STATE, DISSIDENTS, AND CONTENTION: IRAN, 1979-2010

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ABSTRACT

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Why after almost a decade of silence and “successful” crackdowns of contention during the 1980s has Iran witnessed once again waves of increasing popular protest? What are the processes and mechanisms behind the routinization of collective actions in Iran since the early 1990s, which continue despite state repression? Why and under what circumstances does a strong authoritarian state that has previously marginalized its contenders tolerate some forms of contention despite the state’s continued repressive capacity? And finally, to what extent are available social movement theories capable of explaining the Iranian case?

In “State, Dissidents, and Contention: Iran, 1979-2010” I engage theories of social movements and contentious politics in order to examine the emergence, development, and likely outcomes of popular contention in contemporary Iran. My study is the first project of its kind to focus on elite factionalism and its impact on popular mobilization in contemporary Iran. Although other scholars have extensively written on elite factionalism in postrevolutionary Iran, they have not analyzed the implications of the inter-elite conflict for the emergence and development of social protests against the Islamic Republic. While this study primarily utilizes political process and resource mobilization models, it acknowledges the importance of economic, ideological, and breakdown approaches for the interpretation of the emergence and development of popular mobilization in contemporary Iran. Drawing on data gathered from census figures, public policies, state and oppositional newspapers, and interviews with dissidents and state officials, this study shows that collective actions against the Islamic Republic emerged gradually due to institutional changes, limited electorate competition, social and educational expansion,
and, more importantly, the intellectual transformation of a significant segment of the elites and
their action-intended discourse. I demonstrate that the political opportunity structure is not a
unitary national opportunity but rather varies by social groups, demands, and contexts.

I make this argument by exploring the political environment for collective mobilization in
contemporary Iran in four key contexts: 1. the period of consolidation, war, and repression
(1979-1988, the Khomeini era); 2. the period of postwar reconstruction and economic
liberalization (1989-1997, the tenure of President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani); 3. the era of
reform and political opening (1997-2005, the tenure of President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami);
and 4. the period of mobilization in the context of increasingly violent repression (2005-present,
the tenure of President Mahmood Ahmadinejad).

By examining social protests within these different contexts, I conclude that regimes that
use force to restrict political rights after a long and sustained period of opening risk eliciting
resistance from dissidents who have already gained organizational resources to challenge the
state’s violent closing.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

State, Dissidents, and Contention: Iran, 1979-2010

“Society is a very mysterious animal with many faces and hidden potentialities, and ... it’s extremely shortsighted to believe that the face society happens to be presenting to you at a given moment is its only true face. None of us knows all the potentialities that slumber in the spirit of the population.” -- Václav Havel

In “State, Dissidents, and Contention: Iran, 1979-2010” I engage theories of social movements and contentious politics in order to examine the emergence, development, and the likely outcomes of popular contention in contemporary Iran. My study is the first project of its kind that focuses on the fluid and consistently increasing elite factionalism and its impact on popular mobilization in contemporary Iran. Although other scholars like Mehdi Moslem have extensively written on elite factionalism in postrevolutionary Iran, they have not analyzed the implications of the inter-elite conflict for the emergence and development of social protests against the Islamic Republic of Iran, hereafter IRI (Baktiari 1996; Buchta 2000; Moslem 2002; Keshavarzian 2005).

My research analyzes how forms, developments, and the changing nature of political context and opportunity structure, alongside demographic and social changes influence repression-dissent interactions. By treating the interactions of the state and its multiple dissident groups as chosen and rational strategies and counterstrategies, the main argument of this study is that elite division, the ideological transformation of a significant segment of the ruling elite and institutional changes coupled with the demographic and social alterations are key factors in the emergence of contentious collective actions in postrevolutionary Iran. I illustrate throughout this study that the gradual expansion of socio-political space by both the reformist currents and the Iranian state during the tenures of Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Seyyed Mohammad

Khatami (1989-2005) has increased the opportunity for peaceful participation and mobilization, reducing the effectiveness of state repression, which may ultimately promote long-term democratic transformation.

Social protests and civil disobediences in organized, sustained, public, and collective forms have been playing, since their emergence in late 18th century Great Britain and France, important roles in socio-political affairs around the world, profoundly transforming numerous countries’ political, cultural, and social structures such as France, Russia, China, Mexico, and Cuba.

With two successful revolutions and waves of popular protests since the tobacco uprising in 1890s, Iran offers a prime example for the increasing force of popular protest in the modern world. In addition to their transformative nature for states and societies, the emergence of waves of civil unrest across the world, particularly since the 1960s, also ignited increasing academic interest in the study of contentious politics. The primary aim of this study is to examine the rise and fall of popular struggle in contemporary Iran with a focus on the Rafsanjani and Khatami eras.

Iran has a long, vital, and complex history of popular mobilization. Since the late nineteenth century, collective public claim making has become a critical component in the interactions between the state and multiple social actors in the country. In 1892 the tobacco uprising, composed of a coalition of the traditional merchant class (the bazaar) and the clergy, forced the Qajar monarch to cancel the secretly contracted and humiliating concession between the Iranian government and the British Major G. F. Talbot. The treaty had sold to the British company the monopoly of the production, sale, and export of all tobacco in Iran for fifty years. This massive popular protest in response soon proved to be a rehearsal for an initially successful constitutional revolution in 1906 that limited the power of the king through the creation of a modern constitution and majles, or the parliament. The partial parliamentarization of Iranian politics coupled with a broad
popular nationalist mobilization in the early 1950s brought Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq to power, a democratic and influential prime minister who nationalized the Iranian oil industry. The overthrow of Mosaddeq’s democratic government through the American and British engineered coup d'état in August 1953 and the increasing militarization of Pahlavi state were followed by an unprecedented and massive social revolution in 1979 that terminated 2,500 years of monarchical rule and profoundly transformed Iranian society.

Social movements and revolutions in Iran with longer than a century of history have captured the attention of many analysts, observers, and scholars. Since then, historians, political scientists, and sociologists have sought to explain the origins, development, and outcomes of many large scale popular mobilizations. Several scholars have utilized and revisited a variety of theoretical models to examine the social origin and causes of the emergence and development of popular mobilizations in their historical contexts. Others wrote interpretive works on modernization, democracy, arbitrary rule, industrialization and revolutions in Iran. A brief review of selected scholarship on Iran will demonstrate the distinction of my research from these studies. When reviewing recent scholarship on Iran, it is crucial to distinguish between pre- and post-1979 studies. The Islamists’ ascension to power after the revolution and the period of social turmoil that followed not only massively transformed Iranian society, but also radically reshaped many fields of Iranian studies. For the first time, native Iranian scholars, educated in Iran and abroad, became the predominant experts in almost all fields of Iranian studies in the West, such as literary studies, history, philosophy, economics, and sociology. Many of these scholars were forced into exile because of the political and social restrictions suddenly imposed upon them and their work.
The scholarly literature, produced before or after the 1979 revolution, dealing with the late nineteenth and twentieth century Iran focused on the general history of the country. To my knowledge, no prior study on the state and society in Iran analyzes popular struggle in the country through the lens of the political process model of social movement theory. The overwhelming majority of current studies on modern Iran are interpretative and analytical reports of turning points in Iranian history, such as the Tobacco Movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century, the Constitutional Revolution in the first decade of the twentieth century, the decline of the Qajar Dynasty, the rise of Reza Khan (Reza Pahlavi), and the nationalization of the oil industry under Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq.²

Ervand Abrahamian’s comprehensive work Iran Between Two Revolutions (1981) contains an analytical chronology of Iranian history from the late nineteenth century to the events that led to the revolution of 1979. His analysis of Iran’s tumultuous twentieth century offers a compelling account of the origins, process, and outcomes of central events, such as the Constitutional Revolution, the emergence of the Tudeh Party, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979. His work explicating the transformation and formation of social classes and forces in Iran contributes profoundly to scholars’ understanding of the general features of the sociopolitical structure of Iran. Although he describes to some extent the interactions between the Iranian state and a number of other social groups, the aim of this excellent work is not to provide a detailed study of contentious politics in contemporary Iran. In his work Iranian Mojahedin he offers analytical perspective on both the Pahlavi and the Islamic states and their interactions with the People Mojahedin of Iran (PMO hereafter), one of the largest guerilla organizations in the country. Although this book greatly contributes to the history of the formation, development,

² See multiple works by F. Adamiyyat, N. Keddie, S. Zabih, and H. Algar, among others.
and expansion of the PMO and its strategic interactions with the Iranian states since its establishment in the mid 1960s, its motive is not to treat this subject from the perspective of social movement theories and repression-dissent studies.

Hamid Dabashi’s numerous works on Iran that span philosophy, anthropology, cinema studies, and politics—works that include The Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Iranian Revolution (1993) and Iran: A People Interrupted—explore the intellectual origins of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and offer a cosmopolitan definition of Iran and its peoples. In his pioneering book The Theology of Discontent he examines the political and ideological concepts proposed by key intellectuals whose ideas, as he claims, “prepared the revolution” decades in advance of its inception and shaped its form and outcome.

Homa Katouzian’s insightful and comprehensive studies, among them State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of Pahlavis, examine the origin and development of arbitrary rule, democracy, and law throughout the modern history of Iran. In his theoretical examination, he concludes that in conflicting situations rebellions and revolutions were “led against the unjust rule,” not necessary between democratic forces and the ruling elite. His investigations, however, do not explore state repression-dissents interactions and how their strategic negotiations affect the course of events in Iran.

There are a number of works which do examine the interactions between the Iranian state and other social actors, but not through the lens of the political process model and also not during the time period under examination by my research. For example, Asef Bayat’s Street Politics: Poor Peoples’ Movements in Iran analyzes the movements of urban disenfranchised and poor squatter-dwellers in Iran. The “quiet encroachment of the ordinary,” as the author calls movements of the urban poor, bears only indirect political implications, but it “implies changes
that the actors consider… significant in themselves without intending necessarily to undermine political authority.” He analyzes the impact of ordinary people, who do not belong to an organized political party or major dissident networks. Although his analysis helps readers understand the strategies of the urban poor in dealing with institutional obstacles and restrictions, he does not examine popular protests and collective actions at a national scale. He studies poor people’s collective actions without seriously engaging in the theoretical debate and analysis of contentious politics.

In his most recent work *Making IslamDemocratic* Bayat provides critical analysis of social movements and state-reformists interactions and traces the origins of new public debates and the emergence of social movements in post-Khomeini Iran. Without doubt his analytical presentation of the sociopolitical events during postrevolutionary Iran contributes tremendously to our understanding of current affairs in Iranian society. However, he does not take into account important social movement theories to explain the Iranian case and its integration within the broader scholarly discourse of social movement generally.

Scholars who study large scale social mobilization, primarily the 1979 social revolution in Iran, have largely overlooked the relevance of event-based analyses of collective actions and activists’ repertoires of contentions in their strategic negotiations with the repressive Iranian state. More importantly, the chief purpose of their research is to explicate the ideological, political, and economic causes of the 1979 revolution. In his two influential works on the Iranian Revolution3, sociologist Misagh Parsa argues that the Pahlavi state’s increasingly interventionist and exclusionary economic policies were the main triggers for the popular uprising that lead to the 1979 revolution. He further claims that these policies sooner or later politicized adversarial

social groups, including the clergy, bazaar, and workers, which prompted these actors to consider the state as the main target in their struggle over resources and power.

Charles Kurzman’s *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* analyzes from a new perspective the causes of popular mobilization that led to the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Based on primary sources and nearly 90 interviews of participants of the revolution, he employs critical mass theory to identify the origins of the emergence of popular mobilization in 1978. Critical mass theory assumes that individuals participate in contentious public gatherings when they expect that others will participate, too, and when their perceived benefits outweigh the costs. In accordance with this explanation, he claims that the emergence of mass collective actions is not triggered by changes in the political opportunity structure, nor is it caused by organizational resources, Islamist networks, economic conditions, ideological factors, or the repressive strategies of the military.

The next work to be mentioned in this vein is Arang Keshavarzian’s *Bazaar and State in Iran*, the only available comprehensive scholarly work on the state-bazaar relationship. As its title indicates, this work provides a unique examination of interactions between one of the most influential social forces in Iranian society, the *bazaar*, and the pre- and postrevolutionary political systems. It explicates the complex network of the *bazaar* and its negotiations with both the Pahlavi and Islamic state and other key actors in Iranian society, such as the clergy. This important study offers novel insights into the organization of the *bazaar* and its manifold strategies to encounter and challenge the state. By defining the *bazaar* as a “concept that depicts a place, an economy, a way of life, and a class, and even … embod[i]es Iran, the Middle East, or the Islamic world,” this work expands our horizon far beyond the dominant and traditional depiction of the *bazaar* as a simple market place (Keshavarzian 2009:45).
Other scholars investigating state-society relations in Iran, including Said Amir Arjomand and Mansoor Moaddel, pay special attention to *Shi’a* ideology as one of the most important triggers of popular protests prior to the massive revolution of 1979 (Arjomand 1981; Foran and Goodwin 1993; Moaddel 1993). Although the above mentioned works provide essential analyses of the interactions between the state and various forces in the Iranian society, they do not present an event based examination of popular struggle in Iran from the perspective of political process model of social movement studies. Furthermore by focusing merely on the 1979 revolution, the timeframe and subjects of the above mentioned works differ from my analysis of the contentious events in the postrevolutionary Iran.

Scholars, who study social movements and revolutions more broadly, such as Theda Skocpol and Jack Goldstone, utilize structural models for the study of social movements and revolutions in China, Russia, and France, emphasizing the nature of the state, economy, and international context (Skocpol 1979; Goldstone 1991). And finally, yet another school of scholars, such as John McCarthy and Mayer Zald, relate the emergence of popular mobilization to the increasing available resources for collective actors—a theoretical model they call “resource mobilization” (McCarthy and Zald 1973; 1977). Furthermore, since the 1970s, scholars such as Charles Tilly, Sidney Tarrow, and Doug McAdam, have employed increasingly the political process model to trace the origins of popular contention in Western Europe and the US. The political process model offers a more general tool for the analysis of the emergence and development of contentious collective actions by focusing on three fundamental factors, such as the political opportunity structure (regime openness/closeness), available organizational and mobilizing structure, and framing processes.
Although my work is informed by structural, cultural, and ideological approaches to explain the progress and cycles of mobilization, I distinguish myself from these scholars of collective actions by underscoring the centrality of political process model to account for the origins of popular contention. By examining contentious politics in Iran through the lens of the political process approach, my research is the first attempt to employ this theory for the study of collective actions in Iran and is among the few studies that analyze popular mobilization in illiberal contexts outside of Western democracies (Boudreau 2004; O’Brien 2008; Almeida 2008).

With the aim of integrating the study of popular contention in Iran into social movement theory, I revisit what social movement scholars call the political process/political opportunity structure model by applying it to a non-democratic regime. Analysts of contentious politics have employed predominantly the political process approach to understand the emergence, trajectory, and outcome of popular contentions in Western democratic societies. As a result, state-society interactions and their trajectories and outcomes in non-democratic settings have not received sufficient attention. My project makes a valuable contribution to the literature by underscoring the usefulness of these models for understanding contentious politics in contemporary Iran.

Drawing on both empirical and theoretical research, my study examines the following questions: Why and under what circumstances does a strong authoritarian state that has “successfully” marginalized its contenders in the past tolerate certain forms and degrees of

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{4}}\text{ See numerous works by D. McAdam, J. McCarthy, M. Zald, S. Tarrow, C. Tilly, D. Della Porta, A Oberschall, H. Kriesi, R. Koopmans, and D. Rucht.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{5}}\text{ Throughout this dissertation, I use interchangeably the terms dissent-repression, state-society, authority-opposition, and state-social movements’ interactions to signify the same relational meaning. I use these different but synonymous terms to avoid redundancy.}\]
contention despite the state’s continued repressive capacity? How do the contenders of an oppressive state organize large-scale mobilization on the streets, and why do dissidents choose to challenge the ruling elite through other, less costly means, such as petitions and court appeals? Why, for instance, do some oppositional actors decide in some circumstances to fight the state through armed struggle and in others to employ non-violent strategies? What would be the implications and outcomes of the strategic interactions between this state and its many contenders? And finally, to what extent are the available social movement theories capable of explaining the Iranian case?

To address these questions, I divide the political environment for collective mobilization in contemporary Iran into the following four settings: 1. consolidation, war, and repression (1979-1988, the Khomeini era); 2. postwar reconstruction and economic liberalization (1989-1997, the tenure of President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani); 3. reform and political opening (1997-2005, the tenure of President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami); and 4. mobilization in the context of increasingly violent repression (2005-present, the tenure of President Mahmood Ahmadinejad).

With the aid of primary sources, such as state and dissident newspapers and fliers and oral history archives, I illustrate how collective acts of claim making emerged, evolved, intensified, and, in some cases, disappeared.6 After the genocidal massacre of dissidents and the

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6 The primary archival materials utilized for this research include state and semi-state newspapers like the Jomhouri-e Eslami, Keyhan, Ettela’at; reformist newspapers such as Khordad, Sobh-e Emrooz, Sharq; and oppositional weekly like Kar, Nameh-e Mardom, Rah-e Tudeh, Mojahed and Enghelab-e Eslami dar Hejrat. I also made extensive use of rich online news sources by both state and opposition groups and individuals like Ayatollah Hosseinali Montazeri, Abdolkarim Soroush, and Mohsen Kadivar in addition to international or foreign newspapers such as The Guardian, The New York Times, and the German-language media Der Spiegel, Die Süddeutsche Zeitung, and Neue Zürcher Zeitung. For a complete list of archival sources, see the bibliography at the end of this dissertation.
destruction of oppositional political organizations in the 1980s, civil societies and associations reemerged gradually due to the changing political environment and limited economic liberalization since the early 1990s. The available opportunities provided by the increasing fragmentation of the ruling elite and the ideological transformation of many high ranking state officials into staunch proponents of reform generated a semi-free public sphere that led to the emergence of hundreds of associations and organizations and the publication of a plethora of critical books, journals, and dailies. Activists found opportunities within the limited electoral competition to expand the space for more opening and participation and, as we witnessed recently (the Green Movement), to mobilize large-scale street protest against the ultra conservative faction of the regime whom they accused of election fraud—a movement that soon targeted the entire Islamic state.

The Iranian Green Movement is the meeting point of many actors and strata of Iranian society that have been targets of repression by the Islamic state since its inception. The permissible but limited competitive electoral space and the subsequent manipulation of the presidential election in June 2009 provided women, students, teachers, and secular and religious intellectuals to find allies in the elite. The ongoing elite struggle over power and the ultimate attempt of the radical Islamists to oust violently all other factions from the polity compelled many reformists to take to the street as a last resort in their negotiations with the Islamic state. Regimes that use force to restrict political rights after a long and sustained period of opening risk eliciting resistance from dissidents who have already gained organizational resources to challenge the state’s violent closing (Goldstone and Tilly 2001, Tarrow 1998). As noted above, the tenures of Rafsanjani and Khatami (1989-2005) were accompanied by significant economic and political changes that led to a relative liberalization (Bayat 2007).
Since 1997, popular protest became a routine venue for many contenders in Iran in their strategic interactions and negotiations with authorities. In what follows, I illustrate that former and new contenders returned to the political scene in the late 1990s with new forms of activism, implementing—unlike activists during the 1980s—non-violent tactics and innovative contentious collective performances and repertoires.7 Dissident actors noticed quickly the emerging opportunity for collective claim making and employed inventive performances to make their presence felt.

As we will see, at different historical moments novel forms of social protests were partially tolerated and unintentionally facilitated by the state due to its devastating loss of legitimacy in the aftermath of its failure to achieve its objectives in the Iran-Iraq War, its massive abuse of human rights in the 1980s, sweeping demographic changes, and, significantly, the fragmentation of the ruling elite after the death of the charismatic leader and only unifying figure of the Islamic regime, Ayatollah Khomeini, in June 1989.8 The fragmentation of the ruling elite, the complex structure of power, and the existence of many formal and informal competing centers of power provided the contenders with new space and opportunity for mobilization. By analyzing popular mobilization and de-mobilization in Iran, my dissertation demonstrates that the political opportunity structure is not a unitary national opportunity and varies by social groups, demands, and contexts. It furthermore explains the emergence and disappearance of

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7 For Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly contentious performances are relatively familiar and standardized whereby one set of political actors makes collective claims on another set of political actors. For example, participants in the Ukraine’s Orange Revolution used mass demonstrations as visible, effective performances. Contentious repertoires are an array of contentious performances that are currently known and available within a set of political actors. For example, England’s antislavery activists helped to invent the demonstrations as a political performance, but they also drew on petitions, lobbying, press releases, public meetings, and a number of other performances. (Tilly 2007:11)

8 The use of titles, surnames, and so on does not denote sympathy or antipathy for persons or groups analyzed in this dissertation. In some cases, the addition of a certain title such as Ayatollah is due to its usage by all national and international observers of Iranian politics and is used in this dissertation for the purpose of clarity. In order to avoid redundancy, I use Khomeini, the Islamists, and radical clerics interchangeably to refer to the same political force.
opportunities and threats for various groups and how changing environments impede and facilitate the dynamic of claim-making and mobilization. Instead of limiting opportunities for social resistance, I conclude that repression against contentious collective actions in the aftermath of a relatively long period of expansion of social and political space ironically facilitates popular mobilization, which may ultimately promote long-term democratic transformation.⁹

Factionalism, Repression, and Mobilization

Why is it important to study contentious politics in contemporary Iran? Popular contention in Iran offers an example of social resistance that survived, reorganized, and returned to the political scene despite the unprecedented level of brutal repression, the large scale mass execution of dissident activists, and the destruction of many oppositional organizations during the 1980s.¹⁰ More importantly, popular contention diffused across the country and has gained strength, as we have seen recently in the post-election turbulence in Iran since June 2009.

The death of the founder of the Islamic state, the ruling elite’s subsequent fragmentation, and the institutional and socio-political changes initiated in the early 1990s during the tenure of the more pragmatic President Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani provided a new space for activism and collective claim-making. Although the Islamic state was initially able to contain contention, marginalize its organized oppositional groups during the 1980s, and consolidate its power, it

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⁹ For Charles Tilly, political opportunity structure consists of opportunities for and threats to claim making on the part of one or many actors by changes in regime openness, coherence of the national elite, stability of political alignments, availability of allies for potential claimants, and regime repression or facilitation with respect to possible forms of claim making. (Tilly 2008:12)

¹⁰ According to the oppositional groups, international human rights organizations (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch) and official Iranian sources from June 1981 to August 1988, 20,000 to 30,000 activists were executed, nearly 100,000 were imprisoned, and 10,000s of dissidents went underground.
failed in its overall oppressive project to create an “Islamic man” through the so-called Islamic Cultural Revolution and attain lasting popular consensus. Thus, the regime’s increasing totalitarian tendency¹¹ in the 1980s and its failure to exercise total control over both private and public spheres alienated the masses of Iranian youth, women, students and intellectuals.¹²

The form and degree of surveillance and the harsh repressive strategies and their subsequent failure also transformed the nature of contention and social resistance in the country. The Islamic state, unlike many other authoritarian regimes, targeted not only dissident political activists, but also ordinary citizens. Any individual could become the target of state reprisal for simply behaving “un-Islamic” and thus violating the “Islamic order.” What then would be the likely consequences of this kind of social repression for the dynamic of resistance and popular mobilization?

One of the implications of the repression against ordinary citizens’ “un-Islamic” behavior and the state’s invasion of the private realm was the formation of new forms of resistance in the everyday life of ordinary individuals who rejected the state’s intrusive and doctrinaire “Islamization” policies. As findings of research elsewhere shows, states' repression of the quotidian life (everyday routines) of citizens generates anti-systemic identity and facilitates collective mobilization (Flacks 1971; Johnston 1991; Snow, Cress, Downey & Jones 2010). Later in this study, I will outline how a large percentage of technically “illegal” acts occurred and continue to occur in Iran that the state would like to control, but cannot (e.g. violating the

¹¹ A totalitarian regime is portrayed as a regime that constantly controls both private and public spheres (Brzezinski & Friedrich 1956, Arendt 1973).

¹² The public sphere, according to Habermas, is an arena (favorably in a discursive democracy) where social actors freely debate the needs and concerns of the society in various available public spaces to eventually shape the state’s decision-making processes. Important features of the public sphere are the absence of violence and the existence of freedom and free access to social networks, the rule of law, and the accountability of state institutions. For an in-depth analysis of the public sphere, see the following works: Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere by Jürgen Habermas (1962), and Habermas and the Public Sphere by Craig Calhoun (1993).
Islamic dress code, consuming alcohol and drugs, viewing satellite television, utilizing social networks, such as twitter, facebook, and blogging, and organizing parties and performances of underground music). Instead, the state represses these behaviors only irregularly, so that the fear of repression is always felt by dissenting citizens, but the pressure is not great enough to prevent individuals from continuing their behavior.

Why does the Islamic regime refrain from using severe and consistent repression against dissidents and the “un-Islamic” behavior of millions of citizens in Iran? The ruling circles consist of multiple formal and informal factions that disagree fundamentally on a number of social and political questions, including on the policy towards different opponents. The very contradictory nature of the Islamic state provides a limited degree of pluralism and discursive space. The Islamic Republic of Iran is based on two very important foundations, namely Republicanism and Islamism, which signifies, at least theoretically, that the state possesses both democratic and authoritarian qualities. While on the one hand its republican principle allows for a certain degree of power-sharing and the holding of elections on municipal and national level, on the other hand its theocratic Islamist nature limits its democratic dimension. It is the theocratic authorities that decide the overall orientation of the state not its republican institutions, namely the Majles, or Iranian parliament. Every bill passed by the parliament has to be confirmed by the powerful Shouray-e Negahban, or the Guardians Council (GC), and the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution, who is a Vali-e Faqih, or Islamic jurist, representing the highest instance in the power hierarchy.

