Militant Clergy and the Qom seminary professors), who presented lists of *maraje’* in the first days of December 1994, did not have the civility to mention Sistani or any other grand ayatollah outside of Iran.

8. This was the result of the fact that, in the original draft constitution of 1979, the Guardian Council was modeled after the French Conseil Constitutionnel, as defined in the 1958 French constitution.

9. The first presidential elections took place only a month after the constitution was ratified, and with no clear guidelines for the supervision of elections, the Guardian Council approved the candidacy of 106 and rejected only 18, mostly leftists. The Guardian Council’s jurists must have regretted this leniency, which allowed Abolhasan Bani-Sadr to become Iran’s first president. In the next presidential elections, in July 1981, the Guardian Council was more strict in determining when a candidate was among “the religious and political figures (*rejal*)” and a “believer in the bases of the Islamic republic,” with such vaguely defined qualities as “management capability,” “trustworthiness,” and “piety” (Article 115). From then on, for each presidential election, only a handful of men would be able to meet the Guardian Council’s unspecified criteria: 4 out of 238 in 1997, 10 out of over 800 in 2001, and 7 out of 3,010 in 2005.

10. The Guardian Council took advantage of this transfer to strengthen its power of supervision in the national elections as well (Momen 1998: 150).

11. Despite the urging of the supreme leader in a gathering to mark its 20th anniversary in July 2000, as reported in *Ettela’at*, July 20, to create constitutional jurisprudence, the Guardian Council has failed to do so since 1986. Its early opinions were edited and published by one of its lay members, Hossein Mehrpur (1992).

12. My interview with the commission’s chairman, Ayatollah Ebrahim Amini, in 2001.

13. Note that the Expediency Council includes the six clerical jurists of the Guardian Council who are *mojtaheds*. The creation of the Expediency Council has, in fact, increased the power of these jurists, who have been among its members from the very beginning. The jurists of the Guardian Council now wear two hats; as one of them once boasted, “I have one responsibility in the morning, another in the evening. My responsibility in the morning is to speak according to the Shari’a [in the Guardian Council]; my responsibility in the evening is to see to the public interest [in the Expediency Council]!” (cited in Arjomand 2001: 319).

14. The peak of the Supreme Judiciary Council's activities was from 1984 to 1989, although they continued for a couple of years after Musavi-Ardabili into 1991 and declined thereafter (Qorbani 2003: 345–541).

15. The chronic shortage of judges with requisite training in Shi'i jurisprudence, however, made further Islamization unlikely. There were only 5,000 judges for 10,000 positions, while recognized institutions produced only 600 graduates a year, according to *Ettela'at*, November 30, 1999. Only a small proportion of these come from the *madrasas* or can become *majtaheds*.

16. See the next section.

17. To perform the same function, he also proposed the Judiciary Police to be set up by the late Ayatollah Beheshti, formed from the general police force with which it was later amalgamated.

18. On Hashemi, who was tried in August and executed in September 1987, and the significance of this episode, see Buchta 2005.

19. Mohajerani survived a stormy hearing at the Majles in the spring of 1999, but he was dismissed the following year following pressure from the supreme leader.

20. "Legislation" (*qanun-gozari*), is another neologism, but a less important one.

21. His key neologism notwithstanding, Javadi-Amoli's rational argument is similar to the "rational" proof of theocratic government offered by Khomeini in 1970. Neither has anything to do with the validity of reason (*'aql*) as the fourth source of Shi'i law, as authoritatively established by the greatest Shi'i jurist of the 19th century, Sheikh Morteza Ansari, in his still universally accepted and narrowly circumscribed "practical principles" (*osul-e 'amliyyeh*).

22. Ayatollah Amoli published Haeri's (1997) critique of his position in the subsequent issue of *Hokumat-e Eslami*, with a polite note referring to his eminent father. A similar "democratic" theory of *velayat* had earlier been published inside Iran in 1984 by Hojjat al-Eslam Ne'matollah Salehi-Najafabadi (Moussavi 1992).

23. The commission displayed little energy, though it continued to receive complaints of violations of the constitution and property rights, mostly from religious minorities (Arjomand 2001).

24. To see the extent of the departure from Shi'i tradition, just compare it to Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi's categorical assertion that "*bay'at* plays no role in the legitimacy of the *velayat-e faqih*, as it played no role in the legitimacy of the government of the Immaculate Imam" (Mesbah-Yazdi 1996: 91). He goes on to say that *bay'at* is merely instrumental in bringing about the government of the jurists, as it leaves him no excuse to avoid taking over the management of society.

25. Mesbah-Yazdi had evidently forgotten his earlier assertion that all jurists must obey the supreme jurist as the theocratic ruler (Mesbah-Yazdi 1996: 94).

26. It was called "the decree in 8 clauses," to invoke Imam Khomeini's famous December 1983 decree that bore the same appellation and declared the end of revolutionary violence and the beginning of law and order.

27. See the reports in *Ettela'at*, July 19 and 27, 2000. According to *Ettela'at*, November 20, 2000, it passed the "General Judiciary Policies of the Country" some four months later.

28. The Guardian Council did not react quite so fast, but a week later its spokesman told both Khatami and Shahrودي to mind their own business because constitutional interpretation was the function of the Guardian Council. Another Guardian Council member told the president that all he should/could do was to issue his "warning" (*hoshdar*) of constitutional violations, as he had been doing without being able to take any further action; see *Ettela'at*, December 6, 2000.

29. Earlier that month (September 2002), I had urged the office of the president, through Vice President Mohammad-Ali Abtahi and a number of reformist members of the Majles, to do so.

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NEW CONSERVATIVE POLITICS AND ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR IN IRAN

Ali Gheissari and Kaveh-Cyrus Sanandaji

The decade leading up to the 2005 presidential elections—marked by contentious issues such as the state of the domestic economy, the increasingly stifled power of the presidency, and the direction of Iran’s nuclear program—created an opportunity for the traditional clerical establishment to make an intense effort to successfully consolidate conservative power. The Guardian Council’s controversial interference in the February 2004 parliamentary elections helped to reinstate a conservative parliamentary majority that had been missing since the 2000 elections. Despite concerns about such interference, the public took a keen interest in the 2005 presidential campaign. There was heated debate about Iran’s domestic agenda, particularly its stagnant economy and the future of its foreign policy. The proposed agenda for economic reform by pragmatic conservatives contrasted sharply with the reformists’ failure to articulate concrete solutions to ameliorate public grievances. As a result, political activity and discourse gravitated toward the pragmatic camp, signaling a shift to a new form of conservative politics in Iranian elections, in stark contrast to the reform-oriented sentiment that had dominated the Khatami years. Although this period witnessed an expansive ideological realignment toward conservative political dominance, the subsequent geographic realignment was limited to traditional urban reformist strongholds (socioeconomically aggrieved voters) and failed to affect the peripheral ethnic-minority-dominated provinces (socioculturally aggrieved voters). These developments suggested that, despite setting the tenor of the campaign, the pragmatic conservatives would fail to translate voter support into election victory, as evidenced by the hard-line populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s victory over the pragmatic Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani in the second-round runoff (June 24, 2005).

THE ELECTORAL CONTEXT

Incumbent Mohammad Khatami, having already served two consecutive four-year terms as president, was constitutionally barred from seeking a third term. His eight years in office witnessed efforts to liberalize social and political facets of the Iranian state and also initiated debates on the prospects for reform and democratic change in Iran.¹ However, these liberalizing efforts were met with increasing opposition from the clerical establishment's conservative coalitions, including the Guardian Council and the supreme leader—particularly significant after conservatives reasserted themselves in the 2004 parliamentary elections. The ineffectiveness of the reform agenda, in light of the institutional opposition it faced from unelected elements of the state, coupled with increasing economic disparities, set the context for the outcome of the 2005 presidential election.

The Decline of Reform

In addition to the underlying challenges to the reformist agenda of the Khatami years, three significant developments occurred in the immediate lead-up to the election that ensured the pro-reformist camp would fail to win the presidency. First, mass disqualifications of the candidates in 2004 parliamentary elections impaired the reformist effort beyond the election itself. The reformist movement suffered a split: some activists, such as Akbar Ganji, maintained that reformists should boycott the 2005 elections in order to reduce the conservatives' legitimacy, while others, such as Khatami himself, insisted that reformists needed to participate in the 2005 elections in order to challenge the conservative reassertion. Moreover, the initial disqualification of the two reformist candidates, Mostafa Moin and Mohsen Mehralizadeh, by the Guardian Council instigated public protest and further disillusioned hopeful reformist voters.

Second, this discord coupled with the reformists' failure to offer a single viable candidate led to further division among the alliance, limiting their ability to win. Indeed, the absence of a strong reformist candidate to rally support for reform (similar to the previous two elections that brought Khatami to the presidency) exacerbated the political disorganization and infighting as various coalitions debated the merits of each candidate for endorsement. Even by January 2005, many reformist politicians continued to deny the implications of failing to endorse a single candidate as a threat to the reformists' ability to succeed in the June elections. For instance, according to Seyyed Hadi Khamenei, the secretary general of the pro-reform group *Majma'-e Niruha-ye Khatt-e Imam* (Society of the Forces [following] the Imam's Line), "reformist groups are not facing any difficulty in reaching consensus on a single candidate.... Of course, all the 18 reformist political parties might not reach consensus, but a majority of reformists could take a unified decision on a single candidate."² The reformist

coalitions' failure to compromise and endorse a single candidate, and their continued denial of such a failure, resulted in a divided reformist voter base.

Finally, in March 2005, when many reformists came to anticipate a conservative victory in the June elections, some pro-reformist commentators attempted to console their constituency by suggesting that, in order to function efficiently, a conservative president would have to establish a coalition government that would include pro-reform elements.³ By relying on this false sense of security that, regardless of the election outcome, reformists would be included in a coalition government, the pro-reform platform adopted a resigned mentality months before reaching the polls. This attitude prevented the reformists from putting forward a viable candidate and embarking on effective presidential campaign.

Unlike the 2004 parliamentary election, a combination of factors, as well as the active involvement of paramilitary forces such as the Basij in securing conservative votes, and not simply the Guardian Council's vetting, was responsible for the 2005 presidential outcome favoring the conservatives.⁴ Indeed, the 2005 presidential election offers a good opportunity to analyze electoral behavior, and particularly the voters' support for reform. This analysis enables us to examine the extent of ideological and geographical realignment that occurred in Iran during the 2005 presidential elections.

Consolidation of New Conservative Politics: Ideological Realignment

Similar to previous elections, the contest leading up to the first round of the 2005 election concerned the ongoing debate between reform (modernity) and tradition.⁵ However, a significant development that further reduced the ability of the reformists to win was the emergence of a new conservative politics. Paradoxically, this conservative consolidation took place during Khatami's presidency; "the conservatives, in seeking to limit democratic practices, actually intensified competition within their own ranks."⁶ This split in the ranks stimulated an ideological realignment among conservatives, and it resulted in the emergence of hard-line populists who sought the support of the poor, and pragmatic conservatives who turned to the middle class—the two demographic constituencies that historically had been loyal to the reformists. The former, which included Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, pursued bread-and-butter issues targeting lower-income voters with economic grievances; the latter, who included Rafsanjani, introduced policies that promised social and political change, presenting their agenda as "conservative reform." The pragmatists criticized the reformists' inability to implement change, and they maintained that the means to successfully implement reform was the establishment of a strong and accountable government. This ideological transformation by the populist and pragmatist conservatives detracted from the reformist support base by inviting a potential geographic realignment toward conservatism among voters who had traditionally sided with reformist candidates.

As described above, despite their previous popularity all predictions suggested that reformists would not do well in the 2005 presidential elections. This sentiment indicated a shift toward a political context devoid of Khatami-style reform and, conversely, dominated by a new breed of conservatives. In sum, this shift was facilitated by the reformists' failure to nominate a single candidate with the ability to rally their supporters and, moreover, by their failure to offer a new and tangible political program different from that of Khatami's. In fact, failure to provide a solution to the recurrent tensions between the elected and unelected power centers, which had often hampered the implementation of policies for sustainable economic development under Khatami, was particularly significant in addressing the current political and socioeconomic grievances of voters—an issue that, as the following data analysis shows, determined the outcome of the second round of the 2005 presidential election.

This ideological shift was mirrored in a geographical realignment of voter support from traditional reformists to the new conservatives, garnered from the nonethnically dominated lower-income provinces (with demographic composition greater than 50 percent ethnic Persians) and the urban middle class. Many believed the strongest contenders for reformist votes were moderate conservatives, such as pragmatist Rafsanjani, who had served twice before as Iran's president (1980–1989), and the former Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) commanders Mohsen Rezai (who later withdrew his candidacy) and Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf. These predictions held true during the second round of elections, as the pragmatic conservative Rafsanjani had a support base comprising lower-income voters from traditionally reformist, ethnic-minority-dominated provinces.

The Conservative Political Campaign: Nationalism and Economic Growth

The plight of reformists during the 2005 elections was not viewed by all in the pro-reform constituency as necessarily bad news. In this period, and during the initial phase of the conservative ascendancy to power, conservatives did not advocate a return to theocracy or war with the world. Rather, they insisted on pragmatic domestic and foreign policies that lacked a commitment to democracy, but nevertheless contained an ambitious program for change. The new breed of conservatives combined an appeal to Iranian nationalism with the promise of economic growth, good government, and positive engagement with the outside world. For instance, Rafsanjani, who failed to receive the majority of votes, promised national reconciliation to end the gridlock that had resulted from political battles between President Khatami and the supreme leader and his clerical allies. Most Iranians, especially those in the bureaucracy and the private sector, were weary of the absence of progress owing to political infighting and economic stagnation. As evidenced by the resulting runoff between two nonreformist candidates, many welcomed the prospect of efficient government,

even if the government was not to be democratic. This sentiment was reflected in the overwhelming voter support for Ahmadinejad during the second round, given that his populist agenda focused specifically on improving Iran's economy. There was virtually no talk on the campaign trail of exporting the revolution or of increasing solidarity with the larger Islamic world. Indeed, the conservative candidates all talked about Iranian nationalism and their fidelity to it. Although they continued to identify themselves as fundamentalist (*osulgara*), the conservative candidates' vision for foreign policy at times echoed the political rhetoric of the bygone Pahlavi era: emphasize a policy of reconciliation, promote Iran's national interests, and reiterate the larger "Persian zone of influence." Many candidates (with the exception of Ahmadinejad, as discussed below) signaled to resolve the standoff between Iran and the United States, ending concerns over stability and national security in the country. Since political insecurity has often been a source of deep societal contention, it was particularly significant to middle-class Iranian voters because of the negative ramifications to commerce and the economy in general; continued imposition of U.S. trade sanctions restricted market activity by reducing foreign investment and limiting trade, thus aggravating Iran's economic stagnation and adding to the population's grievances vis-à-vis the central government.

Conservative politicians also put forward detailed economic development plans for long-term structural changes to address the high rates of inflation, underemployment, income inequality, and corruption. These candidates not only recognized that bread-and-butter issues remained a major concern of the Iranian population but also acknowledged that comprehensive economic and political development required increased inclusion of disaffected citizens to reduce the rift between state and society. Some, such as Rezai, spoke of bridging the generational divide by addressing the needs of youth and by involving them in the governance of the country. Others attacked the senior clerics in the Guardian Council, arguing that they belonged to a bygone era and were incapable of addressing Iran's present needs.

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES AND FACTIONAL POLITICS

The ideological realignment of the political spectrum that occurred prior to the 2005 presidential elections was echoed by the diverse political stances of the candidates, particularly the new breed of conservatives. Their separate orientation is evident in a brief analysis of the significant factions and coalitions that emerged in this period. It must be noted that, since a complete list of all persons who applied for candidacy was not released, this analysis of party endorsements is limited to the remaining seven presidential candidates approved by the Guardian Council, who ultimately participated in the election (see fig. 9.1).⁷ Although several candidates were referred to in the media as independents,

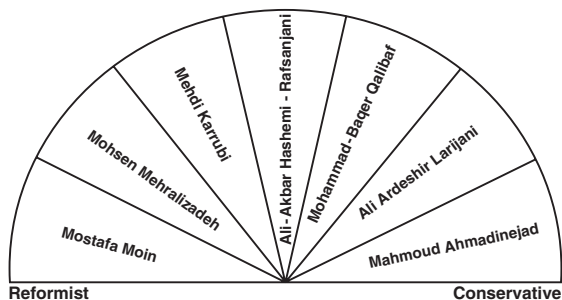


FIGURE 9.1. Approved presidential candidates, 2005.

it can be argued that ideologically these candidates leaned toward either the reformist or the conservative camp. Thus, to simplify the following analysis we can categorize the main political factions and coalitions into two groups—reformists and conservatives—within which various trends emerged during the first half of 2005.

Reformists

Mostafa Moin was the first significant reformist to officially announce his candidacy, on December 29, 2004. Moin announced that, if elected, he would appoint Mohammad-Reza Khatami (President Khatami's brother and speaker of the reformist Sixth Majles) as his first vice president and Elaheh Koulaee (a representative of the Sixth Majles) as his spokeswoman.

Moin was supported by the *Jebhe-ye Mosharekat-e Iran-e Eslami* (Islamic Iran Participation Front, or IIPF), the influential reformist political party established in 1998 led by Mohammad-Reza Khatami. Its membership included a number of religious intellectuals and reformist journalists, such as Reza Tehrani, Ali-Reza Alavi-Tabar, and Eisa Sahar-Khiz, as well as supportive authors and activists such as Mohammad-Javad Gholam-Reza Kashi and Shahla Sherkat. During the period leading up to the elections, the IIPF had stated that it would only support a presidential candidate from within the party, with the exception of Mir-Hossein Musavi and Mostafa Moin. Although the IIPF had initially considered Musavi as its candidate for the 2005 presidential election, Mousavi's abstention forced the IIPF to endorse Moin instead—the candidate it believed would win the greatest approval of the other reformist parties in the alliance. This endorsement caused some conservative deputies in the parliament to pressure the Guardian Council to reject Moin's candidacy, which initially it did, but the decision was later overturned. Moin also enjoyed the support of the *Showra-ye Hamahangi-ye Jebhe-ye Eslahat* (Coordinating Council of the Reformist Front, or CCRF). However, in spite of spending much

precious time trying to reach a consensus on a candidate, the CCRF endorsed Moin at the eleventh hour and thus failed to attract widespread support. Other influential pro-reform organizations that endorsed Moin included the Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami (Organization of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution); the Nahzat-e Azadi-ye Iran (Liberation Movement of Iran); the Anjoman-e Eslami-ye Mo'alleman (Islamic Association of Teachers); the Anjoman-e Eslami-ye Jame'eh-ye Pezeshki (Islamic Association of Physicians); and the Anjoman-e Eslami-ye Modarresin-e Daneshgah-ha (Islamic Association of University Lecturers).

Mohsen Mehralizadeh, the second reformist candidate, had previously served as vice president and the head of the National Sports Organization under Khatami. Mehralizadeh initially declared his candidacy on December 29, 2004. Identifying himself as a candidate for the Iranian youth, Mehralizadeh moved on to state that he would withdraw if the reformist alliance reached a consensus to endorse a single candidate. The fact that his candidacy was contingent upon such a personal condition was indicative of a certain degree of disorientation within the reformists' campaigning efforts during this period. Although having been initially rejected along with Moin by the Guardian Council, Mehralizadeh's candidacy was later approved. As an ethnic Azerbaijani, he received support from the Majles representatives of Gilan, Azerbaijan, and Khorasan, yet he did not receive the endorsement of his own party, the IIPE.

The third reformist candidate was Mehdi Karrubi, the former speaker of the Majles from 1989 to 1992 and again from 2000 to 2004, and the secretary general and founding member of the Majma'-e Rowhaniyun-e Mobarez (Society of Militant Clerics, or SMC). Although Karrubi was an outspoken critic of the Guardian Council, he was a supporter of the supreme leader, serving as an adviser to Khamenei and as a member of the Expediency Council. Karrubi was considered a pragmatic reformist, a position that was reflected in his endorsements by various political parties and coalitions traditionally aligned with the center. As such Karrubi's nomination by the SMC was significant. Although in the early years of the revolution, the SMC was an important platform for conservatives, supportive of exporting the revolution and increasing state control over the economy, the party underwent a significant ideological shift with the induction of new pro-reform members such as Seyyed Hadi Khamenei, who was general secretary of the Majma'-e Niruha-ye Khatt-e Emam (Society of the Forces [following] the Imam's Line); Ayatollah Kazem Nur-Mofidi, representative of the supreme leader in Golestan [formerly Gorgan] province; and Abolfazl Shakuri, former Majles deputy from Zanjan.⁸ Karrubi's endorsement by the SMC as early as January 2005 echoed the sentiment that he would be the reformists' favored candidate. He also received endorsements from the Islamic Association of Engineers and the Shiraz Branch of the student-run Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat (Office of Consolidation of Unity).⁹

Conservatives

As previously noted, several important developments followed the intense competition among conservative candidates for the endorsements of conservative political factions, which subsequently resulted in an ideological divide among them. This period also witnessed the emergence of a new conservative politics that displayed significant ideological diversity and provided the electorate with greater choice and a more competitive and democratic-like election.

Among the conservatives, Rafsanjani, the chairman of the Expediency Council and former two-term president (1989–1997), emerged as a moderate and pragmatic candidate.¹⁰ Although he was once a founding member of the Islamic Republic Party, which had advocated the establishment of a theocratic regime following the 1979 revolution, Rafsanjani's political agenda increasingly wavered between the conservative and reformist camps with regard to economic and foreign policy issues. In an attempt to distinguish himself as a moderate candidate, Rafsanjani proposed an agenda that entailed significant economic and political reform—an agenda that appealed to both conservative and reformist elements. His pragmatism was evident in his willingness to reestablish diplomatic relations with the West, especially with regard to Iran's nuclear program, and his support for a free market economy. His was an agenda that sharply contrasted with the declared policies of his rival populist candidates, who proposed increasing government intervention in the economy in order to remedy stagnation.¹¹

After much public speculation, Rafsanjani announced his candidacy on May 10, 2005, with the support of several significant factions from both ends of the political spectrum. This outcome was the result of Rafsanjani's revised pragmatic agenda and his intense lobbying with various conservative and reformist factions that had begun as early as 1997. Despite remaining a loyal member of the pragmatic conservative *Jame'eh-ye Rowhaniyat-e Mobarez* (Association of Militant Clergy), following Khatami's 1997 election Rafsanjani had begun building relations with the reformist camp. He particularly established a close bond with the *Hezb-e Kargozaran-e Sazandegi* (Implementers of Development Party), a reformist platform founded by former members of his cabinet and staunch supporters of his policies.¹² Reportedly, by mid-November 2004, 14 political organizations had announced their support of Rafsanjani's candidacy.¹³ Rafsanjani's decision to accept the nomination for presidency and register for the election had a significant impact on the conservative alliance beyond the pragmatic conservative constituency.

The influential *Showra-ye Hamahangi-ye Niruha-ye Enqelab* (Coordinating Council of the Forces of the Revolution), a traditionally conservative coalition comprising some older leaders of the conservative alliance and headed by Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nuri, focused on reaching consensus on a single conservative

candidate. This process resulted in intense and controversial lobbying among the conservative factions, particularly on the choice between Ali-Akbar Velayati and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; the first was a moderate conservative whose policies echoed those of Rafsanjani and the second, a hard-line populist. Although the coalition initially endorsed Velayati, an adviser to the supreme leader for foreign affairs and a former foreign minister during Rafsanjani's presidency, Velayati declined the conservative endorsement and instead chose to run independently, on the condition that Rafsanjani would not participate. When Rafsanjani registered to run, however, Velayati withdrew completely from the presidential race and gave his support to the pragmatic conservative Rafsanjani. At the time this momentous decision did not appear as particularly significant to the reformists but later proved decisive for the outcome of the elections and the new realignment of the traditional conservative camp. Indeed, as one of the most influential conservative factions, the Coordinating Council had preferred to endorse a moderate conservative candidate (such as Velayati), but now found itself having to endorse Ahmadinejad as the best remaining alternative—an endorsement that fundamentally realigned the faction toward a more hard-line conservative ideology.

The greatest competition following this development took place among the three hard-line conservative candidates: Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf, Ali Larijani, and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Qlibaf, the former head of the police, initially appeared to have the support of several factions of the conservative alliance and the self-proclaimed endorsement of the supreme leader, owing to his appeal to both extremes of the conservative alliance. However, as the election approached it became evident that Larijani and Ahmadinejad were the two main contenders for the hard-line conservative endorsements. Ali Larijani, the supreme leader's representative to the Supreme National Security Council, also received the support of the Coordinating Council.

Although Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was the mayor of Tehran, prior to the election campaign he was a relatively unknown figure in national politics. His presidential campaign promoted a populist agenda that highlighted revolutionary ideals of equality, justice, and anticorruption. Ahmadinejad's campaign strategy focused on his austere lifestyle, often highlighting his humble residence and unadorned appearance and emphasizing his opposition to the corruption of the old establishment. This proved a successful means of connecting with the lower-income voters who were thought to have become disenfranchised with Iranian politics, in view of their mounting social and economic grievances. Ahmadinejad's populist agenda was embodied in his pledge to "put Iran's petroleum income on people's tables"—a pledge that subsequently proved unfeasible. His approach aimed to attract support from both the religious conservatives and the traditionally pro-reform voters among the lower-income and urban youth constituencies.

Ahmadinejad's political endorsements nevertheless reflected the support of hard-line conservatives. He was initially endorsed by groups such as the Coordinating Council of the Forces of the Revolution, some members of the Islamic Society of Engineers, and the Abadgaran-e Iran-e Eslami (Developers of Islamic Iran, or DII) whose speaker, Mehdi Chamran, was also a member of Tehran's city council and a right-hand man to Ahmadinejad during his tenure as mayor. This latter group later supplied many new appointments in Ahmadinejad's government.

THE 2005 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION RESULTS

The ninth presidential election of the Islamic republic was the first in Iran's electoral history to be settled in a second round runoff, since no candidate received more than the 50 percent majority of popular votes required for an outright first-round victory. Polls conducted in March, prior to the election, by the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) suggested that Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani was the clear favorite, projected to receive 28.2 percent of the votes, followed by Mehdi Karrubi (8.8 percent), Ali-Akbar Velayati (5.6 percent), Ali Larijani (4.4 percent), Mostafa Moin (4.1 percent), Mohammad Tavakoli (3.9 percent), Mohsen Rezai (2.1 percent), Hasan Rowhani (2.1 percent), Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf (1.9 percent), Mohammad-Reza Aref (1.8 percent), and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (1.7 percent) placing him 11th out of 16 potential candidates.¹⁴ The first round took place on June 17, 2005, and resulted in Rafsanjani's receiving 21.01 percent of the votes, unexpectedly followed by Ahmadinejad and Karrubi, who received 19.48 and 17.28 percent of the votes, respectively. According to the election results released by the Ministry of the Interior, as reported by the Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA), the election turnout was 62.66 percent of eligible voters.

Despite the meager differences in votes among the top three candidates, Iranian electoral law dictates that only the top two candidates progress to the second round. Thus, on June 24, 2005, Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani competed for the presidency. Surprisingly, pre-voting polls conducted by the Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA) one day before the runoff suggested that Ahmadinejad was the favored candidate, projected to receive 45 percent compared to 39.1 percent for Rafsanjani.¹⁵ These predictions echoed the final outcome of the runoff, in which Ahmadinejad received a comfortable 61.69 percent majority compared to Rafsanjani, who received 35.93 percent. Official figures indicate that there was a minor drop in turnout from the first round, with 59.76 percent of eligible voters registering a ballot. Table 9.1 reflects the national aggregate vote totals that each candidate received in the respective rounds.