This inherently contradictory characteristic of the Islamic Republic has ignited heated debates in postrevolutionary Iran since its inception. It continues to be a major controversial theme in negotiations between the regime’s ideological factions, including the modernists and
traditionalists. The proponents of pragmatic modern and dynamic Islamic jurisprudence, or fiqh-e pouya, emphasize the republican principle of the Islamic Republic and believe that the law and decision-making should take into account changes within modern societies and respond properly to the needs of today’s world. In contrast to the modernists’ understanding of fiqh, the traditional interpreters stress the Islamist nature of the state and claim that the Islamic sources of law, namely the Qur’an and the Hadith, and the tradition of the Islamic Prophet provide comprehensive answers to all of the problems of our time. In sum, the modernists base the legitimacy of the state on the will of the majority of the people, while the Islamic traditionalists define the legitimacy of the Islamic regime solely through its compatibility with their understanding of shari’a.13 As we will see in this study, the reformists’ discourse and their alternative reading of Islam plays a key role in the emergence of public claim making against the dominant conservative faction led by the supreme leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

In addition to the ideological contradictions I have outlined above, the structure of power in Iran becomes more complex when we consider the existence of many formal (e.g., official state institutions) and informal power centers (e.g., influential political clerics and Grand Ayatollahs and semi-official revolutionary institutions).14 Later in this study we will return to the factional politics in Iran and its impact on popular mobilization.

The question that arises here is this: what are the implications of these ideological and political disputes for the emergence, dynamic, and outcome of popular mobilization in Iran? The basic answer is that the presence of these different views and factions within almost every major state institution prevents the state from employing consistently harsh repressive policies in its

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13 For more information, see Schirazi 1997.

14 For more information on factional politics in Iran, see Buchta 2000 and Moselm 2002.
dealings with the dissidents. Furthermore, the ideological contradictions of the Islamic regime provide an interpretative space and framing opportunity for the challenging actors.

By framing, I mean a shared understanding of a problem and possible solution through action. Activists express their common interests and demands through sophisticated and strategic framing. As we will see in subsequent chapters, the nature of the framing and demands of each challenger determines the form and degree of state repression. In this discussion framing is understood as an action-intended interpretative strategy that activists utilize to translate words into actions. Iranian reformist clerics, philosophers, and journalists frequently challenge the Islamic Republic (IRI) with their inclusionary, pluralist, and democratic readings of Islam and engage actively in conversation with the aim of expanding the public sphere.

The inconsistency of repressive strategies demonstrates the authorities’ indecisive utilization of its available repressive capacity and the existing disagreement among the ruling elite in its negotiations with its many contenders. The inconsistent and irregular employment of repression may intimidate activists in the short term. Yet at the same time it may facilitate contention and encourage the actors to stay on the scene and act more cautiously in the long term with new strategies (Tilly 1978; Gamson 1990; Khawaja 1993; Beissinger 2002; Steen & Gel’man 2003; Davenport et al. 2005). The irresolute suppression of certain dissidents and the very abstract definition of “political crimes”, jorm-e siasi, by a faction-ridden regime are frequently translated into opportunities for claim-making by diverse groups of Iranian activists.15

Iranian journalists, writers, artists, students, women, and intellectuals remained active when the

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15 Political crime according to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s judiciary system is the spread of cultural and political propaganda against the Islamic state and the definition suggests that “constructive” criticism is not counted as a crime. This definition of crime is very broad and can encompass any critical views of authorities. For more information, see the popular online magazine Tabnak, the legal resource Vekalat, and the newspaper Shahrvand-e Emrouz, accessible at http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=9803, http://www.vekalat.org/public.php?cat=1&newsnum=1510180, and http://www.shahrvandemrouz.com/content/4430/default.aspx. Accessed August 1, 2009.
state officials shut down their newspapers, journals, and offices. They did so by forming new alliances, establishing new associations, and changing the repertoires of their claim-making. Repeatedly, the same groups of Iranian dissident journalists and intellectuals targeted by the state’s censorship used formal institutional and informal venues to negotiate and publish their media under new names with almost the same subjects and orientation.

The initiation of the enormous repressive project of Islamization in 1980, which targeted predominantly institutions of higher education through the so-called Cultural Revolution, soon encompassed all aspects of Iranians’ lives. Initially, many thousands of university students and professors were expelled, arrested, exiled, or executed. In the course of the top-down violent Islamization the new Islamic order was imposed on citizens, which included the compulsory veil and dress code, gender segregation, and the performance of collective prayers in schools, offices, and public spaces. To the present day, Iranian citizens’ homes—their very private realms—are invaded arbitrarily by law enforcement officials or the paramilitary basij, who justify these intrusions by their perhaps “imagined” suspicious un-Islamic activities, which consist mostly of private parties and family events celebrated with music and drinks. The so-called gasht-e ershad, or Morality Guidance Police, patrols the streets of all Iranian cities and issues warnings about “un-Islamic” dress and conduct. It also arrests ordinary citizens for “violating” these codes.

During the so-called erteqa’e-e amniyyat-e ejtemai, or the project for the increase of public safety that started in spring 2007, many thousands of citizens were arrested, warned, or had to participate in compulsory courses in which they were coerced to learn “Islamic” behavior.

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16 Niruy-e Moqavemat-e Basij or the Mobilization Resistance Force is a paramilitary organization under the control of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, the most powerful military organization of Iran. The Basij was founded in late 1979 under the direct decree of Ayatollah Khomeini to “protect the Islamic Revolution from domestic and international threats.” The organization consists of approximately 700,000 personnel. From its inception to the present day, Basij is the strongest arm of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the oppression of the dissident forces and the compulsory enforcement of “Islamic order.”
According to official Iranian state sources, during the spring and summer of the same year 113,354 women were warned, 150,000 were detained and had to sign a “commitment letter” to behave in an Islamic fashion, and many thousands men and women in Tehran alone had to complete a so-called “Islamic guidance class.” According to both independent and government sources, millions of Iranians throughout the country became the targets of the so-called “public safety project” and other repressive actions of the state. Based on an estimate of a high official of the judicative branch govveh-e qaza’iyyeh, over 12 percent of the entire Iranian population had been charged and persecuted. This estimate does not include political activists and many millions who received warnings or were arrested temporarily. In most of these cases, youth, women, and other ordinary citizens are charged with “un-Islamic” behavior such as attending parties, drinking, and violating the Islamic dress code.

The persecution of millions of Iranians for actions that are not considered illegal in many parts of the world constitutes a unique pattern of state-society interactions. Many millions of Iranian women make persistently collective claims against the state by simply ignoring the state’s dress code and by testing continuously in their everyday lives the boundaries between their actions and the state’s tolerance. Millions of Iranian youth challenge the authorities by creating public arenas in the basements and backyards of their homes with their underground music, their dress, and life-style. These everyday forms of resistance may not make headlines, but—as James Scott aptly illustrates—after years of continuation, they “make [their] political

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17 For more detailed information, see the UNHRC report: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,IRBC,,IRN,,47d65459c,0.html. Accessed November 10, 2009.

presence felt” and generate a voice and an alternative way of life that challenge the state’s control of private and public realms (Scott 1985).

The ongoing cultural revolution not only failed to achieve its objectives, but it also turned three of its major targets—namely women, youth, and university students—into the most relentless and defiant anti-systemic activists. In the turbulent post-election protests during the summer of 2009, we witnessed on the streets of Iranian cities how the meeting of millions of defiant Iranian youth and women (who possess very modest or almost no organizational resources) with other organized political dissidents (e.g. student organizations, dissident underground organizations, the Reformists Islamic Participation Front, and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution) enforced the power of anti-authority movements. They were able to do so because of changes in the political opportunity structure in Iran brought about by the presence of factionalism, demographic transformations, and institutional changes in the post-war and post-Khomeini state—all subjects I explore at length.

**Demography, Fragmentation, and Framing**

Iran is an increasingly educated society with a very young population. At the turn of the last century nearly two-thirds of the country’s 70 million citizens were under the age of 30 and approximately 20 million of them were enrolled in institutions of secondary and higher education. The decline in the illiteracy rate is another very important factor to be noted here. In contrast to 1977, when only 58.9% of the male population and 35.5% of the female population could read, nearly 90% of men and over 80% of women were literate by 2008.19

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19 These statistics were generated by the Statistical Center of Iran. For a detailed report, see [http://62.60.136.184/content/userfiles/sci/sci/year86/TEST15.pdf](http://62.60.136.184/content/userfiles/sci/sci/year86/TEST15.pdf). Accessed November 5, 2009.
This demographic and educational transformation combined with institutional changes that began during the tenures of Rafsanjani in the early 1990s and the reformist president Khatami in late 1990s created a new public realm that paved the way for the emergence of oppositional public collective actions in the country.

The eight-year Iran-Iraq War was over, the authoritative charismatic leader of the revolution had passed away leaving a vacuum, and the once limited and managed factionalism under the iron fist and charismatic power of Khomeini gradually resurfaced. The succession crisis and the search for a supreme leader immediately after the death of the Ayatollah in 1989 turned into a regime crisis. This crisis, that to the present day accompanies the regime, seriously damaged the Islamic state’s legitimacy and divided the Iranian polity into many factions. The nomination of the low-ranking cleric Ali Khamenei, who was not an Ayatollah, as the successor of Khomeini and the Vali-e Faqih, the highest ruling Islamic jurist, faced fierce resistance within the Iranian clergy that, at the time, was in charge of almost all of the key positions in the country.

For first time since Khomeini’s marginalization of the influential Ayatollah Shari’atmadari in 1980 and Ayatollah Montazeri in 1988, the clerical Shi’a ruling elite has been persistently challenged by an additional but highly influential force, the dissident Shi’a clergy and the so called roushanfekran-e dini, religious intellectuals. As we will see in the forthcoming chapters, the emergence of these clerical and non-clerical religious intellectuals, once part of the ruling elite, with their modern and pluralistic reading and interpretation of religion provided contending dissidents, such as secular intellectuals, women activists, and students, with a plethora of opportunities for collective claim-making. Once again as during the anti-Pahlavi revolutionary mobilization of the 1970s, activists are employing the rich resources of religious networks, such as mosques, and the thousands of dissident clerics are armed with all the
collective capacities and interpretative space of Shi’a Islam, such as collective prayers, religious ceremonies, anniversaries, and major national events.

During the tenure of Rafsanjani (1989-1997), Iran entered an era of post-war reconstruction, cautious economic opening, and an improvement of its relations with the international community. During this period, three major competing camps—the radical Islamists centered around the supreme leader Ali Khamenei, the pragmatist circle around Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, and the Islamic left affiliated with figures like Mehdi Karrubi and Mousavi—openly debated their disputes. The heated discussions between the radicals and the pragmatist camp on controversial political, social, economic, and cultural issues soon reached other social actors outside state institutions. Increasingly defiant students, women activists, and intellectuals participated in the public debates. It was not primarily the state that defined from above the social, cultural, and political norms as was the case during the 1980s. As noted earlier, the harsh repressive measures and war coupled with Khomeini’s charismatic dominance dominated public discourse during the 1980s. As a result, any dissenting voice was either immediately suppressed or did not have the opportunity to engage in the public realm. However, this situation changed when the emerging political and intellectual rift among the revolutionary elite became evident and the Iranian polity was increasingly divided into splinter groups.

During the past two decades, interpretative framing has become the most powerful weapon for the activists in their shared collective demands for change and reform. As mentioned

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20 Factional politics in today’s Iran are more complex and diverse and thus supersede the initial three camps, namely the pragmatic modernists, traditional Islamists, and the Islamic left. Furthermore, as discussed throughout this study, elite fragmentation in Iran since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini has been consistently fluid and increasingly intensified. The most recent form of this division worth noting is the rift among the so called Ossulgarayan, or the principalists led by the supreme leader Khamenei, on the one hand and President Ahmadinejad on the other hand. The proceeding chapters of this research address in greater detail factionalism and the fragmentation of the ruling elite and explicate the causes of this growing factionalism. I illustrate how this growing ideological rift impacts contentious politics and state-dissidents interactions in contemporary Iran.
briefly, the emergence of religious intellectuals offered a democratic interpretation of Islam that resulted in a serious ideological rift within the political elite. These intellectuals were important because they had been high-level participants in influential cultural, political, and government intelligence institutions for over two decades. This fragmentation was manifested most powerfully in the election of the reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami in May 1997.

These new intellectual framings and debates gradually put an end to the state’s domination of the public sphere. Khomeini’s direct intervention through speeches and decrees were the orientation manual for all actions of the state, which resulted in an unprecedented marginalization of all alternative views from the country’s institutional and public arenas. The death of the powerful and incontrovertible charismatic leader opened windows of opportunities for multiple critical views and a semi-free public sphere. Although the public sphere as the marketplace for ideas is state-monitored, activists and intellectuals innovatively exploited the available free space and participated in this discursive arena. Religious intellectuals and activists even interpreted some of Khomeini’s statements in their favor creating new opportunities and expanding the available space for collective claim-making. These emerging new and defiant “arguments of mixed companies,” in Kantian sense, provided an intellectual and political base for emerging political action and contention (Habermas 1991). Later in this study, we will see how women, students, and youth utilized the intellectual and political divisions among the ruling elite for their collective objectives. They noticed that the repressive capacity of the state is not based solely on technological advantages, high-tech weapons, and large scale military organizations but rather on the willingness and the degree of the state forces’ determination in utilizing these resources against activists.
Since the death of its founder, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been constantly divided and unable to develop functioning and united strategies in its negotiations with dissident actors in Iran. This partial “paralysis of will” that Mark Beissinger observed in his groundbreaking work on nationalist mobilization in Soviet states has been a characteristic of the Iranian state since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in June 1989 (Beissinger 2002). Iranian activists exploited this partial paralysis of the factionalized state and gradually expanded the opportunity for contentious claim-making with their active engagement and strategic framing in the available discursive space. By doing so, they gained high level support from the country’s influential senior Ayatollahs, such as Hossein Ali Montazeri. As Tilly points out, “certification” and “recognition” from religious, intellectual, and moral authorities expand the space for activism and enhance the capacity of mobilization for dissidents. More importantly, this high level recognition raises the risk and cost of repression for the state (Tilly and Tarrow 2004). States that repress groups whose claims enjoy recognition by popular and influential figures may jeopardize their legitimacy, which may conversely translate into opportunity for dissidents’ claim-making.

Public intellectual discourse in post-Khomeini and postwar Iran turned gradually towards internal issues, such as economic reconstruction and development, democratic rights, and social justice, as opposed to the radical anti-Western and Islamization debates that dominated the public political discourse during the first decade of postrevolutionary Iran. One of the most prevailing common denominators of many actors in the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was anti-US imperialist rhetoric. It played an unprecedented role in the postrevolutionary struggle over power.

With their anti-Western rhetoric, Khomeini and his followers targeted the West and Iranian intellectual dissidents whom they called gharbzadeh. This almost untranslatable term
(gharbzadehgi) was coined by the Iranian philosopher Ahmad Fardid in the 1940s and popularized by the influential writer and social critic Jalal Al-e Ahmad in the 1950s who published his controversial work under the same title. Gharbzadehgi means literally being plagued by the West and metaphorically it denotes the “negative” influence of Western intellectual traditions and culture on the Iranian intelligentsia. It is a critique of the Westernization and modernization of Iranian society. The international spirit of anti-Western imperialism in the 1960s and 1970s as a main framing of many social movements and revolutions in both Western and non-Western countries also reached Iran. The anti-Western discourse gained force when the democratic government of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq was toppled by an American and British engineered military coup d’état. The anti-US and anti-Western imperialist debates were further enforced by the emergence of radical Iranian Marxist and socialist-oriented Islamic organizations in the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Soviet-oriented Hezb-e Tudeh-e Iran (Tudeh Party of Iran), Sazman-e Cherik-hay-e Fada’i-e khalq-e Iran or Fadai’an-e Khalq, (Organization of Iranian People Guerilla Freedom Fighters, hereafter PFO), and Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran (The People Mojahedin Organization of Iran, the PMO). In the ensuing chapter after this introduction, we will see how the immense force of anti-US-imperialism in postrevolutionary Iran served Ayatollah Khomeini for the formation and consolidation of the Islamic state.

Political Process Model and Iranian Contentious Politics

By examining contentious politics in Iran, I demonstrate that repression-resistance interactions in an authoritarian environment can be best conceptualized and explicated through the existing theories of contentious politics that account for indigenous conditions and contexts
for mobilization and protest. The political process/political opportunity structure model for the
analysis of social movements and contentions offers the best available framework for the
understanding of state-contender interactions in Iran. This research is an attempt to revisit the
political process approach by analyzing state-dissident interactions in a non-democratic context.
In doing so, I develop a more general explanatory model of the origins, trajectories, and
outcomes of contentious movements within an authoritarian setting. This model, which takes into
account institutional, political, and cultural factors, allows me to demonstrate the variability of
the strategic encounter of the Islamic state with its many opponents.

By analyzing popular mobilization and de-mobilization in the Iranian context, this study
demonstrates that the political opportunity/threat structure is not a unitary national opportunity
and differs by social group, issue, and region. It furthermore explains the emergence and
disappearance of opportunities and threats for various groups and how this changing structure
impedes or facilitates the dynamic of claim-making and mobilization.

The political process model offers a more universal tool for the analysis of the emergence
and development of contentious collective actions by focusing on three fundamental factors, the
political opportunity structure (regime openness/closeness), available organizational and
mobilizing structures, and framing processes. Framing denotes the intellectual and interpretative
presentation of the demands made by social actors. We will see how, on the one hand, these three
elements affect the dynamic of contention in Iran and its likely outcome and how, on the other
hand, an examination of the emergence, mechanisms and processes, and outcomes of social
resistance in the Iranian socio-cultural context allows us to develop a broader and more general
theory for explaining the emergence and trajectory of contention elsewhere. Furthermore, we
will see how political opportunity structures acquire religious and cultural dimensions in the
Iranian socio-political environment and provide dissidents unique opportunities for mobilization, framing, and innovative repertoires.

The Iranian religious, cultural, and political context with its many available collective events and ready-made informal networks, mosques, universities, and bazaars offers activists tremendous opportunities for public debate and collective actions. The contentious gatherings in the recent post-election turbulence in the country illustrate how activists were innovatively using events such as Friday prayers, Jerusalem Day, and religious events during the holy month of Ramadan as a platform for their agenda. These events that are nationally celebrated and promoted by the Islamic State also function as a vibrant mechanism for the diffusion, micromobilization, and decentralization of social resistance. The decentralization and diffusion of contentions reduce the vulnerability of the movements to state repression (Lichbach 1987; Opp and Ruhel 1990; Rasler 1996). First, they are not led and organized by a central or national political party that the state could dismantle. Moreover, these ready-made ritual events that are celebrated across the country give the dissidents a unique opportunity to take to the streets and utilize a public arena for their own agenda. In Tilly’s words, activists consciously transform a weak repertoire (ritual events) into a strong repertoire through which they express their own collective claims (Tilly 2008:15). Recently, Iranian activists appeared en mass at the “Jerusalem Day” celebration and instead of shouting the official state slogans “down with Israel, down with the USA,” which have been used in the past thirty years, they shouted “down with the dictator” and demanded free elections and freedom for all political prisoners. The protests were so strong that the authorities cancelled the annual celebration of the death of the founder of the

21 International Jerusalem Day (rooz-e jahani-e quds) is an annual celebration since 1980 on the last Friday of the holy month Ramadan promoted and organized by the Iranian state to express solidarity with the Palestinian people and to oppose Israel and the West.
Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, along with a number of other important events out of fear that the protesters would “highjack” them for their own agenda.22

Although Iranian activists predominantly employ inherited modular repertoires in their protest events (e.g. repertoires such as demonstrations, strikes, and petitions used for centuries by European activists), they also invented their own particular repertoires of claim-making. Iranian democracy protesters express their collective claims in unique ways using blogging and other social networks (i.e. text-messaging, video clips), organizing sports and ritualized religious events, writing slogans on walls and banknotes, praying collectively, staging poetry readings, and gathering nightly to shout “allah-o akbar” (“God is great”) and “down with the dictator” from the roofs of their houses. By transforming a ritual event (weak repertoire) into a strong repertoire and by shouting “God is great” almost every night for months and during important national holidays, an important shift was generated that social movement scholars call scale shift, in this case upward scale shift. The upward scale shift in demand and space (namely the diffusion, rising dynamic, and radicalization of popular contention in Iran) illustrates the positive impact of regime-fragmentation on the emergence and trajectory of contention in Iran. The intensity of the elite conflict not only spread the contentious collective actions from Tehran to cities and provinces such as Shiraz, Mashhad, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Hamadan, Mazandaran, and Gilan but it also increased the demands of the collective claimants. Increasingly, Iranian dissidents and activists moved from reformist claims to more profound radical demands, such as

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22 Since the 2009 presidential election, authorities either cancelled or denied permission for many important annual religious and political gatherings, such as the prayer for the ‘Aid al Fitr that marks the end of Ramadan and the cancellation of the annual celebration for a very popular and progressive figure during the 1979 Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmud Taleqani. For more detailed information, see BBC Persian: http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/09/090908_he_ir88_taleghani.shtml. Accessed on October 1, 2009.
calling for the removal or resignation of the supreme leader and the replacement of the Islamic Republic with a secular Iranian Republic.

**Chapter Outline**

The subsequent chapters of this study, after this introductory chapter one, present a comprehensive examination of state-dissent interactions and their likely outcomes. Chapter two, “State and Clergy: A Historical Overview” presents an outline of interactions between two major forces in Iranian history since the 16th century. It aims to provide a context for better understanding the debates in subsequent chapters, particularly the question raised in chapter three, namely what are the historical and socio-political grounds that helped a radical clerical faction become the most powerful bloc in the postrevolutionary struggle over state power.

Chapter three, “Regime Consolidation: Mobilization, War, and Violent Demobilization, 1979-1988,” examines the events during the initial years after the revolution and provides important context for understanding the emergence, trajectories, and the likely outcomes of repression-dissent interactions in post-Khomeini Iran. In this chapter we learn why and how the violent closing of the relatively open political environment (February 1979-June 1981) successfully destroyed the mobilization capacity of multiple well-organized political organizations and associations, and it consolidated the Islamic State—a state that survived years of oppositional armed attacks and a long foreign war, namely the prolonged and bloody Iran-Iraq conflict from 1980 to 1988.

Chapter four “Regime Opening: Postwar Reconstruction and Economic Liberalization, 1989-1997” explicated emerging elite factionalism in the context of cautious economic liberalization, postwar reconstruction, and social and educational expansion. It further presents
the promising opportunities for contentious claim making by pointing to the ideological transformation of a segment of the ruling Islamists, analyzing how economic, educational, and demographic changes created favorable condition for dissident activism despite the presence of unpredictable and violent state repression.

Chapter five, “From Interpretation to Mobilization: Factionalism, Competitive Elections, and Framing” illustrates the impact of competitive (though very limited) elections, factional divisions, and above all available interpretative framing on the emergence and development of collective actions against the Islamic Republic in Iran. It shows how limited and controlled elections combined with the presence of alternative pluralistic Islamic discourse were translated into opportunities that facilitated public claim makings. It further argues that the reformist discourse in the inter-factional politics was the chief factor for the rise of popular mobilization in post-Khomeini Iranian politics.

Chapter six “Reform and Political Opening: Mobilization and Counter-mobilization, 1997-2009” examines the available discursive and organizational vehicles that enabled student and women dissidents in Iran to take to the streets and challenge the authorities in the context of political reform and increasing factionalism within the ruling elite. It presents the organizational structure of social actors and shows how these actors utilized, expanded, and exploited the available opportunities to promote the diffusion of popular contention during the reform era. Furthermore, this chapter illustrates how the formation of a semi-free public sphere since the early 1990s translated arguments and interpretations of what Kant calls “mixed companies” into actions. This chapter then turns to its final concern, namely why the reformists in charge of both the executive and legislative branches failed to restructure the Islamic state, despite the relative initial opening of political space.
<table>
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<th>Context of Mobilization</th>
<th>Opportunity/Threat Capacity</th>
<th>Organizational</th>
<th>Forms of Collective Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consolidation, War, and Repression, 1979-1988</td>
<td>Increasing unification and consolidation of the elite; decreasing institutional access, growing threats, and disappearing opportunities</td>
<td>Dismantling and destruction of many dissent political parties, unions, and civil society associations</td>
<td>Sustained street protests, strikes, sit-ins, public statements, flier distribution, and armed attack, all carried out predominantly by radical leftist organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Liberalization and Postwar Reconstruction, 1989-1996</td>
<td>Emerging elite factionalism and opportunities, educational and social expansion</td>
<td>Emerging and rising social, cultural, and political associations and publications</td>
<td>Student and labor-based protests, petitions, strikes, meetings and press publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Opening and Reform, 1997-2005</td>
<td>Intensified elite factionalism, increasing institutional access, and rising opportunity</td>
<td>Establishing new reformist political organizations and forming coalitions and cyber activism</td>
<td>Student, labor, women, teacher, religious, and intellectual-based collective actions, including petitions, rallies, strikes, and court appeals</td>
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<td>Regime’s Closing and Repression, 2005-2009</td>
<td>Returning repression, decreasing institutional access, and growing factionalism</td>
<td>Regime’s limiting and shutting down of organizations, associations, presses, and cyber activism</td>
<td>Student, labor, women, teacher, profession-based mobilization, including rallies, strikes, sit-ins, and meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mounting Repression, the Green Movement, and the Post-2009 Election</td>
<td>Violent elite clashes and mounting repression, exceedingly limited institutional access</td>
<td>Violent dismantling of dissent organizations and closing of newspapers and web pages</td>
<td>Street mobilization, such as increasing distribution of fliers and audio and video clips; rise in petitions, court appeals, and nightly gatherings on rooftops</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Contexts of Collective Mobilization in Iran, 1979-2010
Chapter Two

State and Clergy: A Historical Overview

You ignorant fools [secular intellectuals], a land of [or a land ruled by] religion is paradise on earth and is built by the pure hand of the clerics. Those half-alive [nimeh-jan] clerics whom you piles of dust (khas va khashak) rebuke are ruling tacitly two-thirds or more of this country and you do not know it.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Khomeini 1944: 202)

Although my dissertation examines the state-dissident interactions since the 1980s with a focus on the growing influence of the reformist currents, a historical examination of the state-clergy relationships shall provide essential context for understanding the emergence, trajectories, and transformation of collective mobilization in contemporary Iran. I will illustrate how the radical Islamists and Khomeini loyalists marginalized all their liberal and leftwing contenders and took total control over state power after a groundbreaking social revolution in 1979 and have since been the dominant force in Iranian politics.