The outcome of the first round that came to exclude pro-reform candidates, such as Karrubi, and that resulted in two conservative candidates gaining the majority of votes, is evidence of the ideological realignment of the Iranian

TABLE 9.1. National summary of 2005 presidential election results.

Candidates	First round (June 17, 2005)		Second round (June 24, 2005)	
	Votes	%	Votes	%
Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani	6,159,435	21.01	10,046,701	35.93
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	5,710,354	19.48	17,248,782	61.69
Mehdi Karrubi	5,066,316	17.28	—	—
Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf	4,075,189	13.90	—	—
Mostafa Moin	4,054,304	13.83	—	—
Ali Ardeshtir Larijani	1,740,163	5.94	—	—
Mohsen Mehralizadeh	1,289,323	4.40	—	—
Invalid votes	1,221,940	4.17	663,770	2.37
Total	29,317,024	100	27,959,253	100

Source: Based on various data from the Ministry of the Interior.

political system to the right. In fact, upon the announcement of the election results of the first round, Karrubi, in an open letter to the supreme leader, complained about election irregularities and interference by elements from the Ministry of Intelligence, the IRGC, and paramilitary Basij forces.¹⁶ It is within this electoral context that the outcome of the second round of the elections unfolded, revealing a significant geographical realignment in support of hard-line populism that provided Ahmadinejad with the necessary votes to gain a comfortable majority on June 24, 2005.

The 2005 Election and National Electoral Behavior, 1997–2005

With the aggregate national results of the 2005 presidential election presented in table 9.1, we can now begin to understand the voting behavior that was exhibited. In order to do so, however, it is necessary to examine the context in which that voting took place, namely the voting trends exhibited in preceding elections. For example, when given the opportunity from 1997 to 2005, many Iranians registered their dissent by voting against the officially endorsed candidates and in favor of reformist candidates. As evidenced by the 2004 parliamentary elections, Iranians also expressed dissent within the confines of the electoral system by either casting blank votes or not voting at all, thus denying legitimacy to the election and the winning candidates a popular mandate.¹⁷ As previously mentioned, the new conservative politics can be seen within the framework of the Khatami era as a consequence of the reformists' failure to

fulfill their promises, particularly to ameliorate the population's economic and cultural grievances.

During Khatami's presidency (1997–2005), the reformist platform, which advocated increased liberalization in social, political, and economic domains, also created a more inclusive and open atmosphere that allowed different segments of the state and society to adopt democratic principles—albeit within the rubric of theocracy. Despite the drop in support for pro-reform factional



FIGURE 9.2. Map of support for reform, 1997–2005.

Key: (1) Western Azerbaijan; (2) Eastern Azerbaijan; (3) Golestan (formerly Gorgan); (4) Hormozgan; (5) Ilam; (6) Kermanshah; (7) Kurdistan; and (8) Sistan and Baluchestan.

Note: This map highlights the provinces that registered greater than 50% support for reformist candidates during the 1997, 2000, 2001, and 2005 national elections. This analysis omits the 2004 parliamentary election results because the Guardian Council's vetting process significantly limited the ability of voters to register their support for reformist candidates, thus serving as an inaccurate measure of voters' preferences.

politics, which followed the 2004 parliamentary elections, observers contend that Iranian society remained deeply engaged in democratic discourse. For instance, during this period several provinces supported reform and political competitiveness—indications of a democratic impulse. This “impulse” can be quantitatively measured in an analysis of provincial electoral behavior, as support for reformist candidates exhibited in the national elections also held during this period. Indeed, in identifying the provinces that supported reform, we can isolate the correlates of a potential foundation for future democracy in Iran.

By emphasizing socioeconomic factors, classical theories of democratization often suggest that reforms and greater political competitiveness emerge first in the most industrialized, literate, and urbanized provinces.¹⁸ Alternatively, political-cultural explanations suggest that this democratic impulse is strongest in provinces with the most civic culture.¹⁹ It can be noted that Iran retains many structural factors that favor democratic development—in particular, the socioeconomic preconditions highlighted by advocates of modernization theory.²⁰ Indeed, many contemporary observers assign credit for the emergence of this democratic impulse to the correlates of modernization and globalization: an expanded middle class (that includes a growing youth population), increased wealth and literacy, rapid urbanization, and exposure to outside influences through the Internet and satellite television.²¹

However, a quantitative analysis of election patterns reveals that, contrary to the expectations inherent in these traditional hypotheses, support for reforms and greater political competitiveness emerged in the less developed provinces.²² In fact, support for reforms during the period between 1997 and 2005 materialized in the poorer, more rural, and less literate provinces, including Western Azerbaijan, Eastern Azerbaijan, Golestan (formerly Gorgan), Hormozgan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan, and Sistan and Baluchestan (see fig. 9.2).²³

Regional Voting Behavior (1997–2005) and the National Election

Regular national elections in the Islamic republic have served as a means of institutionalized interest articulation and aggregation. Although elected officials are limited in their ability to implement political, cultural, and economic policies that contrast with the views of the supreme leader and the Guardian Council, elections have, nonetheless, initiated the political socialization of the general population, more so than served as means of ensuring regime legitimacy. Hence, the elections provide the people of the country with a means of expressing their interests and registering their grievances with the central government, particularly in the direction of reform. However, as previously mentioned, the new conservative politics that emerged during the reformist Khatami era can be seen as a result of the selfsame socioeconomic and sociocultural grievances, shared by lower-income voters and particularly concentrated

TABLE 9.2. Provincial support for reform in presidential elections.

	1997	2001	First round, 2005
Support for Reform <i>Any province with greater than 50% of the popular vote in support for reform</i>	Ardabil*	Ardabil*	Western Azerbaijan*
	Western Azerbaijan*	Western Azerbaijan*	Eastern Azerbaijan*
	Eastern Azerbaijan*	Eastern Azerbaijan*	Golestan*
	Bushehr	Bushehr	Hormozgan*
	Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari	Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari	Ilam*
	Isfahan	Isfahan	Kermanshah*
	Fars	Fars	Kurdistan*
	Golestan*	Gilan*	Lurestan*
	Hamadan	Golestan*	Sistan and Baluchestan*
	Hormozgan*	Hamadan	
	Ilam*	Hormozgan*	
	Kerman	Ilam*	
	Kermanshah*	Kerman	
	Khorasan	Kermanshah*	
	Khuzestan*	Khorasan	
	Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad	Khuzestan*	
	Kurdistan*	Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad	
	Markazi	Kurdistan*	
	Qazvin*	Lurestan*	
	Qom	Markazi	
	Semnan	Mazandaran*	
	Sistan and Baluchestan*	Qazvin*	
	Tehran	Qom	
	Yazd	Semnan	
	Zanjan*	Sistan and Baluchestan*	
		Tehran	
		Yazd	
		Zanjan*	

(continued)

TABLE 9.2. (*continued*)

	1997	2001	First round, 2005
	Gilan*		Ardabil*
	Lurestan*		Bushehr
	Mazandaran*		Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari
			Isfahan
			Fars
			Gilan*
			Hamadan
			Kerman
No Support for			Southern Khorasan
Reform			Khorasan-e Razavi
<i>Any province with</i>			Northern Khorasan*
<i>less than 50% of</i>			Khuzestan*
<i>the popular vote in</i>			Kohgiluyeh and
<i>support for reform</i>			Boyer Ahmad
			Markazi
			Mazandaran*
			Qazvin*
			Qom
			Semnan
			Tehran
			Yazd
			Zanjan*

Note: Asterisk denotes the presence of ethnic minority groups that collectively constitute greater than 50% of the population of each province.

Source: Based on various data from the Ministry of the Interior.

among the ethnolinguistic minorities.²⁴ Moreover, the embryonic democracies that emerged in the eight provinces with ethnolinguistic minorities that constitute the majority of their population, can be seen as facilitated by strong indigenous leadership willing to address the needs of the local ethnic minorities.

This support for reform by lower-income groups echoes the argument that economic grievances, among other factors (such as demands for social and cultural liberalization), have been significant campaign issues that have determined the outcome of the national elections. After the first round of 2005 presidential elections, the political debate soon shifted focus to socioeconomic grievances of the lower classes and those living in disadvantaged provinces.

And this focus on economic issues motivated the lower-income groups not only to participate in the elections but, in the second round of elections, to vote in favor of the populist antireform candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who promised to address their economic grievances.

However, analysis of voting patterns also suggests that, in addition to having economic grievances, the ethnolinguistic minority voters were responding to the discriminatory “homogenization” policies of the central government. This is particularly evident in the peripheral provinces home to Azeris, Kurds, Turkmen, and Baluchis; the combined effect of these economic and cultural grievances accounts for their continued support of reform. That is, although the provinces with ethnolinguistic minorities are also poor, rural, and less literate, their voting behavior is representative of these provinces’ ethnic minorities. Although we cannot confidently quantify the individual motives that stimulated this causal relationship, given the aggregate nature of the electoral results, we can look at a qualitative explanation of the core cultural grievances shared by most ethnic-minority groups in Iran.

To begin, although ethnolinguistic and religious differences in Iran have often been downplayed or ignored by the central government, Iran is a significantly diverse state. This includes religious differences between the Shi’a majority and the Sunni minority, as well as ethnic differences between the estimated 51 percent Persian majority and the remaining ten ethnolinguistic minorities constituting the other 49 percent of the population. Moreover, these minorities are predominantly located in the peripheral provinces of the northwest and southeast—the same eight provinces that have fostered democratic growth.

Since the formation of the modern state in Iran, the central government has adopted a homogenizing nation-building policy toward the ethnolinguistic minority groups, which has resulted in a chronic imbalance and a significant political, socioeconomic, and sociocultural disparity between the center and the periphery. The fact that people in these ethnolinguistic provinces have supported the reformist candidates could perhaps be seen as their attempts to improve their conditions via a liberalization agenda that sought equality and representation via the rule of law. Hence, support for reform was strong in those areas where opposition to the government’s centralizing policies was strongest, and democratization progressed in areas where ethnic minorities with indigenous leadership were strongest. However, given the limited degree to which the reform policies were implemented, these expectations were not met.

Nevertheless, these traditionally reformist voters continued to vote for reformist candidates until they were given only a choice between two conservative candidates, as in the second round of the 2005 presidential elections. Although this period witnessed an expansive ideological realignment toward conservative dominance, the geographical realignment was limited to traditional urban reformist strongholds (socioeconomically aggrieved voters) and failed to affect

the peripheral ethnic-minority-dominated provinces (socioculturally aggrieved voters). These results show the continued significance of ethnic minorities in the Iranian political system, a voting bloc that remains ideologically opposed to conservatism and desirous of social and political liberalization. Indeed, the results of the second-round presidential elections reiterate the notion of multiple strata of grievances among the Iranian population, manifested as an ideological split between sociocultural and socioeconomic interests.

HOW GROUP GRIEVANCES INFLUENCED THE PRESIDENTIAL VOTE

When Iranian voters faced only a choice between two conservative candidates, there was a geographic realignment of the voting population. Voters with sociocultural grievances (as mentioned above, those in the peripheral ethnic-minority-dominated provinces) supported the pragmatic Rafsanjani as a “reformist by proxy,” while voters with socioeconomic grievances (mostly the lower-income urban youth and workers) ideologically realigned to support the hard-line populist Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

In essence, Rafsanjani’s pragmatic conservative platform presented a different concept of reform to the electorate that appealed to some reformists, notably those with sociocultural grievances. In fact, at this point, the reformists faced the problem of having to fight to hold onto their own constituency. They were not in a position to promise democracy through the elections, and they had nothing else with which to appeal to the electorate. So for many voters, conservative pragmatism appeared as the only viable option—at least in terms of delivering on sociocultural and foreign policy issues. Indeed, many Iranians believed that a conservative president would be better placed to resist pressure from the supreme leader and his coterie of powerful clerical leaders. The success with which conservatives made inroads into the reformist base is exemplified by the endorsement of Qalibaf’s conservative campaign received from the reformist newspaper *Sharq*, whose editorial board consisted of veteran pro-democracy activists of the Khatami period.

The geographic basis of Rafsanjani’s support in the second-round elections reveals the shift in geographical alignment. The maps in figures 9.3 and 9.4 capture this phenomenon, showing Rafsanjani’s support correlating almost perfectly with traditional reformist support (as shown in fig. 9.2 earlier)—low in urban areas and high in rural peripheries. Figure 9.4 reveals the limited extent of this realignment in the traditional reformist voting bloc, indicating that there was limited voter participation in these peripheral regions (such as Kurdistan).

The resemblance between the two maps is not coincidental. In their approximation of the pragmatic conservative agenda, the ethnic minority voters who participated in the second round cast their ballots in support of Rafsanjani, the conservative candidate who would most likely offer minorities increased

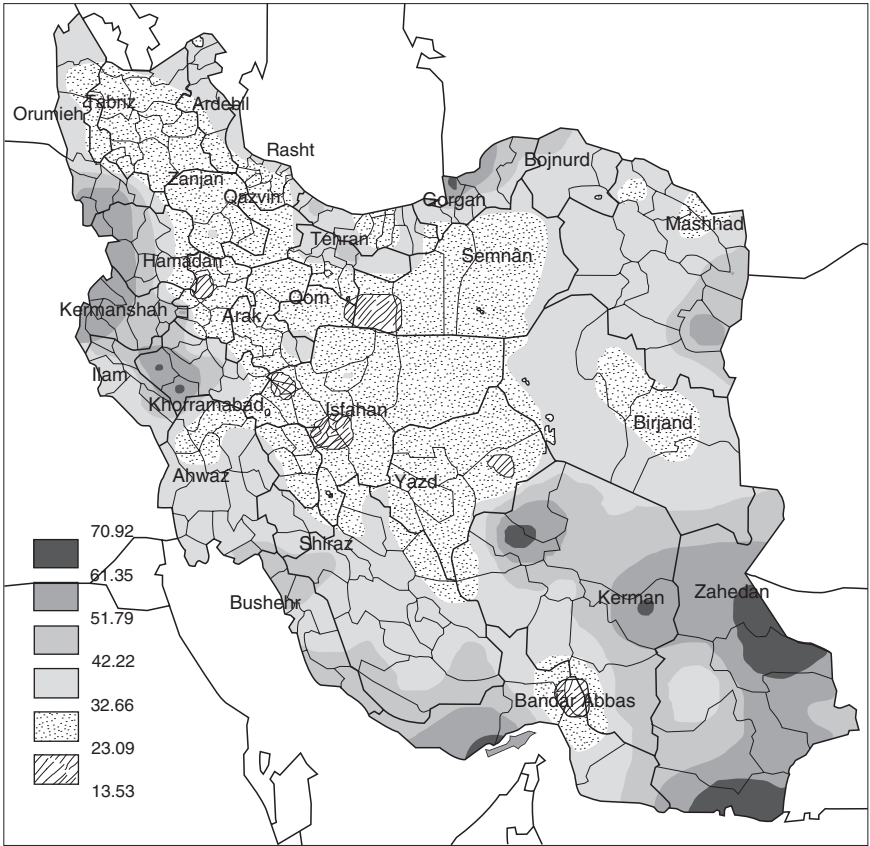


FIGURE 9.3. Voter support for Rafsanjani, second round, 2005.

Source: Bernard Hourcade, “The presidential elections of June 2005 in Iran: A geographic analysis,” working paper, Paris: Mondes iranien et indien, CNRS, n.d., p. 5. Cartographie Philcarto (Kriging), copyright CNRS Mondes iranien et indien, 2006.

rights and improved opportunities. But likewise, as evident in the significant decrease in peripheral voter turnout between the first and second rounds, many ethnic-minority voters did not accept Rafsanjani as a sufficient proxy for reform. This was the only way these voters could register their dissent and attempt to deny the winner a popular mandate. However, this voter boycott decreased support for moderate conservative Rafsanjani and subsequently gave rise to the hard-line populist Ahmadinejad, who received a wider majority of the vote.²⁵

Rafsanjani’s platform was too similar to that of the failed reformists. Nevertheless, he received votes from traditional reformists in the lower-income ethnolinguistic minorities of the provinces, who were protesting the government’s

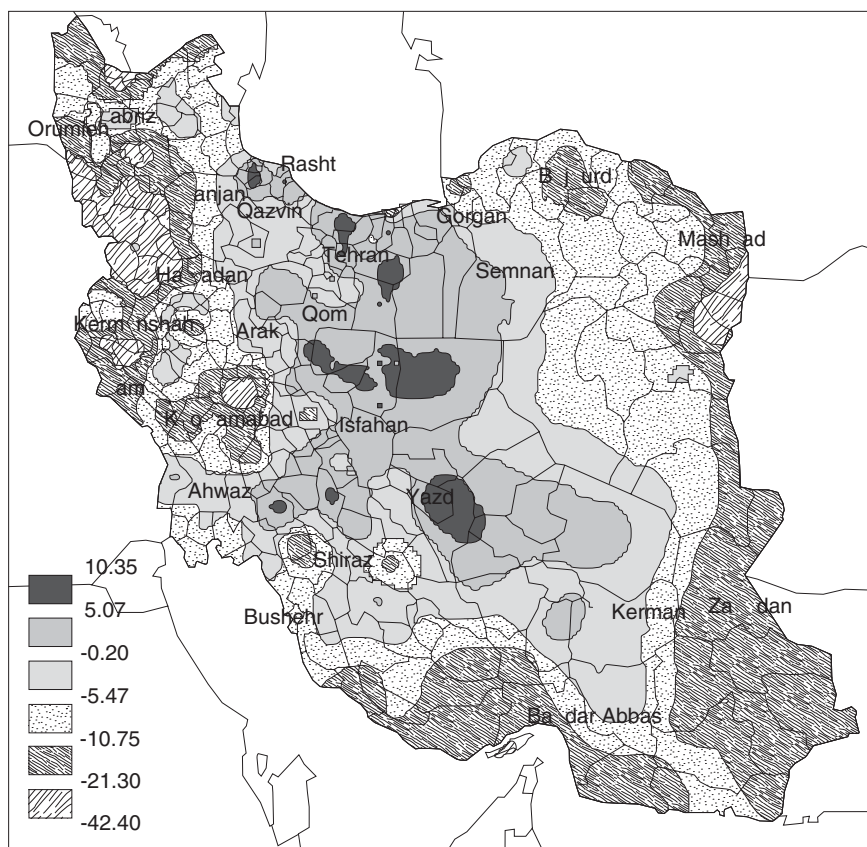


FIGURE 9.4. Change in voter participation, 2005.

Note: A map of Iran that highlights the change in general voter participation between the first and second rounds of the 2005 presidential election.

Source: Bernard Hourcade, "The presidential elections of June 2005 in Iran: A geographic analysis," working paper, Paris: Mondes iranien et indien, CNRS, n.d., p. 2. Cartographie Philcarto, copyright CNRS Mondes iranien et indien, 2006.

homogenization efforts as well as signaling disapproval of the hard-line conservative Ahmadinejad.

Thus, as mentioned earlier the geographical realignment toward conservatism is limited to the urban, literate, affluent areas where middle-class socioeconomically aggrieved voters cast ballots in support of Ahmadinejad. Since the reformists' economic policies had let down the socioeconomically aggrieved voters by failing to ameliorate the country's economic conditions during the previous eight years, these traditionally reformist voters aligned with the conservatives. Given that Rafsanjani's policies were too similar to those of the

reformists, as well as the widespread allegations of corruption against him, Ahmadinejad's populist policies were attractive to these disenchanted voters from urban cities such as Hamadan, Qom, and Isfahan. As the map in figure 9.5 confirms, the geographical realignment toward Ahmadinejad is limited to the more urban, literate, and affluent areas highlighted in a darker shade.

It is therefore evident that, while voters with sociocultural grievances supported Rafsanjani, voters with socioeconomic grievances supported Ahmadinejad. Given that neither candidate attracted significantly more voters to the political spectrum, Ahmadinejad's electoral victory over Rafsanjani is most logically attributed to the fact that, while both candidates were competing for

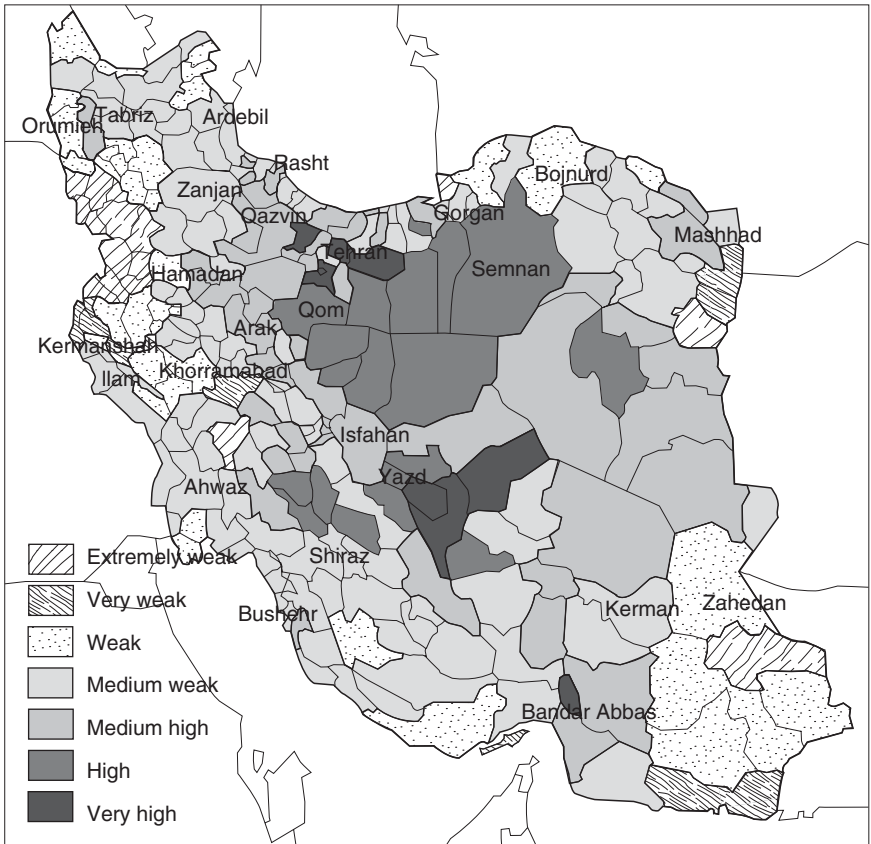


FIGURE 9.5. Voter support for Ahmadinejad, second round, 2005.

Source: Bernard Hourcade, "The presidential elections of June 2005 in Iran: A geographic analysis," working paper, Paris: Mondes iranien et indien, CNRS, n.d., p. 6. Cartographie Philcarto, copyright CNRS Mondes iranien et indien, 2006.

the former reformist voters, Ahmadinejad received a greater number of votes from those with socioeconomic grievances than Rafsanjani did from voters with sociocultural grievances. It is also clear that consistent support for reform from the peripheral ethnic-minority voters suggests that sociocultural grievances are greater than economic ones. Thus, despite ideological and geographical realignments that characterize the emergence of this new conservative politics, our findings emphasize the continued importance of ethnic minorities as a voting bloc ideologically opposed to conservatism and desirous of social and political liberalization.

The interesting twist in this second-round runoff was that Ahmadinejad also benefited from greater support than Rafsanjani among traditional conservative voters. This was attributed to efforts by the Basij and mosque networks on Election Day in getting out the conservative voters to cast their ballots for Ahmadinejad.

CONCLUSION

The rise of a new group of radical conservatives, the Developers (DII) coalition, during the 2005 presidential elections—and its subsequent consolidation with appointments to various executive positions in the state system, including sectors dealing with the economy—changed the contours of Iranian politics and created a new context for not only domestic affairs but also for the country's international posture. However, given the experience of past elections and DII's failure to improve socioeconomic conditions and deliver on its populist campaign promises, it is possible that many of the voters who supported radical conservatives in 2005 will cast their votes for a more pragmatic and reform-oriented candidate in the next election. Perhaps Rafsanjani's rise to the top position at the Assembly of Leadership Experts in September 2007 could set the tone in that direction. Nevertheless, despite inherent reformist tendencies among the electorate, this will not necessarily secure victories for reformist candidates in the upcoming elections.²⁶

Conservative-dominated institutional barriers may continue to ward off the reformists and resist liberalization in order to maintain their hold on Iranian domestic and international politics. Furthermore, a different and more pragmatic conservative coalition is likely to pursue a populist provincial policy, similar to that of Ahmadinejad's, in an attempt to build support with these constituencies to a populist forum in the 2009 election. However, a populist provincial policy, which in the past has aimed at mobilizing the periphery (whether geographic or in terms of wealth and stratification), may not win over the ethnic and religious minorities or address their concerns with marginalization. In fact, conservatives' populist policy regarding the ethnic and religious minorities, as manifested under Ahmadinejad, has proved more problematic

compared to that of Khatami and the reformist Participation Front (IIPF), which had exhibited greater flexibility and accommodation.

Finally, the recurring tug of war in Iran's electoral landscape can be portrayed not so much as a struggle between neatly quantifiable factions with predictable performance but as ad hoc coalitions that form and reform, contributing to unpredictable electoral behavior among voters. Although managing a collection of coalitions and constituencies may well be viewed as a sign of the fluidity and flexibility of the Islamic republic in coping with social and domestic politics, in effect the vetting mechanism presents a real danger to the electoral system. Through its policy of protecting vested interests by setting limits on competition and freedom of choice, the existing vetting method results in what many among the electorate would regard as an inadequate and unsatisfactory range of candidates, thus reducing for them the significance of the electoral process as a whole.

NOTES

The authors wish to record their gratitude to Kaveh Ehsani, Anoushiravan Ehteshami, and Ali Rahnama for their helpful suggestions and comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. For Khatami's views, see Mohammad Khatami, *Az Donya-ye Shahr ta Shahr-e Donya* (From the City's World to the World's City), Tehran: Nashr-e Ney, 1997; and *Eslam, Rowhaniyyat, va Enqelab-e Eslami* (Islam, the Ulama, and the Islamic Revolution), Tehran: Tarh-e Naw, 2000. For debates on reform and democratic change in Iran during Khatami period, see Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, "Iran's democracy debate," *Middle East Policy* 11(2), summer 2004, pp. 94–106.

2. See *Iran Daily*, January 10, 2005, available at <http://irandaily.ir/1383/2187/html/national.htm#37311>.

3. See, for example, Mohammad-Reza Sardari, *Sharq*, February 26, 2005. Accordingly, the electoral history of Iran since the Revolution could be summarized as follows: Abolhasan Bani-Sadr, the first president of the Islamic republic, was a conservative candidate (from the Jame'eh-ye Rowhaniyat-e Mobarez [Association of Militant Clergy]), and his prime minister, Mostafa Mir-Salim, was another conservative candidate (from the Hey'at-ha-ye Mo'talefeh-ye Eslami [Coalition of Islamic Associations]), but they could not work together or accomplish their objectives and their government collapsed. Next was the government of Mohammad-Reza Mahdavi-Kani (following the third presidential elections), which came to power after the assassination of Mohammad-Ali Rajai and Mohammad-Javad Bahrani. Mahdavi-Kani formed a coalition government, with Mir-Hossein Musavi as prime minister. Accordingly, the composition of Musavi's cabinet was a good reflection of factional politics, with conservatives, such as Ali-Akbar Velayati, Ahmad Tavakkoli, Hibibollah Asgarowladi, and Morteza Nabavi in key ministries of foreign affairs, labor, commerce, and post office and telecommunication serving a more pragmatic prime minister. Likewise, in the second Rafsanjani government (1993–1997), the ministries of the interior, culture and Islamic guidance, and finance were in conservative hands, but the conservatives did not have full control over the cabinet or the government as a whole. Pro-reform analysts thus argued that subsequently all the conservative hopes for a clear victory in the 1997 presidential elections did not materialize when Mohammad Khatami came to office and their candidate Ali-Akbar Nateq-

Nuri lost—in that election Supreme Leader Khamenei had openly supported Nateq-Nuri, a factor that in election terms worked against the latter. This time the pro-reform mindset was such that Iran would see another coalition government, consisting of the old elements from diverse platforms. For a detailed list of various ministerial appointments in six governments prior to the 2005 presidential elections, see www.javannewspaper.com/1384/840524/politic.htm#s82326. For 1997 presidential elections, see Ali Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000, pp. 82–109. For 1997 developments, see also various essays in *MERIP* 212(3), fall 1999, special issue, “Pushing the limits: Iran’s Islamic revolution at twenty,” guest ed. Kaveh Ehsani; note in particular Ehsani, “Do-e khordad and the specter of democracy,” pp. 10–11. See also Abdol-Ali Rezai and Abbas Abdi, eds., *Entekhab-e Naw: Tahlil-ha-ye Jame’eh-Shenasaneh az Vaqe’eh-ye Dovvom-e Khordad* (New Choice: Sociological Analyses on the Do-e Khordad Event), Tehran: Tarh-e Naw, 1998.

4. From a list of 1,014 prospective candidates, the Guardian Council initially approved only six and then, following Khamenei’s intervention, increased the list to eight candidates.

5. See Saïd Amir Arjomand, “The reform movement and the debate on modernity and tradition in contemporary Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 34, 2002, pp. 719–731.

6. Vali Nasr, “The conservative wave rolls on,” *Journal of Democracy* 16(4), 2005, pp. 9–22, here p. 16. For a background discussion on conservative consolidation, see Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, “Conservative consolidation in Iran,” *Survival* 47(2), summer 2005, pp. 175–190; for a comprehensive analysis, see Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran’s Silent Revolution*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2007.

7. Although Mostafa Moin and Mohsen Mehralizadeh were initially rejected by the Guardian Council, after significant public objection and a letter from the supreme leader, in a reversal their candidacy was approved by the Guardian Council on May 23, 2005.

8. See *Sharq*, February 14, 2005.

9. It may further be noted that the main office of Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat in Tehran (i.e., the Allameh Branch) had unofficially boycotted the elections, and one of its leaders, Ali Afshari, subsequently received a prison term for organizing the students against the government; see <http://chronicle.com/daily/2005/09/2005092807n.htm>.

10. For a more detailed discussion on the Rafsanjani period, see Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 105–126.

11. Despite losing the election to Ahmadinejad in the second-round runoff, Rafsanjani remained an advocate of his pragmatic policy and used his position as chairman of the Expediency Council to criticize President Ahmadinejad’s administration, thus reflecting a rift in the conservative block.

12. This reformist faction was primarily concerned with Iran’s economic development, and following the 2005 elections it became a major critic of President Ahmadinejad’s hard-line policies.

13. Iranian Labor News Agency (ILNA), November 17, 2004, available at www.ilna.ir/shownews.asp?code=147343&code1=15.

14. Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), “First round presidential voting survey,” March 14, 2005.

15. Iranian Students Polling Agency (ISPA), “Second round presidential voting survey,” June 23, 2004. It is important to note that, owing to the limited availability of pre-voting polls conducted in Iran, we have to resort to a comparison of ISPA and IRNA polls. Although this raises methodological concerns, we controlled for this problem by ensuring that both polls

employed similar methodology: 1,200 respondents were interviewed in the capital cities of 12 provinces in each survey: Tehran, Khorasan, Isfahan, Eastern Azerbaijan, Khuzestan, Fars, Kermanshah, Hormozgan, Mazandaran, Sistan and Baluchestan, and Yazd.

16. See Mehdi Karrubi's open letter to Ayatollah Khamenei dated Sunday, June 19, 2005, available at <http://mag.gooya.com/president84/archives/031422.php>. On the same day, Rafsanjani echoed Karrubi's concerns; see www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/06/050619_mf_hashemi_statement.shtml. Also on the same day, the Ministry of Intelligence issued a statement rejecting Karrubi's allegations; see <http://mag.gooya.com/president84/archives/031412.php>.

17. A. William Samii, "Dissent in Iranian elections: Reasons and implications," *Middle East Journal* 58(3), summer 2004, pp. 403–423.

18. See Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1963.

19. See Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963; and Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994.

20. Modernization theorists, such as Lipset (see note 18 above), contend that the relationship between economic and political development is positive and linear, suggesting that the correlates of industrialization—urbanization, literacy, and GDP/capita—should serve as strong predictors of the level of support for a transition to democracy. In the case of Iran, observers suggest that these correlates result in greater support for reform and political competition.

21. See, for example, Michael McFaul, "Chinese dreams, Persian realities," *Journal of Democracy* 16(4), 2005, pp. 74–82.

22. For a quantitative analysis, see Kaveh-Cyrus Sanandaji, "The emergence of embryonic democracies: Foundations for future democracy in Iran?" Senior honors thesis, Department of Political Science, University of California, San Diego, 2007.

23. For a detailed list of provinces that registered less than 50 percent support for reformist candidates in the 1997, 2001, and first-round 2005 presidential elections, see table 9.2.

24. As the second-round runoff occurred between two nonreformist candidates, it requires a separate analysis, given later in this chapter.

25. For an electoral map of Ahmadinejad's votes, see Bernard Hourcade, "In the heart of Iran: The electorate of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad," *MERIP* 241, 2006, pp. 10–11.

26. Although this chapter was written prior to the 2008 parliamentary elections, its findings were confirmed by the elections' results. The electorate overwhelmingly supported the more moderate candidates aligned with Qalibaf and Larijani, and opposed the more radical candidates aligned with Ahmadinejad. Moreover, the reformists were unable to overcome the institutional barriers, such as the Guardian Council's vetting process, in order to reenter the political arena. For a case study of the 2008 parliamentary elections, see Kaveh-Cyrus Sanandaji, "The Eighth Majles elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A division in conservative ranks and the politics of moderation," forthcoming in *Iranian Studies* 42(4), 2009.



ETHNICITY AND RELIGIOUS MINORITY POLITICS IN IRAN

Nayereh Tohidi

Contemporary Iran, somewhat similar to its pre-Islamic Persian empire, is a heterogeneous, multiethnic (if not multinational), and multilingual country. Many Iranians, scholars among them, are hesitant to acknowledge or even talk about the reality of the ethnonational diversity of Iran, either out of ignorance, prejudice, or chauvinism, or from the fear of a potential movement for separatism and secession. This fear has been due, in part, to external interventions. Attempts to fan ethnic tensions in Iran by some regional powers, to gain political concessions from the country's central government, has been one reason for suspicion toward any ethnic-related demands, thus the association of ethnic issues with national security. In the past, the Soviet Union and pan-Turkists of Turkey were seen as the primary encouragers of ethnic tensions in Iran. At present, playing the ethnic card has become part of the U.S. strategy of "regime change." The continuous crisis in U.S.–Iran relations, therefore, has exacerbated the sensitivity and significance of the ethnicity question in Iran.

As of 2000, the total population of Iran was estimated to be 67 million, with approximately 98 percent of the people Muslim; Shi'a make up 89 percent and Sunni 10 percent of the country's total population.¹ Non-Muslim religious groups are a clear numerical minority (about 1 percent of the population), yet sociopolitically, economically, and culturally they make up a significant portion of Iran's society. Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, Bahais, and others constitute the non-Muslim population.

Ethnic differences lay at the intersections of religious differences in Iran. Most of the Sunnis (as a religious minority in Iran) constitute distinct ethnic minorities as well, residing in the Kurdistan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Golestan (formerly Gorgan), and Khuzestan provinces. Not all Shi'a are ethnic Persians. According to Eliz Sanasarian, "If language is utilized as the main distinguishing feature of ethnicity, Persian (*Farsi*), despite being the official language, is the mother tongue of barely half of the population of Iran."² Other languages include Turkic

(of different dialects such as Azeri, Turkmen, Qashqai, and Shahsavan), Kurdish, Baluchi, Luri, Arabic, Gilaki, Assyrian, and Armenian. Sanasarian points out that of the five dominant non-Muslim religious minorities, three of them (the Bahais, the Jews, and the Zoroastrians) have Persian as their mother tongue. Ethnically and linguistically, Turkic-speaking people are the largest minority in Iran.

There are no reliable or exact figures about the sizes of the ethnic minorities in Iran. It is harder to find demographic information on ethnic groups than on the religious minorities. The figures presented here, then, are the estimates frequently found in official and standard sources.³ As of 2003, the ethnic classifications are estimated as: Persian (51 percent), Azeri (24 percent), Gilaki and Mazandarani (8 percent), Kurd (7 percent), Arab (3 percent), Lur (2 percent), Baluch (2 percent), Turkmen (2 percent), and other groups—Armenian, Jew, Assyrian, Qashqai, Shahsavan, and others (1 percent).⁴

Though the words “Persian” and “Iranian” are often used interchangeably, as of the 1990s only a little over half of the Iranian population is ethnically Persian. Available estimates of the population size of the Turkic people vary; the official estimate in the mid-1980s was 14 million, and in a conservative estimation, they make up about 26 percent of the Iranian population. Azeri ethnonationalist activists, however, claim that number to be 24 million, hence as high as 35 percent of the Iranian population. Iranian Turks are not a unified collectivity; they are divided along Shi’a–Sunni, subethnic, tribal, family, and local lines. Many Shi’a Turks (in particular Azeris) have assimilated into the Persian milieu.

THE STATUS OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN IRAN

Any assessment or analysis of the status and rights of ethnic and religious minorities in Iran, as elsewhere, has to be done on three levels: the state institutions (e.g., the constitution, legal rights, state policy, state ideology); the response of the minorities, or the state-minorities relations; and the interreligious groups or interethnic relations—that is, the way the majority group (be it religious or ethnic) perceives, feels, and treats or interacts with the minorities (i.e., patterns of prejudice and discrimination that exist in the society at large).⁵

Addressing all three levels of assessment is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, particular attention will be made here to the role of the state, as scholars agree that, “the state plays a critical role in designing and implementing minority policy,” especially in a state-centered country such as Iran, where the state is omnipresent in both private and public spheres of people’s lives. In this context, I examine some general patterns concerning state policy and the ideology of the ruling elite in Iran vis-à-vis ethnic and religious minorities.

In her book *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Eliz Sanasarian has used Milton Esman’s formulation for the various approaches taken by the state elites

toward ethnic diversity and the minority question.⁶ According to this formulation, the state elites in different countries have generally shown two distinct preferences.

First, if the state elites refuse to accept or tolerate pluralism in its society, instead it will tend to promote homogenization or deppluralization. The goal is to make everyone part of a collective whole and to do away with particularities. Assimilation either through coercion or through “positive incentives” (by, for example, rewarding those who acculturate) is a method of enforcing state policy. In extreme cases, homogenization involves population transfers and extermination, including genocide.⁷ Sanasarian suggests that the Pahlavi state’s policy on ethnionationals and religious minorities was shaped by the goal of homogenizing society and doing away with diversity—to make everyone in an ethnic and religious minority into an “Iranian.”⁸

Second, if the state accepts pluralism as an inevitable fact—“a permanent and legitimate reality” of society—Esman argues, then the policy alters radically. It becomes one of “regulating” or “managing” religious and ethnic conflicts and preventing ethnic uprisings and interreligious clashes. This approach may implement a variation of federalism and regional autonomy. Using the case of the United States, as discussed by, for example, Crawford Young suggests carefully designed measures and rules based on the principles of bargaining, compromise, and legal equality. Equality for the individual and collectivity, institutionalized access to authoritative allocation at the national level, and guaranteed security are seen as necessary tools against cultural oppression and coerced assimilation.⁹

However, the state’s accepting religious and ethnic pluralism does not necessarily preclude coercive measures and policy. The third possibility is that the state may coercively exclude certain minorities and “confer on one dominant ethnic or religious segment a monopoly of political participation, economic opportunity, and cultural prestige.”¹⁰ Or, as is more common for this approach, state officials may employ a policy of subordination whereby the state “generally offers the minority some rights, although they are inferior to the rights enjoyed by members of the dominant community.”¹¹ Under circumstances of subordination, a minority group may enjoy “freedom of enterprise” or even a higher per capita income than the majority, yet it also experiences “significant state-sponsored discrimination” in other areas of life. The form and nature of discrimination may vary from country to country and minority to minority.¹²

The Islamic republic falls under the third approach. As Sanasarian states, “In contrast to the Pahlavi state, the clerical-led regime has shown acceptance of the permanence of [the ethno-religious] pluralistic nature of society. It is an accepted practice for parliamentary deputies to introduce their provincial/ethnic identity during their speeches on the floor. (This would have been a betrayal

of the “Iranianness” of the state under the previous regime.) Yet, as the Esman model suggests, acceptance does not preclude the use or the threat of coercion. The policy concerning constitutionally recognized non-Muslim minorities has differed from those non-Muslims not recognized in the constitution.”¹³ The Bahai and the Christian converts remain excluded and have been targets of violence and persecution, for example.

According to state ideology, Armenians, Assyrians, Jews, and Zoroastrians are “legitimate people” (*ahl al-dhimma*, or protected people)—*ahl al-kitab* (people of the Book, or followers of revealed religions)—hence they possess some recognized and valuable rights (e.g., the ability to vote for their own deputies, the right to assemble, the right to practice their religion freely, and so forth), yet they are excluded (overtly or covertly) from other rights and are clearly a subordinated collectivity. The theocratic nature of the state and Islamist ideology pursued by state elites have excluded non-Muslim and non-Shi’i religious minorities, as well as many secular Muslims, from access to membership in the polity, especially with regard to the real organs of power and decision making.

Since its inception, the Islamic Republic of Iran has institutionalized discrimination or segmentation among its citizens on the basis of religion and gender, as manifested in its constitution, state policies, and state ideology. This systemic discrimination has explicitly favored men over women and Muslims over non-Muslims, and above all Shi’i over Sunni and other Muslim sects.¹⁴ In hindsight, it is no surprise that the first significant protests against the Islamic republic were carried out in 1979 by women and by ethnic and religious minorities (Kurds and Turkmens). When analyzing the minority politics in the Islamic republic, it is important to note that the central problem with regard to gender politics lies within the clearly male-biased laws, including the constitution. With regard to ethnic politics, it is not the law or the constitution as much, but mostly the failure to implement the rights enshrined in the constitution, that has been viewed as the primary problem. That is why in campaigning for their rights, women in Iran have directly challenged the constitution and the legal system, while the ethnic groups have emphasized policy issues.

For example, Article 19 of the Iranian constitution states: “The people of Iran regardless of ethnic and tribal origin enjoy equal rights. Color, race, language and the like will not be cause for privilege.”¹⁵ It can be noted that, while discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and race is ruled out, religion and sex are not mentioned, implying that these two can be causes for privilege and discrimination.

Article 15 of the constitution provides the following ethnic minority rights: along with Persian, “the official and common language and script of the people of Iran,” which is the language of official documents, correspondence,

and statements, as well as textbooks, “the use of local and ethnic languages in their press and mass media is allowed. The teaching of their literature in their schools, along with Persian language instruction is also permitted.”¹⁶ In practice, however, these rights have seldom been implemented. It can further be noted that this article does not obligate—but only allows—the state or private sector to provide instruction of literature or presentation of mass media in ethnic languages.

Articles 12, 13, 14, and 64 of the constitution pertain to religious minorities. As mentioned earlier, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians have been referred to in the constitution as recognized faith communities. According to Article 64, the Zoroastrians and Jews will each have one representative in the Islamic Consultative Assembly (the Majles) of 290 members. The Assyrian and Chaldean Christians will together have one representative, and the Armenian Christians of the south and the north will each elect one representative.

The following examples are among the concrete and practical implications of the discriminatory bases in the constitutions:

(1) As identified by human/women and minority rights lawyers such as Shirin Ebadi and progressive clerics such as Mohsen Kadivar, there are at least three bases over which the ruling law and penal code in Iran are explicitly discriminatory: sex, sexuality, and gender (bias in favor of the male and the heterosexual); religion (Muslim over non-Muslim and Shi’a over Sunni); social position and occupation (clergy over lay people). These have rendered obvious legal privileges for Shi’i Muslims and covert discriminations against Sunnis and non-Muslims in employment and in holding powerful public office. As a result, the head of all the ministries, the media (state TV and radio) the president, vice presidents, members of the Guardian Council, Expediency Council, and the Assembly of Leadership Experts, and finally the supreme leader (or the supreme jurist) all have been either by legal requirement or tacit agreement strictly male Shi’i.

(2) Only in the year 2002, thanks to the reformers’ efforts in the previous Majles, was the blood money (*diyah*) of Muslims and non-Muslims equalized. Yet, when a Christian dies, if he or she has a Muslim heir among his or her heirs, the Muslim heir can take over the shares of all the rest.

(3) The social label or adjective *aqaliyat* (minority) on members of the religious minorities and placement of the sign *AQALIYAT* on the windows of stores and public sites belonging to religious minorities have had mixed consequences: it freed them from scrutiny for adherence to Islamic religious codes, but it also excluded them as the “stranger” or the “other” (*gheyr-e khodi*), the one who is separate from “us” (*khody*). Under the Islamic republic, as Sanasarian argues, this has led to an institutionalized “otherness.”

Accordingly, “religious minorities have been segmented in word, thought, and action. . . . Before 1979, everyone was an ‘Irani’ albeit in pretense; after the Revolution, Irani was replaced by aqaliat, Bahai, and Sunni. ‘Hamvatan’ [fellow countryman/countrywoman] was replaced by ‘Muslim sisters and brothers.’ These theocratic state designations were reflected in school textbooks, communal and national commentaries, and debates.”¹⁷ Initially, deputies representing religious minorities expressed objection to the use of the word *aqaliyat* in Article 13 of the constitution; they preferred the word *javame’* (communities), but now they use it in reference to themselves as well to ensure continuity and legitimacy, and when possible they push the boundaries within which they can maneuver.¹⁸

Like many aspects of society in postrevolutionary Iran, the status of religious and ethnic minority groups have remained unsettled. During the years immediately after the Revolution, there was a revival of ethnic cultures and a proliferation of publications in various ethnic languages. But this trend did not last long. Some positive ethnic characters or ethnic images, speaking in their ethnic languages, have made brief appearances in recent films made by Iranian filmmakers (something that was absent under the previous regime), but most other cultural manifestations of ethnic diversity have been constrained.

With the passing of years, and especially with the rise of the reform movement, flexibility and political and ideological divisions within the clerics and the ruling elite have resulted in contradictions of policy and practice. The presidential election in 2005, for example, displayed great fluidity and numerous contradiction vis-à-vis minority politics.

THE ETHNIC FACTOR IN THE NINTH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Compared with previous elections, the last presidential election (2005) was clearly influenced by ethnic factors. This ought to be of special importance to policy-makers, especially to those in Iran who insist that “Iran has no ethnic problem.” When Islamist authorities portray Iran as a cohesive Shi’i state, and secular nationalists (especially monarchists) describe it as a cohesive “Persian nation of Aryan race,” they brand any warnings about minority issues as “artificial,” “foreign instigated,” and “divisive,” thus avoiding serious scholarly debate on ethnic and minority issues.

There have been ample signs, however, of rising ethnonationalism and increased alienation among Iran’s ethnic and religious minorities in recent years, to the extent that some authorities have issued warnings. For instance, in late 2004, during the State Week (*Hafteh-ye Dowlat*), the minister of intelligence, Ali Younesi, reported that the nature of future crises in Iran will not necessarily be political but, rather, they will be ethnic and social.¹⁹ He, like other

authorities in the present and former regimes, however, claimed that foreign elements are trying to stir up sectarian and ethnic differences.

Candidates and Their Campaigns

Two months before the presidential election, the oil-rich Khuzestan province became the scene of bloody ethnic-related riots and confrontations. In their election campaigns, therefore, most of the presidential candidates placed special importance on their slogans and promises concerning ethnic and religious minorities. While some candidates gave lip service to the ethnic issues, others promised to implement Articles 15 and 19 of the constitution, and also to allocate a share of high government positions to ethnic minorities, especially non-Shi'i minorities. For instance, Mostafa Moin visited Sistan and Baluchestan province in March 2005, and in an unusual appeasing gesture to Sunnis, conducted the ritual prayer alongside the province's high-ranking Sunni cleric, Mowlavi Abdolhamid.

In early March 2005, the cleric and presidential candidate Mehdi Karrubi visited the city of Ahwaz in the Khuzestan province, and he praised the role of "brave young people, particularly Arab, Lur, and the tribes of Khuzestan."²⁰ Also in Tehran, while meeting with some activists of the House of Ethnic Groups (Khaneh-ye Aqوام), Karrubi listened to their demands and promised that, under his presidency, the status of ethnic minorities would improve.²¹ Conservative candidate Ali Larijani, too, while speaking in Maragheh (in the Azerbaijan province) claimed that he had been in favor of "preserving Iran's ethnic identities and reviving the culture, arts, music, and language of various ethnic groups, including Azeri-speakers." He then traveled to Aq Qal'eh, in the northeastern Golestan province, where in he praised Turkmen people and expressed his "strong opposition to the appointment of nonnative officials to administrative positions in the country's provinces and districts."²²

Another conservative candidate, Mohsen Rezai, met with tribal leaders in Abadan on March 24, 2005, and said, "[w]hen I talk about justice I mean that there should be no difference between the provinces or tribes and we should not have first and second class citizens. In order to realize this... we must treat all ethnic groups equally. In fact a change in our view towards ethnic groups is extremely important and the next government must courageously pursue this issue."²³

Rezai's statement is a clear admission of the existence of ethnic discrimination under the present regime. But what caused more opposition was the statement made by President Khatami's spokesman, Abdullah Ramezanzadeh, a Kurd who previously served as governor of Kurdistan province. During a conference organized by the reformists in the mostly Kurdish town of Kermanshah, Ramezanzadeh said: "We [the Kurds] will only take part in the elections and vote if we are guaranteed to have a share in the power."²⁴ Conservatives

criticized him and pointed out that there were already some Kurds in the government, such as Bijan Namdar-Zanganeh, the petroleum minister, and Massoud Pezeshkian, the health minister. As a result of an outcry against Ramzanzadeh, President Khatami reportedly barred him from taking part in any more election meetings.²⁵ However, Kurdistan's subsequent low turnout in the elections proved Ramezanzadeh's earlier remarks.

Promises Made, Votes Cast

How these ethnic-related promises were received varied among the different ethnic groups. According to Eqbal Rezai, a Kurdish journalist from Sanandaj, people of Kurdistan did not trust the promises candidates made. Turkmens, however, seemed more optimistic about the prospect of such promises being fulfilled, as reported by Ahmad Khatami-Nia, a Turkmen journalist. The reason behind the relative optimism on the part of Turkmens is that, after the Revolution, for the first time a number of district and regional heads were appointed or elected from among native Turkmens.²⁶ In their meetings with the presidential candidates, therefore, Turkmen representatives asked the candidates to address at least their minimum demands. According to Abdolrahman Diyehji, editor of the daily *Sahra*, "the election turn-out was good."²⁷

Some of the conservative ruling clerics, on the other hand, warned against promoting ethnic rights during the presidential campaigns. During his two Friday prayer sermons in late February 2005, Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, secretary of the Guardian Council, scolded the presidential candidates for bringing up "[certain] issues in certain provinces" and that "ethnic sensitivities will be provoked and will result in discord."²⁸ Later he warned that the United States was determined to exploit the rifts and "hatch the same plots against Iran" that it did in Lebanon and Iraq, "fanning the flames" of ethnic and religious differences.²⁹

In response to the above comments, the chair of the Association of Khuzestani Arabs located in Tehran (Beyt al-Arab, or Arab House), Hasan Abbasian, sent an open letter to Ayatollah Jannati, admonishing his "unjust, undemocratic, and un-Islamic" stance on the issue of ethnic minorities. This powerful and long letter written within an Islamic-nationalist framework cites both the Koran and the constitution to support its arguments for ethnic diversity, minority rights, and federalism.³⁰ Abbasian argued that the true Islamic approach toward *mellat* (nation) and *ommat* (faith community) and minority rights is compatible with the internationally accepted definitions and also with the long tradition of ethnic diversity and respect for ethnic rights and cultures in the old tradition of the Islamic Caliphate (from the earliest times to the Ottoman period), and also within the tradition of the Persian empire since the ancient Achaemenids to the Sassanids, to the Islamic era, and under Mongols, Safavids,

Afsharids, and Qajars, arguing that Iran's polity has always contained autonomous emirates with different ethnic groups, nationalities, languages, and cultures. Accordingly, under King Darius, for example, "there were 49 ethnic or racial groups and at least 25 to 30 provinces or federal states that were governed autonomously."³¹

Abbassian continued by saying that "it was only under the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi and his centralized and anti-Islamic dictatorship that a policy of de-ethnicization was established in order to eliminate diverse identities. He imposed the culture and language of one ethnic group, Persian, on all other ethnic groups."³² He further pointed out that, "owing to the special international conditions of the time, British colonialism had dictated this policy to Iran in order to prevent communist influence."³³

He wrote passionately about the poverty and deprivation in Khuzestan, and further pointed out that, "Unfortunately whenever we talk about our ethnic rights, we are accused of treason and separatism." But, he stressed, "Arabs demand Islamic democracy, freedom of speech, respect for the rights of women, religious and ethnic minorities. These demands are in common with what non-Arab Iranians want." He argued that it is only by addressing the valid concerns and by respecting the rights of non-Persian Iranians "who constitute over 50 percent of the country's population," could the country remove excuses for foreign intervention, prevent foreign manipulation of ethnic and religious differences toward secessionism, and become better able to maintain Iran's territorial integrity.³⁴

In sum, the way the 2005 presidential campaign was conducted, as well as the election results, clarified the political map of Iran. It showed that, rather than herdlike and homogeneous, the Iranian citizenry was a differentiated community with important crisscrossing splits in terms of socioeconomic class backgrounds, genders, cultural practices, provincial and ethnic ties, and political aspirations.³⁵ Among other things, the election results indicated strong ethnic-related patterns: in the first round, the five provinces with the lowest turnouts were either Kurdish or Azeri regions.³⁶

Many minority members seem to cast their votes for a candidate who was perceived as more sensitive toward their specific concerns, regardless of factional affiliation. For example, Hasan Abbasian (chair of the Beyt al-Arab, an official organization of the Arabs of Khuzestan) claimed that, "the left or right candidates, regardless of their slogans are the same in the eyes of the Arabs of Khuzestan. What matters for the local people here is which candidate will care for Arabs' concerns and will better address their demands."³⁷

Three out of seven candidates had ethnic ties: Mehdi Karrubi was from Lurestan, Mohsen Mehralizadeh from Azerbaijan, and Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf was a Khorasani Turk. But ironically, Mostafa Moin, who was not associated with any ethnic minority, made more promises on ethnic-related issues

than all the other candidates. The candidates with local and ethnic ties did well in their own provinces. Mohsen Mehralizadeh, an Azeri Turk, won most of his votes from his own region. Karrubi, an ethnic Lur, also received the highest votes in Lurestan. Given the capital's low voter turnout, it appears that national elections are increasingly being decided outside of Tehran; the first-round voter turnout in Tehran was only 33 percent as opposed to 62 percent nationwide.³⁸

THE DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT AND THE ETHNIC QUESTION

Regardless of whether Hasan Abbasian's version of Iran's history or his analysis is accurate or not, his perception of ethnic issues and his ethnic-related demands are shared by many Arab activists, as well as activists from other ethnic groups, except that many of them may use a more secular language.³⁹

Like Abbasian, most ethnic rights activists reject separatism and assert that they want their constitutionally guaranteed rights—that is, implementation of the aforementioned Articles of 15 and 19 of the constitution, as well as Article 48, which requires “just distribution of national incomes among provinces and distribution of economic projects on the basis of needs and potentials of each area,” and Articles 12, 13, 14, and 64 that pertain to religious minorities.