For centuries Shi’a clerics have been presenting themselves as the only legitimate heirs of the 12th Shi’a Imam during his occultation to lead the umma, the Islamic community. Although before the development of Khomeini’s concept of Velayat-e Faqih, the rule of Islamic jurist, the clergy never aimed explicitly to replace the monarchical rule through an Islamic authority, the claim that the 12th Imam and its representatives are the single legitimate ultimate authority functioned for centuries as a Damocles Sword over the heads of the ruling elites. Whether as the opposition or the ally of the state, the clergy’s claim for political supremacy and even a takeover of state power enjoyed high legitimacy and found strong backing from the Iranian population. A prime example of this support is the referendum of March 31, 1979, where over 16 million of the eligible twenty-two million citizens participated, of which 98 percent voted in favor of the
formation of the Islamic Republic (Tabatabaei 2008: 68, 269-275). It should be said that a significant segment of the electorates was not aware of the actual nature of an Islamic Republic since they never experienced it as such.

Since the 16th century, when the founder of the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1736) declared Shi’a Islam the official religion of Iran, the Shi’a clergy has been playing a critical role in Iranian society. Initially, a country with the majority of the population belonging to the Sunni branch of Islam, the Safavid rulers utilized all of their material and spiritual means to convert the Iranian population to Shi’a Muslims. To do so, they recruited numerous Shi’i religious scholars from southern Lebanon, Iraq, and other Arabic countries, and provided them with generous funding to establish a Shi’a infrastructure in the country (Halm 1994: 15-19). From then on, these scholars, through the assistance and generous endowment of the Safavid kings, built seminary schools and religious centers to teach students the Shi’a doctrine—students who in turn soon became important players in sociopolitical affairs of the country to the present day. The graduates of these religious schools, ruhanian, or clerics, experienced such a rapid growth in number and influence that they soon established themselves as an important social class of clergy, tabaq-e ruhaniyyat.

The Shiites, or followers of Imam Ali, believe that after the death of the Prophet Mohammad, the leadership, imamat, of the community, umma, should have been delegated to Ali and not to Abu-Bakr (the father-in-law and companion of the Prophet). The dispute over

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24 I use interchangeably synonyms like clergy, ulama, Ayatollah, theologians, and mojtahed to avoid redundancy.

25 Ali was the son-in-law of the Prophet Muhammad and one of his most influential and close companions. He was the second person after Khadija, the wife of the prophet, to convert to Islam.
the legitimate successor of Mohammad divided the early Muslim community into two factions: a majority Sunni, and a minority Shi’a. The latter believed that Ali and his sons and grandsons were the true and legitimate leaders of the community because they were members of the prophet’s family. Based on this concept of leadership, the Shi’ates believe that the twelve Imams, Ali and his eleven sons and grandsons, are the legitimate rulers of the Islamic community. Due to the harsh and repressive actions against the Shi’ates, they believe that the twelfth Imam, Mehdi, went into occultation in order to preserve the continuity of Shi’a Islam and will one day return to rescue humanity from unjust and repressive rulers. During the time of the occultation, the mojtaheds, who are the highest ranking scholars in Shi’a Islam (more often called Ayatollah, or literally the “sign of God”), were purported to have been the only legitimate rulers of the community. Thus it is not surprising that for centuries the clergy’s claim to absolute monopoly over state power and ultimate political authority posed the most powerful challenge to the state.

According to the Shi’a doctrine, all temporal rulers are illegitimate. During the entire period of the Safavid Dynasty since the 16th century and the ensuing Qajar dynasty up until the early 20th century, the temporal rule of the kings were mainly legitimized (or at least tolerated) through the ideological confirmation and justification of influential mojtaheds (Arjomand 1988: 11-16; Halm 1994: 119). They were accepted, supported, or tolerated to the extent that they respected the ulama’s interpretation of Islamic law and norms. Since the establishment and

26 Ayatollah, a religious scholar who is a marja-e taghlid, or source of emulation, is also the highest institutional instance within the internal structure of the Shi’a clergy, represented only by those scholars who through their years of seminary education and religious writing and interpretation of the religious texts produce in addition to important writing on various sociopolitical issues a thesis, or ressaleh. This thesis is a book that contains concise guidelines to all important questions that an Islamic community or an individual believer faces in daily affairs. According to the theory of taghlid, or emulation, each member of the Shi’a community should follow the religious guidelines of one Ayatollah who offers each Ayatollah a social base or constituency. Thus Ayatollahs possess an inherently committed following that provides a sociopolitical base. In addition to the unprecedented ideological impact of the institution of taghlid, this institutionalized relationship between the Ayatollahs and their constancies has a strong economic characteristic. Every Muslim has the duty to pay khoms and zakat, or religious taxes, to his marja-e taghlid. This unique form of ideological influence over the faithful masses coupled with the presence of economic sources independent of the state enabled the clergy to play a dominant role in Iranian history.
institutionalization of the Islamic clergy in the Iranian society is a unique phenomenon in the Islamic world, the monarchies ceded a great deal of legitimacy and ideological power to this group (Keddie 1971: 6-8).  

Islamic rituals and centers offered the clerics a ready-made network that transgressed all social and ethnic boundaries. Shi’a Islam is the religion practiced by the overwhelming majority of the Iranians. Seminary schools exist in almost every urban area of the country. More importantly, thousands of mosques are scattered across Iran which facilitate collective Islamic rituals, such as Friday prayers and numerous religious ceremonies and festivities. These mosques and events supplied religious leaders with a means to institutionalize their relationships with the faithful masses across social and class boundaries and to secure strong popular support (Arjomand 1988; Parsa 2000).

Moreover, the ulama, although at the early Safavid period dependent on the generous funding of the royal court, later enjoyed independent financial sources for their activities through the religious endowments, vaqf, and taxes, sahm-e Imam. One historian of Iran describes the shift in ulama-state relationships as follows:

In the early Safavid period the theologians and their followers and progeny were dependent on the financial and political largesse of the shahs, and they understandably did not give the shahs political or ideological trouble… Over time, however, the factors conducive to an alliance between court and ulama changed. Economic bases for ulama independence of the shahs grew… Throughout the Muslim world Muslims may make bequests of their property or money as vaqf (inalienable endowment)…As vaqf is, in theory, inalienable, it should have grown ever larger over the centuries, in fact it tended, even before changes, to be subject to confiscation. Under a long lived dynasty like the Safavids that wished to stress its own piety and itself made vaqf contributions, the size of vaqf property and the number of ulama and religious students supported by it grew considerably. Such inalienable income gave the ulama a strong economic base from which some of its members could, if so inclined, bite the hand that fed them (Keddie 2006: 15-16).

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27 For an outstanding analysis of the early Shi’a debate over leadership and political claims, see Modarressi 1993. For a general historical role of the Clergy, see Halm 1994. For an excellent extensive analysis of multiple Islamic ideological discourses prior to the 1979 Revolution, see Dabashi 2005.
These economic sources enabled the Shi’a clergy to function for centuries as a powerful autonomous force next to kings. This dualistic structure of power that social scientists characterize as dual sovereignty, coupled with the dominant ideological position of the Islamists, provided them with a unique opportunity, which in the ultimate clash between the royal court and its multiple oppositions secured the clerical hegemony and decided the revolutionary outcome in their advantage. Particularly, during the entire period of the Qajar Dynasty (1794-1925), the composition of power in Iran was characterized by multiple poles of power, such as the tribal forces, the bazaar, and emerging modern class of intelligencia, wherein the court of the king and the ulama were positioned at the top of the societal hierarchy (Algar 1969; Akhavi 1980; Abrahamian 1982; Arjomand 1988).

The state-clergy interaction reached its explosive highpoint during Nasser al-Din Shah’s reign (1848-1896), when he continued to promote foreign investments and invite European advisers into the country, and, more importantly, when he sold the monopoly of the Iranian tobacco industry to a British company. This decision galvanized massive popular mobilization under the leadership of influential mojtaheds who eventually forced the Shah to annul the tobacco concession in 1892. A fatwa, a religious decree, was issued by the prominent marja-e taqlid Ayatollah Shirazi: “From today on the consumption of tobacco in all of its forms is a fight against the Twelfth Imam.” (Baghani 1971: 86)

The tobacco uprising was the first successful protest movement against the Qajar dynasty. Led by the ulama and the bazaar, the movement included the gradually emerging modern middle class and the intelligentsia. This was the first time in the modern history of Iran that a segment of the clergy moved beyond a mere observatory role and mobilized nationwide the population on the street against the state policy. Through their leading position in the tobacco
uprising, the prominent Ayatollahs proved their wide social base and capability of mobilization to both the ruling Qajar and other social actors, including the bazaar and the emerging modern intelligentsia.

The next groundbreaking political event that altered the political landscape of the country was the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911. This revolution illustrated for the first time in Iranian history that, in addition to the religious factions under the leadership of the ulama and the bazaar, other influential actors existed who posed a serious challenge to the political establishment. These new groups included the modern intelligentsia and the emerging, but still weak, modern middle class. The Constitutional Revolution marked the first attempt in Iranian history to replace a weak and traditional state with a European form of constitutional government (Arjomand 1988; Katouzian 2006).

Although the early stage of the revolution seemed to be successful—the Qajar monarch was forced to agree on the establishment of a constitutional assembly in August 1906 and the creation of a constitution and parliament for the first time in the Iranian history—the movement did not achieve its major goals of establishing a functioning parliamentary system. It failed due to the resistance of some conservative factions within the clergy, led by Ayatollah Fazlollah Nuri, who insisted on the incorporation of an amendment to the new constitution that would position the clergy as the guardians of the constitution and give them veto power in the Majles (Iranian parliament). These guardians would have had the right to examine the compatibility of the law with the shari‘a (Abrahamian 1982: 94-96). The dispute among the groups represented in the new Majles over the nature of the new constitution, the future orientation of the new government, the tax reforms, and the growing interference of foreign powers, particularly the
Russians, ended in a civil war that after a decade of disintegration generated a centralized authoritarian state (emergence of Reza Khan). ²⁸

After the failure of the Constitutional Revolution, the British and the Russians entered Iran and divided the country into two “zones of interest” and were informally in charge of the political affairs in the country. Thanks to the massive logistic and organizational support of the British, Reza Khan entered Tehran with a few thousand soldiers, the so-called Cossack Brigade, which was the only well-organized army of the country at the time, and took control of the capital. Within four years, he removed the last monarch of the Qajar Dynasty and declared himself the first king of the Pahlavi Dynasty on December 13, 1925, and succeeded in establishing a strong centralized state with a functioning modern administration and a nationwide bureaucracy.

The Shah’s strategy during the period of consolidation (1921-25) and the first two years after his accession to the throne (1925-27) was a combination of violent attacks on the tribal forces, which were important players in several provinces and in the Constitutional Revolution, and a retreat and concession in dealing with the clergy. He was aware of the strong position of the ulama, and knew that without their backing he would not be able to diminish the influence of the former ruling elite, namely the landed upper class, which included the ruling Qajar family and the tribal chieftains in many areas of the country outside of the capital. Following the successful removal of the former ruling elites and their tribal allies, the Shah focused his efforts on his next and by now his greatest challenge, namely the growing power of the clergy. He saw that the only way to push back the clergy from the key venues of influence was to modernize the country’s educational, financial, and judicial system. By introducing modern schools, he aimed

²⁸ For extensive examination of state-ulama relationships during the 19th and 20th centuries, see Algar 1969 and Akhavi 1980. For detailed analysis of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution, see Afary 1996.
to secularize the country’s educational system and diminish the influence of religious elements. And by modernizing the economic and fiscal systems, he intended to cut the ulama’s sources of financial support. By implementing judicial reforms, he replaced the shari’a law with a modern and secular legal code, which up until that time had been the indisputable monopoly of clergy (Abrahamian 1982: 136-7).

The British and the Russians ultimately removed Reza Shah from power in the middle of World War II as a reprimand for his cooperation with Nazi Germany. On September 17, 1941, Reza Shah’s son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, succeeded his father through the support of the British and Soviets. However, the removal of the powerful Reza Shah opened opportunities for repressed groups, such as the communist, nationalist, and Islamist opponents, resulting in the formation of the Liberal National Front led by Dr. Mosaddeq, the Society of Muslim Warriors led by Ayatollah Kashani and influential members of the bazaar, the militant Fada’ian Islam (Devotees of Islam), and, more importantly, the Soviet-oriented communist Tudeh Party. During the period of 1941-53, known in Iran as douran-e tajziyeh, the era of disintegration, the country was divided once again into two zones of influence. With the British in the South and the Soviets in the North and with a massive demand for liberalization from dissident forces, the new king was aware of the critical importance of backing from both the allies’ troops in Iran and the clergy. As a result, the new Shah initiated a series of reform programs to open the political space.

The first step he took towards political liberalization was a policy of reconciliation and concession in dealing with the powerful clergy, whereby he ordered, among other things, the establishment of a theological seminary department at Tehran University and the release of political prisoners. The degree to which the Shah was determined to implement a profound agenda of reform can be measured by his actions during his later political career. As his actions
in the post-1953 *coup d'état* against Mosaddeq proved, he was more of an authoritarian ruler

The era of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq (from April 1951 to August 1953) was one of the
most controversial periods in contemporary Iranian history chiefly due to his nationalization of
Iranian oil. He was a member of the Oil Committee of the *Majles* and, of course, thanks to his
initiative, the committee voted unanimously to nationalize the oil industry on March 7, 1951.
One week later on March 15, the *Majles* voted in favor of the recommendations of the Oil
Committee. On April 28, the *Majles* nominated Mosaddeq as prime minister (Ladjevardi 1988:
70). The nationalization of the oil industry was the most important action that Dr. Mosaddeq
took towards reducing British influence in Iran which was in charge of the country’s oil industry.
He saw British imperialism as the primary obstacle towards achieving his ultimate objectives, the
absolute independence from foreign powers and the formation of a democratic government.

Although the nationalization of the oil industry increased Mosaddeq’s popularity on the
street, he faced complex challenges during his short tenure from various forces, the court of the
Shah with his domestic and foreign backers, and the formidable religious faction led by
Ayatollah Kashani, which eventually overthrew his government. The Shah as the most powerful
instance in the power hierarchy in charge of the military and Kashani with his enormous support
among the population illustrate that Mosaddeq lacked two key instruments, sufficient political
power within the polity and control over the street mobilization. To increase his power and to
consolidate his position, he asked the *Majles* for the approval of the prime minister’s
constitutional right to select and appoint the minister of war, who is in charge of the military.
Furthermore, he requested that the *Majles* extend his legislative power for a limited period of six
months so that he could carry out several reform programs in various institutions, including
changing the public security law, improving the living conditions of the urban poor and peasants, and reforming economic developments that were approved and led to massive dispute between him, the Shah, and Ayatollah Kashani (Cottam 1988: 32, 40; Katouzian 1990: 128-36).

His reform programs and his democratic, secular, and pluralistic views brought him into conflict not only with British interests in Iran, but also with influential groups within the country, such as the clergy, to some degree with the communist Tudeh, and finally, with the Shah and his court, who controlled the powerful military. While the leftist Tudeh Party enjoyed support from the Soviet Union, the right-wing groups who were affiliated with the Shah and his court received aid from the British and American governments. Mosaddeq’s only support base was derived from the population, yet even this support was limited. Although on the one hand the social base of this popular movement was primarily urban-based and supported by the middle and upper-middle classes and the modern intelligentsia, on the other hand the clergy exercised tremendous authority within multiple strata of Iranian society. The presence of influential Ayatollahs in every major city of Iran, such as Ayatollah Kashani in Tehran, and their capability to mobilize the bazaaris (e.g., shopkeepers, artisans, and traditional middle class merchants) and the masses of the urban poor limited Mosaddeq’s popular support. The modern educated urban middle-class, particularly the intelligentsia, formed the staunchest supporters of Mosaddeq throughout his tenure. However, the religious bazaaris and the clergy supported Mosaddeq as long as he held the support of the central clerical figure, Ayatollah Abol-Ghasem Kashani. Undoubtedly, the competition between and disputes among the major actors within the movement, such as the traditional urban population and the bazaaris around Ayatollah Kashani versus Mosaddeq and his followers was a major obstacle to the success of the nationalist movement. As a leading religious figure with significant popular support, Kashani considered himself in no way less important
than Mosaddeq in the movement against British imperialism and the monarchy. Although Kashani supported Mosaddeq through a number of political actions in parliament, his Weltanschauung differed from Mosaddeq’s in many ways. Disputes erupted between the two men when Kashani did not approve of some of Mosaddeq’s appointees in the Majles, such as his recommendation for the deputy defense minister (Azimi 2004: 29-32).

Apart from disagreement on bureaucratic issues, the central problem between Mosaddeq and Kashani lay in question over the general direction and form the government should take. Kashani, a religious man and a conservative political cleric, was naturally interested in a critical role for religious principles in government actions, if not in the creation of an Islamic state (Akhavi 1988: 97). Given Mosaddeq’s background as a secular democratic politician who aimed to create a democratic state, it is understandable to see why this dispute led to the ultimate breakup of the coalition between these two men. On several occasions Mosaddeq requested that Kashani adhere to clerical quietism on political issues, which provoked a massive counter reaction from Kashani. The conflict between the two reached its climax when Mosaddeq’s request to increase the power of the prime minister was approved by the Majles. Kashani, serving as the speaker of the Majles at the time, disapproved of this request and was humiliated by the overwhelming vote of approval for Mosaddeq. From then on, Kashani saw his position endangered (Azimi 2004: 57-60). A person who aspired to be a major player in the government was now witnessing how Mosaddeq and the Majles were attempting to marginalize him from the political arena. Thus he initiated a public uprising against Mosaddeq and his government, accusing him of aiming to establish an authoritarian one-man system and of being a “leftist” who ignores Islamic norms and values. At this moment Mosaddeq realized the tremendous capacity Kashani possessed as a speaker to mobilize the masses and his willingness to undertake any
means to bring down his government (Akhavi 1988: 95-8). The first major backlash for
Mosaddeq’s government occurred with the breakup of his coalition with Kashani. However, the
ultimate blow that overthrew Mosaddeq occurred when the defector Kashani collaborated with
the military under the command of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi against Mosaddeq (Ibid, 95-
8).

With Ayatollah Kashani now squarely within the oppositional camp against Mosaddeq
and eager to cooperate with both the military and the British and US-governments, the anti
Mosaddeq alliance was now poised to take action. As time passed, both the Shah and Kashani
were increasingly alerted that Mosaddeq’s oil nationalization campaign bred far more political
consequences than economic at their expense. Thus Mosaddeq’s ultimate aim, namely the
creation of a secular and democratic state with no major role for both the Shah and the clergy,
had to be stopped at any cost.

Conceivably, Mosaddeq could have survived had he been more cautious in dealing with
his major ally Kashani. He should not have jeopardized his coalition with such a powerful and
influential force in the consolidation stage of his government. In light of this fact and the
hostility of the Shah against his tenure, Mosaddeq should have attempted to reach a calculated
consensus with Kashani and make some concessions to him without entirely relinquishing his
democratic objectives. I believe that without the collaboration of Kashani and his followers, the
Shah would not have been able to remove such a popular government through such a poorly
organized coup and, more importantly, to consolidate his power. The Coup failed initially but the
relentless masterminds behind this conspiracy, the American, the British, and the Iranian
Military performed the action two days later with success. A coalition between the Shah and the
religious forces gathered around Ayatollah Kashani and supported by American and British forces, eventually toppled Mosaddeq’s government on August 19, 1953.

The overthrow of Mosaddeq’s democratic government ushered in an era of sophisticated and harsh repression that would set off a massive social revolution in 1979. The post-coup d’état era is characterized by the targeted and violent persecution and oppression of dissident groups. The establishment of a “modern” military and police apparatus served not only to consolidate the Pahlavi dynasty, but also to concentrate power in Mohammad Reza Pahlavi’s court. From that moment onward, critics of the Shah and his regime were faced with vicious attacks orchestrated by the military and the secret service. Members of Mosaddeq’s cabinet were arrested, exiled, or executed. Affiliated activists of the communist Tudeh Party were sentenced to long imprisonments. Mosaddeq died in March 1967 after years of house arrest.

The Qom Uprising: A Rehearsal for the 1979 Revolution

In the wake of pressure from the Kennedy Administration to implement sociopolitical reforms following the “successful” destruction of opposition forces in the late 1950s, the Shah announced major programs which were first and foremost focused on land reform. This initiated the so-called “White Revolution” and the ensuing industrialization of the country. The Shah’s industrialization, modernization, and restructuring programs disadvantaged various groups in different ways. While the landed aristocracy protested against the diminishing of its economic influence, the traditional bazaaris perceived the modernization policy of Shah as a major threat to their interests. In their view, the new investments and import policies which led to a new culture of consumption would eventually damage their economic structure. The clergy also could not accept the modernizing policy, which radically reduced the economic resources of the traditional bazaaris.
as the most powerful constituency of the Ayatollahs, because the religious taxes, collected from the
_bazaaris_, had allowed them to sustain their autonomy from the state. And finally, the clergy’s
opposition was not confined to the land reform; they also protested against the enfranchising of
women—another key component of the Shah’s reforms. The climax of the protests was achieved
when the military forces of the Shah brutally repressed a demonstration led by seminary school
students in the holy city of Qom in June 1963 and killed several hundred protesters. Following this
event, students, secular intellectuals, liberals, leftists, and religious forces organized various forms
of protest, such as demonstrations at universities and collective actions in mosques across the
country in solidarity with the uprising in Qom.

The ongoing harsh crackdown of peaceful collective actions and dissents generated
precisely what the reform agenda initially aimed to avoid, namely the radicalization of political
activism. Convinced that no venues for non-violent activism were available, a small segment of
the former activists in the Tudeh Party and National Front declared a new approach to their
struggle against the “repressive monarchy,” the guerilla warfare, which was a departure from
non-violent activism. The uprising of June 1963 and the ruthless crackdown of the protest events
by military forces marked the emergence of an era with new pattern of interactions between the
state and its many challengers. The regime was faced with new types of militant Islamists,
Marxists, and intellectual actors, such as the radical revolutionary clergy under the leadership of
Ayatollah Khomeini, guerilla organizations, and modern religious intellectuals, such as Ali
Shari’ati, Ayatollah Seyyyed Mahmood Taleqani, and Mehdi Bazargan.

Following the popular protest and its crackdown in Qom the Shah arrested and exiled a
less prominent but outspoken anti-Shah cleric, Khomeini, whose forced exile ultimately secured
him a central position in the anti-Shah movement. For the first time in the history of the
confrontation between the clergy and the monarchy, it was Khomeini, who at the very center of political discourses against the monarchy in Iran, proclaimed that the *ulama* were the only legitimate rulers of an Islamic society and materialized this historical claim (see more below).

We should distinguish between two important phases in Khomeini’s life to help us understand his shift from a reformist cleric to a radical revolutionary. When he advocated a reformist agenda during the 1940s and 1950s, he never claimed political rule and was a supporter of the monarchy as a ruling order. He went so far as to oppose its removal. Khomeini stated:

> Until that moment, the *ulama* had never revolted against the state order, not even when it had passed laws that contradicted God’s decree or were tyrannical. They would continue to abstain from protest in the future because a rotten state order was better than no state order. The *ulama* have still not opposed the monarchy as a whole (Khomeini 1984: 186).

There are no indications that before the massacre of June 1963 Khomeini proposed the creation of an Islamic state ruled by the *Vali-e Faqih*, or religious jurists. Instead, he condoned a corrective and observatory role for them to monitor the compatibility of the state laws with Islamic codes (Akhavi 1980: 163). Yet the trajectory of events during 1963 coupled with Khomeini’s exile to Iraq prompted a radical shift in Khomeini’s political activism. Hamid Dabashi describes this shift in Khomeini’s thinking as follows:

> The June 1963 uprising marked the end of a sustained growth in Khomeini’s political activities and, at the same time, inaugurated the beginning of a new more powerful, phase of his attempt to topple the Iranian monarch. In the revolutionary annals of modern Iranian history, 15 Khordad 1342 (5 June 1963)-which coincided with 12 Muharram 1383 (the most passionately charged month in the Shi’i calendar)- is recorded as the day on which a premonition of the 1979 Revolution should have given the Pahlavi state the initial sign of its coming problems (Dabashi 1993: 413-14).

Khomeini’s growing explicit attacks against the Shah after this bloody event secured him a leading position within the otherwise predominantly quietist clergy. Moreover, his residence in the religious capital of Shi’ite theology, Najaf; Iraq, provided him with a religious center and network, as well as a safe haven for his activities far from the repressive apparatus of the state. At this point
in his exile, Khomeini developed his concept of an Islamic state. For the first time, a prominent Ayatollah formulates a theory of an Islamic state and called on the people of Iran to remove the “un-Islamic” monarchy:

The *vali-e faqih* must either singly or together ensure that a government in God’s divine will is adopted—one that applies the retribution [of the Qur’an], secures borders, and preserves order. If only one individual possesses this capability, the responsibility rests on him personally; otherwise this duty is fulfilled when several capable individuals assume this role […] Should the opportunity to create such a government not be present, then this duty of governing is relinquished in no way, because God has transferred this role to the *vali-e faqih*, and thus the *vali-e faqih* in this case must take the necessary measures to govern to the extent possible: he must raise the taxes on the poor, the “fifth,” property tax, and head tax [on non-Muslims], to the extent that he is able in order to use these to the betterment of Muslims. He must, whenever possible, apply the sanctions imposed by God [in the Qur’an] (Khomeini: 1971: 159-160).