Yet, there has been tension and mistrust between many Iranian pro-democracy or human rights activists and the ethnonationalists who emphasize ethnic and minority rights. This tension is somewhat similar to the one between the nationalists (secular as well as religious) and the women's rights activists (feminists). But whereas tension between feminists and nationalists has diminished in recent years, tension and mistrust between nationalists and ethnic-rights activists has not decreased much. For instance, Yusef Azizi Bani-Torof, the former prisoner of conscience and an Iranian Arab writer and advocate of minority rights, has complained that many human rights activists, intellectuals, and political organizations in the opposition, including the Center for Defenders of Human Rights in Iran (CDHRI) (Kanun-e Modafe'an-e Hoquq-e Bashari dar Iran), founded by Shirin Ebadi, and the Writers Association (Kanun-e Nevisandegan) have shown hesitance when speaking out in support of people in Khuzestan and in condemning government repression of Iranian Arabs. This hesitance is due to an old suspicion of secessionism and also to sensitivity toward applying such terms as nationality (*melliyat*) to minorities such as Arabs, Azeri, Kurds, and Baluchi. He argues that “Whatever you want to call them, ethnic groups or national groups, Azeri-speaking Iranian or Iranian Turks, Arabic-speaking Iranians or Arab-Iranians, the fact remains that half of Iran's population who happen to be non-Persian are deprived of many of their social, economic, cultural and political rights.”⁴⁰

To overcome this tension, at least among the elite, an educational campaign on identity politics is in order. Accurate terminology, better theoretical conceptualization of the ethnic question, national versus ethnic identity to prevent confusion between nationality (*melliyat*) and ethnicity (*qowmīyat*), and understanding of the interconnectedness of minority rights, women's rights, and democracy are needed. At the same time, there needs to be made a practical and strategic demarcation between what constitutes separatism and what are legitimate ethnic and minority rights.

Policy-makers in Iran need to be reminded that national or ethnic identities are neither exclusive nor fixed. Many scholars of identity, ethnicity, and nationalism, from Benedict Anderson⁴¹ to Anthony Smith,⁴² Crawford Young,⁴³ Milton Esman,⁴⁴ Dov Ronen,⁴⁵ and Joseph Rothschild,⁴⁶ including the ones who have studied the identity question in Iran, such as Mostafa Vaziri,⁴⁷ Richard Cottam,⁴⁸ Touraj Atabaki,⁴⁹ and Lois Beck,⁵⁰ among others, have come to conclude that tribal identity, as with ethnic and national identity, is an imagined identity based on continually revised conceptions of history and tradition in the context of contemporary circumstances. That is, identity is constructed. Tribal people in Iran have invented and reinvented traditions according to changing sociopolitical conditions. Each tribal group was composed of people of diverse ethnolinguistic origins, yet each group forged its own customs and created legends of origins.⁵¹ According to Beck, various "communities have survived by mixing with others, by shifting loyalties, and by transforming themselves socially, culturally, and politically."⁵² State repression and coercive homogenization may only exacerbate the interethnic distrust and latent resentment, and prejudice would therefore strengthen the more extreme and separatist elements. Even those elements within the ethnic-rights movements who are separatists should be allowed to express their ideas as long as they do it through nonviolent means. It is only through fair division of power and resources among different provinces of Iran, and by learning and understanding the grievances of minority groups through open dialogue and debates, that the extremist elements can be isolated and peaceful, respectful, and pluralistic coexistence can be maintained.

In its statement issued in the aftermath of violent unrest, the CDHRI warned the government authorities that unrest in Khuzestan was a "wake-up call that is expected to have awakened the authorities"; that it was about the reality of "discrimination and suffering" and the necessity for "respecting different ethnic groups and uniting them around national interests by eliminating discrimination and deprivation through concrete and effective measures." The CDHRI condemned the police attack against the peaceful demonstrators and demanded justice for the victims of the violence and an end to discriminatory laws and policies.⁵³

The latest spate of ethnic-related unrest in Iran was the massive demonstrations of Azeri in Iran's northwestern province of Azerbaijan, from May 22 to May 28, 2006. This unrest highlighted the growing role that ethnic issues play in Iran's domestic politics and international relations. The trigger for the protests was a cartoon published in the May 19 issue of *Iran*, a state-owned newspaper based in Tehran, which depicted Azeri and their Turkic language in insulting terms (including the use of cockroach imagery). A protest initiated by Azeri students in Tabriz, the regional capital, and the smaller cities of Ardabil, Orumiyeh, and Zanjan, soon spread farther and was followed by closure of shops and bazaars and a gathering of tens of thousands of people on the streets.

It is striking that the focus of the protests soon shifted from the controversial cartoon to broader sociopolitical issues. The demonstrators demanded the resignation of local officials and police authorities who had ordered repressive measures against the overwhelmingly peaceful protests. Several people, including journalists working for Turkic-language newspapers or Web sites, were arrested; other citizens were severely beaten by police. The cartoon was a catalyst for the expression of long-held grievances and suppressed feelings of humiliation and resentment by many Azeri people. The slogans of the demonstrators—among them “Down with chauvinism,” “Long live Azerbaijan,” and “Azerbaijan is awake and will protect its language”—reflected both ethnic-related grievances and antiestablishment sentiments.

To defuse the crisis and divert people's anger, state authorities shut down the *Iran* newspaper and jailed the cartoonist and editors, who issued an apology to the Azerbaijanis. This did not appease the outraged Azerbaijanis; they sought an apology from the minister of culture and Islamic guidance, and from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad himself. The minister belatedly apologized, but President Ahmadinejad did not; indeed, he blamed the turmoil on foreign elements and linked it to Western pressures over the issue of Iran's nuclear proliferation. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, reinforced this view days later with talk of a “foreign plot” by Iran's “desperate enemies” trying to disrupt national unity by instigating ethnic unrest. Meanwhile, Azerbaijani cities remained under a semi-curfew for days, and were filled with special antiriot guards and plainclothes security men, reportedly deployed from Iran's southern provinces.⁵⁴

Many activists concerned with ethnic minority rights believe that their ethnic-related demands are inseparable from the national demands for democratic rights and socioeconomic improvement that concern all people of Iran. All Iranian ethnic groups want improvements in their economic situation and increased opportunity to participate in decision making and the administration of their country; according to a journalist from Ardabil, “whomever among the candidates who can respond positively to these demands will win

the votes of the minorities as well.”⁵⁵ Whether federalism (and, if so, what forms of federalism) can be the answer for Iran’s ethnic question in a democratic polity is a subject for another book, but in one of the following sections I introduce a new proposal akin to federalism that has been recently proposed by some reformers in Iran.

PERILS OF THE “SECURITY APPROACH” TO THE ETHNIC DEMANDS

According to some scholars, the Arabs, but more so the Kurds and Baluch, are suspected of having the highest potential for secession, especially since they stand with past claims to separatism. Eliz Sanasarian, for example, lists the following interconnected reasons: (1) Religious (sectarian) differences, in addition to ethnic differences, have placed Baluch and Kurds (who are overwhelmingly Sunni) in conflict with Shi’i theocracy. (2) Arabs are half Shi’i and half Sunni (according to some estimates most Arabs in Iran are Shi’i and their conflict with the government does not have sectarian nature), while Kurds and Baluch are overwhelmingly Sunni. (3) All three are border ethnic groups and have counterparts across the Iranian borders. (4) The past history of political movements among Kurds and Baluch point to an unceasing quest for some type of independent statehood. (5) Both Kurdish and Baluchi ethnic groups, despite their intraethnic rivalry and their poverty, have shown strong cross-border connections and networks and both groups possess large land areas and populations. (6) Their resistance to and lack of interest in Persianization has remained unchanged.⁵⁶

I would add to these reasons the recent regional and international factors developed after the U.S. invasion of Iraq that might have given more urgency to the Kurdish question. Karim Sadjadpour, for example, argues that a newfound self-confidence among Iraqi Kurds has amplified the sense of ethnic nationalism among Iranian Kurds. Recent regional changes in Iraq and Turkey have resulted in some new dynamics among Kurds, rendering past conventional wisdom unrealistic. Specifically, it has been assumed that Kurds are far closer historically, culturally, and linguistically to Persians than they are to Turks or Arabs, hence Iranian Kurds were assumed to be far less prone to separatist agitation than Turkish or Iraqi Kurds. But these assumptions may not hold true in light of recent changes.⁵⁷ Internal factors, especially the shortsighted and repressive policies of the Islamic republic, seem to be reinforcing this potential. For instance, the latest cycle of violence in the Iranian province of Kurdistan and neighboring Kurdish areas, which was incited by the brutally violent and provocative murder of Shivan Qaderi, a Kurdish opposition activist (in Mahabad, on July 9, 2005) by some members of security forces, has already left up

to 20 people dead and hundreds wounded. Hundreds of others are believed to have been arrested, including prominent Kurdish human rights defenders and activists.⁵⁸

The Unrest in Azerbaijan

It may further be noted that many of the above reasons would also apply to Sunni Turkmen, but more so to Shi'i Azeris. For instance, Sanasarian argues that since Azeri people are more assimilated within the Persian milieu, they are not particularly separatist and do not have a past history of political mobilization for separatism. However, among many people, Azeri activists are also suspected of separatism; the Azerbaijanis' 1945–1946 movement toward autonomy has been recorded in the collective memory of many Iranians, whether true or not, as a separatist move.

Both then and now, most Azeri activists maintain that they have not been after separation. Rather, they demand their legitimate cultural and ethnic rights within a democratic federal system—the rights constitutionally authorized since the constitutional revolution of the early 20th century, in the articles relating to *anjoman-ha-ye ayalati va velayati* (provincial societies), which are grassroots local councils. These councils, formed through direct elections, would operate on behalf of the civil society in order to monitor the state functions and protect people's interests at the local, regional, or provincial levels.⁵⁹

The recent developments in Khuzestan, Baluchestan, Kurdistan, and to a lesser extent Azerbaijan indicate that, under the right circumstances, any border ethnic group has the potential to activate its ethnic identity and mobilize along ethnoreligious lines. As Dov Ronen observed in his studies, whenever individuals perceive the government as an obstacle to the target of their aspirations for freedom or goods, they activate their ethnic, national, or other identities to bring about change.⁶⁰

Cross-border and international reinforcement of these potentials would, of course, add to the likelihood of ethnic mobilization, as demonstrated in the recent cases of Khuzestan, Baluchestan, and Kurdistan. In all three cases, it was state policy or local government authorities, however, that wittingly or not provoked an outrage among Arabs and Kurds, resulting in violence and ethnic mobilization. It seems that a similar process of provocation has been underway in Baluchestan, a Sunni region, caused by the appointment of a new governor. Following the 2005 election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president, a Shi'i from Sistan, Habibollah Dehmoreh, who is known for his hard-line anti-Sunni Islamism, was appointed as the governor of Baluchestan. This resulted in an outrage among Baluch and two Baluch deputies in the Majles resigned in protest.⁶¹ In a statement issued on September 15, 2005, by the United Front of the Iranian Baluchestan (Jebhe-ye Mottahed-e Baluchestan-e Iran), they said:

An evil-minded plot similar to the ones carried out in Khuzestan and Kurdistan, which led to so much bloodshed and violence, is about to take place in Baluchestan. Peoples of Sistan and Baluchestan have always lived together in peace despite the fact that the language of people in Sistan is Persian and their religion is Shi'a while the language of people in Baluchestan is Baluchi and their religion is Hanafi Sunni, at the same time about 30 percent of people in Sistan are also Baluch. Since its inception, the Islamic Republic has tried all sorts of tricks to exploit the cultural and religious differences between us; for one, most of the governmental positions in various cities of Baluchestan have been occupied by Sistanis. Now, the new government has decided to impose Habibollah Dehmordeh on the Baluch, a person whose Hezbollahi [i.e., hard-line], anti-Baluch, and anti-Sunni background has been known for years. His 26 years of record is full of mischief and divisive actions among Sistanis and the Baluchis.... Our people need to remain vigilant and careful in their reaction to this new imposition. The intention of the government is to attack our protest actions under the usual pretext of fighting separatists, smugglers, and rebels.⁶²

The Khuzestan Trouble Spot

A closer review of the recent (2005–2006) ethnic-related clashes in Khuzestan can help us understand how the old suspicions and “security approach” (*didgah-e amniyati*) to ethnic demands are feeding new tensions, and how the wrong state policies or wrong government actions are complicating the minority politics in Iran today.

Two curious incidents instigated the 2005 bloody confrontations in Khuzestan and Kurdistan. The first one was the dissemination (initially through some Internet sites) of a letter (a secret official directive) in April 2005, just a month before the presidential election. The letter, allegedly written by a prominent reformer, Mohammad-Ali Abtahi (Khatami's former chief of staff), was addressed to Mohammad-Ali Najafi, then head of the Plan and Budget Organization, advocating a government plan to alter the Arab composition of Khuzestan by transferring a great number of Arabs to other parts of Iran and replacing them with non-Arab ethnic groups, and also changing the Arab names of various places and streets of this province to Persian names. Provoked by this letter, there was a peaceful demonstration in Ahwaz on April 15, 2005, but it soon turned violent, owing to the attack by special antiriot police. This was followed by more demonstrations and acts of violence in subsequent days.

Abtahi's denial of the authenticity of this letter on his personal Web site was rather vague, while asking political factions not to use Khuzestan for scoring points with the reformers because, if they keep doing that, he threatened, “it

is the conservatives who have to respond to many unanswered questions that have preoccupied many people's minds." As implied by Abtahi, some observers believe this was a deliberate provocation on the part of certain forces to terrorize the atmosphere, on the one hand, and on the other, to mobilize Arabs and by implication other ethnic groups, against the reformers. For one, the letter was widely spread with no attempt by the security forces to prevent the leak, and the timing coincided with the day (April 20) that was declared by pan-Arabists as "the 80th anniversary of the occupation of lands of Alahwaz by Iranian forces." The Arab media in the region, Aljazeera in particular, fueled the provocation, leading to the unrest, demonstrations, and counterdemonstrations, as well as many arrests, injuries, and unconfirmed killings.⁶³ The U.S. government reacted to the unrest in Khuzestan by accusing the government of Iran of violating the rights of Arabs; "this is not the first time that Iran is violating the rights of minorities," stated Adam Early, the spokesperson for the U.S. State Department.⁶⁴

Though officially the Iranian government attributed Khuzestan's unrest to foreign elements,⁶⁵ some members of both factions blamed each other for instigating the unrest as a plot intended to influence the results of the election.⁶⁶ In a letter signed by 180 deputies in the Majles, local authorities were criticized for their "negligence" and Khatami's government for its delay in issuing an official denial of the letter.⁶⁷ As damage control, Ali Shamkhani, the defense minister who is a native Arab from Khuzestan, rushed to that region, and in a public speech, promised speedy release of the arrested Arabs. He denied the existence of any governmental plans for forced migration or transfer of Arabs, or any plans against the Arabic language. "By including Arabic language lessons in the curricula of the public schools in the country, we have actually tried to promote Arabic," Shamkhani declared.⁶⁸

The Question of Foreign Instigation

The ruling conservatives, be they the secular nationalists of the former Pahlavi regime or the present Islamists of the Islamic republic, have usually used the threat of a foreign-incited disintegration of Iran (*tajziyeh*) and secessionism (*joda'i-khwahi*) as excuses to scare the public away from serious consideration of the valid grievances minorities have in Iran. In the past, any demands for ethnic rights or any movement toward autonomy were attributed to pan-Turkism (in the case of Azerbaijan) and/or leftist agitation tied to a Soviet plot for annexation of Iran's territories. Nowadays, in the absence of the Soviet Union, it is the West, Zionism, and Western-supported pan-Turkism that is said to be the main culprits behind ethnic-related demands or movements. This long-held suspicion has resulted in a sense of distrust and insecurity on the part of the central government and the ruling elites,

hence a "security approach" to any complaints or movements of peoples in Kurdistan, Baluchestan, Khuzestan, and Azerbaijan.⁶⁹ This distrust of ethnic issues has practically justified either secular ultranationalist homogenization (in the case of the Pahlavis) or religious (Shi'i Islamist) segmentation under the present regime.

Having been warned of the problems associated with a "security approach" does not mean that foreign manipulation has *not* played a significant role in the minority politics of Iran. Several studies have documented the role of the British, Russian, and later the Soviet governments in ethnicization of politics or politicization of ethnic issues in Iran's modern history.⁷⁰ Some recent changes in the U.S. policy toward the ethnic question in Iran also require special attention as far as the "foreign factor" is concerned. For example, as Ervand Abrahamian notes that, traditionally, the United States used to support the territorial integrity of Iran and the homogenization and assimilationist policies upheld by Pahlavis (as in the U.S. supportive role in the shah's crushing of the autonomous movements in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan in 1945–1946). In the past, it was countries like Russia and, to some extent, the pan-Turkists of Turkey that desired a disintegration of Iran. But during the past 15 years, Abrahamian argues, there has been a new shift in U.S. policy: "The American neo-conservatives, in collaboration with the operators in Washington, have openly spoken of the major minorities in Iran such as Arabs, Baluch, and Kurds who would need the right to independence. Of course, if all these ethnic groups obtain independence, there will remain no country named Iran."⁷¹

Some scholars of Iran such as Shirin Hunter even suspect that it is not only the so-called regime change in Iran that many in Washington (as well as many in Iran) are pursuing, but also that some in the West contemplate certain changes in the size and composition of Iran's geopolitical map ("Iran is too big for them"), the idea that most Iranians abhor.⁷²

IS IT ETHNICITY OR THE CENTER-PERIPHERY DISPARITY, OR BOTH?

Many observers of human rights in Iran attribute the recent ethnic-related clashes and violence in Khuzestan, Kurdistan, and other regions to socio-economic disparity between central Iran and its provincial peripheries. For example, Mohammad-Ali Dadkhah, a human rights lawyer and member of the CDHRI, sees the main reason for turmoil in Khuzestan to be the wider extent of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and overall underdevelopment in this province compared with others. He blames this on the government's neglect to observe and implement the constitutional rights of Khuzestani people: "Based on the Article 30 of the Constitution, state is obligated to provide all citizens of Iran regardless of where they live or what ethnic

background they have, with public education, primary health care and job opportunities.... There is a religious proverb that 'A hungry person has no faith or religion.'"⁷³

The phenomenon of "hungry person" is among what the chair of Beyt al-Arab, Hasan Abbasian, emphasized, too:

Most Arab people of Khuzestan sleep with empty stomachs on a sea of oil. In the summers they have to drink salty and bitter water because, during the shah's oppression, part of Karun's water was channeled to Isfahan and after the Revolution, some parts of Karun's water was channeled to Yazd, and recently to Kerman, and based on a new decision, the little remaining will be channeled to Qom in the future. The fertile lands of Arab peasants have been forcefully taken away from them and given to the unsuccessful sugarcane industry, which has damaged the environment and hurt the local agricultural economy and the well-being of indigenous people. Instead of helping the unemployed and dispossessed Arabs, they allocate resources to nonnative companies. Due to the lack of familiarity with the environment and inadaptability among the owners of such companies with the hot climate of the region, they are usually unsuccessful and can survive only by employing the cheap labor of indigenous Arabs. State employers discriminate in favor of non-Arabs; all administrative and managerial jobs are given to nonnatives—at times to inexperienced and unconcerned ones. The lack of hygiene, communication, and transportation; the refusal to issue permits for newspapers and publications in Arabic language; the lack of local radio and TV programs; and the lack of attention to development of cities, especially reconstruction of wartorn areas, are among the problems concerning Arab people in Iran. Hospitals and doctors' offices are full of Arab patients; poverty, disease, addiction, and unemployment are rampant. An Arab can barely take advantage of loans and economic opportunities that are available to non-Arabs. The seeds of hatred and prejudice have been planted in the hearts of non-Arabs; nonnatives usually hate Arabs and Arab parents are not free to even choose their preferred names for their children.⁷⁴

This long quotation is worth citing because it illustrates the center-periphery as well as interethnic dynamics in Iran. The passionate description indicates how minority politics is more complicated and profound than a simple interethnic tension incited by outside manipulators. It is related to an uneven, top-down, overcentralized, *étatiste*, and authoritarian strategy of development, a Tehran-centered modernization, or as many see it, a "Persian-centered" nation-state being built that has resulted in wide urban-rural and center-periphery gaps. Since most ethnic groups live in the provincial peripheries, the socioeconomic

disparity, and the exclusion of local members of provinces from administrative jobs and political decision making have created centrifugal tendencies that may exacerbate ethnic differences.

Two of the constitutional articles treasured by ethnic groups directly relate to the problem of center-periphery disparity. Article 48 prescribes: "There should be no discrimination with regard to benefits to be gained from the use of natural resources, the utilization of public funds on the provincial level, and the distribution of economic activities among the provinces and various regions of the country. This is so that every region will have within its reach capital and opportunity to fulfill its needs and develop its skills." Article 100 postulates: "In order to ensure socio-economic development, public health, cultural and educational programs and other welfare matters through popular cooperation in keeping with local circumstances for administering these affairs, every rural area, district, township or province will elect from its citizens members for councils for the village, district, township, and province."⁷⁵

In their open letters to presidential candidates, both Azeri and Kurdish groups have pointed out the failure of the state to properly implement these two Articles.⁷⁶ The idea of "councils" at various levels has been in the Iranian constitutions since the constitutional revolution in 1906–1911. But under the increasingly centralized governments of the Pahlavis, it was never implemented; and under the Islamic republic, though provincial councils were created, they remained powerless.

As a move toward decentralization and strengthening of the civil society, President Khatami waged a campaign for implementation of city and village councils. With much ado and expectation, a national election, with active and massive participation by women and men, led to the creation of such councils in 1999. But the unelected power organs of the state, which were dominated by conservatives, and internal conflicts within many city councils left them deprived of power, authority, and effectiveness.

A FEDERAL STATE FOR IRAN?

In response to the structural problems that have perpetuated a widening center-periphery disparity, weak provincial and city councils, and hence a weak civil society, plus alienation among ethnic groups, most of whom reside in provincial peripheries, a new reform proposal was introduced by the Management and Planning Organization (MPO) during the last months of Khatami's presidency. This proposal seemed akin to a federal system. The recent prominence of "federalism" in Iraqi politics could also have played a role in revisiting the political and power structure of the Iranian state.

The main goal of this proposal was said to be decentralization of state power in the capital through the expansion of the jurisdiction of provincial authorities, the creation of provincial ministries with more autonomy from the center,

and the assignment of more administrative positions and roles to regional and local/native people. Based on this interesting proposal, there would be new administrative divisions in the country. The present 30 provinces would turn into nine geographic areas/regions, and three levels of ministries would be created to administer the country's affairs under the rubric of central/national affairs, provincial affairs, and local affairs at macro, mezzo, and micro levels. This proposal was to be a compromise between the present centralized system and a federal system demanded by many ethnic activists.⁷⁷

The initiator of this proposal, the Management and Planning Organization (MPO), is not affiliated to any ministry. It is an independent organization supervised by the president. The president appoints its director, who is one of the six vice presidents, too. The importance of the position of director of the MPO is next to the first vice president, hence one of the most important positions in the cabinet, or at least among the vice presidents.⁷⁸ This background underscores the significance of the proposal, yet I have not been able to find any discussion or debate on the proposal and its fate remains unknown. Overall the government of Ahmadinejad did not take the proposal seriously. But it is worth noting that, unlike other presidential candidates, Ahmadinejad did not talk about ethnic issues or make special promises to any ethnic constituencies. Though he emphasized the need to decentralize the state bureaucracy and empower the provincial governors,⁷⁹ this was seen in line with his election platform of "social justice" and change in distributive policies, as Ahmadinejad promised he would put national wealth at the service of the masses and not the economic elite concentrated in central part of Iran.

This might have boded well for the provincial minorities resentful of the Tehran-centered strategy of socioeconomic development carried out under the Pahlavis, and continued with little change under the Islamic republic to date. Could Ahmadinejad's own experience as the governor of Ardabil province have contributed to his purported attention to the economic disadvantages of Iran's provinces during the election campaign? And could his emphasis on decentralization make him interested in the decentralizing plan proposed by the reformers? So far, he has not taken any considerable measures toward decentralization.

What is known is the existence of a strong opposition within the power circle to any kind of federalism or devolution of certain powers to the provinces. It was in part owing to this opposition that Khatami failed to actualize some of the promises he had made to the ethnic groups. Many reformers, therefore, do not see any capacity within the hard-liners toward federalism.

Commenting on this question, a political analyst inside Iran maintained that those power circles behind Ahmadinejad are intolerant toward diversity and any distribution of power. A revealing example, he pointed out, was the fact that "Tehran is one of the rare capitals around the world where

no Sunni mosque can be found. They have never allowed Sunnis to build a mosque of their own in Tehran. In this way, Tehran falls behind even Athens, that up to very recently was the only capital in the entire Europe where no mosque could be built!"⁸⁰ While in the summer of 2006, an initial plan was approved by the Greek parliament to build the first mosque in Athens since the Ottoman rule,⁸¹ the Iranian Shi'i-supremacist government has yet to allow any building of a mosque for Iran's Sunni Muslim minority in Tehran.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

During the Khatami presidency, the motto "Iran for all Iranians" was introduced as a gesture toward inclusiveness, pluralism, and multiculturalism. But this inclusive idea was soon abandoned with the revival of a Shi'i Islamist exclusionary discourse of Ahmadinejad's administration. Yet many reformist intellectuals are moving beyond the old paradigms of both secular Aryan-centered and religious Shi'i-centered homogenized Iranian identity. In opposition to both the external threat of exploitation of ethnic tensions and the internal threats of interethnic issues, and to contribute to the ongoing debates on ways to democratize Iranian political culture, a new pluralistic approach has been gaining ground.⁸² Much of contemporary intellectual discourse on ethnicity and national identity recognizes Iran's multiethnic reality and also its multidimensional identity (a synthesis of Iran's pre-Islamic heritage, its Islamic tradition, and its secular modernity).⁸³

The question of "national identity" of Iranians is beyond the scope of this chapter. By focusing on the ethnic dimension of the latest presidential elections as a case study here, I have tried to demonstrate the reality and significance of ethnic and minority politics in Iran to which the Persian-speaking political and intellectual elites can no longer remain insensitive. My main argument is that a Tehran-centered socioeconomic development strategy has aggravated the sense of deprivation and resentment among the ethnic-oriented peripheries, thus perpetuating an internal potential for ethno-nationalist centrifugal movements that can neither be removed by repressive "security approach" nor be dismissed as a product of foreign conspiracies.

A decentralizing process in distribution of national resources and political power on the one hand and strengthening of the civil society to observe the civil rights and national identity of its citizens on the other, can therefore be viewed as a most viable strategy for fostering national and territorial integrity. Such socioeconomic policy needs to be complemented with a pluralistic cultural and intellectual discourse that redefines nationhood and "Iranianness" by emphasizing on citizenship and rights rather than ethno-linguistic criteria grounded on race, blood, and cultural or religious variables.

NOTES

1. Robert Famighetti, *The World Almanac and Book of Facts: 2000*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
2. Eliz Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 9.
3. Ken Park, *The World Almanac and Book of Facts: 2002*, World Almanac, revised edition, 2001.
4. These figures do not add up to 100 percent, another reason to question the exactness of them.
5. This section has drawn and benefited from the theoretical framework used by Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities in Iran*, pp. 3–8.
6. Milton J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994; Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities*, p. 6.
7. Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities*, p. 5.
8. Ibid., p. 5.
9. Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976, esp. pp. 505–528, cited in Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities*, p. 3.
10. Ibid., p. 6.
11. Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, p. 256, cited in Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities*, p. 6.
12. Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities*, p. 6.
13. Ibid., p. 6.
14. By implication, the Shi'i clerics as a social stratum have a specially privileged position in this system, with certain rights and obligations distinct from the rest of the citizens.
15. Rouhollah Ramezani, "Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Middle East Journal* 34(2), spring 1980, pp. 181–204.
16. Ibid.
17. Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities*, p. 154.
18. Ibid., p. 154.
19. Mehرداد Farahmand (reporter), "Qowmiyat-ha-ye Irani va entekhabat-e riasat-e jomhuri" (Iranian ethnic groups and presidential elections), BBC Persian, June 17, 2005, available at www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/06/050617_mf_ethnicities.shtml. See also RFE/RL *Iran Report*, December 20, 2004, available at www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/06/printable/050617_mf_ethnicities.shtml.
20. Bill Samii, "Iran: Ethnic politics out of bounds," Fars News Agency, cited in RFE/RL *Iran Report* March 31, 2005, available at www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/iran/2005/iran-050331-rferl02.htm.
21. The proceedings of this meeting are one of the most illuminating and concise representatives of the current concerns and demands of ethnic groups in Iran that have been articulated in legal language, carefully avoiding any breach of the Islamic and constitutional redlines; available at www.achiq.org/millimesele/xane-ye_eqvam.htm. I am grateful to the anonymous coordinator of the Achiqsoz Azerbaijani Internet site for providing me with this very informative report.
22. Samii, "Iran: Ethnic politics"; see also Mazdak Bamdadani, "Negahi be tanesh-ha-ye qowmi-ye rouzha-ye gozashteh" (A look at the ethnic tensions of recent days), *Iran-Emrooz*, available at www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/politic/print/691.
23. Samii, "Iran: Ethnic politics."
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.

26. Farahmand, "Iranian ethnic groups."
27. Ibid.
28. Samii, "Iran: Ethnic politics." It is pertinent to note that Jannati's aversion to any acknowledgement of minority rights is related to his role in repressing the Arab uprising in Khuzestan during the early years of the Islamic republic, when he was the Friday prayer leader of Ahwaz, the capital city of Khuzestan province.
29. Samii, "Iran: Ethnic politics."
30. Hasan Abbasian, "Nameh'i baraye Jannati" (A letter to Jannati), *Iran Emrooz*, April 20, 2005; translation from Persian to English is mine.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Farideh Farhi, "What does the ninth presidential election say about Iranian politics?" *Iran after the June 2005 Presidential Election*, Occasional Paper Series, Middle East Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, summer 2005, pp. 8–9.
36. Karim Sadjadpour, "The Iranian street in the post-Khatami era," *Iran after the June 2005 Presidential Election*, Occasional Paper Series, Middle East Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, summer 2005, p. 19.
37. Farahmand, "Qowmiyat-ha-ye Irani va entekhabat-e riasat-e jomhuri."
38. Sadjadpour, "The Iranian street."
39. This is based on this author's review of the views and demands of some prominent activists, such as Yusef Azizi Bani-Torof (writer and journalist who was imprisoned because of his critical views) and Jasem Shadidzadeh (a former deputy from Ahwaz); Javad Hey'at (a prominent Azeri surgeon and writer); Hasan Rashedi, Farzad Samadali, and Akbar Azad (all Azeri writers); Kamal Moradi (editor of the banned weekly *Mobin*); Ro'ya Tolu'i (a Kurdish women's rights activist, who escaped Iran after her release from prison); and Valad-Beygi (head of the Institute for Kurdish Studies).
40. Cited by Khosrow Shemirani, "Vaqa'ye'-e Khuzestan az manzar-e hoquq-e bashari-ha va siyasat-madaran" (Events in Khuzestan from the viewpoint of human rights activists and politicians) in *Shahrvand*, May 6, 2005, also available at www.rowzane.com/000_maqalat/000_m2005/2505/50507sharvand.htm.
41. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983.
42. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.
43. Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976.
44. Esman, *Ethnic Politics*.
45. Dov Ronen, *The Quest for Self-Determination*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979.
46. Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics: A Conceptual Framework*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1981.
47. Mostafa Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation: The Construction of National Identity*, New York: Paragon House, 1993.
48. Richard W. Cottam, *Nationalism in Iran*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1979.
49. Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-Century Iran*, London: British Academic Press, 1993.

50. Lois Beck, "Tribes and state in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Iran," in *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East*, eds. Philip Khoury and Joseph Kostiner, Berkeley: University of California, 1990, pp. 185–225.

51. Beck, "Tribes," p. 189.

52. Ibid.

53. Reported by BBC Persian, "Hoshdar be hokumat-e Iran dar ertebe ba havades-e Khuzestan" (Warning to the Iranian government regarding the events in Khuzestan), April 23, 2005, available at www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/04/050423_mf_ahwaz_warning.shtml.

54. See Nayereh Tohidi, "Iran: Regionalism, ethnicity and democracy," *OpenDemocracy*, June 29, 2006, available at www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-irandemocracy/regionalism_3695.jsp.

55. According to Behzad Khosrovani, a journalist in Ardabil, as reported in Farahmand, "Iranian ethnic groups."

56. Sanasarian, *Religious Minorities*, p. 14.

57. Sadjadpour, "The Iranian street," p. 19.

58. According to many reports, after murdering Shivan, the security forces tied his body to a Toyota truck and dragged him in the streets. Instead of inducing the intended fear among Kurds, this act of savagery caused widespread anger and disgust in the Kurdish region. See Amnesty International Public Statement, AI Index: MDE 13/043/2005 Public News Service 215, August 5, 2005.

59. See, for example, Mostafa Rahimi, *Qanun-e Asasi-ye Iran va Osul-e Demokrasi* (Iran's Constitution and Principles of Democracy), Tehran: Sepehr, 1979, pp. 177–178.

60. Ronen, *Quest for Self-Determination*, p. 4.

61. This resignation turned out to be symbolic, as following some intervention the two deputies came back to the Majles and reclaimed their seats.

62. Full statement published in *Iran Emrooz*, September 5, 2005.

63. Referring to a statement by Ali Yunesi, the intelligence minister, on April 18, 2006 BBC Persian reported of 200 arrests. See, "Yunesi: 200 nafar dar Khuzestan dastgir shodand" (Yunesi: 200 people were arrested in Khuzestan), available at www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/04/050418_v-younese-khozestan.shtml.

64. BBC Persian, "Amrika Iran ra mottahem be naqz-e hoquq-e Arab-ha kard" (United States accused Iran of violating Arabs' rights), May 16, 2005, available at www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/story/2005/04/050420_a_iran_ahwaz.shtml.

65. Abdolvahed Mousavi Lari, the interior minister, claimed that the letter attributed to Abtahi was fabricated outside Iran and then disseminated in Khuzestan in order to play havoc with the upcoming presidential elections; see BBC Persian, "United States accused Iran."

66. BBC Persian, "Warning to the Iranian government."

67. BBC Persian, "United States accused Iran."

68. Ibid.

69. For a discussion of the implications of a "security approach" to ethnic issues, see Nader Entessar, *Nameh* 40, August 2005, pp. 55–57; see also Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Ethnonationalism*, Boulder, Colo.: Lynn Rienner, 1992.

70. For example, see Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and the Struggle for Power in Iran*, revised edition of *Azerbaijan, Ethnicity and Autonomy in the Twentieth-Century Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000; and David B. Nissman, *The Soviet Union and Iranian Azerbaijan: The Use of Nationalism for Political Penetration*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1987.

71. From an interview with Ervand Abrahamian, available at <http://free.gooya.com/politics/archives/026122.php>.

72. Shireen Hunter, "Letters to the president: The Islamic world and U.S. foreign policy," paper presented at Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., April 14–16, 2002.

73. Cited by Shemirani, "Events in Khuzestan."

74. Abbasian, "Letter to Jannati," p. 4.

75. Ramezani, "Constitution of the Islamic Republic."

76. See, for example, the "Open letter by Kurdish reformers about the demands of the Kurds to presidential candidates," *Emrooz*, April 2005; for Azeri and Arab groups, see "Ayatollah Karrubi dar didar ba barkhi az fa'alín-e khaneh-ye aqwam: aqwam-e Iran dar zamíneh-ye azadí-ha-ye farhangí ba tang-nazarí-ha-ye shadídí ruberu hastand" (Ayatollah Karrubi in meeting with some activists of the House of Ethnic Groups: Iranian ethnic groups are faced with severe restrictions in cultural freedoms), available at www.achiq.org/millimesele/xaneyeqvam.htm.

77. For additional discussion on this proposal, see Kaveh Omidvar, "Tarh-e dowlát-e eyalati dar Iran," BBC Persian, May 8, 2005.

78. This organization is the result of a merger of two organizations, the Plan and Budget Organization and the Administrative and Employment Affairs Organization. The merger took place in July 2000 under President Khatami.

79. Siamak Namazi, "The Iranian presidential elections: Who voted, why, how and does it matter?" *Iran after the June 2005 Presidential Election*, Occasional Paper Series, Middle East Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, summer 2005, p. 7.

80. Personal exchange with Mohammad-Hossein Hafezian, senior research fellow at the Center for Scientific Research and Middle East Strategic Studies, Tehran, September 19, 2005.

81. See Andrew Burroughs, "Athens Muslims to get a mosque" BBC News, July 18, 2006, available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5190256.stm>; and "First Athens mosque," Athens City Guide, July 26, 2006, available at www.greece-athens.com/article.php?article_id=60.

82. For the ongoing debates on democratization, see Ali Gheissari and Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

83. For a critical review on the ethno-linguistic view of nationhood and chauvinistic approach in construction of Iranian national identity, see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Contesting nationalist constructions of Iranian identity," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East*, 12, spring 1998, pp. 43–55.



IRAN'S REGIONAL POLICIES SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Anoushiravan Ehteshami

Outside forces have played a major part in the birth and development of Middle Eastern and North African (hereafter MENA) states, as well as in shaping the environment in which these states operate. As a penetrated regional system, the MENA region, for all its active internal dynamics (nationalism, Arab-Israeli war, radical Islam, etc.), was by the 1950s subject to the influence of strategically driven calculations made by the world's two superpowers. The superpowers' calculations and strategies directly affected not only the politics of the region but also the environment in which the local forces were taking shape. For over a generation, the cold war was the framework of the MENA regional system, from North Africa in the west to the borders of the Soviet Union in the Caucasus and Central Asia. It created a loosely controlled environment for the regional actors to function within.

The cold war, for all its inconsistencies and tensions, however, had at the very least given the region a degree of forced organization, even "organized chaos." Its ending not only exposed the Soviet allies to new pressures, not only threatened to remove the special privileges of the pro-U.S. allies, but also, perhaps most importantly, lifted the externally imposed conditions on internal processes of the regional system itself. Thus, the sea change in the international system, which followed the end of the cold war and the implosion of the Soviet superpower, created the necessary conditions for a new period of dynamic change in the MENA region, which, as far as Iran is concerned, has manifested itself in two broad ways: the de-radicalization of Arab states; and the radicalization of Sunni-affiliated Islamic terrorist networks (such as al-Qaeda), which at the same time contain a strong anti-Shi'a core.

With the 20th century an increasingly distant memory, it is now possible to take stock of the cold war itself on regional politics, as well as to chart the types of forces that will probably be shaping the MENA region into the 21st century. It is not in dispute that the end of the cold war has caused a real and perceptible

change in the nature of regional relations and, perhaps more crucially, in the behavior and calculations of Iran and its role perception. Iran was among a number of MENA states that had either developed a dependence on cold-war geopolitics or had found itself on the cold war's strategic fault lines running through the regional system. While it formed the northern boundary of the cold-war powers in the Middle East, in Iran's case a combination of the above had emerged to shape its role, its self-perception. The end of the cold war, thus, did create some major challenges for the Islamic republic. Furthermore, as we have seen since the late-1980s, the transformations in the region's dynamic strategic geometry have shown that foreign and domestic policy adjustments often tend to be made almost simultaneously in Iran.

THE ARENA OF FOREIGN POLICY AND THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSFORMATION

The end of the cold war was one important factor in a range of changes that were to sweep the arena. We can further highlight the following factors as having had particularly significant impact: the currents of globalization; structural economic difficulties; the development of the European Union's (EU) presence in the MENA area, and the deepening of its relations with Tehran (in particular from the early 1990s); the polarization and divisions among the Arab system and the deepening subregionalization of the MENA regional system; the fading away of unifying issues in the Arab arena; political instability in the Arab world; problems associated with succession and transfer of power; the emergence of al-Qaeda as the most violent and dangerous face of political Islam posing a direct challenge and an equal threat to both the West and Shi'a-dominated Iran.

Post-cold war realities, thus, very quickly put to rest Iran's "neither West nor East" foreign policy principle. So in the 1990s it was the new geopolitical realities that came to dominate the agenda, bringing Iran closer to its Eurasian hinterland (Central Asia, China, the EU, and Russia). In the new millennium, however, geopolitical complexities have been compounded by the challenge of Salafi Islam, which has emerged as the single most significant source of threat to Iran's, as well as the West's, regional interests. Al-Qaeda's fierce attacks on both the Shi'a and the West, furthermore, have made tacit, unacknowledged, allies of Iran and the West in containing its impact on the status quo in the Middle East. Remarkably this has been so despite the ongoing rift between Iran and the United States.

As already noted, the end of the cold war had also encouraged a de-radicalization of the region at the elite level, a trend that the Islamists tried to reverse (in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Sudan), but with little success as far as state action was concerned. In Iran's case Arab de-radicalization and the final collapse of rival Arab camps resulted in reciprocal pragmatism, introducing new

prospects and opportunities for cooperation between Iran and several Arab states, as is evident from the emergence of closer ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia from 1996, and also from Iran's broadening relations with the so-called moderate Arab states such as Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, and even Egypt (with which Tehran still does not have formal diplomatic relations but with which it cooperates in several regional and international forums).

However, at the substate level, the de-radicalization of state policies encouraged the rise of the al-Qaeda counter-discourse and cult mentality, which since the late 1990s has played an increasingly important part in the direction of politics in the region. It can be argued that the pan-Islamism of pre-al-Qaeda form, similar to the pan-Arabism before it, proved unable to create a sustainable international and intra-Islamic structure, even though at the practical level MENA states have had to respond to the challenge of political Islam in all its shapes. Today, however, violence-driven al-Qaeda is displacing Arabism and traditional Islamism, and it is actively generating new and more potent waves in the region that, if unchecked, will lead to further geopolitical realignments in the Middle East and possible estrangement in Iran's attitude toward its Arab hinterland. As a consequence, a further adjustment in Iran's role perception may ensue, which is perhaps the greatest irony of all, given that the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution provided the high-water mark of a movement that had been growing across the region for the best part of the 20th century.

The Iranian revolution, which in terms of its ideology changed the trend in 20th-century revolutions, ended the reign of a pro-Western, secular regime in a large, well-placed and strategically important Middle Eastern country. Inevitably, its ripples were to be felt across the region, despite the fact that this revolution had occurred in a non-Arab and Shi'a-dominated country. Like other revolutionary regimes, Tehran was determined to encourage the growth of its brand of ideology and "export" it wherever possible. Islamist movements in other Muslim lands began receiving support from Iran's new revolutionaries and many Arab groups were to find sanctuary in Iran.

The forces of revolutionary Islam were also fanned by the Afghani resistance to the Soviet occupation of that country in late 1979. For ten years, Western military and security agencies trained and supplied these Islamic fundamentalists, and they helped in getting Muslim volunteers from the MENA region to the battlefields of Afghanistan. At the time they chose to turn a blind eye to the growth of a widely antisecular and anti-Western network of radical Islamists who would come to extend their influence across western Asia and North Africa, and even to the West itself.

Iran's revolution and the Afghan war of late 1970s and 1980s, however, were manifestations of a long tradition of Islamist politics in the region that had begun in Egypt in the 1920s (with the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood movement) and had spread to every corner of the regional system by the late 1980s.

In 1980, one group assassinated the Egyptian president (Anwar al-Sadat) and another occupied the Great Mosque in Mecca; in 1982, Syrian forces put down an Islamist challenge; in 1988 and 1989, the Tunisian Islamist movement had been pushed underground for its antigovernment activities; in the late 1980s, Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad organizations unleashed terror on the Israeli population and took on the secular Palestinian groups; and throughout the 1980s, Lebanese Islamist groups attacked Western targets in that country, took Westerners hostage, and started a military campaign against the Israeli occupation forces. By the end of the century, although some Islamist forces had managed to enter mainstream politics in some regional states (Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan, Turkey, Yemen), political Islam as a whole—the so-called revivalist movements—had not quite managed to shed their violent streak. In Afghanistan, Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Libya, Palestine and Israel, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, and Yemen, radical Islam continued to engage in violent activities, but it was not until the bloody arrival of al-Qaeda that a new chapter in radical Islamist politics was opened. This new force was distinct from all others for the hostility that it expressed against both Washington and Tehran (and their respective regional allies). Thus, in Iranian foreign policy terms, if the post-cold war period is to be reviewed, one must draw a clear distinction between the 1990s, on the one hand, and the post-1990s, on the other. It is argued here that the regional canvas has changed considerably in the period under discussion, which directly affects the conditions under which Tehran shapes its policies.

THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The end of the cold war in 1989 brought to the fore the importance of the “three Gs” in Iran’s foreign relations: geopolitics, geostrategic vulnerabilities, and globalization. Since the late 1980s, when power at home also shifted from the Khomeinists to a more pragmatic and technocratic section of the elite, Tehran has had to find policies that speak to the profound systemic developments around it, and it has been compelled to function as much as possible within the new international system. This new system can be characterized internationally by the end of the cold war and the demise of the Soviet superpower and regionally by the emergence of the United States as the undisputed extraregional power in the Middle East.

Concern with the country’s territorial integrity has also been heightened with ethnic resurgence becoming the order of the day in the post-cold war international situation and the successes of nationalist movements to evolve from insurgencies to territorial states. Fear that secessionist movements in Iran and on its borders could be used by outside powers to destabilize the country, and the grip of the ruling regime, have struck a cord with Iranian Islamists and nationalists alike. Indeed, since the fall of Baghdad in April 2003, the dual

concern of the rise of the Kurds as a pivot of post-Saddam Iraq and the activities of Sunnis influencing Iran's own Sunni Arab minority, has raised fears of secessionist tendencies taking hold on its western border to a new height.

Speaking more generally, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, at least two schools of thought about the new international system have prevailed in Iran.¹ One school welcomed the changes that had occurred in the international system since 1989, arguing that the demise of the Soviet Union had improved the prospects for Iranian maneuverability. The end of the cold war, and end of the strategic competition between Moscow and Washington in regions such as the Middle East and the Caspian Sea, would enable Iran to exert its influence more freely and finally emerge as the powerful regional player that had been the country's destiny. In the absence of superpower pressures Tehran would be left free to create a new regional order in which Iran would be holding the balance of power. In the new situation, Iranian power would derive from a combination of the Islamic revolution, a sound and pragmatic foreign policy, strategic use of the country's hydrocarbon wealth, and its enormous geopolitical advantages in western and Central Asia. Proponents of this school also argued that continuing competition among the United States, the European Union, and Japan over the resources of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea would inevitably generate new rivalries at the international level that, with careful planning, Tehran would be able to exploit to its own advantage at the regional level.

The second school viewed the end of the cold war and the demise of the USSR with real concern and anxiety. It believed that Iran could no longer rely on the tried and tested strategy of the negative balance between Washington and Moscow for securing its own position in the region. With the superpower competition now effectively over, Iran would inevitably become less valuable strategically to the superpowers. It would no longer have value to the West in terms of "containing" the Soviet threat. Moreover, as there appears to be no external threats to U.S. interests in the Middle East, the latter would inevitably increase its pressure on those regional states (like Iran) that had thus far managed to function outside of its sphere of influence.² The United States, moreover, would adopt a harder line with those states and actors with the potential to undermine its vital interests in the Persian Gulf subregion and the rest of the Middle East (particularly in the Arab-Israeli arena). Even in Central Asia and the Caucasus, Washington appeared determined to "freeze" Iran out of its emerging markets and the strategically important pipelines routes. Elements in this school also maintained that it would be wrong to assume that, in the new world order, the oil and natural gas needs of the Western countries would inevitably lead to competition over control of these resources. Far from competing for control, the West would unite to prevent the monopolization of these resources by any local power unfriendly to the West, it was surmised.

Over ten years on, it is clear that both dominant schools of thought had, in fact, been right in that, while Iran's room for maneuvering did indeed increase after the end of the cold war, and Iran did capitalize on the demise of the Soviet state to broaden its influence in the former republics of the USSR and beyond, at the same time the pressures from the United States and the threat of Salafi Islam to Iran, and to the Shi'a arena as a whole, have also mounted since the end of the last century, and the events of 9/11 further complicated Iran's regional policies.

DOMESTIC POLITICS AND IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING

For much of the 1980s, various factions and centers of power within the clerical establishment took advantage of many opportunities to advance their own interests and to implement their own foreign agendas. This was particularly visible in relation to the Arab world. The radical camps were in constant search of the vehicles for exporting the Islamic revolution and concluding alliances with Islamist movements in the region. In the first decade of the republic, the struggle between the so-called moderates or pragmatists and the radicals was a determinant element of the policy process.

Factionalism and institutional competition have been rife and important features of the postrevolution Iranian political system. The factions themselves are rather fluid and normally comprise a variety of tendencies and blocs built around powerful personalities. They tend to act as fronts and, as such, do not always function as a single entity. Since August 1989 and the constitutional reforms of that year, a "presidential center" has been created at the heart of the executive power structure of the republic.³ But this institutional change has not ended intra-elite power politics in the system, which in turn has allowed the growth of a number of "consultation circles" at various levels of decision making. The political analyst Mahmood Sariolghalam has divided these grand circles usefully into the two groups of revolutionaries and internationalists.⁴

The constitutional reforms also brought into being a new Supreme National Security Council, controlled by the president and his staff. This body has become the nerve centre of policy-making in Iran and as such is the key body where foreign policy is debated and security policy is determined. Under the reformed constitution, the foreign minister reports directly to the president, who heads the council of ministers. Thus, implementation of foreign policy initiatives through the foreign ministry is also monitored through the president's office. While the legislature is constitutionally barred from interfering in the executive's foreign policy-making process, the Majles does discuss foreign policy issues and its members are often heard making pronouncements on regional and international matters. Furthermore, they do try to influence the

direction of foreign policy through the power of Majles' own committees and through not infrequent contacts with foreign dignitaries.

Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic republic, is a key figure in the decision-making process. Few foreign policy matters can be decided without his direct input and approval. While he has been known to be an opponent of the radical factions and is himself associated with the conservative camp in Iranian political terms, he is not averse to policies that, at heart, are explained in terms of the national interest. From an ideological and "identity-orientation" standpoint, however, he favors the maintenance of a reasonable distance between Iran and the West, and he strongly opposes the "Westernization" of Iranian society.⁵ He frequently speaks about the cultural invasion of the country—for example, by the U.S.-led Western powers—an argument that finds favor with the traditionalists and the conservative forces. Such perceptions, articulated from such a high office, undeniably do have an impact on Tehran's foreign policy, but not enough, I suggest, to dislodge or derail its pragmatist foreign policy ethos. At least this was the case until 2005, the end of the Khatami period and the beginning of the neoconservative Ahmadinejad presidency.

The president remains the key foreign policy player, and the role and influence of his office is borne out by the impact of the officeholder concerned. Between 1990 and 2005, for example, both post-Khomeini presidents favored Iran's further integration into the international system, being supportive of efforts to improve the country's relations with the outside world. As I show later, President Ahmadinejad's administration has revised much of the reformist agenda and has introduced a much greater anti-Western, immoderate tone to his presidency. It may be said that the latter is perhaps more to the supreme leader's liking, but by the same token it can be argued that the previous presidents were able to pursue international goals and objectives distinct to their own presidencies and the preferences of the supreme leader.

This said, it must also be acknowledged that, although since 1989 the presidential office has emerged as the main foreign-policy-making organ of the state, the president's foreign policy decisions are not made in isolation of other power centers. In this regard, as already mentioned, the role of the supreme leader (*Rahbar*), the Majles, and the Guardian Council are all extremely important in the Iranian foreign-policy-making process. The supreme leader is the individual whose support is crucial in implementation of foreign policy decisions. He can and does make public statements endorsing certain decisions, thus providing justification for the president's foreign policy initiatives and diffusing direct criticism of the executive branch. Furthermore, he intervenes in a range of indirect ways, largely to ensure that policies regarded as not in keeping with the general interests of the *nezam* (term commonly used to denote the system of government in Iran) are kept off the policy agenda. He holds the pen

that draws the red lines around the prickly issues that the executive branch is advised to recognize.

Not unlike other states, the Iranian foreign ministry's role in the policy process and the role of the foreign minister are also significant. The ministry tends to be engaged in implementing policy and providing the public face for the rest of the world. Another important factor influencing Iranian foreign policy today is public opinion, which is shaped by open debate in the press and disseminated by a fairly open and large media machinery. Numerous newspapers and periodicals discuss and get involved in the discussions of virtually all core opinion-makers within the political establishment, as do increasingly influential individuals from the world of academia and the slowly emerging semi-independent think tanks. Collectively, they drive the agenda and give voice to the range of views bubbling up in Iran's numerous power centers.

IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 1990S: FROM REJECTION TO ACCOMMODATION

Actual Iranian foreign policy since 1989 has been based on the notion of "both North and South," which Rouhollah Ramazani popularized in 1992.⁶ Iranian strategy has focused on exploiting the growing void between the United States and its European allies and Japan over regional and international economic issues as a way of blunting the U.S.-imposed sanctions on the country. Thus, Iran's confrontational stance of the 1980s slowly gave way to a much more conciliatory foreign policy line. The post-cold war environment encouraged this trend in Iran's relations with the outside world.

The post-cold war order also encouraged the trend of regionalization, which Tehran took advantage of by engaging with such organizations as the Economic Cooperation Organization and the Tehran-based Caspian Sea Organization. Likewise, Iran attempted to improve its alliance with states like Syria in the Middle East and deepen its ties with China, North Korea, Russia, and lately India, Greece, and Georgia outside of the Middle East, as a way of widening its partnerships. Iran, therefore, took advantage of the end of the cold war to develop links with both the North and the South Poles of the international system, but it remained vulnerable to global winds of change because it refused to enter into any meaningful alliance.