Khomeini’s radical and uncompromising view and his call to establish an Islamic state challenged both the monarchy and prominent quietist clerics in Najaf and, particularly, in Qom, the central theological seminary in Iran. Some of the prominent Ayatollahs distanced themselves publicly from Khomeini’s views and called on him to avoid this kind of radical political confrontation with the monarchy and to confine himself to teaching at the seminary school. In response, Khomeini extended his verbal attacks against the Shah and his court to those clerics who devoted their life only to religious rituals and pedagogy in the seminaries:

> It is not enough to visit the holy shrines and say one’s prayers there. We [the *ulama*] live from the alms obtained for Islam, so we must also work for the religion. The *ulama* could be the *caliphs* [“rulers”] of Islam, if they would bring the people closer to Islam and not wait for the twelfth Imam to appear! […] What are you doing sitting around here discussing? […] You are treated with respect by the people and so it is also expected of you to rise against repression. You have received a high position, but have not fulfilled your responsibilities. You care neither about what happens to the people nor what the regime does.”

With this and similar public statements against the “clerics in service of Shah’s court” *akhundhay-e darbari*, Khomeini was able to marginalize the quietists, moderate, and reformist clerics, who maintained good relation with the royal court, and more importantly, possessed to some degree relatively strong constituencies. He recognized

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the tremendous impact of political Islam as a revolutionary ideology and did not miss a single opportunity to deploy it for his political agenda. At the same time, he was aware of the fact that in the struggle against the monarchy, his clerical competitors were as “dangerous” as the Shah:

In the period before 1979 [more specifically since 1963] it was not only the Shah who met us with bullets and weapons—if it only it were just the Shah, a fight against him would have been easy for us. It was, to the contrary, the hypocrites, the reactionary clergymen among us, whose duplicity and sanctimoniousness were a thousand times worse than bullets and guns.30

With the development in the late 1960s and early 1970s of a theory of an Islamic state and the concept of Velayat-e Faqih, the rule of Islamic jurists, Khomeini questioned the legitimacy of the monarchy and presented an alternative form of government that within a few years replaced a 2,500 year-old monarchy with an Islamic state in which the role of the Islamic jurist was institutionalized, and the leader of the Islamic Revolution was placed at the top of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI).

Although in his speeches Khomeini addressed diverse subjects, such as social injustice and the Shah’s foreign policy and modernization program, the central concern of his messages in the 1970s was consistently the fate of Islam and the creation of an Islamic state.31

Yet Khomeini and his loyalists were not alone in their radical activism against the Shah. The emergence of left-wing guerilla organizations in the 1960s and early 1970s, the Marxist Sazman-e Cherik-haye Fada’i-e Khalq-e Iran, People’s Fada’i Organization of Iran (PFO), and the Islamic left Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran, the People’s Mojahedin of Iran (PMO) exceeded Khomeini’s radicalism. Both major guerilla groups of the 1960s originated from

30 Ibid, p. 10

31 For a detailed examination of the development of Khomeini’s political thought see Dabashi 1993: pp 409-84, and Abrahamian 1993.
liberal political organizations and the communist Tudeh Party. The Marxist PFO was founded by former members of the Tudeh Party and National Front. The founders of the PMO consisted entirely of former political activists of the group called Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran, the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI), former Mosaddeq loyalists.32

In a series of statements, the new generation of activists explained why they left behind non-violent activism and turned to armed struggle:

The bloody massacres of 1963 were a major landmark in Iranian history. Until then, the opposition had tried to fight the regime with street protests, labor strikes, and underground networks. The 1963 bloodbath, however, exposed the bankruptcy of these methods. After 1963, militants--irrespective of their ideology--had to ask themselves the question: “What is to be done?” The answer was clear: “guerilla warfare.” (Cited in Abrahamian 1982: 482)

The sophisticated secret police and repressive strategies of the Shah regime did not allow the guerilla organization to expand the reach of their activism. After several armed attacks against the targets of the states these groups were seriously weakened when a majority of their members were arrested and executed. Nonetheless, the sporadic attacks of these groups against the regime kept the spirit of resistance alive, particularly at the universities. Only later in 1978, due to a political opening and the release of radical political prisoners, the militants were able to reorganize during the last few months of the street protests and revolutionary struggles. But they never reached the capacity to becoming mass-based organizations, a condition for which they had to wait until the collapse of the Shah regime in 1979.

Another crucial form of anti-Shah activism during the 1960s and 1970s is represented by a new type of modern Islamic intellectuals, such as Dr. Ali Shari’ati, who is certainly one of the most important and influential thinkers in Iran during the 1960s and 1970s. He challenged not

32 LMI was founded by reform-minded and influential figures such as Mehdi Bazargan, Ayatollah Mahmood Taleqani and group of other religious liberal activists in 1960. The first post revolutionary interim government consisted mainly of the members of the LMI with Mehdi Bazargan as the Prime Minister. Shah banned this group in 1963.
only the Shah regime, but also the clerical interpretation of Islam and the Marxist currents of the
time in the country. It was perhaps his intellectual contribution that single-handedly prevented
university students, one of the key actors of resistance against the Shah, from joining *en masse*
Marxist political parties, such as the Tudeh Party and the PFO. Shari’ati’s modern and
sociological reading of Islam and his innovative interpretation of the Qur’an emerged in Iran at a
time when the clergy, especially the political faction affiliated with Ayatollah Khomeini, was
still absent from the center of universities and the modern educated urban middle class
(Sachedina 1983: 191-92). Shari’ati’s presence and his firebrand speeches on Islam, social
structure, and political philosophy, in addition to his critique of the ruling establishment, soon
made him the most famous anti-establishment intellectual in Iran. He was a teacher of the
masses, an architect of social change, and, as Dabashi explains, “without a doubt, the most
furious revolutionary among the ideologues of the Islamic revolution in Iran” (Dabashi 1993:
106). In the Marxian sense, he “had not only interpreted but certainly intended to change”
(Dabashi 1993: 104).

Shari’ati, like many other intellectuals of his time, searching for an explanation for the
defeat of revolutionary movements in Iran since the failure of the constitutional revolution in
1911 suggested a return to “our original cultural and religious values.” He explained
unambiguously what he meant by this return to an authentic cultural origin, to oneself, *Bazgasht
beh Khishtan*:

> When we say return to one’s roots we are really saying return to one’s cultural roots…Some of
you may conclude that we Iranians must return to our racial (Aryan) roots. I categorically reject
this conclusion. I oppose racism, fascism, and reactionary returns. What is more, Islamic
civilization has acted like scissors and has cut us off completely from our pre-Islamic
past…Consequently, for us to return to our roots means not a rediscovery of pre-Islamic Iran, but
a return to our Islamic roots (cited in Abrahamian 1989: 116).
Influenced by European thinkers such as Karl Marx, Max Weber, and the ideas of the Frankfurt School, Shari’ati formulated a new Islamic political and philosophical approach for the interpretation of history and society. In Dabashi’s words:

…Shari’ati sought to transform Shi’ism from what he considered to be a religious tradition with a multiple set of historical traits and institutions into a political ideology of monolithic revolutionary proportions. As a student of Marxism, actively supporting the revolutionary causes of Cuba and Algeria, Shari’ati had been convinced of the necessity of ideological convictions to augment, or advance, the “material conditions” of any revolution. He said he disagreed with Franz Fanon, in this particular regard, that “Third World” countries should abandon their religion in order to be ideologically equipped to either defeat the imperialistic powers or launch a revolution against their government. On the Contrary, he sought to use an already-established “ideology” in the Islamic world in order to create the necessary political apparatus—party, slogan, banner, and popular force—to achieve the same revolutionary ends (Dabashi 1993: 110).

His intellectual legacy is significant because his reading of Shi’a Islam presented a modern revolutionary ideology and called for a radical revolutionary change. This rendered him one of the key “ideologues of the Iranian Revolution.”

In his lectures, such as *Ummat wa Emamat*, Community and Leadership, and *Islamshenasi*, Islamology at the Hosseiniyyeh-e Ershad in Tehran (a Shi’a religious center), he presented his nuance revolutionary interpretations of Qur’an, and Islamic history that opposed the clerical interpretation. He asserted that only the “real” and “true” Islam, *eslam-e rastin*, which he called *tashayy’o-e ‘alavi* or *tashayy’o-e sorkh* (“the Red Shi’a”), was as a revolutionary ideology capable of liberating first itself and then the *umma* from injustice and inhumane exploitation (Abrahamian 1982: 465; Dabashi 1993: 111-13). He rejected vehemently the previous forms of Shi’ism, referring to them as the *tashayy’o-e safavi*, Safavid’s [dynasty] Shi’a, by which he meant an institutionalized clergy that misinterpreted Islam and therefore did not represent the true Islam. Such understandings, in his view, treated religion as private property:

It is necessary to explain what we mean by Islam. By it we mean the Islam of Abu Zarr; not that of the caliphs. The Islam of justice and proper leadership; not that of the rulers, the aristocracy and the upper class. The Islam of freedom, progress and consciousness; not that of slavery, captivity and passivity. The Islam of the mojahed; not that of the clergy. The Islam of virtue, personal responsibility and protest; not that of (religious) dissimulation, (clerical) intercession and (divine)
intervention. The Islam of struggle for faith, society, and scientific knowledge; not that of surrender, dogmatism and uncritical imitation (*taqlid*) of the clergy (cited in Abrahamian 89: 112).

In his modern understanding of Islam, Shari’ati unequivocally questioned the clergy’s monopolistic possession of interpreting religious texts. He attacked the institution of *marj’a-e taqlid*, the sources of emulation, arguing that every Muslim is capable of understanding Islam and its teachings and does not require clerics as a source of emulation in order to understand religious sources and be a true believer:

There are two different Islams. One is the revolutionary ideology for social development, progress, and enlightenment. The other is the scholastic education of philosophers, theologians, statesmen, and [Islamic] jurists, *Fqaha*. Islam as a revolutionary ideology belongs to Abuzar, the Mujahedin, and now the intelligentsia. Islam as a scholastic education belongs to Abu Ali Sina, the Mujtaheds, and the religious experts. The latter form of Islam can be understood by foreign specialist and even reactionary individuals. On other hand, revolutionary Islam can be understood by the uneducated. In fact, sometimes the comprehension of the uneducated of genuine Islam surpasses that of the Fiqih, Islamic jurist or religious scholar and the prestigious theologian (Shari’ati 78: 21).

Shari’ati consistently emphasized that it is the duty of the intellectual to enlighten the masses in their societies; therefore, he advocated a shift in the leadership from the clergy to the modern religious committed intellectuals (Dabashi: 1993:120-27; Boroujerdi 96: 110-12). If Khomeini with his populist political rhetoric and writings against the Shah positioned himself as the leader of the 1979 Revolution, then without a doubt Shari’ati was the indisputable “architect of this Revolution.”

Based on his modern interpretations, Shari’ati articulated a theory of state that he called “guided democracy.” Accordingly, he referred to the Qur’an to describe this state as founded on *shoura*, consultation, and *bay’ah*, recognition, which to him meant the participation of the people in the sociopolitical affairs of their community. For him, democracies were the most progressive and even the most Islamic form of government. Nevertheless, he had great reservations about advocating it for developing nations. Ironically, Shari’ati’s argument parallels the theories of third world revolutionary intellectuals during the 1960s and 1970s who advocated revolutionary
progress and development, as opposed to democratic elections, to create a government. In Shari’ati’s concept of democracy, the intelligentsia plays the most important role. In Abrahamian’s words: “The intelligentsia’s role is not limited to raising public consciousness and paving the way towards the revolution, it included the authority to govern society after the revolution (Abrahamian 1989:113).

In *Ummat va Emamat* he declared that the only governing form that would be both acceptable and desirable after the revolution would be that of the intelligentsia. He further explained that the most important and crucial responsibility of the intellectuals in the third world was to discover the causes of the “backwardness” and stagnation in their societies. He was clearly against the rule of a clergy or theocracy, “since they were an integral part of the oppressive ruling class.” He was also suspicious of the rule of the masses in developing countries, which would possibly elect conservative traditionalists rather than progressive intellectuals.

In justifying his notion of democracy, he referred to the twelve *Imams* of Shi’a. He claimed that the twelve *Imams* were designated and not directly elected by the people, because in the early phases of any postrevolutionary condition the masses were not mature enough to choose the best leader.33

Looking at the events since the 1979 Revolution and the radical Islamists assumption of power, it would not be unfair to claim that Shari’ati unintentionally helped the clergy seize power in Iran. Not only were modern religious intellectuals convinced by his revolutionary interpretations of Islam, but secular intellectuals were also to some extent persuaded as well. These secular intellectuals were involved in the anti-Shah movement, and they later supported

Khomeini during the initial stages of revolutionary protest in late 1978. Shari’ati’s vague concept of an Islamic state, guided by enlightened intellectuals, and his appropriation of modern Western thought successfully linked Islam to the modern intellectual in Iran. As a result of his efforts, Khomeini easily penetrated one of the most important social bases of the modern and secular social forces, namely university students and the modern middle class.

In addition to their hegemonic position in the bazaar and mosques, Khomeini loyalists gradually made their way into the bastion of the modern educated middle class. This unprecedented and remarkable network allowed his followers to form a coalition whose magnitude encompassed a diverse range of social actors, from rural peasants and small land owners to university students and professors, in addition to the initial support of radical guerilla forces, such as the Marxist PFO and the PMO. Neither Marxists’ notion of a “people’s democracy” proposing a key role for the proletariat, nor Shari’ati’s notion of the intellectual’s “guided democracy,” nor the Islamic leftists centered around the People’s Mojahedin’s Islamo-Marxist concept of a “classless society,” jam’eh-bitabagheh-touhidi, were able to gain ground beyond the campuses of the universities and the modern urban middle class.

The confrontation between the Shah regime and its opponents reached a new stage when the Shah, under pressure from the Carter administration in late 1977, initiated a limited political opening, released political prisoners, and granted universities autonomy. The group that benefited most from this opening and emerging political opportunity was Khomeini’s camp of radical clergy (Kurzman 2004: 80-83; Foran 1994: 169-73). The clergy enjoyed at least two important privileges. They wielded the ideological organizational upper hand over other actors (e.g., liberals, leftist guerilla groups) and they suffered the least from the state’s repressive policy (Keddie 1981: 243).
This gave them more opportunities to act and remain intact. As Khomeini described it on November 1, 1977:

Today in Iran, an opportunity has arisen. Make the most of this … Now [oppositional] party writers are stirring. They are making critiques. They are writing letters and signing them. You too should write letters. A hundred gentlemen of the clergy should sign them … Inform the world … This is an opportunity that must not be lost (Cited in Kurzman 2004: 22).

At the time, the Khomeini loyalists were the only actors who possessed a nationwide network and organizational structure. From the holy city of Qom, the theological center of the clergy, they sent clergy men to all of the major cities and regions of the country. It was already too late for both the Shah to overcome the massive protests against his regime and for the non-clerical opposition groups to play a leading role in the revolutionary process. The mosques in each locality across the country became centers of collective action against the state and thus the most crucial factors for mobilization.

In the political context of pre-revolutionary Iran, the Islamists alternatives from the radical guerilla organizations of PMO to the religious liberals of LMI to Ayatollah Khomeini proved to be stronger in their opposition to the secular authoritarian monarchy than their other two competitors, namely secular nationalists and socialists. The overwhelming presence and influence of the multiple revolutionary nationalist, socialist and Islamic discourses led some Iran scholars to state that the causes of the 1979 Iranian revolution were to certain degree political, economic, and social but they were predominantly religious and ideological (Arjomand 1988; Dabashi 1993; Skocpol 1994; Parsa: 2000). The culmination of a variety of these discourses, from the writings of Tabataba’i, Taleqani, and Shari’ati to those of the liberal nationalists and radical left, endowed Khomeini with unprecedented ideological power which would ultimately shape the course and outcome of the Iranian Revolution (Dabashi 1993: 4-7).

As Hamid Dabashi describes:
Without Shi‘a ideology and the role of radical and revolutionary clergy in mobilizing the masses of the Iranian people for the formation of a broad multi-class coalition, it would not have been possible to overthrow within such a short time a relatively strong state without a major economic crisis, a defeat at war, or noticeable international sanctions.

In addition to the crucial role of the clergy, the exclusionary nature of the Shah regime and the massive centralization of power also played a key role in the formation of a broad oppositional coalition, a necessity for a successful revolution (Parsa 2000). According to Tilly, the increasing centralization of state power and the exclusion of other social actors from the polity facilitate favorable conditions for a broad anti-systemic alliance, a key factor for mass mobilization and a successful revolution (Tilly 1973: 439-44). As the prime minister of the interim government the late Mehdi Bazargan pointed out when asked by a foreign reporter to name the leader of the revolution, the answer was the Shah who had become a “negative” leader. By this, he meant the exclusionary actions of the Shah alienated the masses and unintentionally helped their revolutionary mobilization and the formation of a broad anti-regime alliance.34

Chapter Three

Regime Consolidation: Mobilization, War, and Violent Demobilization, 1979-1988

Don’t expect me to act in the manner of [Khomeini] who, head down, moves ahead like a bulldozer, crushing rocks, roots and stones in his path. I am a delicate passenger car and must ride on a smooth, asphalted road.

Mehdi Bazargan, the prime minister of the 1979 provisional government appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini (cited in Bakhash 1984: 54)

“Revolutions are the locomotives of history.” Karl Marx

In February of 1979, the locomotive of Iranian history took a new turn and with it the country entered a tumultuous phase. Under the leadership of the charismatic cleric Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, an old and strong Monarchy was replaced in a relatively short time with a new state that has survived decades of war and oppositional challenges. Postrevolutionary Iran was marked by an intense and complex struggle over state power. This revolutionary turning point unleashed coercive forces and trajectories that would dramatically shape the form and dynamic of the state-dissidents interactions to the present day.

Scholars of state and social revolutions argue that successful revolutions produce states that are stronger than the regimes they have overthrown (Eisenstadt 1978; Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1978). Since revolutions, and particularly those whose magnitude is as great as the 1979 social revolution in Iran, succeed mostly through a broad coalition of different oppositional forces, the immediate consequence of the overthrow of an old regime is a political environment characterized by many competing contenders, in which each share the desire to control state power in order to implement their sociopolitical agenda. This raises an important question. How and under what circumstances does one center of power or one faction of the revolutionary elite...

35 The Class Struggles in France, page 102.
become the dominant force and capture control of state power in the postrevolutionary period? If the existing prerevolutionary alliance breaks apart, as was the case in Iran, then what are the available strategies for one or more powerful actors to marginalize all other contenders and assume total state power? Taking into account two available general strategies, namely repression and accommodation, I argue that the dominant postrevolutionary Islamist faction led by Ayatollah Khomeini exclusively utilized the strategy of repression in its dealings with contenders. I further demonstrate how Ayatollah Khomeini’s charismatic authority coupled with major strategic campaigns--the seizure of the US-Embassy in Tehran (the hostage crisis), the Iran-Iraq War, and the so-called Islamic Cultural Revolution--helped the Islamic regime consolidate. These factors served as strategic repressive instruments and profoundly shaped the political opportunity/threat structure during the first decade in postrevolutionary Iran until the end of the war and the death of the Ayatollah in 1989. Additionally, the dispute in the camps of the liberal and leftist opposition helped the pro-Khomeini force gain the upper hand. The Iranian left, that is, the PMO, PFO, Tudeh, Peykar, joined the anti-US politics of the Islamists and contributed significantly to bring down the liberal interim government of Bazargan. More importantly, the rift and split among the left never allowed them to form a broad alliance against the powerful Khomeini faction. This chapter will discuss the split among the opponents of the radical Islamists and demonstrate how the IRI exploited the rift among its contenders and gradually destroyed their organizational structures.36

Analysts of postrevolutionary state-making predominantly claim that new power holders are not capable of deploying simultaneous repressive methods against all of their contenders because in the formative period of state-making the new authorities are not strong enough to

36 In order to avoid redundancy, throughout this study I use interchangeably the terms Islamists, the Khomeini loyalists, the pro-Khomeini camp, and the radical clergy to describe the same political faction.
repress all of their competing challengers. They further claim that a mere use of repression during the formative stage will make the new state vulnerable and diminish its opportunity to use the resources of other groups for its own agenda. Therefore, in the immediate aftermath of a revolution and after a certain degree of order is established, the strategy of accommodation enables the new revolutionary elite to use the resources of other groups and thereby enhance its capability to counter radical contenders. Such states, analysts of state-making argue, are most likely to use a combination of strategies of accommodation—that is, involving some contending groups in the government and allowing them to implement at least partially their own agenda—and repression, rather than focusing on one of these strategic tools to consolidate and sustain their power (Tilly; 1978; Skocpol 1979; Levi 1981; Rasler & Thompson 1989). My understanding of repression is derived mainly from Tilly’s definition of repression as “any action by another group which raises the contender’s cost of collective action” (Tilly 1978: 100).

Since the process of cornering contenders of the new state is a costly process due to their resistance to state policy, the dominant power elite is more likely to choose accommodation as its first key strategy for countering resistance forces. In order to neutralize its opponents, it needs to establish military organizations and a degree of order, which ultimately requires enormous economic resources. As a result, a new postrevolutionary state is doomed to deploy accommodation as a crucial strategy to consolidate its power. Scholars consider repression an effective strategy only after the formation of a relatively strong state which allows it to face the challenges of its opponents. Repression may then enable the state to weaken and possibly destroy its contenders’ capacity for mobilization to accelerate the process of state-making and the consolidation of power (Tilly 1978; Rasler and Thompson 1989).
The IRI had consistently utilized repressive measures against its opponents and had not accommodated any oppositional actors either in the formative period (February 1979- June 81) or in the consolidation stage (1981-83). After June 1981, the political opportunity structure for contention was harshly constrained by mass arrests followed by mass executions of thousands of activists by a united ruling elite. It was also constricted by the formation of innumerable formal and informal revolutionary institutions of repression and surveillance, such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRG), the Committee of the Islamic Revolution (CIR), the Islamic Revolutionary Courts, the Special Court for the Clergy, and multiple wealthy revolutionary foundations known as bonyads.

While the new regime was engaged in negotiations with its contenders, it never made concessions to these forces. The new state used negotiations as a strategy to buy time and defer decision-making whenever repression was not advantageous or possible. In almost every case, the negotiation partner was compelled to relinquish his agenda. To put it simply, the radical Islamists never negotiated the content of their agenda, but rather they tried to persuade all other forces to rally behind Khomeini’s path, the khatt-e Emam, and support it unquestionably. In August 1979, only five months after the overthrow of the Shah regime, Khomeini delivered a firebrand speech to a visiting crowd. The largest state-run newspaper of the time, Keyhan, characterized the event as the “last warning of Imam [Khomeini] to the conspirators.” Khomeini proclaimed publicly what went wrong and what should be done with his opponents:

…We made a mistake. We did not act in a revolutionary way and gave these corrupt groups opportunities. The government of the revolution, the army of the revolution, the [Islamic] guard of the revolution--none of them acted revolutionary and were not revolutionaries. If we, from the beginning, where we broke the corrupt regime [of the Shah] and destroyed this corrupt obstacle, had acted revolutionary and had broken the pen of the mercenary press [journalists], had shot down the corrupt magazines and presses, had tried their directors, had prohibited the corrupt [political] parties, had punished their bosses, had installed gallows in the big squares, and had cleaned up these corrupt people, we would not have these troubles with them. I ask the almighty God and our dear nation for an apology. We weren’t revolutionary people…If we were revolutionaries, we would not allow them to exist; we would forbid all political parties and fronts,
According to the Islamic notion of d’awa, he saw it as his religious duty first to invite everyone to follow the “Islamic” path. As the history of the postrevolutionary Iran proved, all who opposed Khomeini’s call and path of “Islam” were mercilessly oppressed. Whenever persuasion did not work, repression became the new state’s immediate approach. Khomeini’s strong social base combined with the employment of consistent and ruthless repression allowed him to marginalize his contenders and seriously weaken or destroy the mobilization capacity of his many opposing liberal and leftist organizations.

Most analysts of repression-dissent interactions agree that repression may impact dissent both positively and negatively. However, it is crucial to take into account the level of the repression, the repressive capacity and strategy of the state, and the strategies employed by the dissenting groups (Tilly 1978; Davis and Ward 1990; Henderson 1991; Khawaja 1993; Moaddel 1994). A high capacity state that is, a state with a relatively strong popular base and military organizations, economic resources, and unified elite is more capable of ignoring, marginalizing, or even destroying the organizational capacity of oppositional actors than a low capacity state with a fragmented elite and limited social resources (Tilly 2006: 20-9). Thus I argue that the high capacity rentier state of Iran, due to its access to rich economic resources such as oil, its high mobilization capacity, and more importantly the unifying charismatic authority of Ayatollah Khomeini, was able to ignore and marginalize all of its contenders. Even Khomeini’s

37 Based on this and other speeches of Khomeini where he opposed the existence of multiple political parties as a source of fragmentation in the Iranian nation, his followers would shout the slogan hezb faqat Hezbollah, rahbar faqat Ruhollah (“the only party is Hezbollah, the only leader is Ruhollah [Khomeini]”). Hezbollah in the Iranian context signifies informal vigilante groups that have been attacking the opponents of the IRI since its emergence immediately after the collapse of the Shah-regime. The subsequent chapters of this study will provide a detail analysis of semi-statal and informal networks of repression, such as the Hezbollah and Ansar-e Hezbollah.
appointment of the liberal politician Mehdi Bazargan from the *nehzat-e azadi-e Iran*, The Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI), as the head of the new provisional government was an opportunistic decision. He could barely find enough experienced personnel among his radical Islamist supporters to run the country, and in addition he used the liberals as a buffer against international and internal criticism. It was the best possible option for Khomeini during the transition from the old regime to the new revolutionary power to appease some of the opposition and to win time for his agenda in long term.

Although in February 1979, the Ayatollah requested Bazargan of the Liberal Movement of Iran (LMI) to form the interim government, at the same time the newly established, powerful Council of the Revolution was dominated by clerical figures that he trusted, such as Ayatollah Mortaza Motahhari and the cleric Mohammad Hossein Beheshti. During the short tenure of the liberal interim government (February to early November 1979), Khomeini and his close followers created diverse Islamic cultural, political, and military institutions directed by his close clerical advisers. These official institutions run by pro Khomeini Islamists together with the radical revolutionary tide that swept across the country prevented the liberal interim government from implementing its policy. Historian Shaul Bakhash describes the situation very well:

Bazargan’s authority and his vision of a rapid return to normalcy were challenged from several directions: by the spirit of revolution abroad in the streets; by the rapidly developing “parallel government” of revolutionary committees, courts, and guards backed by the Revolutionary Council; by a plethora of political parties and movements advocating various radical policies; and by ethnic uprisings (Bakhash 1984:55).