But, while it is true to say that Tehran has been redefining its priorities in the post-cold war era, it was unlikely that it would forgo its Islamic profile only for the sake of economic or political gains.⁷ One only has to consider Iran's successful involvement with the Islamic Conference Organization since autumn 1997 to realize that Tehran will continue to capitalize on Islam in its international profile and for policy reasons. Iran's policy responses to international developments, therefore, do not always fit the realist's paradigm. In Iran, the "identity

baggage” does complicate matters, making it harder to see Iran’s foreign policy profile in purely classic realist terms. In the words of Adib-Moghaddam, its foreign policy can most comfortably be seen in the context of “utopian-romantic-realism.”⁸ Of course, considerable tensions do exist among the three “drivers” identified by Adib-Moghaddam, and it would be fair to say that of the three, the latter, realism, still plays a dominant role in decision making. It is also true, however, that in practice since the early 1990s Iran has chosen to prioritize the resolution of domestic problems (economic reconstruction, development, the strengthening of civil society, and promotion of the rule of law) over long-term ideological foreign policy posturing.⁹

REGIONAL POLICY CHANGES IN THE 1990S

By the late 1980s, military and political developments in the region had forced a reassessment of the rejectionist strategy of the republic. This critical stage in Iran’s foreign relations can best be termed as the reorientation phase, characterized by the transition from radicalism to accommodation. This period started in earnest in June 1988 and lasted until August 1990, by which time we see the end of the transition to pragmatism and the establishment of the pragmatist line in Iran’s foreign policy.

For Iran, the main test of its new pragmatism came with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, which marked a watershed in its own right. The invasion immediately raised Iran’s profile and highlighted its significance as a regional player. At the same time, however, the invasion raised regional tensions and provided a catalyst for the return of the Western powers to the Persian Gulf subregion, thus weakening Tehran’s ability to shape the policies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and its efforts to forge ties with the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms based on collective action. Iran’s position during this crisis was in sharp contrast to its interventionist and adventurist policies of the postrevolution period; nonetheless, the fact that the GCC states had already lined up with the U.S. camp meant that Tehran was unable to form a joint platform with them. In 1990, thus, Iran might have stood on the side of the West in demanding the return of Kuwait’s sovereignty, but it was not one with the West in the campaign to remove the Iraqis. Neutrality in this conflict may have given Tehran a large measure of flexibility in its foreign relations, but it did not help it to build closer regional ties with its neighbors. Nevertheless, as the first test of its pragmatism, Iran’s reaction to the invasion did give it scope to deal with Iraq as well as the antiwar Arab forces, while its insistence on the reversal of the aggression and an unconditional Iraqi pull-out brought it closer to the anti-Iraq Gulf monarchies. Its restraint and neutrality granted Iran further diplomatic gains, too, in terms of renewed diplomatic relations with Jordan, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia, and some constructive contacts with Egypt and Morocco.

Isolation of Iraq in the region and the active role of Arab armies in defense of Kuwait, however, brought other pressures. With its victory in the first Iraq war, the United States responded to renewed pressure from Europe and its Arab allies to address the Middle East's most serious problem, the Arab-Israeli conflict. For Iranian diplomacy, the Madrid process was a minefield, for not only did it threaten to subsume its ally, Syria, in a Western-oriented peace agreement with Israel but it also took Iran dangerously close to being frozen out of the unfolding regional order following the first Iraq war. Tehran was rather concerned that the emergence of new agendas from Israel, the Arab states, and the Palestinians had left no room for Iranian involvement, bar opposition to the whole process. This role Iran readily accepted, on the grounds that the Madrid process was U.S.-inspired, flawed, and designed to rob the Palestinians of their rights in favor of Israel's regional hegemony. Furthermore, for Tehran, the issue of Palestine had become such a key politico-moral problem and an Islamic issue that necessitated the country's formal opposition to the peace process on religious grounds. The Madrid process exacerbated Iran's broader geopolitical worries as well, for when it came to Israel, there had been almost universal agreement that the Jewish state was an active regional rival bent on checking Iran's political and military power and on undoing its achievements in terms of military and nuclear technology self-sufficiency. Military leaders and their political masters seem to be convinced that Israel is planning a confrontation with Iran. Thus, as Israeli diplomacy and its economic forces reach the shores of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea, it is seen in Tehran as concrete evidence of Israel's encirclement strategy.

Also problematic for Iran was the way in which the peace process was sucking in Iran's Arab neighbors in the Persian Gulf, adding to Tehran's sense of isolation and loss of influence in the subregion. This sense of diminishing influence was heightened after 1993, with many GCC states opening direct channels of communications and trade talks with Israel and their willingness to bring the process (through multilateral and bilateral meetings) to the Persian Gulf itself.¹⁰ Nonetheless, Tehran's declared strategy toward the peace process was one of nonintervention: it would not endorse the process, but neither would it stand in its way. Equally troublesome was the so-called Damascus Declaration of "6+2" as the regional states' preferred option of widening the Persian Gulf's security net. That Iran was pointedly excluded from the GCC-Syria-Egypt discussions added to the sense of isolation emerging at the end of the Kuwait crisis.

Although close contacts between Tehran and its Arab friends were maintained after 1988, the rapprochement in Syrian-Egyptian relations in the wake of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the success of the Saudi-Syrian-sponsored Taif agreement for Lebanon, raised the prospects of a reemergence of the same tripartite alliance among Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria as had

existed in the mid-1970s. The danger from Tehran's perspective was that the presence of such an Arab alliance could only lead to marginalization of Iran's regional role. While in the 1970s the shah's regime had been relatively successful in containing the influence of this alliance in the Persian Gulf subregion, in the absence of those same resources at its disposal, Iran's post-Khomeini leadership clearly could not do likewise. It had no diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia or Egypt at that time, and it could offer few incentives to Syria to resist the lure of Saudi oil and petrodollars or Egyptian diplomatic clout. This prospect of an Arab alliance of the sort discussed above in the post-cold war regional lineup was the first source of concern for Tehran, in which a weakened Iraq as an enemy might be replaced by an alliance of strong Arab states.

The most crucial and interesting development in Iran's foreign policy emerged toward the end of the 20th century, of course, which was marked by the presidential election victory of Mohammad Khatami in 1997. From the outset, Khatami strongly reinforced the nonideological aspects of the country's foreign policy. But it went further, preaching compromise with others, implementation of the rule of law in international relations, and moderation in its own behavior. This post-1997 phase in Iran's foreign policy can suitably be termed "the drive for moderation." It was symbolized by Khatami's overtly moderate and nonconfrontational approach to foreign policy, the president's declared aim of establishing a "dialogue of civilizations," and attempts at reaching an understanding with the West (including the United States). Khatami and his policies continued to capture international headlines over his two consecutive terms of office and kept the West intensely interested in developments in the country. During his first term in office, Khatami made scores of overseas trips and visited no fewer than ten countries—more than any other Iranian leader since the Revolution. His travels took him to such new diplomatic destinations as Italy, France, Germany, and Saudi Arabia, as well as China, Syria, and several Central Asian and African countries. In his second term, he built on these visits to advance Iran's policy of *détente* to a much wider community of states and nonstate actors.

With regard to the Persian Gulf, clearly Iran's pro-GCC strategy did bear some fruit, as seen by its successful courting of Saudi Arabia in the mid-1990s. The two countries' defense ministers have met on several occasions since 1996 and Iranian naval vessels have visited the Saudi Red Sea port of Jeddah, arguably the kingdom's most strategic maritime facility. But, Tehran still regards Saudi Arabia as an ideological rival, in Central Asia and elsewhere in western Asia, as well as a close ally of the United States. Riyadh also is conscious of the latent threat Iran poses to its interests in the Persian Gulf and beyond, particularly in the context of Iran's nuclear-related activities. Saudi Arabia remains keen to develop its friendship with the pragmatic elements of the Iranian leadership and carve for itself the role of mediator in any Iranian-American

exploratory discussions; but with recent changes in Iran (a conservative-dominated Majles now complemented by a right-populist president) and the dramatic changes in the U.S.-Saudi relations post-9/11, it is questionable how much credit Riyadh can gain from such a role. So, a cooling of ties between Tehran and Riyadh (and the GCC as a whole) was a probability even without the dramatic political changes in Iran and the increasingly vocal regional concerns about its nuclear program.

IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE NEW CENTURY: POST-DÉTENTE?

The argument being made here is that systemic changes into the new century have left a mark on Iranian politics, forcing a significant shift away from the accommodationist period of the 1990s. Not only has the country's domestic politics shifted rightward, bringing a whole new breed of neoconservatives to power, but the republic's foreign policy has also hardened in very perceptible ways. But the constructive trend, characteristic of the 1990s, broke down well before the rise of the neoconservative Ahmadinejad.¹¹ It was first tested in 2001, and it weakened to breaking point from 2002 onward.

First, the September 11, 2001, al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on the United States posed a serious challenge to Iran's revolutionary profile as a defender of political Islam. Tehran, after all, had been the world's most vocal proponent of political Islam in recent years, alongside a handful of other actors, notably the Taliban in Afghanistan, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and Hamas in Palestine. But it did not prove too difficult for Tehran to overcome the problem of association as it quickly drew a clear distinction between its system of governance and the Taliban-backed violence unleashed by al-Qaeda. Without hesitation, Iran cooperated with the West in the removal of the Taliban regime from Afghanistan, and it did what it could to assist the United States in rebuilding its impoverished eastern neighbor. Tehran immediately associated itself with those voices, now coming from the West, that regarded the Taliban as a cancerous movement to be removed from the region. In Afghanistan, Iran and the United States found a common cause, indirectly helping each other to get rid of the Taliban and to contain the Afghanistan-based al-Qaeda network. But little else in terms of closer bilateral links grew from this intimate security experience. Indeed, despite their close collaboration in Afghanistan, the biggest direct fallout for Tehran was President Bush's 2002 Axis of Evil pronouncement, followed by new revelations about the depth and vibrancy of Iran's nuclear program.¹²

Iran's sense of injury over the Bush speech, combined with the U.S. fears of the Islamic republic's nuclear activities, helped make Khatami's second term much more diplomatically tense than his administration had expected. Indeed, the nuclear debate not only dogged his administration to its final days, until

the summer of 2005, it also directly fed into internal political wrangling that eventually enabled the neoconservatives to gain the reigns of power by adopting a much harder foreign policy line in national debates as a means of currying favor—in the sense of playing the nationalist “it is our right” card—with a disgruntled electorate. By the end of 2002, Iran’s nuclear program had emerged as a major international flashpoint, intensifying the country’s increasingly unsteady relations with the West.

Beyond the nuclear crisis, and the 2001 Afghan war to remove the Taliban, the other dramatic transformation in Iran’s regional environment occurred with the fall of Baghdad on its western border by a U.S.-led military coalition in March-April 2003. Thanks to the United States’s military intervention, in one mad rush to Baghdad Iran’s most immediate geopolitical and ideological challenger in the shape of Saddam’s regime in Iraq was totally and emphatically obliterated. The removal of the Sunni-dominated 30+-year-old Ba’thist regime gave real political sustenance to the Shi’a of Iraq, who had for years been dependent on the generosity, support, and protection of their Iranian brethren for activism, if not outright survival. Post-2003, the Shi’a-dominated state in Iraq began to look to Iran for economic, social, and eventual military support. Iran’s growing influence emerged as a double-edged sword for the occupying forces, however; without question, Iran was instrumental in stabilizing the Shi’a in Iraq. At the same time, as its influence grew relative to other players, it raised concerns in the West and among Iraq’s Arab neighbors that Iran would more than likely stand to reap the greatest benefit from the fall of the Ba’thist regime. No lesser person than the Saudi foreign minister expressed this fear in public (in September 2005), in New York. His views reflected those of other Arab leaders as well, of course, all of whom were fearful of an Arab Shi’a resurgent in the Arab world, with Iran as its main locomotive. To the dismay of the Iraqi leadership, and also of Hezbollah in Lebanon (both of which have strong Arab credentials), both King Abdullah of Jordan and President Mubarak of Egypt openly spoke of their fear of an Iran-orientated Shi’a crescent emerging in the region.

The Arabization of the Shi’a question, in other words, while undoubtedly extending Iran’s domain, has at the same time also threatened to complicate, if not undermine, Tehran’s relations with many of its Arab and Sunni neighbors. But while growing ties between Tehran and Baghdad made Washington uncomfortable, as well as Iraq’s Arab neighbors, Tehran and Washington still needed each other in the pursuit of their own interests in Iraq. The irony is that the uneasy relationship between the two countries inevitably soured their understanding about Iraq—so much so that by early 2005, Tehran was being depicted in both the United States and the United Kingdom as a meddler in Iraq instead of as the stabilizing power it had hoped to be considered.

In reflecting more widely on the transition from accommodation to resistance, it is now clear that President Khatami himself was so bogged down at home that, after losing control of the Majles in 2004, and under pressure internationally over Iran's nuclear program and its role in Iraq (among other factors), he effectively became a hostage of the factional power struggles in the republic. Being little more than a lame-duck president for much of his second term, he failed to create a sustainable basis for the advancement of his reform agenda at home or for his accommodationist strategy for foreign policy. Indeed, toward the end of his presidency he may well have gone a long way toward undoing much of his legacy. His parting shots in the nuclear discussions with the EU3 (France, Germany, UK), in which Iran raised the negotiating stakes just before handing over power to the Ahmadinejad administration, and over Iraq, in which Iran openly demonstrated its security presence in that country, for instance, were so aggressive as to prepare the ground for the much harsher and more confrontational line that followed with the election victory of neoconservative Ahmadinejad.

Iran beyond Détente

The post-1990 changes in Iran's geopolitical environment, and the systemic changes since the end of the cold war, did reinforce the oil-weighted tendency in Iranian strategic thinking and the primacy of economics in Iranian foreign policy making. This, however, did not mean that ideology and strategic ambitions were being completely displaced. Iran's leaders have continued to assert that the republic's strategic ambitions cannot be realized without the country's economic renewal. Conversely, a weak economic base in the globalized economic system has increasingly been viewed by many Iranian leaders as a recipe for further peripheralization. In the hands of the reformists' successors, however, a revived economy is seen as a prelude for the relentless advancement of Iran's geopolitical advantages. For the resurgent neoconservative right, which blocked the implementation of many of Khatami's key integrationalist policies and actually engineered its own electoral victory in the 2004 Majles elections to recover institutional power from the reformists, the economy was a means to an end.

As we saw, the Majles elections set the scene for the vital presidential race in 2005, which in the end (and through an unprecedented second round of voting) was won by one of the most inexperienced of the eight candidates running for election. Ahmadinejad was not the most experienced of the candidates, certainly, but he more than made up for a lack of experience with his ideological and populist zeal. His grossly populist domestic agenda of "establishing social justice" and "ending corruption" found echo in a much harsher foreign policy line as well. His suspicions of the West have been matched by

his populist-nationalist line on Iran's important place in the world. With this president, the decade-old intra-elite debates about Iran's post-cold war role and standing were rapidly ending in the position that post-9/11 Iran's regional weight had grown so considerably that it could now exercise power and extend patronage at will. For the neoconservatives, an accommodationist line was dangerously close to appeasement in international affairs—something that they had vowed never to allow.

Interestingly, although at the outset President Ahmadinejad's administration expressed its commitment to continuing Khatami's foreign policy line, soon after taking office, through key personnel changes and well-publicized and highly controversial policy-related speeches, the character of Iran's foreign relations began to show dramatic signs of change. Slowly but surely, on several fronts Iran's accommodationist line on regional matters began to transform into a somewhat harder position on matters of concern.

In real terms, Iran's role in, and approach toward, the brief but bloody Israel-Hezbollah war in July–August 2006 provided sufficient indication of the new direction of Iran's regional profile. Even more significantly, it provided further evidence of Tehran's considerable reach into traditional Arab theatres. The Lebanon crisis following the fall of Baghdad in 2003 showed how that single historic event had even more greatly facilitated Iran's deeper reach into the heart of the Arab East as it demolished the Arab world's historic eastern gateway. Although the gateway had been breached many times before by Iran since the early 1980s—as the strengthening of Hezbollah itself from 1982 graphically illustrates—the 2006 war was to illustrate Iran's ability to capitalize on the major geopolitical transformations taking place in the region to advance its own interests.

Hezbollah in Action: Iran on the Offensive

As already noted, the 2006 Lebanon war, if one can quite call it that, took place in the midst of an already tense regional environment. While 9/11 and pressures for reform from outside had continued to provide the main backdrop to the region's complex problems, a host of other issues were fueling the crisis situation. The most noteworthy among these were: the fragile state of Iraq (which had entered a new stage of horrific sectarian violence since early 2005), the Palestinian Authority's relations with the outside world under its Hamas-led government, the continuing struggle in Afghanistan and Pakistan against al-Qaeda and a resurgent Taliban, and the growing fears in Arab circles of the march of the Arab Shi'a across Arabia and the Levant. Without any halt to violence in the Occupied Territories and no roadmap toward peace in Palestine in sight, with Iraq apparently being shattered along sectarian lines, and Iran now favoring a slash-and-burn strategy as the words of the President Ahmadinejad

seemed to imply, it is no exaggeration to suggest that the tinderbox was dry and ready for an engulfing blaze, even if Hamas and Hezbollah had not dared Israel into further acts of violence by taking its soldiers hostage.

But, significantly, the conflict in Lebanon illustrated an altogether new dimension to Iran's regional role in these rather tense circumstances. The point about whether Iran had, in fact, instructed Hezbollah to goad Israel is a moot one at this stage, as we explore the wider dynamics of the war. The perception of an Iranian-backed small but dedicated militia "winning" the first Arab war against Israel in the Jewish state's 60-year history has scarcely been resisted in commentaries.¹³ Although the true costs of the war to the Arab side—Israel's unlikely willingness to give up any Palestinian or Syrian territory without cast-iron and enforceable security guarantees, death and destruction visited on Lebanon, major loss of life and property among the Lebanese population, the arrival of more foreign military forces in Lebanon, and the deepening of factional and sectarian differences in the country—are indeed great, one is still left with the feeling in the region that Hezbollah and its 15,000 militia has managed to dent Israel's aura of invincibility. The fact that Hezbollah had apparently single-handedly fought the Arabs' longest war with Israel to the bitter end—firing some 246 rockets into Israel on the last day of the war, superseding the previous record of 231 fired on August 2—and had forced Israel to agree to an internationally negotiated cease-fire with it were sufficient reasons for it to feel victorious and for Iran to feel proud of its own role and achievements. The Iranian government's open and unreserved support for Hezbollah stood in sharp contrast to that of the Arab regimes' position, which rather swiftly changed from condemnation of Hezbollah's action as "reckless" in the early days of the war to one of muted expression of support for the "Lebanese resistance" half way through the war.

It was clear to all that this Arab adjustment was, in small measure, a response to a groundswell of support on the Arab street for what was portrayed by the Arab media as Hezbollah's heroism in the face of an unjust onslaught.¹⁴ The Egyptian press in particular took great delight to favorably compare Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah with the late President Nasser of Egypt. Despite the many contradictions present in this comparison, the notion that Nasrallah now represented the struggle against Israel was to stick, which of course presented some major issues for the Arab regimes bordering Israel or that were allied with the United States. To cap it all, while the Sunni-Christian-dominated Lebanese government went out of its way to host the visiting Iranian foreign minister at the height of the crisis, it pointedly refused permission to the U.S. secretary of state to visit Lebanon on her tour of the region. This, of course, raised Iran's standing ever further. By virtue of where it stood in this conflict, in other words, Tehran was always going to make substantial political capital from the war.

Furthermore, if this campaign was ultimately a proxy war between Tehran and Washington, as many commentators in Iran and Washington insiders have surmised,¹⁵ then the fact that mighty Israel was being reduced to that of the United States' "champion" in the battle against Iran's much smaller Arab protégé could play out very badly in strategic terms for Israel's desire to maintain its deterrence against hostile neighbors, particularly against an emboldened Iran. But even more seriously, the fact that in the eyes of the Arab masses, Israel (and by extension the United States) in fact lost the war will have a much bigger strategic implication as Tehran's neoconservatives begin to position themselves as the only force able and willing not only to challenge the U.S.-dominated status quo but also to change the regional balance of power in favor of "the forces of Islam."

Of perhaps even greater strategic significance for the region are two further aspects of the responses to the war. At one level, Arab frustration and anger at Israel's overwhelming use of force, and the pro-Western Arab regimes' rather mixed response to the conflict, has for the first time in years facilitated the transformation of the Arab-Israeli conflict from a safety valve for channeling internal opposition outward into the sharp edge of a weapon with which to attack Arab ruling regimes for their continuing autocracy, economic incompetence, and corruption. In the case of Egypt, it has been noted, the man on the street "is beginning to connect everything together. The regime impairing his livelihood is the same regime that is oppressing his freedom and the same regime that is colluding with Zionism and American hegemony."¹⁶

The problem does not end here, for such changes in outlook and public opinion also affect the ways in which Iran can position itself in the region. Over time a structural imbalance has begun to emerge between Iran's position in the Arab-Israeli conflict and that of the pro-Western Arab governments that Tehran has been able to exploit to great effect at times of crisis. So far it has been able to do so without too much cost in terms of its relations with Arab states, but this can change at any time if the nuclear issue, or Iraq for that matter, continue to erode confidence in the Iranian administration.

For Iran, its popular opposition to the current situation in the Arab-Israeli conflict—its declared position of resistance and rejection of what it calls "imposed solutions"—enjoys legitimacy at home and on the Arab street. On this basis the Ahmadinejad administration has built a much wider commitment to the Palestinian cause as championed by the Hamas-led government. Its growing diplomatic and financial commitment to the Palestinian government—high-level and publicized visits by Hamas authorities to Iran and in excess of \$120 million in aid in 2006¹⁷—combined with Palestinian expressions of gratitude to Iran during their time of hardship, continues to win Iran supporters across the region and also helps Tehran's standing in the Muslim world as a dedicated supporter of the Palestinian cause. In addition, and in strategic terms, it has enabled

Tehran to keep its penetrative position in the Arab heartland without contest from other Arab states or leaders.¹⁸ How can they, after all, object to a third country actively and apparently robustly supporting the Palestinians!

From this vantage point, Tehran (with the help of Damascus, it has to be said) is able to attack the United States and Israel for their apparently anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab positions, and set itself up as the true voice of resistance in the region. This, however, is a wholly negative and reactive position to hold and all that it takes is a shift in the logjam of Arab-Israeli conflict and Iran's gains can quickly reverse. Furthermore, the line adopted by Tehran under Ahmadinejad is not conciliatory and is unlikely to advance the cause of badly needed reforms in the region. As is noted here, the Lebanon war dangerously eroded the routine business of the area, forcing a whole new division of social energies in the Arab world: "resistance (advocated by Hezbollah and its supporters in Iran and Syria as well as Islamist and pan-Arab opposition movements) versus restraint (advocated by Arab governments and other voices calling for peace with Israel) became the primary axis of political division, taking the place of democracy versus autocracy. The interplay of ideological and historical themes inherent in the Arab-Israeli conflict led to accusations of capitulation, treason, and betrayal by one side and irrationality and irresponsibility by the other."¹⁹ Iran's interventions under its neoconservative president have done little to help heal the fissures permeating intra-Arab relations.

But if activists in the Arab world begin to organically link the lack of democracy at home with the situation in Palestine, as an example, and conclude that "we could not change what our government was deciding on the issue, and the Palestinians [end up] paying the price,"²⁰ then Tehran will be able to effectively capitalize on the peoples' frustrations with their own governments for further extending its reach regionally. Under such a scenario, it will be for the first time since the Revolution that Tehran will have been able to directly reach the Sunni Arab masses and build a rapport with them over the head of their often over-protective governments.

At another level of engagement, the Iranian and Hezbollah response to the reconstruction needs of Lebanon since the end of the war have showed them to be committed champions of the masses and creative partners in trying to rebuild peoples' lives. While the Arab states have, on the whole, committed funds for the reconstruction of the more visible projects in the country, Iran and Hezbollah, by contrast, spared no expense to jump-start a massive rebuilding program of both the private and public facades of Lebanon. In a major "hearts and minds" drive, Hezbollah itself began the process of investing in the reconstruction of the country even before the war had ended, but since then millions of dollars have been committed for the rebuilding of homes and infrastructure of southern Lebanon, much of it efficiently dispensed to fill the basic needs of the population and their welfare.

Alongside Hezbollah has stood Iran, which has not only raised substantial amounts of cash through private donations but has also seen its government commit as much as \$100 million to rebuilding Lebanon.²¹ Iran announced in October 2006, for instance, that it was going to build and fully equip 60 schools in Beirut alone and a further 40 schools in the Bekaa Valley. In addition, it was to build five hospitals in southern Beirut, four in the Bekaa Valley, and a further 10 in the south of the country. It also announced a plan for the rebuilding of roads, bridges, mosques, and Shi'a places of learning across the country.²² With this level of commitment and presence, its close partnership with Hezbollah affords Iran access to every corner of the country. Given that Lebanon is a vital part of the strategic jigsaw puzzle that makes up the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran thus has emerged as an enduring central actor in that theatre, too.

If any new evidence for the significant role that Iran was now playing in the heart of the Arab world was needed, then the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war provided it. Like most wars, this one injected a noticeable degree of dynamism into the regional system and allowed the proactive parties to capitalize on its course and make gains at its end. In Iran's case, the gain has been at the regional level, acquiring another lever for the exercise of its role in the Middle East, and for the execution of its ongoing struggle with the United States. This strategic link, which has emerged since late 2001 between Iran's growing regional role and the United States' position regarding Iran, was graphically outlined by the former head of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), General Yahya Rahim-Safavi, who explained in a television interview in Tehran that "if the Zionist regime or the Americans make problems for us and organize attacks against us...[they should remember that] the Zionist regime is [only] about 1,300 kilometers from our centers. If we have a missile range of 2,000 kilometers, it is only natural that a distance of 1,300 kilometers is within this range. I'd [also] like to say something else: if the Zionist regime was defeated by a group of Hezbollah in Lebanon..., after all, Hezbollah is a small group in Lebanon, which defeated the Israeli army in this 33-day war, [then] how can Israel withstand a great nation that numbers 70 million, 90 percent of which are Shiites? As for the IRGC and the Basij—we have 10 million Basij members and strong Revolutionary Guards. There is no comparison."²³ Iran, by this reckoning, was ready for a showdown with the U.S.-Israel regional axis.

PRESIDENT AHMADINEJAD OPERATIONALIZED

Beyond Lebanon, evidence of a hardening line in Tehran was every where to be found. By way of another illustration, one can point to the many public initiatives of President Ahmadinejad since taking office. His pronouncements made about Israel in October 2005, his position with regard to the EU3 negotiations over Iran's nuclear activities since August 2005, and his administration's slowly

changing policies toward Iraq and the Persian Gulf more broadly, provide concrete examples of three newly emerging trends.

A World without Zionism

First, with regard to the former, the president's call in his speech at the World without Zionism conference for Israel to be "wiped off the map" signaled a very different approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict to that established in the early 1990s by President Rafsanjani. This speech followed an earlier one made during the election campaign itself, in which Ahmadinejad proposed that the West was under the tutelage of "Zionists" in all its policies.

Although under both domestic and international pressure, the president had to moderate his line presented at the October event; the fact that he was present at all at this annual anti-Israel event, let alone giving the keynote address, was sufficient to raise serious questions about the longevity of *détente* as the core of the new administration's foreign policy. But it was the content of what he said that raised even more concern, for it was widely interpreted that with this speech Iran was indicating a hardening of its position toward the conflict and a new effort to lead the rejectionist camp in the region. Iran, it was said, was moving away from the middle ground, posing a growing threat to regional and international peace and security.²⁴

Of course, Iran's harder line toward Israel, and the peace process in general, has had direct implications for Tehran's relations with the Arab world, Turkey, Pakistan, and indeed the West. Concerns over the greater likelihood of a direct confrontation between Iran and Israel raised the temperature in the GCC countries and their concerns about the direction of Iran's regional strategy under Ahmadinejad. Already suspicious of Iran's role in Iraq, many saw the president's outburst as a precursor of further tensions in Iran's regional relations. For Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey (which already have good relations with Israel), and such countries as Pakistan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman (which are striving to build links with the Jewish state), the Iranian president's call for the destruction of Israel went down more like a lead balloon than a rallying cry. The Arab world's collective condemnation of President Ahmadinejad's message added a new geopolitical twist to an already tense situation. With this call, Tehran managed not only to isolate itself from its Arab hinterland but also to actually cause severe disruptions in its dealings with its non-Arab regional partners (Turkey, India, and Pakistan). For the first time in many years Tehran was distanced from both its Arab and non-Arab Muslim neighbors. The price, therefore, for the resurrection of "identity" as the core of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy was not an insignificant one. In security terms, the president's comments did add to the sense of crisis being generated by Tehran, which was itself an unsettling reality for Iran's neighbors,

who had become accustomed to the conciliatory line of the previous two presidents, which constituted 16 consecutive years. The winds of change blowing from Tehran were received with much trepidation.

Nuclear Politics

The second example, which to be fair was not entirely of Ahmadinejad's making, relates to the nuclear discussions that have tended to dominate Tehran's relations with the West since 2003.²⁵ Ahmadinejad's United Nations speech in September 2005, and his key personnel changes in Iran's negotiating team, provided the most direct examples of the direction of thinking in Iran. Talks between the EU and Tehran had already broken off in August 2005, when Iran resumed uranium conversion after a nine-month suspension, so there was not much that the new administration needed to do to worsen the crisis. However, its tougher language and style have delayed the emergence of a satisfactory compromise between Iran and the West. Although an EU3+1 (Russia) team has been negotiating with Tehran since December 2005, it is far from clear how much success the new proposals to bring Russia in as the conduit for Iran's uranium-enrichment activities will have. But the issue of concern here is not purely the technical aspects of the discussions; rather, the sad reality is that even closure on the nuclear debate will probably not lead to closer relations between Iran and the West or the opening of a dialogue with the United States.²⁶ We are now a far cry from the Paris agreement of November 2004, in which Iran and the EU3 talked optimistically of building closer economic ties with each other and working toward creating a region-wide security structure on the back of a nuclear agreement.²⁷ With Iran's GCC neighbors highly suspicious of Iran's moves and motives today, it is less likely that they will accept Iran's terms for closer security discussions without having a U.S. presence at the talks—something that the new Iranian administration will find harder to accept. In practice, however, and despite Tehran's offer of a 6+2 security pact to its GCC neighbors to encompass all the Persian Gulf states, it is its bellicose tone and aggressive posture vis-à-vis the U.S. presence that shapes the policies of the neighboring GCC countries. Their perception, without exception, is one of fear when set against Iranian claims that its Martyrdom Seeking Battalions (formed in 2002 and numbering some 56,000 potential suicide attackers) are ready to attack U.S. bases in the Persian Gulf if attacked, or that its missile systems can target U.S. facilities across the region.²⁸

Iraq and Iran

Third, in Iraq, evidence of Tehran's strong hand, both in its relations with Baghdad's new masters and its close links with the Shi'a and Kurdish communities

of the country, has sent a ripple of fear across the Arab East. As already noted, since early 2005, Iraq's Arab neighbors have been much more open in their criticism of Iran's growing role in that country. King Abdullah II's comments in mid-2005 about the rise of an Iran-dominated "Shi'a crescent" out of the Iraq war was followed in September by the pessimistic assessment of the Saudi foreign minister in New York that America's policies since the war were effectively handing Iraq over to Iran, despite the efforts of the Arab states in 1991 to ensure that Iraq would not become a base for Iranian ambitions.

Iran's influence in Iraq today does indeed stretch far and wide. In the south, Iran has a dominant socioeconomic presence, where even its unconvertible currency is widely used. Iranian pilgrims and officials freely mingle with their Iraqi counterparts and Iran's security apparatus has secured a firm footing in the camp of the Anglo-American trained police and military units of the new Iraqi security forces. As a consequence, Iran today has a strong military presence in Iraq.

Furthermore, owing to its close links with the two main Shi'a parties in Iraq (al-Dawa and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq [SCIRI]) dominating the Iraqi government today, Tehran also has easy access to the government machinery of the new Iraq. Indeed, Iran is at pains to show its solidarity with the Iraqis, and since the end of 2003, it has been doing all it can to assist Iraq's new rulers manage the country. But at the same time, it is feared in the GCC that Iran is trying to create new facts on the ground by actively changing the demographic map of Iraq's oil-rich Basra province by settling Iranians in these areas. Also, Tehran's role in bringing Syria and post-Saddam Iraq closer has been noted by Iraq's other neighbors and the danger of a three-way alliance being built, which could also extend to the Shi'a communities of Lebanon, is another concern for them. So, the new Iraq and its new partnerships provide fertile ground for Iran to deepen its presence and also take advantage of Iraq's unique geopolitical place to extend its role farther westward. For Turkey, as much as for Jordan and the GCC countries, Iran's gains in Iraq can often seem as a net loss of influence for them. In policy terms, while Iran's hand may be strengthened in regional negotiations, its vastly superior geopolitical standing can just as easily undermine its efforts to strengthen ties with the moderate Arab states as a means of checking the U.S. regional role.

CONCLUSIONS

Iranians are now second-generation revolutionaries, and one might expect that the country would have settled down into a clearly visible, if not well-defined, development path that would also have helped carved its role and position in the international (and by extension the regional) system. Over two decades since the Revolution, however, Iran is yet to decide what real role it will play on the

international stage. Making its mind up has not been helped, of course, by the tense regional setting and the country's growing geopolitical importance since the late 1990s. Developments in the region—to be more direct, turmoil—do seem to have a direct effect on the domestic politics of the country, and so long as it sees itself as a beacon of resistance it will not be able to chart for itself an accommodating role, which in turn fuels tensions with its neighbors and the wider international community. Also, so long as Iran and the United States see each other as regional hegemonic rivals, Tehran will find it uncomfortable to swim with the currents sweeping the region.

So, a combination of the above, added to the perceptible de-liberalization of public space in Iran since the 2005 presidential election, indicate that the Islamic state has entered a new stage in its evolution, in which personnel changes at the top have brought to the fore new priorities. But these changes have also underlined the force of revolutionary values and ideology in the system. It is quite striking that the rhetoric of President Ahmadinejad sets him apart from many of his predecessors—even Khamenei when he was president in the 1980s. It is a consequence of the fluidity of Islamist Iran, referred to earlier, that someone like Ahmadinejad can take center stage and so dramatically change the tempo and mood of the country and, at the same time, renegotiate the country's regional role on its own terms.

Ahmadinejad's policy pronouncements have unsettled nerves at home and abroad, and have again raised suspicions of Iran's motives and strategic objectives in the region.²⁹ His election victory, however, did not change the structures of power nor the relationships between the institutions of power. In the final analysis, despite his neoconservative leanings, President Ahmadinejad has to govern a modern, complex, and wayward state, as well as rule over a restless population that no longer responds positively to pressures from above and is at the same time desperate for its fair share of Iran's bounties. Geopolitical realities today, moreover, as well as 16 years of constructive policy-making at home, have their own policy momentums that cannot easily be dismissed or bypassed. Iran's role perception can certainly be modified under different leaders and changing international conditions, and its policies altered to meet its new priorities, which are already happening under President Ahmadinejad. But how far a postrevolutionary state can be run by a neorevolutionary president is a question that merits further investigation. My suspicion is that it will have to be the neorevolutionary who has to change, given Iran's shifting demographic balance, its economic difficulties, its role in the international political economy as a major hydrocarbons producer, and the pressures associated with geopolitics.

More than 27 years after the birth of the Islamic republic, Iran is still looking to find its natural place in the order of things, a struggle that has not been helped by the dramatic international and regional developments since the early 1990s. With each new administration since 1989 Iran has put into place the

building blocks of a forward-looking country comfortable with its past and cautiously optimistic about its future. Since 2001, however, securitization of international politics and the grand geopolitical developments in western Asia have had such a dramatic impact on the Iranian polity that today it has an administration dominated by the security spirit of the Revolution, if not indeed many of its personnel. With political Islam reemerging as the ideological principle of Ahmadinejad's worldview, moreover, it was inevitable that the tone, if not the content, of Iran's relations with the outside world would change.

Policy in Iran (as elsewhere) is not shaped in a vacuum, and for all the emphasis on the role of identity and ideology in the Islamic republic, I venture to suggest that it is still the wider context that determines the agenda. To follow President Ahmadinejad's policies, and those of his successors, we must therefore appreciate the domestic backdrop as well as the regional realities in which they take form.

NOTES

1. For a more detailed discussion of Iranian perspectives on the "New World Order," see Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Syria and Iran: Middle Powers in a Penetrated Regional System*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

2. The security dimensions of this school of thought are explored in Steven R. Ward, "The continuing evolution of Iran's military doctrine," *Middle East Journal* 59(4), autumn 2005, pp. 559–576.

3. See Anoushiravan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, London: Routledge, 1995.

4. See Mahmood Sariolghalam, "Iran's emerging regional security doctrine: Domestic sources and the role of international constraints," in *The Gulf: Challenges of the Future*, ed. Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2005, pp. 163–183.

5. Shaul Bakhash, "Iran: The crisis of legitimacy," in *Middle Eastern Lectures 1*, Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1995, pp. 99–118.

6. Rouhollah K. Ramazani, "Iran's foreign policy: Both north and south," *Middle East Journal* 46(3), summer 1992, pp. 393–412.

7. Karen A. Feste, *The Iranian Revolution and Political Change in the Arab World*, Abu Dhabi: Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996.

8. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, "Islamic utopian romanticism and the foreign policy culture of Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14(3), fall 2005, p. 287.

9. Shaul Bakhash, "Iran since the Gulf War," in *The Middle East and the Peace Process: The Impact of the Oslo Accords*, ed. Robert O. Freedman, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998, pp. 241–264.

10. Note Oman's hosting of the multilateral talks on water in April 1994, which included Israel, the visit of the late prime minister Rabin to Muscat in December 1994, and the establishment of direct trade links between the Jewish state and Oman in September 1995, and Qatar's increasingly overt contacts with Israeli business and political leaders.

11. See Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2007.

12. Robert M. Gates, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Suzanne Maloney, *Iran: Time for a New Approach*, Washington, D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations, 2004.
13. See, for example, Robert Grace and Andrew Mandelbaum, "Understanding the Iran-Hezbollah connection," *USI Peace Briefing*, September 2006.
14. Neil MacFarquhar, "Arab opinion turns to support Hezbollah," *International Herald Tribune*, July 28, 2006.
15. See, for example, Edward Luce, "Bush believes conflict is a U.S.-Iran proxy war," *Financial Times*, August 12, 2006.
16. Kamal Khalil, director of the Centre for Socialist Studies in Cairo, quoted in Michael Slackman, "War news from Lebanon gives Egyptians a mirror of their own desperation," *New York Times*, August 6, 2006.
17. See *Gulf Yearbook 2006–2007*, Dubai: Gulf Research Center, 2007.
18. The Palestinian foreign minister, Mahmud Zahar, said as much on his November 2006 trip to Tehran: "Iran has handed out until now over 120 million and will supply more aid. Its support is very important for us. Iran is a major actor in the region and if we can obtain support from Arab and Islamic countries we will have the assurance that there will be no step backwards on the Palestinian issue." Agence France-Press, November 17, 2006.
19. Amr Hamzawy, "Arab world: Regional conflicts as moments of truth," *Arab Reform Bulletin*, November 2006.
20. Ibid.
21. Kitty Logan, "Iran rebuilds Lebanon to boost Hizbollah," *Daily Telegraph*, July 31, 2007.
22. See RFE/RL *Iran Report* 9(39), October 23, 2006.
23. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), "Iran's Revolutionary Guards corps commander on US military weakness," November 16, 2006.
24. American Foreign Policy Council and McCormick Tribune Foundation, *Forging an Iran Strategy*, Chicago, Ill.: McCormick Tribune Foundation, August 15, 2006.
25. Details of this are discussed in Judith S. Yaphe and Charles D. Lutes, *Reassessing the Implications of a Nuclear-Armed Iran*, Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 2005; Mark Fitzpatrick, "Assessing Iran's nuclear programme," *Survival* 48(3), autumn 2006, pp. 5–26.
26. The reasons for this are masterfully explained by Shahram Chubin, *Iran's Nuclear Ambitions*, Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006.
27. Shannon N. Kile, ed., *Europe and Iran: Prospects on Non-proliferation*, SIPRI Research Report 21, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
28. See Agence France-Presse, November 21, 2006, and November 3, 2006.
29. What the United States conveniently refers to as "the world's leading sponsor of terrorism." See Tony Snow's (White House spokesman) statement, Reuters, November 12, 2006.



IRAN'S PERSIAN GULF POLICY IN THE POST-SADDAM ERA

Mohsen M. Milani

The Persian Gulf is arguably the most important strategic region of the world today. After all, in this oil-addicted era, some two-thirds of the world's proven oil reserves are located in that volatile region. By the logic of demography, geography, history, and human and natural resources, Iran is unquestionably the most important country in that region. As the oldest country in the region, Iran's population comfortably exceeds that of all other countries of the region combined. Its literacy rate is the highest in the region; its middle class the largest; its civil society the most vibrant; its economy, measured by GDP and size of labor force, the biggest; and its army the largest and most powerful indigenous force. Iran also has the longest shoreline of any Persian Gulf littoral state. Most significantly, Iran controls the Strait of Hormuz, the small opening to the Persian Gulf, which a former CIA director aptly called "the gate to heaven." Finally, Iran has an impressively large amount of proven oil and gas reserves combined, perhaps unrivaled in the region. While it is commonly believed that Saudi Arabia is the biggest source of energy in the region, the actual data about the proven oil and gas reserves for Iran and Saudi Arabia depict a different picture. Saudi Arabia has 264.3 billion barrels of proven oil reserves (the largest in the world), and Iran has 138.4 billion barrels of proven oil reserves (the third largest in world)—Iran, however, has 26.4 trillion cubic meters of proven natural gas reserves (the second largest in the world) compared to only 6.57 trillion cubic meters for Saudi Arabia.¹ In short, Iran will remain a pivotal source of oil and gas for the world for decades to come.

It is precisely because of the economic and strategic significance of the Persian Gulf that Iran, both imperial and Islamic, has consistently sought to project its power in the region. And it is for the same reasons that since the dawn of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 the United States has consistently

sought to contain the Iranian power in the Persian Gulf, and to increase its own influence in the region. Therefore, it should not be surprising at all that the United States and Iran have been engaged in a fierce rivalry in the Persian Gulf for the past three decades.

In the past few years, however, the strategic cards in the Persian Gulf have been shuffled, creating new opportunities as well as existential threats for Iran. In March 2003, the United States overthrew Saddam Hussein. On the one hand, Iraq—Iran's archenemy—was defeated and its historically oppressed Shi'i majority, a potential ally for Iran, was liberated and energized, helping Iran to solidify its position as the most powerful indigenous force in the region. On the other hand, the United States virtually encircled Iran with its more than 160,000 troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, elevating Iran's threat perception to an unprecedented level.

In what follows, I discuss the transformation of Iran's Persian Gulf policy since 1979, its role in past regional security regimes, its reaction to the emerging strategic situation in the region, and its current policy toward Iraq. I will make four main arguments. First, the collapse of Saddam Hussein has accelerated Iran's transformation from a revolutionary to a regional status quo power in search of creating "spheres of influence," particularly in southern Iraq. One of Iran's ultimate strategic goals is to become a hub for the transit of goods and services between the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, Central Asia, and possibly China. Second, Iran's Iraq policy is directly correlated to Tehran's threat perception regarding the United States. A threatened Iran whose legitimate security needs are ignored will act more mischievously in Iraq than will a secure Iran. In my opinion, the United States and Iran can surely build upon their common interests in Iraq to lay the foundation for improving their tortured relations. Third, any future regional security regime that excludes Iran will most likely be expensive, ineffective, and unsustainable. Finally, when the United States, as the world's most powerful country, and Iran, an emerging regional power, are at peace, the region is most likely to enjoy stability; when they are not at peace, the region and by extension the wider world will suffer.

REVOLUTION IN IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY: ILLUSION AND REALITY

In the late 1960s, when British forces began to withdraw from the Persian Gulf, the United States rushed to fill the power vacuum. Engaged in Vietnam, the United States managed the region's security by remote control. It pursued the Twin Pillar policy, assigning to Iran and Saudi Arabia, both U.S. allies, the task of maintaining regional stability. By the dictate of history, demography, and geography, and with American backing, Iran emerged as the region's hegemon. Iran abandoned its historic claim over Bahrain and recognized its independence,

reestablished its sovereignty over the islands of Greater and Lesser Tonbs and Abu Musa, endorsed the creation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and suppressed a rebellion in Oman that saved Sultan Qaboos's throne. By clandestinely supporting Iraq's Kurds, Iran also contained Iraq, which had signed a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union in 1971 and, from the shah's and Washington's vantage point, was opening the door to Soviet infiltration of the region. A checkmated Iraq was then compelled to sign the 1975 Algiers accord, temporarily ending decades of hostility between the two countries.²

The 1979 revolution fundamentally changed the orientation of Iran's foreign policy and created lingering instability in the region. In November 1979, the U.S. Embassy in Tehran was illegally stormed and its personnel taken hostage. The hostage crisis—and not the Islamic revolution—terminated Iran's strategic alliance with the United States. In September 1980, in the midst of the hostage crisis, when Iran's armed forces were crippled by U.S. sanctions, military purges, and the summary executions of its leaders, Iraq invaded its neighbor. Saddam Hussein was determined to replace the shah as the region's hegemon and to squelch the radical Islamists' efforts to export their revolution across the Persian Gulf and into Iraq. His invasion of Iran marked another episode in modern history when Iran was once again attacked by a neighbor. By 1982, Iran had expelled Iraqi forces from its territory and penetrated Iraq. At this propitious moment, Tehran squandered its opportunity to end the conflict and, instead, made a strategic blunder by demanding that Iraq capitulate.³ Henceforth, winning the war and exporting its revolution became synonymous: twin goals based more on revolutionary romanticism than on reality.⁴

Total victory over Iraq became a dangerous fixation for Iran's clerical leaders. With precious little experience in diplomacy, they exaggerated the power of Islam, inflated Iran's military capabilities, underestimated Iraq's resiliency, and miscalculated American resolve to prevent Iran from winning the war or disturbing the status quo in the region. Still, pursuing this elusive goal allowed the Khomeinists to eliminate opponents, ratify a new constitution, and consolidate their hold over the infant theocracy.

Export of the revolution was driven by ideological and tactical motivations. Still intoxicated with the spectacular fall of the Persian monarchy, the Islamic revolutionaries of Iran innocently believed in the inevitable triumph of Islam. Exporting revolution was also a tactical maneuver to intimidate the Arab states into not siding with Iraq, to orchestrate a regional Shi'i awakening, to train a new generation of Arab Shi'i activists, and to elevate Khomeini as the ideological hegemon of the region. Khomeini declared Islam incompatible with monarchy, denigrated the Arab states as "stooges of American imperialism," and urged the faithful to crush the incumbent regimes. In Bahrain and Kuwait, pro-Iranian elements engaged in subversive activities against the regimes and foreign presence. Even rituals practiced during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca were used to

spread Iran's revolutionary message, which on one occasion resulted in a confrontation with the police and the tragic death of some 400 Iranian pilgrims.

With a Manichaean and self-righteous attitude of "you are either with us or against us," Iran failed to capitalize on the differences between Iraq and the Arab countries in the region. Its vitriolic rhetoric and blatant interventions isolated Iran and proved counterproductive, as the oil-rich Persian Gulf Arab states—in particular Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE—lubricated Saddam's war machine by contributing nearly \$80 billion to it. No wonder Iran suffered from a debilitating "strategic loneliness."⁵

There were other reasons for this strategic loneliness. Chief among them were Ayatollah Khomeini's refusal to resolve the hostage crisis quickly (radical students had taken Americans hostage at the embassy in 1979 and held them for 444 days). The crisis transformed the two former allies into bitter enemies and caused the United States to engage politically in support of Iraq and to increase its military presence in the region. Washington developed a global strategy to contain Iran while it strengthened Saudi Arabia and Iraq, and it encouraged the six Persian Gulf Arab sheikhdoms to create the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—all as a counterforce against Iran.⁶ Despite its official policy of neutrality, the United States was determined to ensure that there would be no decisive victor in the war. Having already imposed unilateral sanctions against Iran, the United States launched Operation Staunch in 1984 to stop the flow of arms from international markets to Iran. Ironically, the sanctions compelled Iran to become more self-reliant and build its primitive military-industrial complex, which eventually became the foundation of the country's relatively advanced missile and weapons programs.

Most important, the sanctions as well as the setbacks on the battlefields awakened the more alert segment of Iran's leadership to the reality that, without advanced weapons systems comparable to those Iraq was purchasing and developing and using, Iran could not prevail over Iraq. Thus, Iran began to venture into unknown terrain in search of new and more lethal weapons, as well as spare parts for its U.S.-origin hardware, a journey that ended in secret negotiations with the United States and became known as the Iran-Contra affair. As a result of these talks, the United States, which at this point hoped for the release of hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon, a strategic opening toward Iran, and an end to Iran's gradual slide toward Moscow, provided Tehran with weapons such as TOW antitank missiles and HAWK missiles. The profits from the sale of these weapons were then transferred, in violation of American laws, to the anti-Sandinista Contras in Nicaragua. For its part, Iran helped to release a few American hostages held by the pro-Iranian Lebanese. Consequently, the Hezbollah seized several more hostages. Thanks to the newly acquired weapons, Iran made significant advances in the war with Iraq, including the capture of the strategic Fao Island in Iraq. However, contacts between Tehran and

Washington ended abruptly when a Lebanese newspaper exposed the secret negotiations and the hostage deal.

The Reagan administration had insisted it would never negotiate with terrorists. With the revelation of the secret talks, an embarrassed administration now reversed its policy and commenced efforts to undermine Iran's war efforts. President Reagan banned U.S. imports of Iranian oil and U.S. House Joint Resolution 216 warned of catastrophic consequences for the United States following a likely Iranian breakthrough in the war.⁷ Under the guise of protecting Kuwaiti oil tankers, the United States opened a front against Iran, which coincided with Iran's Karbala V operation. The United States contributed heavily to the failure of Iran's offensive—its largest and most carefully planned operation against Iraq to date. The mighty U.S. Navy quickly demolished half of Iran's small navy and some of the country's offshore oil platforms, and Iraq used U.S. naval cover to attack Iranian ships and oil facilities. More ominously, the international community remained cynically silent when Iraq began employing tactical chemical weapons against Iranians and Iraqi Kurds, wreaking havoc in Iran.

Iran recognized its isolation when it failed to gather international support to condemn the downing of a civilian aircraft by the USS *Vincennes* in early July 1988, which resulted in the death of all 290 passengers. With waning support for the war at home and frustration on the battlefields, Iran accepted the United Nations (UN)—sponsored cease-fire in July 1988.⁸ The war, which caused nearly a million casualties (dead and injured) to both countries and cost more than their total oil revenues in the 20th century, ended with two losers, as many in the region and the West had hoped. Neither Iran nor Iraq achieved their objectives.⁹ The war also proved that the "balance of power" strategy adopted by the United States to maintain regional stability had not only failed but, much to Iran's chagrin, had increased American involvement in the region.

IRAN AS A STATUS QUO POWER AND IRAQ'S INVASION OF KUWAIT

The death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 marked the beginning of the transformation of Iran from a revolutionary state into a status quo power. Instead of exporting revolution, Iran focused on reconstruction at home and regional stability abroad. A number of factors contributed to this transformation. Iranians were exhausted from a decade of revolution and war, and they demanded improvement in their declining standard of living. It was a demand the Islamic republic could hardly ignore, especially during the transition to the post-Khomeini era. The clerical leadership also recognized that Iran lacked the wherewithal to change the landscape of the Persian Gulf.¹⁰ At last, Iran's revolutionary ideology was genuflecting before the harsh reality of international politics.

Forced to come to terms with this new realism, Iran began a diplomatic charm offensive toward the littoral Arab states. Tehran resumed diplomatic relations with Kuwait, initiated a dialogue aimed at restoring relations with Saudi Arabia, and sent emissaries to the region to emphasize its commitment to regional stability and economic cooperation. Iran also maintained a "cold peace" with Iraq, as the two countries could not liberate themselves from deep-seated suspicions about each other's intentions. Iran continued to support dissident Iraqi organizations, including the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which it had helped create in 1982 as an umbrella anti-Saddam organization of exiles based in Iran. As Iran tried to isolate Iraq after the war, the United States moved closer to Baghdad, partly to contain Iran. National Security Directive 26, signed by President George H. W. Bush in November 1989, for example, labeled Iran and the Soviet Union, and not Iraq, as the main threats to the United States.¹¹ While Iran adjusted to the new realities in the region, Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990.

Iran was the first country in the region to denounce Iraq's attack on its small neighbor and demand its unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. Both the United States and Iraq recognized Iran's potentially critical role and offered Tehran incentives either to remain neutral or to woo it to their side. Iran played its cards well. It pursued a policy I call "active neutrality" that enhanced its interests and avoided entanglement with either the United States or Iraq.¹²

Before he ordered the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein wrote a number of letters to then-President Hashemi Rafsanjani in which he ostensibly pledged to return all territory captured in their war and improve relations with Iran. In reality, the Iraqi leader was preparing for the invasion of Kuwait. After the invasion, the Iraqi army freed the 17 Lebanese and Iraqi Shi'a prisoners convicted of bombing the French and American embassies and attempting to assassinate the emir of Kuwait in 1983 from Kuwaiti jails, and reportedly turned them over to Iran. A week after the invasion, Rafsanjani declared that the 1975 Algiers Accord was the only foundation for peace with Iraq. As he shifted 30 divisions of his army from Iraq's long border with Iran to Kuwait, Saddam Hussein accepted once again the concessions he had made in the 1975 Algiers Accord. This was the first dividend for Iran's policy of active neutrality.

Despite this symbolic victory, Iran was most concerned about the deployment of U.S. forces to the Persian Gulf region. Iran had long opposed the presence of foreign troops in the region. After the British withdrawal in the late 1960s, Mohammad Reza Shah insisted that "the Americans should realize that our opposition to foreign intervention in the region is serious." Therefore, it was natural that declarations by Saudi Arabia's King Fahd and Washington that the deployment of U.S. forces was a temporary necessity did not diminish Iran's fear. Iranian radicals denounced Saudi Arabia for "placing the sacred land of Arabia under the control of U.S. forces," calling it more "shameful"

than the Kuwaiti invasion. Rafsanjani even proposed a peace plan in February 1991, which called for an unconditional Iraqi withdrawal, a nonaggression pact between Iran and the GCC countries, and, most important, replacement of the foreign Multinational Coalition Force with Islamic forces.¹³

Except for ritual and rhetorical denunciations designed mostly for public relations purposes, there was little Iran could do to stop the deployment of U.S. forces. In fact, Iran remained neutral and its relations with the United States seemed about to improve, thanks to President Bush's wise declaration in early 1991 that "goodwill begets goodwill." Bush authorized American oil companies to import roughly 200,000 barrels of Iranian oil and approved the payment of \$250 million to Iran for undelivered weapons purchased under the shah. Nor did Washington oppose an Iranian request for a World Bank loan, and Secretary of State James Baker assured Tehran that Iran would play a role in any future security arrangement in the region.