By involving liberals, the Islamists reduced the pressure on Khomeini’s faction from his more radical opponents. More importantly, Khomeini knew that the clerics around him never held any formal governmental office prior to the revolution. They needed time to gain this experience and to learn how to run a country. Thus, the conditions under the LMI government provided an
opportunity to overcome this learning curve and eventually to undermine the liberal interim
government.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the current supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution and
Khomeini’s successor, explained the situation as follows: “Bazargan was made prime minister
because we had no one else; at that time we ourselves lacked the ability” (cited in Bakhash 1984:
65). The radical clerics’ strategies consisted of a sophisticated amalgamation of short-term top-
down tactical negotiations that gestured toward inclusion and long-term bottom-up exclusion. In
other words, Khomeini bought time with the constant negotiations with the liberals and at the
same time was working on creating a repressive apparatus for the final battle.

Bazargan himself expressed his concerns about Khomeini’s indirect but prescient role in
political affairs during the early days following the revolution:

My role is weak in part because a revolution, a genuine revolution, has occurred and in part
because Khomeini’s power over the people is without precedence in Persian history. Officially, it
is the government that rules. Ideologically, it is Khomeini who rules supreme, along with his
revolutionary councils, committee, and guards (Neue Züricher Zeitung, 07 Nov. 1979).

Bazargan was aware of the weak condition of his government and the powerful impact of
Khomeini on the trajectory of events. Although the interim government consisted mainly of
liberals, the entire military and judiciary institutions were occupied by numerous militant
Islamist revolutionary actors. One-thousand-five-hundred Committees of the Islamic Revolution
(CIR), equivalent to public religious police forces, existed at that time in Teheran alone under the
supervision of Khomeini’s direct clerical advisers. His loyalists were positioned at the top of
each newly formed Islamic revolutionary institution and directed powerful state organizations,
such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRG), a key military organization of the new regime,
and the Revolutionary Courts (Bazargan 1984; Bakhash 1984; Bashiriyyeh 1995; Rafsanjani
These forces, thanks to the support of the popular and charismatic leader of the revolution, became the most powerful pole in the postrevolutionary transition period. Bazargan and his liberal cabinet were faced with a formidable challenge, namely how to resist the aggressive march and penetration of the radical Islamists into the centers of all major institutions. The Islamic Revolutionary Courts were founded with the support of Ayatollah Khomeini to put the former regime officials on trial. Within a few months (February to April 1979) these courts sentenced 550 former civil and military officials to death. Ironically, these death sentences issued by the militant clerics and close advisers of Khomeini, such as Sadeq Khalkhali and Ahmad Azari-Qomi, were supported by the Marxist PFO, the PMO, and the communist Tudeh party—the future victims of these same courts. Approximately two months after the collapse of the Shah-regime, in an essay titled “The Week of Revolutionary Executions,” the official newspaper of the Communist Tudeh party, mardom, defended the hasty killing of the former prime minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda and demanded the continuation of these kinds of revolutionary trials and executions (mardom April, 11, 1979: 2).

It did not take another few months until the same Islamic tribunals targeted many of the activists of the same oppositional forces in the provinces Khuzestan and Kurdistan. Alone within three weeks between late August and early September of the same year, seventy-five activists were accused of being involved in the uprising against the Islamic government and were subsequently executed (Bakhash 1984: 60). It was the first wave of executions to be followed soon after by the mass destruction of dissident organizations.38

38 Multiple issues of the left-wing groups’ journals such as, mardom of the Tudeh Party, kar of the PFO, and mojahed of the PMO during the April/May of 1979 to the end of 1980 and beyond frequently demanded that the “revolutionary government” radically purge all institutions of officials from the former regime and dismantle the army, arresting and harshly punishing its high-ranking generals. Since the collapse of the Shah regime, they all systematically called for radical anti-Imperialist and anti-American policies and criticized the liberal Prime minister for his conciliatory gesture towards the West.
There are multiple ideological and sociopolitical reasons why the new revolutionary state chose to repress rather than accommodate. For the radical Islamists, all actors who were not operating according to the path of Imam Khomeini, *khatt-e Emam*, were potential enemies and were to be removed. Loyalty to Khomeini and his agenda was the precondition for all actors to be included within the camp of the “ideological Islamic revolutionaries,” or *niruhay-e maktabi*. Otherwise, they were immediately declared contra-revolutionaries, or *zed-e engelab*. This campaign was expressed by the repeated slogan “*hezb faqat Hezbollah, rahbar faqat Ruhollah,*” “the only party is the party of God; the only leader is Ruhollah [Khomeini].”

Moreover, Khomeini’s position within the power hierarchy in the country went far beyond all branches of power and law. His orders determined all major policies on domestic and external issues. In his work *The Constitution of Iran*, Asghar Schirazi aptly describes the power of the Supreme leader:

> The plenipotentiary powers of Khomeini were finally so thoroughly established as a principle that belief in them became the standard for loyal profession of the true Islam. Whoever did not accept his exercise of such powers was either no longer a Muslim or was an adherent of so-called ‘American Islam’ (Schirazi 1997: 76).

“Imam” Khomeini, as masses of his followers called him, was the immortal, infallible and sacred figure whose reading of Islam was the only acceptable ideology. Whoever became the target of Khomeini’s criticism, no matter how important those persons were, whether a powerful senior Grand Ayatollah Seyyyed Kazem Shari’atmadari, the elected President Abolhassan Banisadr, or his designated successor Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Alí Montazeri, would be removed promptly from their positions and declared persona non grata.

Another important vantage point for the radical Islamists was that it was the first group to acquire many critical economic resources through the confiscation of former regime officials’
property and through religious taxes before seizing control of the official political and economic institutions in Iran during its formative years.

In addition to the creation of military and paramilitary revolutionary organizations, such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRG), the Committee of Islamic Revolution (CIR), and the Basij, the founding of semi-statal foundations was among the most important revolutionary endeavors. Bonyad-e Mostaz’afin, or the Foundation of the Dispossessed, is among the most powerful and the wealthiest revolutionary bodies in Iran since its inception in 1979. Immediately after the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime, the Bonyad took control of the affluent Pahlavi foundations, banks, and companies. By 1984, the Bonyad was involved in imports and exports, had its own shipping line, and owned nearly nine hundred companies with total assets of 227 billion rials. Politically, the Bonyad has enjoyed a relatively autonomous position and has been accountable mainly to the highest instance of the Islamic Republic, the supreme leader, who also appoints the head of the organization (Moslem 2002: 42-46).39 These financial sources provided the Islamists with an independent source of income, allowing them to counterbalance internal and international pressures.40

The Islamic Revolutionary Guards: From the Guardians of the Regime to the Regime of the Guardians

The Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enqelab-e Eslami, or the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRG), which is accountable only to the supreme leader, became another central and independent power

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39 For detailed information on the activities of the Bonyad, see Moslem 2002 and Amuzegar 1993.

40 For extensive analysis of the Iranian Revolution, see the following works: Bakhash 1984; Hiro 1987; Abrahamian 1989; Parsa 1989; Dabashi; 1993; Moaddel 1993; and Kurzman 2004.
established directly under the order of Khomeini in mid 1979. What at its inception looked like a small-town public safety force had expanded its economic, political, and institutional influence within the power structure of postrevolutionary Iran and continues to be a formidable presence today. The IRG represents within the current landscape of power in the Islamic Republic, if we venture to compare it to the former Soviet Union, all of the following institutions: the KGB, the Communist Party, and the military forces. The IRG is in charge of almost all influential political and economic positions and organizations within the country. It is also the most powerful military wing of the regime. The IRG is far more than a pure military force. Since its inception, it became the main obstacle to the operation of the liberal interim government, the reform agenda of President Khatami, and other political currents opposing the Islamic Regime. The IRG has been the key instrument of repression, accountable only to the highest instance in the power hierarchy in Iran, namely the institution of the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution Khomeini and his successor Ali Khamenei. The origins of the founding and expansion of the IRG can be explained by the revolutionary Islamists’ distrust of the country’s regular army in the fight against separatists in Kurdistan and their desire for a larger and more ideologically committed army to fight in the Iran-Iraq War. Throughout its involvement in Iranian politics, the IRG expanded its influence in all major institutions of the country. Many close advisers of Ayatollah Khamenei, the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution, are “former” members of the IRG. According to the Islamic Republic’s constitution, the IRG has the duty to guard the revolution, meaning the regime.  

41 Article 150 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran proclaims: The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, organized in the early days of the triumph of the Revolution, is to be maintained so that it may continue in its role of guarding the Revolution and its achievements. The scope of the duties of this Corps, and its areas of responsibility, in relation to the duties and areas of responsibility of the other armed forces, are to be determined by law, with emphasis on brotherly cooperation and harmony among them.
constitution allowed its members to interfere in all sociopolitical affairs wherever they saw fit.\textsuperscript{42} The rising influence of the IRG in all branches of power made it the strongest force in the IRI. Particularly since its interference in and manipulation of the presidential elections in 2005 and 2009, it is no exaggeration to claim that the IRG transformed from the guardians of the revolution and regime to a regime of the IRG.\textsuperscript{43} It should be noted that 18 out of 21 ministers during the first and current term of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad (2005-present) were former commandos of the IRG. Ahmadinejad himself is a former member and has very strong ties to high-ranking members of the IRG.\textsuperscript{44} In combination with another powerful force, the beyt-e rahbari (the office of the supreme leader), the IRG arguably controls the judiciary, military, and a significant part of the executive branches. It strongly influences the decisions of the Majles, currently dominated by Khamenei loyalists. The IRG and beyt alliance is also responsible for the crackdown and suppression of the post-2009 election protests. The beyt, an Arabic term that means “house,” is used to furnish the office of the supreme leader with greater Islamic connotations. Employing approximately 12,000 employees, the beyt controls the judiciary system, the propaganda organization of Iran, namely the National Broadcasting, and all Iranian armed forces. The supreme leader also has his direct representative in cities, provinces, institutions, and universities across the country.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{42} The IRG has currently ca. 150,000 men and is also in charge of the paramilitary force, the Basij (mobilization) with approximately 100,000-150,000 active-duty members and ca. 550,000 reservists. It plays a key role in repressing dissent activists. The IRG is heavily involved in many important economic branches as well, such as the oil industry, Iranian Telekom communication, and powerful economic religious foundations.


\textsuperscript{44} See Iran Focus at \url{http://www.iranfocus.com/en/iran-general/-a-feared-force-rolls-business-in-iran-08932.html}.

As the country’s key instrument of repression, the IRG possesses its own air, navy, ground, and intelligence units and runs its own prisons and courts. According to Morad Viessi, a Tehran University professor and an expert of the IRG, six major organs involved in the crackdown of dissident activism are connected to the IRG:

In September 2009 the deputy intelligence of the IRG was promoted and transformed to the Organization of Intelligence as the most important intelligence service of the country—\(^\text{46}\) the Ministry of Intelligence and Security run by Heydar Moslehi who was in the past a representative of the supreme leader in the regular army, the IRG, and the Basi\(j\). The intelligence organization of NAJA, Iran’s regular army (niruy-e zamini-e artesh-e jomhuri-e eslami), has always been headed by the generals of the IRG, the operative branch of the IRG of Tehran, the so-called paygah-e sarallah (the Sarallah base), the Basi\(j\), yegan vijeh-e Pasdaran (the Special Unite of IRG), and nituye entezami (the Law Enforcement Force) led by General Ahmad Reza Radan, a former general of the IRG (Viessi 2011).

The activities of the IRG are not limited to political and security issues. Many of its generals are in charge of several provinces, powerful institutions, and economic organizations. A number of projects in oil and natural gas branches are under the control of the IRG. Its Gharargah-e Khatamol’anbia (the economic machine of the IRG) has 4 branches: karbala, nouh, kouthar, and ghaem. Alone the karbala branch runs 4 major projects: the 1000 km freeway from Qom to Tehran to Mashhad, the express train from Mashhad to Tehran, the construction of new airports in Bushehr and Ahvaz, and the Iranian Automobile industry and metro project of Tehran.

According to sources in Iran, the Janbazan Headquarter of the IRG is in charge of 500 companies related to tourism, education, and sports.\(^\text{47}\)

Iran is a rentier state whose main material supply is derived from nontax external sources, such as income from oil and other natural resources. This economic self-sufficiency

\(^{46}\) Alef, October 6, 2009: Erteq’a-e mo’avenat-e ettela’at-e sepah beh sazman-e ettela’at:

provided the dominant elite with a uniquely independent supply of material power and made it, at least in the short run, less vulnerable to the demands of other internal actors outside of the power structure. Iran’s Oil makes up to 80-85% of national exports and accounts for between 70-80% of annual budget revenue. For example, oil accounted for over 85% of Iran’s total export revenue in 2006 and 70% of budget revenue in 2007. To put it simply, there is “no representation without taxation.” The state is thus in the position to ignore the demands and rights of other social forces in the country. Rentier and semi-rentier states exclude their challengers from the polity and finance the costs of repression through extractions from oil or foreign aid independent of domestic taxes. At least in the short term, they create a strong state through available abundant economic wealth. Rentier states may allocate economic resources to those organizations and fields that best reinforce their presence in society and serve their interests (Beblawi and Luciani 1987; Luciani 1990; Chaudhry 1997).

A rentier state is less vulnerable to the demands of dissident actors only if there is no factionalism and fragmentation within the ruling elite. The rentierism under the charismatic, popular, and unifying figure of Ayatollah Khomeini was a key factor for the regime’s survival during the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 and at home when confronted with serious internal challenges. However, after the death of the powerful Ayatollah, the emerging factionalism and increasingly fragmented ruling elite during the 1990s and beyond made the state incrementally vulnerable to the demands of diverse dissident groups. Moreover, the elite division, as we will see later in this study, is the key instigator of the re-emergence of public social resistance to the state in post-Khomeini Iran. The excluded social actors found powerful allies in the ruling elite, especially during the tenure of Khatami, and formed informal alliances with them. Forming coalitions with a pole of power within the ruling elite allows those social actors outside of the
polity to utilize newly available economic and institutional sources. Iranian activists repeatedly employed this mechanism of coalition and alliance formation during their struggle for democratic reforms. They frequently utilized formal and informal coalitions with multiple ruling actors and expanded gradually the space for collective claim-making. During the tenure of Khatami, Iranian society witnessed the establishment of a wave of critical newspapers, the publication of critical books and magazines, the formation of hundreds of NGOs, and the initiation of a plethora of vital collective actions across the country, particularly in the economic and political heart of the country, the capital Tehran (Bayat 2007).

The question that arises here is this: how could the radical clerics take control of the economic resources of the country and utilize these resources in the service of state-making and repression? There are two possible explanations for this puzzle. The answer lies first in the nature of the great coalition that overthrew the old regime and, second, in the politically fragmented and ideologically less powerful contenders. The pro-Khomeini camp was the most powerful force among the opposition to the Shah, and therefore, had already consolidated its dominant position within the broad coalition against the Shah before and during the 1978-79 uprising (Schirazi 1997: 61-65). In Bakhash’s words:

When he went into exile in 1964, Khomeini left behind clerics in Tehran, Qom, and other provincial cities who were either committed to him personally or who broadly shared his political aims. Some of these, like Montazeri and Hashemi-Rafsanjani remained in touch with Khomeini, handled funds on his behalf, and consulted him regarding their political activities. Khomeini loyalists found their way into a network of mosques in Tehran and other cities. After Khomeini’s arrival in Iraq, substantial amounts of money were contributed in the form of charitable dues (the *sahm-e imam*) in Khomeini’s name. Religious figures in towns and villages across the country collected these contributions as Khomeini’s representatives, and transmitted them to Khomeini’s brother, Morteza Pasandideh, in Qom…When the first protests against the Shah’s regime broke out in January 1978, there was, therefore, the nucleus of a Khomeini organization in place, a more elaborate network of mosques, Islamic associations, and clerics sympathetic to Khomeini, large numbers of young men who had learned at Islamic discussion groups to regard Islam as a dynamic force for change and opposition, and a vast reservoir of dissatisfaction, with the regime which the opposition could tap. (Bakhash 1984: 40, 44)
Moreover, while all of the leftist leaders were in prison and many liberal leaders in Iran were unable to carry out their activities due to the Shah regime’s repressive measures, the clergy enjoyed a historical immunity that provided them with protection and made them less vulnerable to the oppressive measures of the regime. Misagh Parsa’s comparative observation of the role of clergy in Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines sheds a clear light on this matter:

Their historically privileged position and relative immunity from state power provided a great potential to affect social and political processes in these countries. The clergy’s traditional immunity insulated them from government repression. Their independence resources [Islamic taxation for each Ayatollah from their constituency] provided the capacity to oppose and form alternative alliances against the existing political order in times of social conflicts. Furthermore, their control of safe, social spaces in churches and mosques allowed other social groups to mobilize through religious institutions and engage in collective action against the government (Parsa 2000:132).

The Shah regime did not repress the clergy as forcefully as it did the leftist and student movements or, if partially repressed them, it did not have the same effect as on other opponents who lacked strong economic and social bases. The fact that the clergy, as opposed to the other actors (e.g., the left and the liberals), suffered the least from the state’s repressive policy, which allowed them greater opportunity to act and remain intact. Additionally, Khomeini had the freedom in exile to express his ideas much clearer and more radically. His move from Iraq to Paris in late 1978 offered him a unique opportunity to publicize his anti-Shah campaign through the international media network. Within his four months of residence in Paris, he gave 120 interviews with major newspapers and broadcasters. He also had a direct phone line to Teheran through which he contacted his networks of supporters and advisers in Iran several times each day (Bakhash 1984: 49).

As noted above, in addition to the vast religious networks and funding, the charismatic authority of Khomeini as a recognized spiritual and religious leader and the main ideologue within the Islamic Revolutionary discourse contributed enormously to the hegemonic position of the militant clerics within the broad pre-revolutionary alliance. A proclamation of Khomeini
during that time had a ground-breaking impact. Even after the revolution, his most radical and largest opposition, the People’s Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMO), did not venture to criticize Khomeini’s person in their own offices and centers, let alone in public.\textsuperscript{48} Furthermore, as shown above, prior to the revolution the clerical forces led by Ayatollah Khomeini represented an autonomous power center that was financially independent from the state through its extraction of religious taxes from constituencies. Khomeini was ideologically the most influential and politically involved Ayatollah in terms of constituency, financial resources, and social networks in the 1970s (Arjomand 1988; Bakhash 1984; Dabashi 1993). While in exile, Khomeini possessed a functioning nationwide network of prominent clerics, who in addition to the clandestine propaganda also had access to a very important financial source, the so called \textit{sahm-e Imam}, which is a substantial fee paid as a religious tax. The events during the 1978-9 mass protests for Khomeini and against the Shah confirm this assumption. To mention one example, Khomeini was greeted by a mass of millions when he returned to Iran after fifteen years of exile. This popular support translated directly into mobilization capacity for Khomeini, since these supporters paid religious taxes and donated funds that he could use in the early phase of the postrevolutionary period to finance his political campaigns—a resource and base that most of his competitors lacked.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{48} Interview with anonymous activists and close relatives, who were members of the PMO, in Berlin and Paris in summer 2009: “Khomeini was so popular that any opposing gestures against the ‘holy’ Imam could lead to your destruction. No political actors active inside the country could take this risk and criticize Khomeini.” A look at the leftist newspapers and organs confirms this reservation. The Tudeh, the PMO, and PFO also called Khomeini an Imam, as opposed to referring to him by his name. I myself remember vividly as a young school student and activist that whenever we were engaging in discussions with Khomeini loyalists the first question they asked us was \textit{emam ra qabul darin}, “do you support or believe in Imam [Khomeini].”

\textsuperscript{49} Since there is no annual report of the economic activities and of the collection of religious taxes each Ayatollah receives from his constituency, it is not an easy task to present an exact account of the financial support Khomeini received during the revolutionary period from 1978-79. However, the broad popular support for Khomeini during and after the revolutionary turbulence should suffice to imagine his economic advantage in comparison to other social actors involved in the revolution.
Having this advantage alongside the ready-made networks of thousands of mosques—9,015 by the mid 1970s (Kurzman 2004:37-38)—and other religious centers in rural and urban areas across the country provided Khomeini and his supporters with a tremendous capacity for mobilization and collective claim making. Of course, it also gave him unique opportunities to extract economic resources. As was noted above, Khomeini’s enormous popularity among the population and his direct access to a broad social and religious network enabled him and his collaborators to seize property from the former regime’s state companies, land, banks, and other economic institutions. While Khomeini and the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) were mainly preoccupied with expanding their control over state power and the Iranian society as a whole, purging the country’s institutions of “un-Islamic” elements, their contenders were struggling with internal splits and were confronted with the frequent attacks of the vigilante, such as the *Hezbollah, Ansar-e Hezbollah,* and *Basij.*

It should be noted that major leftist organizations such as the PMO and the PFO were during the revolutionary struggle small guerilla organizations. The collapse of the Pahlavi regime and the newly available political opportunity provided them with a strong social base and transformed once very small groups into mass parties, paving the way for the emergence of nearly 100 secular and Islamic political organizations and associations opposed to the IRI (Behrooz 2000: 104-5). Suddenly, they were faced with the challenge of how to run and maintain the activities of an emerging national organization. By mid 1980 these organizations had offices in almost every Iranian city, and had a strong presence at universities, high schools, and among the educated urban middle class, three major strongholds of left wing activism (Abrahamian 1989; Behrooz 2000; Mirsepassi 2000). After examining the social background of several
hundred of the leftist activists in postrevolutionary Iran, Ali Mirsepassi comes to the following conclusion:

The data reveal that in the case of the new revolutionary organizations, members were largely urbanized, educated, and youthful. In the case of the Tudeh Party, its members tended to be heavily represented by older people in the professions. Iranians attracted to left-wing organizations are primarily from the non-religious, highly educated, modern and urban middle classes (Mirsepassi 2000: 171).

Although rapidly growing compare to its pre-revolutionary magnitudes, the left was everything but united in its efforts against the radical clerics and was nearly absent from the bazaar and traditional urban middle class (Ibid).

The major actors of Iranian politics at the national level during the early 1980s may be divided into the following groups: first the Khomeini loyalists, namely the Islamic Republic Party (IRP or Hezb-e Jomhouri-e Eslami), and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution (MIR or Mojahedin-e Engelab-e Eslami), two parties that composed the core of the IRI during the 1980s. Second were the moderate Islamic organizations and liberals, such as the Movement of Combatant Muslims (Jonbesh-e Mosalmanan-e Mobarez), the Revolutionary Movement of the Iranian People (JAMA or Jonbesh-e Engelabi-e Mardom-e Iran), the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI or Nehzat-e Azadi-e Iran), and the National Front (Jebhe-e Melli), all of which lost influence in official politics after the collapse of the interim government and the ensuing crackdown of dissident activities by pro-Khomeini Islamists. Lastly were the secular and Islamic left wing organizations, who presented the majority of the oppositional associations, such as the PMO, PFO, Peykar, and the Tudeh party. The radical Islamic left, also called the Islamic Marxists, or the People’s Mojahedin Organization (PMO) (Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran),
was perhaps at the time the most influential and well-organized opposition force, and it suffered dramatically from the *genocidal* mass killing of its members since 1981.⁵⁰

The largest Marxist force, the PFO, as a major and widespread Marxist organization, lost a tremendous amount of resources and influence due to a split in the organization in early 1980. The disagreement over how to deal with the new regime, imperialism, and the form of government divided the core of the organization into a Majority and Minority camp—a split that soon was followed by several additional divisions. While the PFO Majority argued for a conciliatory policy toward the Islamic Republic and offered its support for “the anti-Imperialist struggle under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini,” the minority faction rejected this policy and accused the Majority of opportunism and undemocratic behavior in the internal debate over differences. The PFO minority was nearly destroyed during the brutal crackdown of the opposition. Hundreds of its members were executed and thousands more were forced underground and into exile. From its European exile, the group’s activities have been limited to the publication of a bi-weekly journal and the organization of very small protest gatherings in some Western European cities against the Iranian State and “global” capitalism. Conversely, the PFO majority supported the Islamic state, the war against Iraq, the seizure of the US embassy, and, more dramatically, the IRI’s crackdown of leftist activists.⁵¹

Along the same line, the Soviet-oriented communist Tudeh Party called any actions that could “weaken the anti-imperialist position” of the Islamic regime a counter-revolutionary act

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⁵⁰ I am aware that it may be controversial to use the term *genocide* in describing the mass killing of leftist activists by the IRI. As in the widespread definition of genocide, the “deliberate and systematic destruction” of members of the PMO and Marxist activists per the *fatwa* of Ayatollah Khomeini leaves no doubt for this characterization. This genocidal motive is corroborated by recently surfaced documents, such as the correspondences between Ayatollah Montazeri and Ayatollah Khomeini and the reports of former prisoners and human rights organizations. See below for evidence of this assessment.

⁵¹ For more information see the Weekly *kar* issues 61-70 (May & June 1980) of both the PFO Majority and PFO Minority.
and whole heartedly supported the Islamic state as the pioneer in the fight against US-
Imperialism.\textsuperscript{52} Both the PFO Majority and the Tudeh found themselves soon after the destruction of all oppositional forces as the prime targets of state repression in late 1982. After the initial cooperation and exploitation of their information and experience in countering the underground organizations, the regime saw the time as ripe for a crackdown against the members of these two organizations, which were operating publicly. Within weeks, hundreds of the leading cadres of both parties were arrested and sentenced to death or life in prison.\textsuperscript{53}

The radical Peykar survived only a few years of harsh repression. Several hundreds of its members, including nearly the entire central committee, were arrested and executed. Tragically speaking, the organization was wiped out. Although the fragmentation of the PFO as one of the strongest and most well-organized Marxist organizations brought the PFO Majority closer to another relatively influential Marxist Party, the Soviet oriented Tudeh party, but as a whole the numerous Marxists groups and associations never formed an anti-IRI Front. The PFO Majority and the Tudeh Party’s staunch support of the IRI, together with disputes among the Marxists and the left in Iran, weakened the position of the opposition camp of the IRI and rendered them vulnerable to the repressive measures of the state.\textsuperscript{54} Furthermore, traditionally the Iranian left has

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Kar} 114 & 115 and many previous/later issues of the PFOMAJ supports the suppression of the oppositional forces and the execution of the activists.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Rah-e Tudeh}, the organ of the Tudeh Party abroad, from issue 32 (February-March 1983) onward and \textit{Kar}, the organ of the PFO Majority, from issue 1 (February-March 1984) and onward report extensively on the arrest and trials of the leaders and members of the Tudeh and PFGO Majority. The weekly \textit{Mardom} of the Tudeh Party and the weekly \textit{Kar} of the PFO Majority from 1980-1982 are predominantly covered by analyses in support of the “Path of Imam Khomeini and his anti-Imperialist struggle” and against the liberal and radical left.