Iran kept its neutrality even during the abortive rebellions that erupted in Iraq after Iraqi troops were expelled from Kuwait. The humiliated Iraqi army confronted two major and distinctly separate uprisings by Kurds in northern Iraq and Shi'a in southern Iraq, both of whom had been explicitly encouraged by the United States to rise up against Saddam Hussein. After some initial successes, the rebellious Kurds and Shi'a were mercilessly slaughtered by Saddam's demoralized Republican Guard while the United States and the coalition forces remained silent. Iran, too, remained silent, calling only for Saddam Hussein's resignation, a face-saving gesture. If the Tehran hostage crisis was the beginning of Iran's revolutionary foreign policy, its passivity during the Iraqi civil uprisings was its formal burial. Revolutionary Iran was becoming a status quo power.

Iran emerged from the Kuwaiti crisis in a more favorable position than did other regional players.¹⁴ Iraq was relegated to a state of suspended animation under UN-imposed sanctions; Kuwait was ruined; the assets of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were depleted, as they had contributed \$56 and \$28 billion to the war, respectively; the possibility of the GCC acting as a defensive pact was exposed as irrelevant; and the conspicuous presence of U.S. and other foreign troops in the region created legitimacy crises for the fragile sheikhdoms that were dependent on U.S. protection. In fact, al-Qaeda's war of terror on the United States and Saudi Arabia allegedly began the moment Saudi Arabia invited American troops into the kingdom.¹⁵

The narrative for Iran was different. Iran began to project its power more confidently. Its regional image improved as Iraq was identified as the real Persian Gulf bully, and its relations with its neighbors, Western Europe, and even the United States improved. Iran's nightmare, however, became a reality, as American troops were now ensconced in its backyard.

Not long after the end of the second Persian Gulf War, the Soviet Union disintegrated. Having strengthened its ties with the new regime in Moscow,

Iran began to expand its influence in the newly formed republics of the former Soviet Union, with whom it shared deep cultural, historical, religious, and linguistic commonalities. The weakening of Iraq, the disappearance of the Soviet empire, and the new opportunities in Central Asia not only accelerated Iran's transformation to a status quo power but also provided Iran with a historic opportunity to become a regional power beyond its southern and northern borders. One of Iran's ultimate strategic goals was to become an economic bridge connecting energy-rich regions—Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Persian Gulf.

During the 1990s, Tehran remained content with the status quo in the Persian Gulf. Iraq's defeat in Kuwait and existing sanctions had reduced it to a mere regional nuisance, with Saddam Hussein a virtual prisoner in his own country. Although some venal Iranians occasionally violated the UN economic sanctions and traded with Iraq, the Islamic republic was ecstatic with the UN inspectors' efforts to disarm Iraq. Tehran maintained its cold peace with Baghdad and conducted low-level bilateral negotiations, resulting primarily in the exchange of prisoners from the 1980s war. Still, Baghdad hosted and supported Iran's primary security threat, the Mojahedin-e Khalq, and Iran continued to back the SCIRI, led by Iraq's most prominent Shi'a dissident cleric, Muhammad-Baqir al-Hakim.

With Iraq weakened, Iran's main preoccupation remained the United States. Iran sought to reduce tensions with the United States through a combination of commercial engagement and economic coexistence in the region. In this spirit, Iran signed a \$1 billion oil deal with Conoco, an American oil company, in March 1995—the largest deal of its kind since 1979. President Bill Clinton, however, quickly issued an executive order banning U.S. companies from investing in Iran's energy sector, which forced the termination of the deal. A year later, Clinton signed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA), which imposed penalties on foreign companies investing more than \$20 million annually in Iran's energy sector. By that time, the U.S. policy of dual containment, which was designed to ensure regional stability by demanding that Iraq and Iran comply with UN Security Council resolutions and end both their support for international terrorism and their acquisition of weapons of mass destruction, was in full force, backed by the presence of U.S. troops in the region.¹⁶ To counter America's containment strategy, Iran developed friendlier relations with Russia and Europe, and signed an oil agreement with the French company, Total, that was even more lucrative than the Conoco deal. Clearly, Iran sought to entice France to become more involved in the region as a counterforce to the United States.

Another top strategic objective of Iran in the nineties was to develop friendly relations with Saudi Arabia. Good relations with Saudi Arabia had enormous real and potential benefits: it could metastasize to improved relations with the United States, stabilize the region, allow Iran to coordinate oil policies with the

world's leading oil importer, and dilute the Al Sa'ud family's strong support for the United Arab Emirates in the ongoing dispute with Iran over the status of the three islands of Abu Musa and the two Tonbs. Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami visited the kingdom, direct telephone lines were established between the senior leaders of the two countries, and a number of bilateral economic and security agreements were signed. Neither Saudi support for the Taliban, Iran's implacable enemy, nor allegations of Iran's involvement in the bombing of the American military residential complex at Khobar reversed this rapprochement. In short, by the eve of the 2003 war for regime change in Iraq, Iran had improved relations with every single country in the region, as well as with Europe, Russia, and China; had become a regional status quo power; and had produced cracks in the U.S. containment policy.

IRAN AND AMERICA AFTER SADDAM HUSSEIN

It is paradoxical that Iran has thus far been one of the beneficiaries of the U.S. military reaction to the barbaric terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. First, the United States overthrew the Taliban and eliminated a significant threat to Iran. In so doing, the United States relied on the Northern Alliance, a coalition that for years had received generous support from Iran to fight the Taliban. Iran indirectly cooperated with the United States to liberate Afghanistan, and the country wasted no time in developing close relations with the Hamid Karzai government. It engaged in Afghan reconstruction, created an economic sphere of influence in the Herat region, and firmed its resolve to become a bridge connecting the Persian Gulf to Central Asia and possibly China. Then, the United States invaded Iraq, eliminating another threat to Iran. The combination of these two historic events in Afghanistan and Iraq improved Iran's regional standing and accelerated its transformation into a regional status quo power.

The case of Iraq was, of course, more consequential than that of Afghanistan, for Iraq was a more serious threat and Saddam Hussein had inflicted more death and destruction on Iran than anyone else in the country's modern history. Iran's enthusiasm for overthrowing Saddam Hussein was matched, however, by its trepidation about the deployment of U.S. troops to Iraq; hence, Iran pushed for what I call the "Afghan model"—that is, for the United States to stay in the background and give an Iraqi face to the operation for removing Saddam Hussein. Chief among those pushing for the execution of this model was SCIRI's Ayatollah Muhammad-Baqir al-Hakim, who firmly believed that "negotiations with the U.S. [are] good and productive for Iraq."

Washington, however, rejected the Afghan model, invaded Iraq, deployed troops, and created a strategic nightmare for Tehran. At first, the quick U.S. victory over Iraq raised concerns among the ruling ayatollahs that Iran, labeled by President George W. Bush as a member of the "axis of evil," would be attacked

by the United States. However, as the Iraqi insurgency grew in strength, fear of a U.S. invasion subsided.

In fact, consensus developed in Tehran that new opportunities in Iraq outweighed the possible threat if Iran avoided any direct confrontation with the United States. Today, Iran appears convinced that it can develop a "tactical consensus" with the United States in Iraq, as it did in Afghanistan. What remains unclear for Tehran is whether this tactical consensus can develop into a strategic consensus, or at least lead to better relations with the United States.

With the escalation of the Iraqi insurgency, two schools of thought have developed about Iran's policy toward the United States in Iraq. One argues that because the United States is in a quagmire in Iraq, it needs Iran, and Tehran should collaborate with Washington as a prelude to direct negotiations. Rafsanjani, for example, declared in 2004 that: "[I]f the U.S. stops its colonial and hegemonic policies, the Islamic republic is prepared to cooperate with the U.S. Iran is one of those countries that is prepared to have all kinds of cooperation with the U.S. Afghanistan was a good illustration of such cooperation, and the Americans themselves were grateful for Iran's cooperation."¹⁷ The other school maintains that Iran's bargaining position will strengthen as the United States sinks deeper into the quagmire that is Iraq, and that escape for Washington will inevitably require an arrangement with Tehran. Advocates of this latter position argue that "the U.S. has now become a hostage of Iran in Iraq."¹⁸

One key factor that can determine the outcome of this policy debate is how the United States addresses Iran's heightened threat perception and its legitimate security concerns. The equation is rather straightforward: more U.S. threats and no incentives will mean more willingness by Iran to undermine the United States in Iraq. Consider for a moment these facts. The United States has imposed unilateral sanctions on Iran and has encircled it. Approximately 160,000 troops are deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq, nuclear-equipped naval carriers cruise in the Persian Gulf, pro-American allies are in power in each country surrounding Iran, and U.S. forces and/or bases are conspicuously present from the Caspian Sea through Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait, Turkey, and Pakistan to Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

Iran must also deal with the U.S. "doctrine of preemption" as enunciated in the 2002 National Security Strategy and the Bush administration's Proliferation Security Initiative. The former permits the United States to conduct preemptive strikes against Iranian facilities suspected of building nuclear weapons, and the latter authorizes the United States to search and seize ships suspected of carrying contraband or suspicious cargo to or from Iran. Add to these the talk about a "regime change," backed by the congressional appropriation of funds, that Tehran views as an existential threat. Addressing Iran's security concerns

would surely increase its willingness to cooperate with the United States in Iraq. The fact is that Iraq, like Afghanistan, is a battleground for a competitive relationship between the United States and Iran, in which “give and take” is the recipe for success.

IRAN'S GOALS AND FEARS IN IRAQ

Iran is an influential player in Iraq. It shares deep historical and cultural ties with that country.¹⁹ In both Iran and Iraq, Twelver Shi'ism is the religion of the majority (95 percent of Iranians and at least 60 percent of Iraqis). Iran's clerics have excellent and well-entrenched relations with the leaders of the Shi'i religious establishment in Iraq's shrine cities, many of whom are native Iranians. There is also a sizable percentage of the Shi'a population of Baghdad and southern Iraq who are native Iranian. Thousands of Iranian pilgrims flocked to Iraq after the collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime, including many who had been forcibly exiled by Saddam, and others who work for the Iranian government. Iran has powerful friends in Iraq's governments, including members of the Dawa Party, the SCIRI and its Iranian-trained militia, and the Badr Brigade. Iran has good relations as well with Ahmad Chalabi, once the darling of some American politicians, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) headed by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, the Kurdistan Democratic Party headed by Masud Barzani, and Muqtada al-Sadr, the rebellious Shi'a cleric whose Mahdi Army has become one of the most feared militias in Iraq.

Despite these levers of influence, Iran's role in Iraq should not be exaggerated. Nor should we confuse Iran's wish-list or vitriolic declarations by demagogues in Tehran with actual policy. Three factors will continue to limit Iran's influence in Iraq: first, the United States will continue to be a powerful impediment to Iran's ambitions; second, as Iran learned during the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq's Shi'a are Iraqis first and Shi'a second; and, finally, Iraqi nationalists embrace deep suspicions about Persians and would oppose Iranian interference in Iraq.

It is also critical to distinguish between Iran's policy and the role played by the informal *ulema* networks that were created centuries ago in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon. It is often impossible to distinguish where one network begins and the other ends. Ayatollah Ali Sistani, head of the most powerful Shi'a religious endowment in Iraq, for example, is Iranian-born; Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi-Shahrudi, the head of Iran's powerful judiciary, is Iraqi-born. Individual clerics can pursue their independent goals, oblivious to the wishes of the Iranian government. It is exceptionally difficult to estimate how much control, if any, the Iranian government or Ayatollah Khamenei exercises over these networks.

It is much easier to identify the policy of the Iranian government. Iran's Iraq policy is more reactive than proactive, and it changes as facts on the ground change. Iran pursues six main goals in Iraq, described below.

(1) Uncertain about Iraq's future, Iran is hedging its bets, backing many Iraqi political factions and organizations, keeping all its options open, avoiding antagonizing any major Iraqi force, and sailing on the top of the dominant wave of public opinion in Iraq. Simply stated, Iran is determined not to be on the losing side in Iraq.

(2) Iran's top priority is to prevent the establishment of an anti-Iran, Sunni-dominated regime in Baghdad. Iran worries about a resurgence of Arab nationalism and the now-banned Ba'th Party, and the U.S. decision to retain members of the "Iran Section" of Saddam's intelligence services who could reignite old hostilities with Iran. Iran could cooperate with a pro-American government or a secular government, but it prefers that its allies, like the SCIRI and Dawa, play a major role in the new government. Clearly, Iran would prefer to see a government in Baghdad that is powerful enough to maintain order but not strong enough to challenge Iran in the region.

Tehran has thus far been rather happy with the composition of the three post-Saddam Iraqi governments, which have all included forces Iran considers friendly. Iran was the first country in the region to recognize the Governing Council and the Allawi-led Interim Government, participated in the U.S.-sponsored Madrid Donor Conference for Iraq, and pledged to start an oil-swap program with Iraq to ease oil shortages.

(3) The third priority for Iran is to support the Shi'i awakening in Iraq. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979, there has been a reawakening of the politically unrepresented and historically repressed Shi'a of Lebanon, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and now Iraq. Thanks to the U.S. destruction of Saddam Hussein's "republic of fear," millions of oppressed Shi'a have been liberated and politically energized. Iran is determined to support and sustain this liberation.

To do this, Iran has moved in two different directions simultaneously. It has consistently endorsed free national elections in Iraq while simultaneously supporting the insurgency, at least rhetorically. Tehran welcomed the expected victories of the SCIRI and Dawa parties in the January 2005 parliamentary election—the first in post-Saddam Iraq. The logic is transparent, notwithstanding the irony that its own Council of Guardians frequently eliminates "unfit" candidates from elections. Electoral victory by Iraq's majority Shi'a in most elections is a virtual certainty.

These clerics have a decisive advantage over their non-Shi'a secular rivals—their networks are long-standing, deeply rooted, and experienced in mobilizing the masses. Even Saddam Hussein could not destroy them. If allowed to compete at some later date, Muqtada al-Sadr's followers could also win in an election, which should make Tehran happy as well.

This is not to suggest that Tehran's agenda today is to push for an Iranian-style Shi'i theocracy in Iraq. Far from it. Iranian leaders, like many prominent Iraqi Shi'i leaders, are cognizant of the fact that Iraq's outspoken Sunni and

Kurdish communities vehemently oppose the creation of a theocracy according to a Shi'i or any other religious standard, which would surely pave the way for the partitioning of Iraq. In fact, Iran is much more concerned about the prospect of Sunni Jihadists and Wahhabi-style fundamentalists fomenting sectarian conflicts between the Shi'a and Sunnis and, in the process, dragging Iran into the fray. At most, Iran might like to see a government run by clerics as in the Islamic republic, but at minimum it will probably be satisfied with the creation of a disciplined Shi'i force in Iraq resembling the Lebanese Hezbollah.

Iranian policy toward the insurgency in Iraq is shrouded in ambiguity and is difficult to decipher. Tehran denies providing any logistical support to Sunni insurgents. The case with respect to Shi'a insurgents, however, is different. Iran denies any involvement in the insurgency, although some Iraqi officials accuse Iran of providing weapons to al-Sadr's Mahdi Army and training SCIRI's Badr forces. It is even harder to establish the support given to the insurgency through the informal Shi'a networks alluded to earlier, although it would be naive to deny that some degree of support has been offered to them.

It is clear, however, that Iran has avoided condemning Muqtada al-Sadr and the Sunni insurgency for a multitude of reasons: partly because Tehran recognizes Sadr's popularity among the Shi'a and views him as a counterforce against the more moderate Ayatollah Sistani; partly because the insurgents, like Iran, oppose U.S. occupation; and partly because Iran would like to endear itself to the Sunni forces. In fact, Iranian television programs aired in Iraq from Tehran in Arabic praise the insurgency as a national liberation movement. Ayatollah Hashemi Shahroudi, for example, has declared, "No one can question the legitimacy of the just struggle of the Iraqi people against [the] foreign occupier"; he makes no distinction between the Shi'a and Sunni insurgencies. During the uprising in Najaf in mid-2004, Shahroudi talked about "the beginning of a new Intifada against foreign occupiers and aggressors."²⁰ It therefore appears that Tehran supports the Shi'a insurgency as long as it does not generate a violent U.S. reaction against Iran or the Iraqi Shi'a. It was in that spirit that, in mid-2004, Iran sent a delegation to mediate between the Coalition Forces and Muqtada al-Sadr, which resulted in the assassination of an Iranian official.

(4) Iran seeks to prevent the United States from establishing permanent military bases in Iraq. Toward that end, Iran has consistently called for an "internationalization of the occupation" and greater involvement by the UN and the European Union. To permanently establish bases, the United States will have to appeal to the elected Iraqi government to sign a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). Iran could easily increase its propaganda and call upon the Iraqis to denounce what Iran would call a "capitulation agreement." Khomeini's denunciation of the same agreement signed between Iran and the United States in 1963 brought him much popularity. Although it has no realistic option but to

live with an American military presence in Iraq, Iran will continue to mobilize Iraqi public opinion against U.S. military bases and political agendas.

Iran also is determined to keep the United States intensely preoccupied in Iraq and prevent it from any victory. At the same time, Iran seems to have made a strategic decision not to allow its own deep involvement in Iraq to lead to any direct military confrontation with the United States. Thus, Iranian involvement and policies toward Iraq oscillate between the two strategic goals of preventing the United States from total victory in Iraq and avoiding any direct military confrontation with the United States.

(5) Iran's fifth goal is to ensure Iraq's territorial integrity and prevent its Balkanization. Iran will not tolerate an autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq that could easily entice ethnic groups in Iran to demand their own self-rule. While Iran may welcome the far-fetched scenario of an independent "Shi'istan" in southern Iraq, its current policy supports Iraq's territorial integrity.

(6) Finally, Iran is most eager to engage in Iraq's reconstruction. Just as it created an economic sphere of influence in Herat, Afghanistan, Iran would like to expand its economic influence in the Shi'i holy cities and southern Iraq. A U.S. pledge not to block Iranian participation in Iraq's reconstruction would be a major confidence-building step by Washington.

The collapse of Saddam's regime, auspicious as it has been for Tehran, has also created new fears and challenges for Iran. One source of anxiety for Tehran is the possible manipulation of the Iraq-based Mojahedin-e Khalq to destabilize Iran. The organization was supported by Saddam Hussein and operated from within Iraq; its members are now under direct American control. Tehran, like the United States, considers this organization a terrorist entity. Tehran, however, condemns the U.S. failure to outrightly condemn and disarm the Mojahedin as "hypocrisy" in the conduct of the war on terror. Because the United States refuses to turn the group over to Iran, Tehran is convinced that the United States plans to use the Mojahedin to destabilize Iran, just as the United States directed the Contras to destabilize the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. Iran, which currently holds several al-Qaeda members, would like to play the "al-Qaeda card" to strike a deal with Washington—al-Qaeda operatives in exchange for Mojahedin agents.

Iran also worries about possible U.S. manipulation of the Qom-Najaf corridor. Historically, the seminaries, or *howzeh*, in Iraq have had a significant impact on Iranian politics. In 1891, for example, Iranian ayatollah Shirazi issued a fatwa (decree binding on all Shi'i adherents) from Najaf that forced the Persian Qajar king, Naser al-Din Shah, to cancel a lucrative tobacco concession he had granted a British company. The fatwa, which banned all use of foreign-owned tobacco, inspired the Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1906. In the 1960s, after the death of Ayatollah Hossein Borujerdi in Iran,

Mohammad Reza Shah sent his condolence telegraph to Ayatollah Muhsin al-Hakim in Najaf in a futile attempt to move the center of Shi'i learning to Najaf and thus marginalize the Qom and Mashhad seminaries. And in the 1970s, it was from Najaf that Ayatollah Khomeini delivered his historic lectures to legitimize the establishment of an Islamic government based on direct clerical rule, or the *velayat-e faqih*.

Today, there are those in Iran, including some clerics, who either seek to democratize or altogether reject the *velayat-e faqih* doctrine. These voices are often suppressed. A powerful *howzeh* in Najaf could reverse this. Ayatollah Ali Sistani, who has millions of followers in Iran and is indisputably the most popular *marja'* (learned scholar) in Iraq, belongs to the quietist school of Shi'i thought, which rejects Khomeini's unique interpretation of the *velayat-e faqih* doctrine. Ideologically, Sistani is much more compatible with the late ayatollah Kazem Shariatmadari, a sagacious cleric who was one of the leaders of Iran's revolution and one of the most vociferous opponents of Khomeini's version of the *velayat-e faqih* doctrine. For his opposition, Shariatmadari was placed under house arrest and died in seclusion in the early 1980s. A Najaf *howzeh* unfriendly toward Iran's version of the *velayat-e faqih* doctrine and supported with Iraqi petrodollars could pose a significant threat to the durability of Iran's clerical government. It is important to note, however, that it would be unlikely for a non-Iranian ayatollah in Najaf or elsewhere to influence events in Iran. Additionally, both the Qom and Mashhad seminaries have blossomed during the past 25 years, and both wield considerably more resources than the Najaf seminary. Therefore, Qom and Mashhad in the long run could influence Najaf more than Najaf could impact them.

IRAN'S PERSIAN GULF POLICY IN THE POST-SADDAM ERA

The removal of Saddam Hussein and the American occupation of Iraq have surely changed Iran's policy toward Iraq and the United States, but they have not qualitatively altered the foundation of the Iranian policy toward the littoral Arab states in the Persian Gulf that was formulated in the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. If anything, the transformation of Iran from a revolutionary power to a regional status quo power interested in diplomatic and economic cooperation and a peaceful resolution of regional disputes (including the sensitive issue of the three islands), has accelerated. We can expect Iran to work closely with the region's oil producers to develop a unified oil policy and continue to pursue a "good neighbor" policy toward all the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Furthermore, Iran will continue to create a counterforce to the U.S. military presence in the region by offering lucrative concessions to the European Union, Russia, and China.

As I have showed in the preceding pages, the Persian Gulf has enjoyed relative stability when the United States and Iran have been at peace and have collaborated with one another. Conversely, when there is a divergence of their interests, regional stability is a mirage. American encouragement of the GCC and reliance on strategies of balancing regional power and containment, during and after the Iran-Iraq War, were all designed to marginalize Iran. They failed, however, to create regional stability. A lesson from this recent history is that any future security regime that excludes Iran will be neither effective nor sustainable.²¹

It defies logic to marginalize Iran, the region's oldest, most populous, and strongest force. Of course, the mighty United States could ignore Iran and unilaterally try to maintain regional stability for years to come. It could also make regime change in Iran a top priority. However, the costs and unintended consequences of such policies would be exorbitant, even for a hyperpower. Rapprochement with Iran, difficult as it may be, would be a much more prudent course.

The daunting task of building a new and unified Iraq with a responsible, representative, and pro-American orientation will take years. It will be expensive and fraught with unpredictable danger. It would be premature to count on Iraq as a power that could maintain or make substantial contributions to regional stability. Nor is Saudi Arabia, with its small population and weak army, in a better position to do so. The other littoral states are simply too small to play an important role in regional security. Finally, outside forces, such as Syria or Egypt, which have a large number of expatriates working in the region, cannot safeguard regional stability.

Thus, the sooner Iran and the United States begin to recognize each other's legitimate interests in the region, the sooner stability will prevail. Tehran has some leverage in Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Afghanistan that it could manipulate to make life more complicated for the United States and its friends or, to the contrary, improve its standing. Or, Iran could play a positive role as a mediator between the United States and various Islamic movements and governments. For its part, Iran must understand that not since the 1979 revolution has rapprochement with the United States been as essential as it is now. The fact is that, if Iran is to take advantage of its unexpected recent strategic gains, it must recognize, and soon, that it will lose far more than the United States if it does not strike a deal with Washington.

A U.S.-Iran rapprochement is a necessary but not a sufficient prerequisite for long-term stability in the region.²² One of the central and oft-ignored lessons of the 1979 Islamic revolution is that a regime devoid of legitimacy or is internally reviled is as much a threat to regional security as is interstate war. While Iran is the most stable country in the region, it cannot be denied that a major threat in the near future is the internal fragility of the monarchies in

the region, which have a deadly combination of archaic regimes and petrodollars. A U.S.–Iran rapprochement will surely make it easier for the United States to manage the ramifications of the inevitable internal changes in the region.

NOTES

I dedicate this paper to the loving memory of Fardioun S. Milani. This article was written for a conference entitled Iran after 25 Years of Revolution, which was held at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., November 2004. This chapter, with minor changes, has appeared at www.wilsoncenter.org/events/docs/MohsenMilaniFinal.pdf. I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Judith Yaphe for her astute commentary on the style as well as the content of this paper.

1. The data for Saudi Arabia are from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sa.html>, and for Iran from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>.

2. See Mohsen M. Milani, "Iraq, and its relations with Iran: Vi. The Pahlavi period, 1921–1979," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. XIII, fascicle 6, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, New York: Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation, 2006, pp. 564–572.

3. See Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988.

4. I have discussed the evolution of Iran's Persian Gulf policy in "Iran's Gulf policy: From idealism and confrontation to pragmatism and moderation," in *Iran and the Gulf*, ed. J. S. al-Suwaidi, Abu Dhabi: Emirate Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996, pp. 83–98.

5. I have borrowed the concept from Professor Mohiaddin Mesbahi of Florida International University.

6. The six members of the GCC are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Oman.

7. House Joint Resolution 216, 100th Congress, Overview of the Situation in the Persian Gulf: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Washington, D.C., 1987, p. 301.

8. For Iran's account of the war, see Mohammad Dorudian, *Aqaz ta Payan* (From the Beginning to the End), Tehran: Markaz-e Motale'at va Tahghighat-e Jang, 2004.

9. See K. Mofid, *The Economic Consequences of the Gulf War*, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 147. He claims that the cost of the Iran–Iraq War was about \$1097 billion.

10. A good example of the new approach was Mohammad Masjed Jamie's *Iran va Khalij-e Fars* (Iran and the Persian Gulf), Tehran: Zendegi Press, 1989.

11. Elaine Sciolino, *The Outlaw State*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991, p. 173.

12. I have discussed Iran's policy during the Kuwaiti crisis in "Iran's active neutrality during the Kuwaiti crisis: Reasons and ramifications," *New Political Science* 21 and 22, spring–summer 1992, pp. 41–60.

13. See *The Persian Gulf Crisis: Relevant Documents, Correspondence, Reports*, prepared by the Sub-Committee on Arms Control, International Security and Services, Washington, D.C., 1991, p. 204.

14. For a good discussion of the impact of Iranian policy on regional security, see Geoffrey Kemp, "The impact of Iranian foreign policy on regional security: An external perspective," in *Iran and the Gulf*, ed. J. S. al-Suwaidi, Abu Dhabi: Emirate Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996, pp. 118–135.

15. See Peter L. Bergen, *Holy War, Inc.*, New York: Free Press, 2001.
16. Anthony Lake, "Confronting backlash states," *Foreign Affairs* 73(2), March–April 1994, pp. 45–55.
17. *Kayhan*, August 23, 2004.
18. Ibid.
19. This section of the chapter is from my essay "Iran's silent majority," *Current History* 104(678), January 2005, pp. 30–36.
20. *Hamshahri*, August 24, 2004.
21. For a refreshing proposal for a new security arrangement, see Michael D. Yaffe, "The Gulf and a new Middle East security system," *Middle East Policy Council* 11(3), fall 2004. For analysis of various security regimes prior to the fall of Saddam Hussein, see Andrew Rathmell, Theodore Karasik, and David Gompert, *A New Persian Gulf Security System*, RAND Issue Paper, 2003.
22. For a good summary, see Judith S. Yaphe, "US-Iran relations: Normalization in the future?" *Strategic Forum*, Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, no. 188, January 2002, available at www.ndu.edu/inss/Strforum/SF188/sf188.htm.



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