\textsuperscript{54} There were many other smaller organizations to be noted here. The first among them was the radical anti-clerical group, the \textit{Forqan}, which was dismantled after assassinating several officials of the IRI, among them Ayatollah Mortaza Motahhari, the cleric Mohammad Mofatteh, and the military General Vali Gharani in 1979 (See \textit{Time}, May 14, 1979). Other groups, such as the radical Marxist \textit{Fada’i Guerilla Organization} of Ashraf Dehghani, the \textit{Ranjbaran, the Razmandegan}, and the Islamic leftists called \textit{Arman-e Mostaz’afin}, who had few sympathizers and whose activities were confined to several Universities in the country, were all destroyed during the mass killing of dissidents in the 1980s. This study intentionally does not cover the state-ethnic minority interactions such as the
underestimated the capabilities of the political clergy and therefore naturally emphasized the
“danger of the liberals” and “their international backers,” US-Imperialism, and global
capitalism—factors that led them to intransigently fight the interim government of Bazargan and
unintentionally pave the way for the Khomeini loyalists to assume power. As we will see below,
the PMO was the only major opposition group that successfully formed alliances with
progressive liberal and moderate Islamic organizations between 1979 and 1981 and challenged
the regime.

Unlike the left, Khomeini’s supporters were not organized within a specific political
party during the revolution. They had formed several political parties, associations, a variety of
military and para-military organizations, and multiple foundations such as, the Islamic Republic
Party (IRP), the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution (MIR), the Islamic Revolutionary Guards
(IRG), and the Foundation of the Oppressed immediately after the collapse of the Pahlavi
regime. Ayatollah Khomeini initially opposed the formation of any political party, even an
Islamic one assembled by his close followers, because he was wary of factionalism. He believed
that parties would create divisions, distract from a united front against his competitors, and risk
overshadowing his central authority within the power structure. The IRP founders, all staunch
supporters of the Ayatollah during his years in exile (e.g., Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani,
Mohammad Hossein Beheshti, and Ali Khamenei), convinced him of the necessity of a strong
Islamic political party in the face of many well-organized challengers. The IRP was founded a
few weeks after the overthrow of the Shah regime, only to be dissolved in 1986 due to internal
disputes (Bakhash 1984; Moslem 2002; Rafsanjani 2004, 2005). As already noted, another pro-

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Kurdish Democratic Party and other ethnic oppositional groups’ actions against the Iranian State whose activities
were predominantly carried out in Kurdistan. Last in this vain to be noted are the pro-monarchy groups around the
family of the former Shah and secular liberals around the late Shahpour Bakhtiar, who was the prime minister of the
ousted Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.
Khomeini group, less significant but present in the IRI institutions and involved in the series of attacks against the leftist during the 1980s, was the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution (MIR), not to be confused with the radical left-wing group, the People’s Mojahedin Organization (PMO). The MIR was also dissolved in the mid 1980s by a decree issued by Khomeini, but the group returned to the political scene in post-Khomeini Iran to become a relevant player in the reformist movement and Khatami’s government. (Bakhash 1984: 67; Arjomand 2010: 67-8). We will return to the politics of the MIR in subsequent chapters.

The intense competition over resources and state power during the early 1980s was predominantly defined by three comprehensive campaigns masterfully orchestrated by the Khomeini loyalists against the liberals and the left.

**Three Eventful Events in the Service of State Repression**

Every revolutionary turning point after the collapse of an old order generates transformative events whose impact reaches far beyond what many actors had imagined. Abbas Abdi, an Islamist student leader involved in the taking hostage of US diplomats in Tehran in November of 1979, declared that he thought the adventure would take no longer than a few days with no lasting effects.55 The hostage crisis and two other prolonged events, namely the Iraqi invasion of Iran and the Islamic Cultural Revolution, have fundamentally shaped the course of Iranian history in the aftermath of the 1979 revolution. In retrospect, these events have been more than short-lived incidents; they have had profound repercussions. In the words of historian, sociologist, and event analyst William Sewell, these kinds of events are *eventful*, unleashing new forces that profoundly transform the existing social structure and shape the formation and

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development of other ensuing events (Sewell 2005:100-101). In the Iranian case, the Islamic
Cultural Revolution, the seizing of the US Embassy, and the Iran-Iraq War are “eventful events”
that were causes of Islamic state-making and, at the same time, played a pivotal role in the
making of the Islamic state and shaping the outcome of state-opposition interactions. These were
three key and long lasting events that served the repression strategies of the Islamic State and
dramatically restricted the opportunity for dissident mobilization, accelerated the state-making
processes (i.e., the formation of military, economic and political institutions), and helping
consolidate the position of the new power holders.

Since the outbreak of the revolutionary movement, anti-U.S.-imperialism has been one of
the most powerful ideological instruments for political mobilization in Iran due to American
support for the former regime and its direct involvement in the removal of the democratic
government of Dr. Mosaddeq in 1953. The Islamists were aware of the enormous impact of this
fact in the internal struggle over power. As Dabashi aptly observed:

The exclusively Islamist claim on the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was acted out against the paralyzing
background of a (perhaps irrational, perhaps legitimate) fear of a U.S. sponsored coup to bring back the
Shah, the way the U.S. had done it in 1953. All secular forces systematically and ruthlessly eliminated in
the shadow of that fear, the Islamists managed to use and abuse the U.S. Hostage Crisis (1979-1980), the
Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), and the Iran-Contra and Salman Rushdie affairs (1989) in order to consolidate
their power without sharing it with other participating forces present and active in the course of
revolutionary mobilization (Dabashi 2005: xxviii-xxix).

With their anti-Americanism, they targeted first and foremost their contenders within Iran. The
first internal victim of the hostage crisis was the interim liberal government. Bazargan and his
entire cabinet resigned collectively in November of 1979 when a group of radical student
Followers of Imam’s [Khomeini] path (“Daneshjooyan-e Khatt-e Emam”) seized the American
embassy in Tehran and took several diplomats hostage. From that point forward, anti-
Americanism, which was a central issue during the revolutionary struggle, advanced to the
foreground of postrevolutionary Iranian politics.
The recent history of leftist guerilla organizations’ activities against the Shah demonstrated how profoundly the anti-imperialist struggle was rooted in their agenda. Khomeini was aware of this opportunity and its mobilization capacity. That is why he constantly rejected any early diplomatic compromise with the US-government. It provided him with the most powerful framing in public discourse in the immediate postrevolutionary period. He ingeniously penetrated the very heart of the leftists’ revolutionary campaign and made it his own. He literally disarmed many of his most organized contenders and even went so far as to rally for his agenda the support of the communist Tudeh and Marxist PFO Majority, two of the largest Marxist organizations in the country (Behrooz 2000: 110-12, 124-30). As noted earlier, the support of a significant segment the PFO central committee for Khomeini was one of the primary causes for the split in the largest communist party in the country.

Although the chief target of the hostage takers was the US-government and the central demand was the return of the ousted Shah to Iran, in the long run the hostage crisis was foremost a campaign initiated by Khomeini loyalists against their internal opponents. It provided the radical Islamists with a unique opportunity to divert public attention away from the debate on internal issues, such as the nature of the new constitution, to external subjects, such as anti-US and anti-imperialist propaganda. It overshadowed the dissidents’ resistance to and rejection of the incorporation of the law in the new constitution which ceded unlimited power to the faqih, namely the supreme leader of the Islamic revolution. The 444 days of the hostage crisis that

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56 The official journals of the Tudeh and the PFO Majority from 1979 to early 1982 frequently published statements of support for the Islamic Republic and the “anti-imperialist” position of Ayatollah Khomeini. For detail information, see kar and mardom during the period mentioned above.

57 Drafted in the summer of 1979 by at the time controversial “Assembly of Experts,” the new constitution mandated that the faqih, or Islamic Jurist, assume the greatest authority in the republic’s government. The constitution was ratified by a referendum in December of the same year. The PMO, Marxist Fadai’un, National Democratic Front (NDF), and the Marxist Peykar and other smaller left-wing organizations boycotted the referendum and called it undemocratic and contrary to the revolution’s objectives.
began in November of 1979 profoundly overshadowed the nature of all subjects of future political campaigns and elections, such as the referendum for the constitution of the Islamic Republic, the presidential election in December 1979, and the shape of the new state headed by a supreme vali faqih, an Islamic Leviathan at the very top of the power hierarchy with unlimited power without accountability.

Every night the hostage-takers would appear on national television and reveal selected documents that allegedly proved the “secret” relationship between their contenders (most often the liberal government) and the “despised” American government. At the highest point of the anti-US turmoil, which Khomeini termed the “second revolution,” such public gestures marginalized the clergy’s opponents irrespective of the falseness of these accusations (Bakhash 1984: 114-116).

The occupied US-Embassy, which the Daneshjooyan-e Khatt-e Emam, or the students of Khomeini’s path, called laneh-e jasousi, the spy nest, provided the radical cleric a unique platform to rally popular support and keep the revolutionary mode alive. From across the country, different groups of the population were brought to Tehran to rally repeatedly in front of the occupied embassy and declare their support for the hostage takers calling for the continuation of the revolution until all “enemies” were eliminated.

Banisadr, who at the time of the hostage-taking served as the minister of finance in the interim government, condemned this act, calling it a violation against international law. However, he revised his statements regarding the crisis upon becoming the first president of the Islamic Republic in January. He suddenly blamed the US for the crisis, accusing it of being the real mastermind behind the separatist turbulence in Iran. He shifted his opinion because he saw that he otherwise could not retain office (Bakhash 1984: 114-118).
The hostage crisis was soon followed by another back-breaking project, the Islamic Cultural Revolution, which was a nationwide campaign organized by the radical Islamists against their opponents in early 1980. The Cultural Revolution was an undeclared war against all social actors who opposed Ayatollah Khomeini and his Islamic state. It aimed to islamize the country’s educational, cultural, and political institutions. The first targets of the so-called Islamization process were the universities as the key centers of the left, particularly of the PFO, Peykar, and the PMO. With the strategic slogan “nah sharqi, nah gharbi, Jomhoury-e Islami” (“neither East, nor West, Islamic Republic”), the pro-Khomeini forces attacked universities and all centers of higher education. Paksazi, or the cultural purification campaign, unleashed a new wave of attacks against the opposition, especially against the PMO and Marxists organizations. In a nationwide offensive carried out by the Hezbollah in early 1980, many of opposition’s centers were destroyed within and without the universities. After the dissolution of the offices of oppositional organizations, all universities and centers of higher education were shut-down for nearly three years (Bakhash 1984: 110-114; Bayat 2007: 50, 59, 66-68, 85).

On September 22, 1980, Iraq’s army attacked Iran and within a short time occupied the strategic and oil-rich city of Khorramshahr in the southwest province of Khuzestan. At the time, it was beyond everyone’s imagination that the violent border confrontation would plunge the country into an eight-year-long war, becoming the longest conventional war of the twentieth century. This prolonged war increased the state’s legitimacy and ability to mobilize against its internal challengers. As Tilly aptly observed in his seminal work *Popular Contention in Great Britain*: “Almost all states that go to war accumulate powers that they could not exercise in peacetime, and use them to suppress dissent” (Tilly 2005: 210). Since Iran was attacked by a foreign power, Khomeini was successful in concentrating all of the state’s resources on the war, rallying popular
support for his efforts and countering his domestic challengers by renouncing the United Nations’ ceasefire resolution. The war diminished dramatically the opportunity for dissidents to counter the state, since some opposition groups consciously retreated from resistance to state policy in apprehension of losing their legitimacy and popular support. The three largest left wing oppositions groups against IRI—the PMO, the PFO, and the Tudeh party—even supported the war and dispatched their members to the front. From October 1980 to mid 1981, the weekly issues of mojahed, kar, and mardom are full of reports in support of the war, pictures of martyred Mojahedin, Fadai, and Tudeh activists on the front, and accounts of their contribution in “defense” of their homeland against “foreign aggression.” The protracted eight year war against Iraq provided Khomeini’s followers with a unique opportunity to divert attention away from domestic debates on political freedom and the establishment of democratic institutions, as was demanded during the revolutionary struggle, toward the Islamization and formation of scores of local and national institutions in the service of war and repression. The war once again brought the historical and deeply rooted phenomenon of martyrdom in the collective memory of Shi’a Muslims to the forefront of everyday life in the Iranian society. The chains of martyr funerals and anniversaries that played a decisive role in the continuation of revolutionary protests against the Shah regime assumed a new dimension in postrevolutionary wartime Iran. Day by day, the memorial services for the “martyrs of jang-e tahmili, or the imposed war” were utilized as platforms throughout the country by state-run broadcasts, Friday prayers, the Headquarter of War Propaganda, or setad-e tablighat-e jang, the organization of Islamic propaganda for War, or sazman-e tablighat-e Islami, and other state institutions as repressive instruments against the “counter-revolutionaries (zed-e engelab) and the enemies of Islam” and for mobilization to the front.

By calling it a war against the *monafeqin*, or hypocrites (a synonym for domestic challengers like the PMO) and *koffar*, or unbelievers (external enemies), Khomeini and his followers masterfully channeled the revolutionary sentiments of millions of Iranians into the combat against all oppositional actors. The large-scale state-run mobilization and propaganda and its domination of all public discourse and arenas did not leave any space open for dissenting voices. By describing the war as a *n’emat-e elahi*, or divine blessing, Khomeini recognized early on the advantages of this war for his domestic and global agenda (Khomeini 1999 Vol. 14: 204). Thus the war had to be continued until the last opposition was destroyed enabling the establishment of a strong state without any serious challengers.

Until the very end of this war, the IRI repeated its strategic slogans *jang jang ta piruzi,* “war, war until victory,” and *rah-e quds az Karbala migozarad,* “the path for the liberation of Jerusalem passes through Karbala,” referring to the holiest city for Shi’a Moslems located in Iraq. From 1980 to 1988, Iran launched nearly thirty large-scale operations against the Iraqi forces. Each operation was accompanied by massive propaganda from the National Broadcasting Service and representatives of the Islamic state in thousands of mosques, during Friday prayers, and in other religious centers where they honored the so-called “heroic martyrs of Islam” and called for the continuation of the war against the “domestic and external enemies” of the Islamic Republic. The strategic slogan in Arabic *kull-o youmin ‘ashura, koll-o ‘ardzin karbala,* “every day is ‘ashura and every land is Karbala,” was employed to depict the war as a conflict between the

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59 During a wide variety of public events orchestrated by the state, participants nationwide would repeatedly shout *death to Saddam the unbeliever, death to hypocrites* (targeting specifically the PMO activists), *death to America, and death to Israel.*

60 For detailed information surrounding mass mobilization for the war against Iraq during its final days and Iran’s acceptance of the UN-Resolution 598, see *Jomhouri-e Eslami* from late June until the end of July 1988. Almost every issue of this daily and other state or semi-state run Iranian newspapers (*Keyhan, Ettela’at*) in June, July, and beyond extensively covered the last days of the mass mobilization for war and the subsequent ceasefire.
followers of the third Shi’a Imam Hussein—who was martyred on the tenth day (‘ashura) of the Islamic calendar month Muharram in the year 680 in Iraq—and his enemies.

With the perpetual reenactment and commemoration of the historic Shi’a mourning of the third Imam, the authorities successfully mobilized millions of the population for their objectives at home and on the front. Repeatedly, Khomeini and his close collaborators stated that the hostage taking of the American in Tehran, the Islamic Cultural revolution, and the war against Iraq constituted other forms and stages of the Islamic Revolution and were, in fact, the continuation of the revolution. This highly effective strategy helped them keep alive the unprecedented waves of popular presence on the streets. The most effective and best organized form of counter-mobilization against the domestic challengers and mobilization for war was the formation of the artesh-e bist milyuni, basij-e mostaz’afan, the “army of twenty million, the mobilization force of the deprived,” the so-called Basij. In this condition of war, brutal repression against the dissidents, and violent top-down Islamization, every group and individual were expected to submit to the will of “Imam” Khomeini. Even neutrality and impartiality were signs of dissent that the Islamists would not tolerate.

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61 Niruy-e Mogavemat-e Basij, or the Mobilization Resistance Force, is a paramilitary organization under the control of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, the most powerful military organization of Iran. The Basij was founded in late 1979 under the direct decree of Ayatollah Khomeini to “protect the Islamic Revolution from domestic and international threats.” The organization consists of approximately 700,000 personnel. From its inception to the present day, Basij is the strongest arm of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the oppression of dissident forces and the compulsory enforcement of “Islamic order.”

62 In the Shi’a tradition, Imam is a title reserved only for Ali, who according to Shi’a is the rightful successor of Prophet Mohammad, and his eleven descendants, all infallible sacred individuals. Awarding Khomeini this title, his followers linked his political leadership with that of the sacred and divine Shi’a leaders (Imams), whose authority no one can challenge.
As discussed earlier, Khomeini never negotiated the contents of his agenda. Rather he aimed to persuade the negotiating parties to relinquish their own agenda and work within his political and religious framework. Khomeini’s first encounters with the PMO, the largest opposition to his regime after the revolution, dates back to early 1972 and 1974, when two members of the central cadre of the organization met with him in his Iraqi exile in Najaf to ask him for support. They described the organization’s conundrum at a time when the majority of the founding members of the PMO were arrested, tortured, and put on trial by the Shah’s secret police, SAVAK. The aim was to concede a positive declaration from Khomeini to gain recognition from his clerical network in Iran in the hope of reinforcing the PMO’s anti-Shah campaign. After fifteen hours of negotiation, Khomeini informed the secret PMO delegation that he was not willing to support a group that sympathizes with international communism, does not believe in physical resurrection after death, and criticizes the clergy. It passed another five years for the next meeting between Khomeini and the PMO to take place. At this time, Khomeini—and not the Shah—was the most powerful man in Tehran. He was aware of the organizational skill of this group and its strong base within the urban middle class, among many members of the LMI, and among the progressive clerics, such as the influential Ayatollah Taleqani and Ali Golzadeh Ghafuri. More importantly at time, the PMO represented a progressive and revolutionary version of Islam. Its political agenda appealed to the young educated urban middle class, much like the socialist and Marxist currents of the time. According to both the PMO and Khomeini, in two secret meetings with PMO leaders in Tehran, the leader of the revolution tried to convince the organization to accept his religious-political program and to denounce Marxist ideology and groups. He would reward them if they did so, he implied, but would punish them if they stepped
out of the bounds of Islam. The PMO leaders left their meeting with Khomeini resolved to consciously avoid any direct confrontation with him (Abrahamian 1989, Rajavi 2010).

Giving up his hope of co-opting them, Khomeini launched a public verbal attack against the PMO in late June of 1980. Drawing on rhetoric from the Qur'an, he called the mojahedin, or freedom fighters, monafeqin, or “hypocrites,” who were worse than infidels (koffars), monafeqin 

badtar az koffarand:

Those who are coming to us in the name of Islam but actually aim to sabotage and do evil acts against Islam, be aware they are not Islamic. They are against Islam and against the revolution. They positioned themselves in many assemblies and groups. They are everywhere. Our nation should be alert…These monafeqin are worse than koffar. They say they are Muslims but they act against Islam (Sahifeh-e Emam Vol. 12: 470; see also Keyhan, August 25, 1979).

These verbal attacks from the powerful “Imam” marked the beginning of the IRI’s systematic attacks against the opposition in general and against PMO activists in particular. Nationwide PMO offices and sympathizers were the target of attacks by the vigilante. Faced with mounting repression, the PMO reduced its activities for a short time and stopped the publication of its weekly Mojahed. However, after a brief period of retreat, the PMO launched a massive counter-attack. Its nationwide political campaign was focused on the IRP, a close ally of Khomeini. The PMO accused the IRP and the “reactionary clergy” of monopolizing power and masterminding Hezbollah attacks against oppositional forces:

The People’s Mojahedin Organization declares one of the famous ruling political parties in the country responsible for the vigilante attacks against the opposition. As our heroic Iranian nation knows, our society has been suffering since a while from the poisoning phenomenon of vigilantism. This detrimental and counter revolutionary phenomenon that is the continuation of the work of the Shah and colonialism has had it hands repeatedly in the blood of our people. It has to be stopped (Mojahed June 19, 1980, no. 92: 1)

The confrontation between the regime and the PMO intensified gradually during the hostage crisis, increased further during the Cultural Revolution, and reached its climax during the presidency of Banisadr, when the PMO formed a coalition with the president against the clerical faction of the Islamic Republic in the IRP.
It should be noted that many oppositional organizations consciously avoided a direct confrontation with Khomeini for two reasons. First, he had enormous popular support. Second, many leftist groups were preoccupied with the extension of their own social bases. All of the leftist organizations were underground guerilla forces under the former regime with limited social and organizational resources. A confrontation with powerful clergy at the early postrevolutionary stage would have posed an existential danger to them. However, this state of affairs changed rapidly when the IRP supporters who called themselves Hezbollahis (the party of God’s supporters) intensified their assaults on the left wing political parties in the aftermath of the November 1979 hostage crisis.

There are at least three reasons why the Hezbollahis, the informal hand of Khomeini and the IRP, increased their repressive measures against their strongest opponent, the PMO. First, they saw how rapidly the PMO was able to expand its base throughout the country. By the end of 1979, the PMO had offices and centers in almost every city in Iran. In the election for the Assembly of Experts in August 1979, three of the ten candidates elected for Tehran were PMO allies on the liberal front and, more importantly, the PMO leader Mas’ud Rajavi achieved the twelfth rank in Tehran. In the election of the first Majles (Iranian parliament), the PMO ran with 127 candidates and did well. Despite the complex two-stage electoral procedure and other limitations, the PMO candidates were able to enter the runoff stage in many cities. The PMO top candidate in Tehran ranked 18th and received 531,943 votes among 408 candidates and a total of 2,134,434 ballots. The PMO suddenly represented a formidable center of power with the capability of forming a broad coalition against the dominant clerics. As they showed during the elections of the Assembly of Experts, the presidential election, and the election for the first
Majles, the PMO’s growing impact on Iranian politics was strong enough to present an alternative program to that of the IRP (Abrahamian 1989).

Second, the responses of the PMO against the repressive measures of the Islamic Republic contributed to the state’s increasingly violent responses. This group intensified its campaign against the IRP in the form of an open letter to Khomeini, strikes, public protests, and demonstrations. It should be noted that from February to the end of 1979 the PMO never directly responded to the rhetoric and physical attacks of the pro-Khomeini vigilante group Hezbollah. Finally, the recent history of the PMO and the radical Marxists organizations proved to the IRP that, if necessary, these former anti-shah guerilla groups would take arms and resist a repressive state as they had done in the past.

The growing social base of the PMO, its systematic resistance against the Islamic Republic, and particularly the formation of an informal coalition between the PMO and Banisadr (the president of the Islamic Republic) were strong enough to frighten the IRP and Khomeini. From early 1981, the PMO called repeatedly for a nationwide protest march against the growing repression and for the support of President Banisadr. On many occasions, the Hezbollah’s attacks against meetings of PMO supporters and, particularly, against the president were prevented successfully but there were also occasions when activists were injured or killed. From early 1980 to June 20, 1981, over 100 activists of various groups, predominantly of the PMO, were killed and thousands were arrested while carrying out political campaigns on the streets of Tehran, Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashhad, Rasht, Amol, Sari, Gha’emshahr, and many other cities (Abrahamian 1989; M’asumi, n.d.).

However, one event in early 1981 rapidly transformed the relationship between the president and the PMO on the one hand and the IRP and Khomeini on the other hand. On March
5, 1981, the birthday of the late Premier Dr. Mosaddeq, whose democratic government was ousted during the coup of 1953, Banisadr delivered a speech to a mass of supporters. Members of the Hezbollah attacked the rally and tried to interrupt the president’s speech. On this day, the Hezbollah supporters faced a new form of resistance that shocked and angered them and their actual leaders behind-the-scenes. Many members of the Hezbollah were seized by a group in the rally and searched. Almost all of the vigilantes carried identity cards that showed their affiliation either with the IRP, IRG, or CIR. The daily *Enghelab-e Eslami* of President Banisadr published these identity cards (see *Enghelab-e Eslami*, March 6, 1981 page 1 and 3). As a result, at the same gathering President Banisadr proclaimed publically: “I am ready to die by the hand of these vigilantes if it helps to ban the culture of vigilantism forever in this country.” From that point forward, Banisadr intensified his efforts against the IRP. He began writing personal and public letters to Khomeini complaining about the unacceptable actions of the IRP and other Islamic organizations. While the exchange between Khomeini and Banisadr continued, the IRP, IRG, and CIR increased their assaults against oppositional forces on the street.

**The Last Demonstration**

On June 20, 1981, the PMO called for a nationwide demonstration in protest against the daily harassment, the direct shooting of activists, and the bombing of houses belonging to prominent families close to the PMO and other left wing organizations. As a result, several hundred thousand PMO supporters demonstrated for freedom and to stop the persistent onslaught of terror against dissidents. In retaliation, the armed Islamic forces attacked demonstrators,
leaving fifty protestors dead and arresting hundreds more. The bloody suppression of the peaceful rally on June 20 by the IRP and the armed Islamic forces, such as the IRG and CIR, marked in the recent memory of Iranians the beginning of an era of unprecedented violence directed against the opposition by the Islamic state under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. From this day forward, disappearances, arrests, and mass executions against the dissidents were at the top of the new state’s agenda. From 1981-1988 tens of thousands of activists were executed, arrested, or fled the country. Alone in the summer of 1988, 5,000 to 10,000 political prisoners were executed (Abrahamian 1989, 1999). The brutal crackdown seriously diminished the mobilization capacity of the largest opposition group of the time, the PMO. Repression destroyed the structure of many smaller organizations, such as the Marxist organization Peykar and the PFO Minority. It also seriously damaged the capability of non-violent actors from liberals to radicals.

The PMO responded with massive counter-attacks against the regime. From July 1981 to February 1983, the PMO carried out an average of 20 armed attacks per week against the personnel and centers of the Islamic regime. The PMO continued with its attacks against key figures and military targets of the Islamic Republic and gradually withdrew the vast majority of its surviving members mainly to Kurdistan, Western Europe, the US, Turkey, Pakistan, and Iraq. The organization announced the establishment of the National Liberation Army of Iran (NLA) based mainly in Iraqi territory in June 1987. From there, the military wing of the PMO launched several large scale armed attacks against the military forces of the Islamic Republic on the Iran-Iraq border through summer 1988. Since its destructive defeat in operation eternal light in late July 1988 and the cease fire agreement between Iran and Iraq, the PMO’s armed activities were

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confined to a few mortar attacks against the Iranian regime’s targets in Tehran in 2000, the 1999 assassination of the deputy chief of Iran’s armed forces Ali Sayyad Shirazi, and the 1998 killing of the former director of the notorious Evin Prison Assadollah Lajevardi in Tehran.66 From Iraqi territory, the organization launched at least five large scale operations against Iranian targets from 1986 to 1988. However, the PMO’s operational opportunity from its main base in Iraq disappeared promptly when Iran agreed to enter a ceasefire with Iraq and accepted the conditions of the UN-resolution 598 in June 1988.

In addition to the violent resistance of the underground leftist organizations, one non-violent opposition force that should be mentioned here is the nehzat-e azadi-e Iran, the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI). Once the core of the first postrevolutionary interim government, the LMI in contrast to many political actors remained within the country and maintained a very modest level of activism against the IRI and Ayatollah Khomeini. Founded in early 1961 by Mehdi Bazargan, Ayatollah Taleqani and Yadollah Sahabi, the LMI has had a long history of struggle for freedom and democracy in Iran.67 Many of its founding and senior members were directly active in the nationalist movement under the leadership of Mosaddeq and the liberal National Front. After the ousting of the liberal government through the British-American lead military coup, Taleqani and Bazargan were among the anti-Shah activists who were arrested several times and spent short and long term prison sentences. However, their continued and effective involvement in the anti-Shah movement in Tehran and the growing resistance against the Shah regime positioned both Bazargan and Taleqani at the center of the movement and their influence exceeded that of LMI


67 For more information on the LMI, see Chehabi (1990), and the website of the LMI at http://www.nehzateazadi.org/n.htm .
organizational structures. Ayatollah Taleqani (a imam jama’at, prayer leader, and frequent speaker of the influential Hedayat Mosque) and Mehdi Bazargan (a professor at the University of Tehran) found two crucial venues to carry on their anti-Shah activities and expand their socio-political network—a network that made Ayatollah Taleqani one of the most popular clerics during and after the 1979 revolution and Bazargan the first prime minister of the postrevolutionary interim government. Ayatollah Taleqani’s death only a few months after the revolution was certainly a huge blow for the democratic orientation of postrevolutionary Iran in general and for the LMI in particular, the organization lost one of its most charismatic and influential founders. It was Taleqani who early on warned against the danger of “religious absolutism” as the worst form of absolutism (Mirabolqasemi 2003: 263-272). It was also Taleqani who left Tehran in protest over the arrest of two of his Marxist sons and who visited the headquarters of the PMO when it was attacked by the vigilante group Hezbollah in late 1979. The LMI was represented in the Islamic Republic’s majles until 1983, when it was banned from all parliamentary and presidential runoffs. Bazargan’s application for the presidential election was rejected by the Guardian of Council and none of the LMI’s candidates would ever pass the necessary examination of the powerful Guardian of Council to run in any election. The high level involvement of the LMI in the revolution, its acceptance of the Islamic Republic’s constitution and recognition of Ayatollah Khomeini’s leadership, and its very close ties to many key clerics in the Islamic Republic, including to Khomeini himself, did not protect the LMI from the increasingly violent Islamist crackdown against dissident activities (Chehabi 1990: 294-303). Again and again, the headquarters of the LMI

68 Mojahed nr. 2. pp 1,6,10 July 30, 1979.

were ransacked by the *hezbollahis*. Bazargan and other members of the LMI were beaten up in the *majles*, and several were arrested from early 1980s to 2011.

Without an official functioning office and newspaper, the LMI struggles to maintain a minimum level of its activities through the publication of books, open letters, and pamphlets. During the 1980s, Bazargan published several open letters and criticized the general politics of the IRI, demanding free elections and the end of the “destructive war” against Iraq. In his open letters to the authorities, mainly to Khomeini during the 1980s, he criticized the repressive measures against the dissidents and the sociopolitical conditions in the country. Bazargan’s letters as the head of the LMI were responded with the mass arrest of prominent members of his organization.70

In early 2010, the LMI announced publicly “the temporarily withdrawal from all political activities due to the increasing political repression by the intelligent and security forces.”71

**End of the Iran-Iraq War**

In mid July 1988, Iran gave up its long resistance to the ceasefire demand of the United Nations and accepted the UN-resolution 598 that put an end to the grueling and destructive war with Iraq since September 1980. Iran’s acceptance of this resolution was accompanied by a

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Iran’s announcement of the ceasefire was followed by an immediate armed attack of the National Liberation Army (NLA), the military wing of the People’s Mojahedin Organization, which was based in Iraq. After days of intense fighting on the Iran-Iraq border, the PMO was seriously defeated and returned its surviving fighters to its main bases in Iraqi territory, where they continue to be based in the present day facing an uncertain fate.\footnote{Operation “eternal light,” called merssaad by the Islamic Republic, was the last large scale attack against Iranian targets launched by the PMO from Iraqi territory in late June and early July 1988, only a week after Iran agreed to a ceasefire. For detailed information, see: http://www.ir-psri.com/Show.php?Page=ViewArticle&ArticleID=108 and http://www.iran-newspaper.com/1384/840504/html/culture.htm and http://www.mojahedin.org/links/books/mosavar_forough.pdf.}

Upon the victory over the NLA, the ‘poisoned’ Ayatollah failed in his efforts to export the Islamic Revolution and “liberate” the holy Shi’a cities, which he believed were the road to the liberation of Jerusalem. He issued a deadly \textit{fatwa}, a religious decree, for the annihilation of his domestic opponents.\footnote{“[S]ince the treacherous \textit{monafeqin} [Mojahedin Khalgh or PMO] do not believe in Islam and whatever they say is stemmed from their deception and hypocrisy, and since according to the claims of their leaders they have become apostates of Islam, and since they wage war on God and are engaging in classical warfare in the western, northern and southern parts of the country with the collaboration of the B’athist Party of Iraq, and also their spying for Saddam against our Muslim nation, and since they are tied to the World Arrogance and have inflicted foul blows to the Islamic Republic since its inception, it follows that those who remain steadfast in their position of \textit{nifaq} in prisons throughout the country are considered to be \textit{muharib} (waging war on God) and are condemned to execution.” For a detailed account of this massacre, see \textit{Deadly Fatwa: Iran’s Prison Massacre of 1988} published by Iran Human Rights Documentation Center at http://www.iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/Deadly%20Fatwa%20-%20Iran%27s%201988%20Prison%20Massacre.pdf.} Based on this decree, thousands of activists and members of leftist opposition groups, who were already sentenced to long term prison, were slaughtered mercilessly. Newly surfaced records reveal that the massacre of the political prisoners was planned prior to the
NLA attack (Montazeri 2001). Once again the resolute founder of the Islamic state did not miss
the opportunity to confirm the assessments of his first liberal Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan,
who described Khomeini as a bulldozer, crushing rocks, roots and stones in his path (Bakhash
1986:54). The Ayatollah behaved for the last time “like a bulldozer” and destroyed thousands of
lives. The bloody massacres provoked the worried reaction of the second most powerful grand
Ayatollah in Iranian politics and, ironically, the designated successor of Khomeini.

Ayatollah Montazeri contacted the supreme leader and criticized unambiguously the
killing of thousands of political prisoners. Khomeini did not hesitate long and responded severely
(Khomeini 1989; Montazeri 2001). The grand Ayatollah Montazeri’s fate was sealed as the
influential advisor and son of Khomeini, Seyyed Ahmad anticipated: “Mr. Montazeri is like a fine
glass and the Imam [Khomeini] is like a hard metal. If they both clash, the former will be
shattered.” Montazeri was removed from all of his official positions and forced to live a life in
isolation, confined to state-monitored religious teaching and house arrest until his death in
December 2009.

Factionalism and challenge under the iron fist and charismatic power of Khomeini could
not survive long. Whenever disputes emerged and the factions could not agree on certain policies,
each faction tried to lobby for its agenda directly by the Ayatollah or indirectly through
Khomeini’s son Seyyed Ahmad, asking for his father’s blessing. Eventually Khomeini’s
intervention for or against a policy would end any further debate. For instance, in the early 1980s

75 Speaking for the Dead: Survivor Accounts of Iran’s 1988 Massacre. A full report available at
http://iranhrdc.org/httpdocs/English/pdfs/Reports/Speaking%20for%20the%20Dead%20-%20Full%20Report.pdf

76 Fars News Agency, March 28, 2009: Nameh-e Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Ahmad Khomeini beh aghay-e Montazeri

77 Ibid.
when the current supreme leader Khamenei, at the time president of the country, opposed Mir - Hossein Mousavi (the current leader of the Green Movement and challenger of Ahmadinejad in the presidential election of June 2009) for the position of Prime Minister, Khomeini staunchly supported the latter and ended the debate, which allowed Mousavi to continue his tenure for eight years (Ettela‘at December 18, 1983; Schirazi 1997: 70-73). No faction could afford to challenge the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution whose power reached far beyond the duties determined in Article 110 of the IRI constitution. Defection and dissent under Khomeini were inexcusable sins and punished severely.

As was shown above, the political context in Iran during the 1980s—dominated by a revolutionary state determined to launch domestic revolutionary cleansing and to export the revolution—was certainly not a favorable condition for the emergence, let alone the sustainability, of public collective actions. Any resisting voice was forcefully pushed aside by a determined revolutionary leader, from the softest critical voice of his designated successor Ayatollah Montazeri to his first prime minister, the liberal Bazargan in Tehran, to Iranian activists thousands of miles away from Iran, such as Shahpoor Bakhtiar in Paris, Professor Kazem Rajavi in Geneva, and leaders of Iranian Kurdish opposition in Berlin. In fact, the revolutionary brigades of the Islamic state followed many activists beyond Iranian borders in Turkey, Pakistan, Western Europe, and the US. Nearly one hundred Iranian dissidents were assassinated abroad while living in exile. The most recent of these threats were carried out against the Iranian journalist Maziar Bahari, a Newsweek correspondent in Tehran. He was arrested while reporting for the weekly magazine during the disputed presidential election in the summer of 2009 and was released after 112 days of
incarceration and returned to Europe. In his live interview with BBC Persian Television on April 19, 2010, he confirmed that the Iranian regime had issued a death threat against him.\textsuperscript{78}

As I have demonstrated, mobilization and contention in the immediate aftermath of the consolidation of a postrevolutionary authoritarian regime with increasing totalitarian tendencies and massive popular support is nearly impossible. If they emerged, they would be successfully contained by repression. We should bear in mind that the Islamic regime that effectively marginalized all its contenders was a product of a mass-based social revolution. It was at the time a regime that was capable of mobilizing millions of people on the street for its agenda and for the war against Iraq, and it possessed a ruling elite highly united against its challengers. Although severe repression initially triggered violent responses from many contenders that transformed the conflict into a semi-civil war, by early 1983 the brutal repressive measures and mass killing of dissident activists decreased the activities of the opposition and led to the near complete de-mobilization of other social actors.

Ayatollah Khomeini’s utilization of all available ideological and material sources of force, including his charismatic authority, a highly politicized Shi’\textsuperscript{a} Islam, and all military and paramilitary and revolutionary institutions and foundations against his opponents, has not left any windows of opportunity open to the slightest degree of contention and criticism even for his long term comrade and designated successor, the grand Ayatollah Montazeri.

The brutal crackdown and repression seriously diminished the mobilization capacity of the largest opposition groups of the time, the PMO, the PFO, and the Tudeh Party. Repression destroyed the structure of many smaller organizations, such as the Marxist organization *Peykar* and the *Fadai’an* Minority. It also seriously damaged the capability of non-violent actors from liberals to radicals. The dissidents of the IRI were able to reemerge only in the absence of its powerful founder and supreme leader.

With the death of *Ayatollah* Khomeini, the end of the Iran-Iraq War, demographic transformations, and the increasingly growing factionalism, the state-dissident interactions entered a new phase. Contenders, old and new, returned to the political scene armed with new strategies with the aim to exploit the existing ideological rifts and factionalism among the ruling elite and to expand available opportunities for their collective claim-making. The authoritarian revolutionary Islamic state that once “devoured” the children of the revolution is now threatened to be “devoured” by very young and educated children who comprise more than 70% of the population and were born after the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In the subsequent three chapters of this study, I will examine the institutional and demographic changes and continuities that affected the nature of mobilization and de-mobilization in Iran, namely urbanization, social and cultural expansion, population growth and elite division. I will be concerned with questions such as why collective actions during the 1980s were mainly sporadic, led by left-wing political organizations, and had not diffused. How and why were the organizational forms of collective actions and their framing transformed? Why in the face of fierce repression did social protests and collective actions develop a new dynamic of sustainability and diffusion in post-Khomeini Iran?

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79 For an extensive account of the interactions between Iranian Marxist Organizations and the Islamic Republic, see Behrooz 1999.
Chapter Four

Regime Opening: Postwar Reconstruction and Economic Liberalization, 1989-1997

"When a people which has put up with an oppressive rule over a long period without protest suddenly finds the government relaxing its pressure, it takes up arms against it."

Tocqueville 1955: 176

Since the 1938 publication of Crane Brinton's *Anatomy of Revolution*, scholars of popular struggles, based predominantly in the United States and Western Europe, have been utilizing existing theories and developing new models to explain the socio-political, cultural, ideological, and historical origins, trajectories, and outcomes of successful and failed social movements and revolutions across the globe (Davies 1962; Arendt 1963; Smelser 1963; Huntington 1968; Wolf 1969; Gurr 1970; Tilly 1964, 1973, 1978, 1996; Skocpol 1979; Arjomand 1989; Parsa 1989; Wickham-Crowley 1991; Goldstone 1991; Dabashi 1993; Moaddel 1993; Rucht 1994; Tarrow 1998; McAdam 1999; Halliday 1999; Goodwin 2001; Foran 2003; Kurzman 2004; Della Porta 2006; Diani 2006; Kriesy 2009).

Analysts of contentious politics choose cases of popular struggle across time and space in order to explain the triggers behind the “sudden” eruption of mass collective actions and, more importantly, to develop a more general tool for explaining the causes of their emergence elsewhere. During the 1920s and 1930s, George Pettee and Crane Brinton saw the reasons behind the eruption of mass popular uprising mainly in states’ fiscal problems and the alienation of the intellectual elite from the ruling circles. As a result, their analyses did not consider factors such as regimes’ international standing, states’ forms and capacities, factionalism within the ruling elite, ideology,

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80 This chapter does not intend to present an in-depth examination of Iranian Economy during the tenures of President Rafsanjani (1989-1997). It presents rather a brief account of major changes to help understanding the socio-political context for dissidents’ activism. For more insights on the postrevolutionary Iranian Economy see Amuzegar 1993 and Alizadeh 2000.
culture, and the strategic interactions between states and their multiple contenting opponents. Their rather descriptive account of revolutionary uprisings prevented them from presenting a social scientific and multi-causal explanation for the rise and fall of popular contention. John Foran summarizes succinctly the limitations of this framework:

comparative historians Lyford Edwards, Crane Brinton, George S. Pettee worked out elaborate sequences of stages that they felt all major revolutions passed through; their “natural histories” highlighted such factors as the desertion of the intellectuals from the old regime, efforts by the state to implement reforms, crises brought on by state fiscal problems rather than opposition efforts, and a process of radicalization during revolutions that ended with military leadership…, yet the standard critique of their work is that it offers descriptions of revolutions rather than telling us why they occur (Foran 1994: 160-61).

Although historical descriptive analysis of popular struggles provides general knowledge about and insights into the state and its many dissidents, this approach is not able to explain the roots of the emergence of collective actions across time and space and their likely outcomes.

With the emergence of new social movements and revolutions since the 1950s in the United States, Western Europe, and elsewhere (e.g., China, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Iran), a number of scholars have presented analytical reviews of the available theoretical approaches for the study of the origins, processes, and outcomes of collective actions, examined their shortcomings, and developed new models. Among them is the sociologist and Iran scholar Misagh Parsa. For his examination of the causes and outcomes of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Parsa divides the theoretical models for the study of collective actions into the following three categories: the social breakdown approach, structural theory, and social movement models (Parsa 1989: 4-9).

While the analysts of the breakdown model see the causes of the outbreak of mass popular uprising in industrialization, urbanization, and modernization (Huntington 1968), the structural model (Skocpol 1979) emphasizes the interactions between the state and dominant social classes, state’s economic policies and their repercussions for various groups in the respective societies, and the international position of the respective regimes (the level of dependency/independency of the
concerned state). Regimes' dependency on major regional and international powers may render them vulnerable to pressure from outside actors, such as the USA and the European Union, among others. Analysts from differing approaches agree, for instance, on the key role the policies of different US governments--from the Kennedy to Carter administration--played in the ultimate collapse of the Shah-regime in Iran due to the heavy influence and presence of the US administration at the time in Tehran.

According to social breakdown theory, the process of industrialization, urbanization, and modernization in general uproots the indigenous social institutions and destroys what Parsa calls “traditional social structure, norms and values … [which] generate social disorganization and its accompanying strains, frustrations, and grievances, which in turn may explode in collective violence and civil disorder” (Parsa 1989: 3). However, the critics of this model aptly argue that these scholars neglect key elements, such as framing opportunities for the opponents, the mobilizing capacity of the dissidents, the institutional structure of the state and its capacity for and propensity to repression (Tilly 1975, 1978; Tarrow 1998; McAdam 1999).

Theda Skocpol, a key representative of the structural model, points out three relevant structural relations: the relations between classes, between classes and the state, and finally between different states within the international system. She argues that a combination of the weakening of the state apparatus through an internal struggle for power, international pressure, and peasantry revolt are the main conditions for the eruption of mass popular contention and the ultimate breakdown of the state (Skocpol 1979).

Some scholars argue that the structural model’s recurrent and exclusive focus on the position of the state and the importance of its relation to the dominant class led them to ignore the complexities of multiple conflicts between various actors and different classes. As Parsa argues:
Skocpol’s formulation is somewhat problematic because it relies heavily on the relationship between the dominant class and the state. It locates the center of the conflicts around the capitalist class and the state…. [T]he simple withdrawal of support by the capitalist class from the state may increase state vulnerability but may not result in revolution (Parsa 2000: 7-8).

In his critique of structural models, Parsa specifies the impact of other classes on a revolutionary process. For instance, a radical working-class insurgency against the state may cause a capitalist withdrawal from opposing the state and thus prevent the formation of a broad and multi-class coalition against the state, which is the most important factor for the success of revolutionary movements (Ibid: 7-8).

Scholars of the social movement approach (Tilly, Tarrow, McAdam, Goldstone) stress the importance of ideas, resources available to the dissidents, and, more importantly, the capacity and degree of centralization of state power (Tilly 1973: 445; Parsa 1989: 4-9).

Other scholars such as William Sewell pay special attention to ideology as a key element in the emergence and development of collective actions. Swell argues that ideology plays a central role in social structures and their transformation. He stresses that ideologies are transpersonal, anonymous structures that are carried out by willful actors (Sewell 1994: 172). With Swell, a number of other analysts, such as Mansoor Moaddel, whose work is especially concerned with the Iranian Revolution of 1979, classify ideology as a very important element which played a crucial role in the success of the Iranian Revolution. Moaddel argues that the adversary reform policies of the state (the Shah) and foreign capital played a role in mobilizing the bazaaris (the powerful middle class urban merchants) against the state, but the nature of the conflict between them was not revolutionary. He claims that Shi’a revolutionary discourse transformed social discontent into a revolutionary crisis (Moaddel 1993: 153-163). He further argues that without the deliberate utilization of Shi’a ideology as an “autonomous element,” Ayatollah Khomeini would not have been able to mobilize such an enormous coalition against the Shah regime. In addition, the failure of...
the nationalist ideology of the Shah, the subsequent legitimacy crisis of his regime, and the alienation of the masses from the ruling elite’s secular nationalist ideology in Iran also played a tremendous role in the success of the revolution. In contrast, analysts like Jack Goldstone see ideology as an important factor that influences only the outcomes of a social revolution, but is not relevant to its outbreak and trajectories:

It is chiefly after the initial breakdown of the state, during the ensuing power struggles and state reconstruction, that ideology and culture take leading roles (Goldstone 1991: 416).

Unlike Moaddel, Goldstone does not identify ideology as an independent factor for the cause of revolutions. Instead he emphasizes its importance after the initial breakdown of the ancient regime.

Similarly, Parsa believes that ideology-centered models fail to recognize a very important social aspect of ideology in the mobilization of collective actions. He sees the reason for the shortcoming of these theories as their failure to take into account the social origins of ideology. “Ideologies,” he argued, “do not emerge in a vacuum and should always be understood in the social and historical context” (Parsa 2009: 9).

As we will see below, the mere existence of structural pressures, grievances, and some degree of organizational resources are not sufficient to launch sustained collective actions, let alone a successful transition to democracy. Therefore it is important to pay attention to other crucial variables, such as interests, opportunities, threats, fragmentation within the regime, available allies within the elite, and above all the state’s capability for and propensity to repression against its opponents (Tilly 1978: 7-8).

Although this study acknowledges the importance of economic, ideological, and breakdown approaches, the main argument of this study is that collective actions against the Islamic Republic emerged gradually due to institutional changes, limited electorate competition, social and educational expansion, and, more importantly, the intellectual transformation of a
significant segment of the elites and their action-intended discourse (all favorable conditions for collective mobilization). The conceptual models of resource mobilization and opportunity structure (the political process approach) provide the best available tools for explaining of the absence or presence of contentious collective actions across time and space. As was shown in the previous chapter, popular contention in Iran during the 1980s nearly completely disappeared from the public arenas in spite of mounting social and economic problems. Faced with a resilient and unified authoritarian regime willing to employ brutal repression and a genocidal mass-killing of its opponents, even groups with a national network and resources were nearly destroyed and could not afford to launch collective mobilization in the midst of violent repression.

Furthermore, by focusing on the alteration within the ruling elite, namely the intellectual transformation of many former Islamists into liberal minded reformists, and other emerging opportunities, such as the above-mentioned social and demographic changes, available organizational structures, and collective framing, the political process approach enables us to answer key questions in the analysis of social mobilization, namely why after almost a decade of silence and “successful” crackdowns of contention Iran is witnessing once again waves of increasing popular protest. What are the responsible processes and mechanisms behind the routinization of popular contention in Iran since the early 1990s, which continue in spite of state repression? And more importantly, how do threats or opportunities differ in relation to each dissident actor across issues, time, and space?

The Islamic Republic without the “divine presence” of its founder and with the end of the War against Iraq entered a new and uncertain phase of its history. The once unified elite under the iron hand of Khomeini had become severely fragmented, an intellectual and political rift that encompassed all divisions of power, including the judiciary and military branches. Any attempt
to concentrate power in the hand of one faction would plunge the regime into a severe legitimacy and security crisis. The turbulences since the 2009 presidential election are a clear confirmation of this assumption.

An authoritarian state in search of a successor for the deceased Ayatollah was faced with institutional and ideological challenges that divided the ruling elite in multiple factions. As the development of events since his departure demonstrated, nobody could replace Khomeini with his same qualities. Seyyed Ali Khamenei certainly lacks his predecessor’s charismatic and religious authority, a chief attribute of Khomeini that enabled him to successfully prevent factionalism from emerging (or at least escalating) and allowed him to mobilize popular enthusiasm for his policy of repression and war. As we will see in this study, populism has been a key attribute of this regime and still remains an effective instrument to counter anti-regime popular mobilization.

This chapter discusses the relationship between the increasing and lasting elite division, the regime’s gradual and cautious opening, institutional access, limited elections and the forms and dynamic of popular collective actions during the tenures of Ali-Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1989-1997).

**Elite Division and Competition**

Since the early 1990s, various forms of collective actions have been routine venues for multiple actors in their public claim making against the IRI due to the changing patterns in the interactions between the state and its many contenders. This chapter argues that the political opportunity/threat context in the post-Khomeini Iran since 1989 has been marked by increasing elite fragmentation, the post-war reconstruction and economic “liberalization,” changing
alliances, and alteration in the propensity to repression by some factions of the Islamic Republic. The IRI, confronted with the socio political challenges after the eight-year disastrous war against Iraq, and a decade of propaganda for the export of the Islamic revolution, was forced to divert its focus from regional and international issues to more pressing internal concerns. The absence of the all powerful and unifying authority of Ayatollah Khomeini provided various factions of the ruling elite with opportunities to openly carry out their differences on domestic and foreign policy issues. The open discussion of the various factions in the majles, other official institutions, and in the press, especially during elections, created multiple arenas of public debate that are routinely utilized by actors outside of the Iranian polity. His successor Khamenei’s interference on many crucial occasions has proved ineffective in deescalating the inter-factional quarrels. The violent clash between factions in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential election is a prime example.

The popular dimension of the revolutionary state with its many semi-formal and informal revolutionary foundations and direct link to various groups of the population led to the diffusion of elite disputes in higher state institutions into the streets of Iranian cities and inevitably expanded the institutional discursive space to the public arenas throughout Iranian society, which facilitated popular mobilization. Since its inception, the revolutionary Islamists in power were concerned with the management and continuing mobilization of their social base for war and counter-mobilization against domestic challengers. As noted earlier, the three overall features of the regime, namely Islamism, republicanism, and populism, were to be materialized in its institutional routines. With republicanism, the IRI established different institutions, branches of power, and held elections we generally encounter in modern democracies, such as elections for the president, parliament, and national, provincial, and municipal offices. The IRI also
institutionalized the separation of the executive, judicial, and legislative branches from each other, at least in theory. The Islamism of the IRI would oversee and materialize the Islamization of all institutions and the compatibility of their law and decisions with that of the officially defined Islam. Finally, populism, as a major pillar of the Islamic state, would enable all branches of state institutions to gain and maintain popular support and to translate it into active mobilization and a show of legitimacy for the regime. In accordance with these fundamental guiding principles of the revolutionary state, Islamic associations and organizations were established to “protect” the revolution from counter-revolutionary currents, or *jaryanat-e zedd-e engelabi*. Thus from its inception the IRI has been establishing a plethora of Islamic associations in universities schools, factories, and all state institutions which would serve in various forms as semi-formal hands of the regime for the realization of an “Islamic” society and an “Islamic” man, as history has proven mostly in service of the IRI’s repressive machine. Soon *anjoman-e islami-e daneshjooyan*, the Islamic Students [higher education] Associations (ISA), *anjoman-e islami daneshamouzan*, and the Association of Islamic [secondary education] Students would play a major role in the crackdown of dissident activities at the universities and high-schools, (the core of oppositional activism), and their purification, *paksazi*, from the “un-Islamic” elements. The *shouray-e Islami-e Kargaran*, the Islamic Council of the Workers should counter any anti-state activities like strikes or, more importantly, prevent the formation of any independent worker unions or other forms of worker organizations.

The policy of Islamization from above through mass mobilization from below provided every single institution and loyal Islamist revolutionary individuals with material and ideological resources to participate in the policy of Islamization, a pseudonym for sophisticated forms of repression whose targets encompassed not only political dissidents but nearly every citizen with
“un-Islamic” behavior. Ironically, the other side of the regime’s populism coupled with the increasing fragmentation of the IRI functioned as the antithesis whose immediate synthesis would be forming opportunities for the emergence of a new but very limited discursive arena. This newly emerging arena was patiently expanded chiefly through the former loyalists of the IRI, many of whom were directly involved in the systematic repression of liberal and leftist activists during the first decade of the IRI, such as Saeed Hajarian, Mohammad Mousavi-Kho’iniha, Alireza Alavi-Tabar, Hamid Reza Jala’ipoor.

The lasting and escalating debates within the elite in all branches of power with links to the popular Islamic associations would soon spread as well to universities, schools, factories, and lower offices of the state institutions. As a result, the formerly loyal Islamist student associations began to split in different factions and challenge the very regime they supported during the war and during the genocidal elimination of the left-wing opposition. In subsequent chapters, this study discusses the role of the daftar-e tahkim-e vahdat (DTV), or the Office of Strengthening Unity, a student organization that was initially a dedicated supporter of the IRI, in the formation and development of anti-regime student movements across the country.81

For a decade the Islamic Republic led by Ayatollah Khomeini managed to maintain the unity of its ruling factions, to successfully suppress all domestic contenders, and to survive the eight year war against Iraq. From February 1979 to June 1981, during the semi-democratic period in the aftermath of the collapse of the Shah-regime, Iranian politics was marked by a fierce struggle over state power through negotiations from above and popular mobilization on the streets. Liberals, the left and the Islamists' interactions resulted in the victorious domination and consolidation of the Khomeini loyalists. As discussed in the previous chapter, the failure of

81 As a leftist activist in Iran, I witnessed the direct involvement of this organization in attacks against the opposition. We called it daftar-e tahkim-e vahshat (terror or harassment), as opposed to vahdat (unity).
negotiations from above with pro Khomeini Islamists over domestic and international issues and the nature of the new constitution ultimately led to the marginalization of the liberals and the merciless destruction of left-wing organizations.

Only a few weeks after the collapse of the old regime in February 1979, the Islamists attacked the peaceful collective actions of women, workers, students, and ethnic minorities across the country. Khomeini’s charismatic and religious authority, which gave him enormous popular support, enabled him to transfer power to the Council of Revolution and the interim government, both established under his direct order. Moreover, the radical clergy managed to run the state after the resignation of the liberal interim government in November 1979 and to expand their authority by forming multiple coercive institutions and organizations. The IRI succeeded to oust Abolhassan Banisadr, the first elected President in Iranian history, in June 1981 and to replace him with a Khomeini loyalist.82

But was the ruling Islamist elite led by Khomeini as unified as it usually appeared? The answer is simply no. As briefly touched upon in the previous chapters, the name of the new state The Islamic Republic bears in theory two different orientations, one that emphasizes the Islamic or religious aspect of this state and the other represents its republican traits. This difference in theory was not without consequences in practical politics. The arguments over the general orientation of the state and subjects, such as social justice and economic policies, the export of the revolution, and over sources for the legitimacy of the Islamic government (e.g., the Qur’an and Sunna versus popular consents) divided the ruling elites into multiple factions, even under the iron fists and charismatic authority of Ayatollah Khomeini. While in the early 1980s the factions could be divided into conservatives, pragmatics and radicals, these factional divisions gradually extended to

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82 This issue is discussed in the previous chapter in greater detail.
more blocs, such as the traditional right, the modern right, the Islamic left, the reformists, and the principalists.

In the Majles, or Iranian Parliament, the judiciary and executive branches, and in semi-statal organizations, such as the bonyads, or influential and wealthy revolutionary foundations, these different blocs discussed heatedly disputed issues but with limited authority. The final judgment laid by ”Imam” Khomeini’s support or rejection of a law or policy would end without delay the dispute and all factions would succumb to his will. In his public speeches he left no doubt about his opposition to the factionalism:

We must all be together and support the [majlis] and the government as it is our religious duty. We must make sure that the foreign press does not remark that there is contention in Iran. If we see that, God forbid, disagreement is going to occur. It is our religious duty to prevent this at all costs, even if it means sacrificing one person or one group for the people (Cited in Moslem 2002: 68-9).

As a result, factionalism due to Khomeini’s prompt intervention was not consistent, instantaneously silenced, and never reached the lower level of state institutions, let alone the general population.

To put it simply, elite division and factionalism in the 1980s had no significant consequences for social mobilization. Due to its abrupt disappearance, the ruling elite’s differing debates on domestic and foreign policy issues never facilitated perceptible changes in the rigid and severely constricted political environment. Scholars of contentious politics elsewhere found positive repercussions of the lasting elite division on the dissidents' collective mobilization, because the differences within the polity may offer some of the outside actors opportunities for critical framing and the formation of alliances with a segment of the elites (McAdam 1982; Calhoun 1994; Schock 1999; Almeida 2008). It will further impact the regime’s capacity for and propensity to repression since a significant segment of the elite will oppose a violent crackdown against their allies or certain dissident actors. However, the changing and emerging opportunity
will affect collective mobilization only if it is perceived as such by the activists on the ground. Changing political opportunity structures such as elite fragmentation, favorable demographic alteration, and social and educational expansion will not automatically lead to collective mobilization. The perceived opportunity supplanted by organizational capacity and framing may generate popular contention (Kurzman 1996; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

Unquestionably, durable open elite dispute and factionalism on the one hand and dissident activism on the other hand had to wait for (re)surfacing until the summer of 1989, when the “Godlike” Machiavellian prince the founder of the Islamic state passed away. Khomeini’s sophisticated political strategies, his simple but effective and appealing rhetoric, and his uncompromising politics made him a perfect twentieth-century Machiavellian prince who possessed all the necessary traits to acquire power and sustain it, in spite of serious domestic challenges and foreign threats.83

Undeniably, the beginning of Rafsanjani’s presidency in the immediate aftermath of Khomeini’s departure in summer 1989 marks a new era in postrevolutionary Iran shaped by ideological and socio-economic transformation. The politics of the Islamic Republic, performed as a one-man-show during the 1980s, were no longer shaped by the actions and decrees of one individual. Although in the post-Rafsanjani period Khamenei gained more and more of the upper-hand and set the course of official Iranian politics, he had to share the power of the supreme leader with Rafsanjani at least during his first tenure (1989-1993), since the latter was arguably more influential and closer to Khomeini. Additionally, Khamenei’s nomination as a nonSenior cleric and non-Ayatollah for the highest office in the IRI should be seen as an opportunity for the modern right around Rafsanjani, the Islamic left, and other contending

83 For Machiavelli’s description of a skillful (virtù) Prince or ruler see the Hackett edition of “The Prince” pp 14-27.
factions. Contradicting a lower ranking cleric is far less costly than challenging a high ranking and relatively popular Grand Ayatollah. Asghar Schirazi, a scholar of the Iranian constitution, provides an excellent description of the position of the new leader:

One of Khamene’i’s chief handicaps has been his relatively low rank in the system of religious authority. This weakness affects the credibility of his claims to power even amongst the supporters of the regime. Amongst the clergy his position is especially disputed, in particular when he attempts to impose his authority on the power-conscious ayatollahs and grand ayatollahs (Schirazi 1997: 78).

Many of the Grand ayatollahs like Montazeri and high ranking clerical supporters of the regime such as Ayatollahs Ahmad Jannati, Mohammad Yazdi, and Shaykh Mehdi Karrubi were initially critical of granting Khamenei power or possibly more authority than Ayatollah Khomeini possessed (Ibid: 77).

According to articles 107 and 109 of the original 1979 Constitution of the Islamic Republic, the supreme leader of the state as the highest instance in the power hierarchy must be a highly respected and recognized religious scholar, that is, an Ayatollah, and a marj’a-e taqlid, or source of emulation. The amendments of the above mentioned articles de jure removed this prerequisite and made the appointment of a lower ranking cleric legally feasible. However, the appointment of at the time hojjatoleslam Khamenei, a non-Ayatollah as the supreme leader by the Majles-e Khobregan Rahbari, or the Assembly of Leadership Experts, only a day after Khomeini’s death opened fierce debate about the extent of the supreme leader’s authority and many issues concerning domestic and foreign policies.

The once limited and controlled elite division by the authority of the final arbiter Khomeini erupted among the conservatives, moderates, and the left in more public, enduring, and intense forms after his death. Despite his superiority in the amended constitution of July 1989, Khamenei’s weak position within the clergy, in comparison to his predecessor’s, inevitably increased the power of other two major factions, the moderate and pragmatic wing led
by President Hashemi-Rafsanjani and the Islamic left. As pointed out earlier, in the new political landscape, Hashemi-Rafsanjani’s faction enjoyed immense influence within the regime due to his strong and close link to Khomeini before and after the revolution. He belonged to the close clerical circle of the Ayatollah during his exile both in Iraq and France. He was a member of the Council of the Revolution, a deputy commander in chief, and the speaker of the Majles from 1980-1989.

Although the constitutional amendment in 1988/89 legally enhanced the power of the supreme leader, it could not prevent the formation of multiple centers of power within which two poles played key roles, the ideological and traditional conservatives led by the supreme leader and the pragmatic modern conservatives (modern right) gathered in the Hashemi-Rafsanjani cabinet. This inevitable formation of dual leadership provided the moderate technocrats with new opportunities for economic, cultural, and educational (re)construction and expansion which in turn unintentionally prepared the ground for the formation of civil society associations and political mobilization.

The traditional conservatives represented by Khamenei oppose political freedom and pluralism and reject any rapprochement with the West, particularly towards the United States. Known also as the traditional right, it is the key element behind all forms of social and political repression in Iran, be it the crackdown of anti-regime protest actions, the closing of critical newspapers, or simply the persecution of the so-called anti-Islamic behavior of Iranian youth and women on the streets of Iranian cities. The traditional right with Khamenei as the supreme leader and equipped with the powerful shouray-e negahban, or Guardian Council, is in fact armed constitutionally with all instruments of “legitimate” authority to ban political parties, prevent
critical politicians from running for municipal and national elections, and to limit the power of the parliament by rejecting its decisions.

A brief review of the intervention of the Guardian Council in the selection of candidates for multiple elections illustrates the top-down engineering of the elections by the dominant Khamenei loyalists. The council accepted the applications of 1,615 out of 2,001 applicants for election of the third majles in April 1988. It banned 1,060 candidates out of nearly 3,000 applications for the fourth majles election in April 1992. In this vein the Council rejected the candidacy of 332 out of 495 applicants for the Assembly of Experts election in 2006, and it permitted only 4 candidates out of 238 applications to run for the presidential election of 1997. In its increasingly exclusionary tendency, the conservative Council allowed only 576 candidates in a poll of 6,856 hopefuls to run for the parliamentary election of 2000, and rejected 17 out of 40 decisions of the sixth majles from June to December 2000 (Baktiari 1996: 148, 218; Buchta 2000: 31; Arjomand 2009: 44).84 Hence, it should not be surprising why the radical Islamist camp in charge of non-elected institutions who enjoy veto rights over the decisions of the majles and the executive branch stresses the “traditional Islamic teaching” as the basis for a legitimate Islamic state and tries to engineer elections’ procedures and their outcomes in the favor of the Khamenei camp.

The modern right, or Islamic technocrats centered on Rafsanjani and organizations such as kargozaran-e sazandegi, or Servants of Reconstructions, were the proponents of economic modernization, liberalization, very limited Islamic pluralism, and pragmatic diplomacy in the IRI’s relationship with the Arab World and the West, including reconciliation with the US.

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Finally, the left spearheaded by prominent individuals like Mir Hossein Mousavi, politicians gathered in the MIR, such as Behzad Nabavi, Mohsen Armin, Mostafa Tajzadeh, and prominent clerical members of majm’a ruhaniyyat-e mobarez, or the Association of the Combatant Clergymen, such as Mehdi Karrubi, Mohammad Khatami, Mohammad Mousavi Kho’iniha, are proponents of state interventionist economic policy, social justice, and welfare. It should be noted that the political agenda and orientations of some of the factions changed with respect to domestic matters and Iran’s relationship with the West, particularly with the USA. The Islamic left, for instance, was originally a radical anti-US faction and also was involved seriously in the massive violation of human rights in Iran. However, the Islamic left’s transformation from radical revolutionary Islamists to proponent of “Islamic Democracy” and perhaps limited pluralism opened a plethora of opportunities for mobilization within the legal framework of the IRI through municipal, parliamentary, and presidential elections (Buchta 2000: 14-20).

With the death of Ayatollah Khomeini not only did the struggle over power within the Iranian polity enter a new phase defined by the ideological transformation of many radicals but the state-opposition interactions assumed a new dimension as well. In the new composition of power, the regime was divided into multiple poles of influence with the supreme leader at the top and President Rafsanjani as the second most powerful acting politician.

The transition from Khomeini to Khamenei was smooth and peaceful mainly because both Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Khamenei as the heads of the two most powerful factions were, despite differences in political views, old friends since the 1960s as supports of Ayatollah Khomeini. After all, they both belonged to the circle of prominent clerics with whom they found the Islamic Republic Party, the most powerful group in the IRI due to its exceptional ties to Khomeini. Their close link until recently and their very special and strong positions within the
ruling elite enabled the regime to manage its factionalism by sharing Khomeini’s unprecedented authority. However, the supreme leader and his office, the nahad-e rahbari, constitutionally maintained the supremacy over all factions, a unique advantage he has been repeatedly utilizing to stop reform agendas, particularly since the end of Rafsanjani’s presidency in the early 1997.

It is important to note that the limited discursive space within state institutions determined the context and defined the nature of future reformist collective actions. The IRI as a revolutionary state assumed power through a massive social revolution and strong popular support. To the present day populism, as one Iran analyst aptly observed, is one of the major dimensions of the regime alongside republicanism and Islamism (Moslem 2002).

Every faction of the IRI, regardless of its ideological and socio-political orientation, justifies the legitimacy of its actions at least theoretically by referring to its popular support and constituency with which the factions maintain organic links. As a result, any debate on the degree of republicanism and Islamism inevitably invites their social base at the universities, lower state institutions, bazaar, mosques, schools and the general population to engage in the discussion.

Indeed, to a certain degree the factions within the regime need the electoral backing of their constituency to maintain their institutional power. Although since its inception the IRI has been holding limited “competitive” elections between the groups and individuals who pass the strict control of the Guardian Council, this “fair” intra-elite role of the game was seriously questioned. In the presidential elections of summer 2005 in which Ahmadinejad won the election in the second round, his two prominent and influential running mates Rafsanjani and Karrubi

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85 For more details on Khamenei’s life and his road to power see the BBC Persian especial page and a Documentary: Khat va neshan-e rahbar (the Supreme leader’s threat and warning), September 17, 2011.
complained publically about the irregularities and fraud in the election. Rafsanjani’s serious
disappointment was shown when he said he would not present a complaint to anybody but
God.86

**Cautious Economic Liberalization and Continuing Repression**

On April 26, 1992 in an article titled *Good-by Khomeini*, the French daily *Le Monde*
reported that a process of de-Khomeinization had started in Iran with Rafsanjani as the President
whose faction, the Islamic right, had defeated the Islamic left in the Fourth *majles* election.
According to *Le Monde*, Rafsanjani now had a free hand to implement his agenda items with
fewer institutional obstacles and less resistance from the radicals. With the radicals, perhaps the
article refers to the Islamic left, a faction that opposed Rafsanjani’s economic policy and had a

It is difficult to judge to what extent Rafsanjani’s economic liberalization and
modernization policies aimed intentionally to deviate from the ideas of the founder of the Islamic
Republic. However, the socio-political development since the departure of Ayatollah Khomeini
reveals a different Islamic Republic. We may perhaps call the process of de-Khomeinization in
the *Second Republic* the unintended consequences of Rafsanjani’s opening course.

Rafsanjani’s policy of cautious economic liberalization, social and educational
expansion, and pragmatic foreign policy facilitated the gradual emergence of an independent
private economic sector and contributed greatly to the formation of a plethora of civil society

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organizations, new cultural and entertainment centers, urbanization, the expansion of state universities, and the establishment of hundreds of private universities. If not more important, these policies deepened the rift within the IRI. The opening created progressively unique favorable conditions for a rising new generation of reform-minded religious and secular intellectuals and their social bases, which would soon stand at the forefront of collective actions. Although the popular protest was initially weak and unorganized, it became steadily more organized, particularly by students and professionals such as teachers, journalists, and intellectuals. Due to the intensification and sustained elite division, popular contentions gradually moved from the form of sporadic local and neighborhood mobilization in the early 1990s to more sustained, profound, organized, and national forms of contentions from the late 1990s onward. A prime example for this is the emergence of the Green Movement after the controversial presidential election of June 2009.

The end of Iran-Iraq war without any favorable outcome for the IRI contributed greatly to the weakening of the revolutionary Islamists and to the failure of their radical strategy of exporting the revolution. It is true that during the First Republic under Khomeini the Islamists of all factions were preoccupied with domestic challenges, war and consolidation. The end of war, however, provided the more pragmatic technocrats the opportunity to shift the focus from the permanent revolution and its export to more pressing domestic issues, such as the postwar reconstruction. As a former commander of chief of the armed forces during the First Republic under Ayatollah Khomeini, President Rafsanjani became the “commander of reconstruction,” or sardar-e sazandegi, in the Second Republic with a cabinet dominated by moderate technocrats. Although his economic liberalization agenda was less successful due the fierce resistance of the radical Islamic left, which comprised the dominant faction in the third majles, it opened windows
of opportunities in social and educational branches. Under the so-called Five-Year Plan, Tehran’s stock market opened to initiate the partial privatization of public enterprises. According to the Iran scholar and sociologist Said Amir Arjomand, although the pace of privatization was very slow due to the opposition of the Majles majority, Iran’s market liberalization grew under Rafsanjani during the 1990s compared to the 1980s. He describes the situation as following:


This stagnation prompted the Rafsanjani team to assume that market liberalization and growth urgently needed institutional, social, and educational reform as necessary preconditions. Given these conditions, the “government of reconstruction” initiated less provocative restructuring endeavors to first outmaneuver the traditional conservatives led tacitly by Khamenei and then to prepare the ground for economic liberalization. Step by step Rafsanjani’s government moved away from the radical Islamism of the 1980s and altered many aspects of Iranian society. Asef Bayat presents a vivid description of Rafsanjani’s policies:

By the late 1980s, Tehran had reflected a crisis of governance that afflicted the nation as whole. The city had become overgrown, overpopulated, polluted, unregulated, mismanaged, and exhausted by war. Its Islamist (exclusionary, masculine, harsh, segregating, and highly regimented) spatiality had alienated the majority of youth, women, and the modern middle classes. In 1989 the pragmatist President Rafsanjani appointed Ghulam Husayn Karbaschi, a former theology student turned urban planner, to fix the capital city. In the course of eight years (1990-98), Tehran assumed a new character that had little to do with the image of an “Islamic city”. Its new aesthetic, spatial configuration, symbolism, freeways, huge commercial billboards, and shopping malls emulated Madrid or even Los Angeles more than they did Karbala or Qum (Bayat 2007: 56).

In the course of urban expansion and modernization across the country, hundreds of new parks, sports facilities, shopping centers, and concert halls were built. Alone in Tehran, the economic and capital heart of Iran, 600 public parks and 27 sports and 13,000 recreation centers were

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established in which many boundaries of gender segregation were partially removed or ignored.

Bayat illustrates the situation as follows:

> While the wearing of headscarves and gender segregation were still enforced by the state, the municipality’s newly constructed 600 public parks brought men, women, boys, and girls together in public places. Recreational activities facilitated a less restricted mingling of the sexes…Whereas the urban space of the 1980s fostered domesticity, kinship, and worship, the new spatial logic embraced civility, citizenry, and secular pursuits. It was a space of relative inclusion, dialogue, and agnostic interactions (Ibid: 57).

This cautious social opening, as was perhaps expected, provoked the concerned responses of the conservative right, which would soon engage in systematic attacks orchestrated by the supreme leader against the commander of reconstruction and his government. In the course of the radical Islamists' pressure on the government, one of the masterminds of the liberalization project, Tehran mayor Karbaschi, was arrested, placed on trial, and sentenced to two years of prison apparently for his involvement in corruption affairs. It went so far that the supreme leader called the officials and “the responsible Muslim people of Iran” to preserve the Islamic identity of the cities. Additionally, in many cities across the country, the vigilante groups of *Hezbollah* attacked “un-Islamic centers,” progressive mayors and politicians, and chanted slogans against the “cultural invasion” of the West.

This modernization and expansion of social structures were further enforced by the extension of state universities and the formation of private universities in nearly every city of Iran, which were called *daneshgah-e azad-e eslami*, Free (Open) Islamic universities. As a result of this growth, the student population in Iran increased to 1,209,000 in 1997 compared to 203,000 in 1987. By 2010, Iran had 2,277 institutions of higher education (nearly four million

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students), compared to approximately 60 universities and colleges in 1979 with only about 230,000 students.\textsuperscript{89}

The political environment for collective mobilization moved gradually to a favorable point of no return as a result of the combined effects of the formation of private Free Islamic Universities in almost every town of Iran, the expansion of state-run universities and the formation of thousands of civil society associations, including hundreds of newspapers and limited electoral competition.

It should be noted that Rafsanjani’s cautious economic and social liberalization initially opened windows of opportunity predominantly to certain intra-regime competitors to reduce the increasing tension among the elite since the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and to remedy the economic and social problems for the sake of consolidating and stabilizing the Islamic Republic-the very regime and political order he fought since his youth to establish. One could say that the main objective of his cautious and limited inclusionary policies was to impede regime-threatening contentions rather than to facilitate them. He is a strategist \textit{par excellence}. Hamid Dabashi offers an insightful description of Rafsanjani:

He is perhaps the shrewdest politician the Islamic Republic has produced. If any Iranian were ever to match Henry Kissinger’s politically criminal mind and Thatcher’s insidious statesmanship, it would be Rafsanjani. One can argue that many of inner tensions within the Islamic republic that surfaced after president Mohammad Khatami’s election in 1997 were in fact already present during Rafsanjani’s presidency, but by a combination of uncanny statesmanship and subtly applied brutality he managed to co-opt all the Islamic (and even some of the secular) dissenters by appearing to be their only hope, thereby saving the Islamic Republic (and with it his own prominence in it) from internal dissent (Dabashi 2007: 189).

The structural alteration and changing political opportunity under Rafsanjani has not done much to reduce the IRI’s repression of liberals and leftist activists. As we will see in this study, the

political opportunity threat structure is not a unitary national composition. Its impact on contentious politics is contingent on issues, interests, actors, time, and space (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).

Rafsanjani was involved in the crackdown of oppositional activities in the 1980s and continued to do so during his presidency, 1989-1997. He was also almost certainly informed and involved indirectly in the persecution of Iranian activists in Europe, Pakistan, Turkey, Iraq, and elsewhere. At least in one major case, namely in Berlin in 1997 in the so-called Mykonos Trial, the High Criminal Court of Germany issued an international arrest warrant against the Iranian minister of Information Ali Fallahian and stated that the assassination of Iranian-Kurdish activists was carried out with the knowledge of the supreme leader Ali Khamenei and President Rafsanjani. 90

Since the mid 1990s, public collective actions have become a routine venue for workers, teachers, students, women, and reformists intellectuals in their interactions with the authorities. The IRI has been facing a mounting number of collective actions in the form of petitions, public meetings, strikes, and street demonstrations. Workers and teachers have consistently demanded better working conditions, women have asked for more social and political participation and rights, and students have called for the respect of universal human rights, free elections, and democracy. This trend increased when the reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami won the election by a landslide victory, leading to the intensification of elite conflict. Since 1997, Iranian collective actors increased their involvement in national political affairs by launching frequent

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public protest events and forging petitions against the authorities in response to arrests, torture, beatings, and politically motivated expulsions from the workplace and universities.

Furthermore, the Islamic state, particularly the ideological faction and the proponent of the permanent revolution, suffered from a legitimacy crisis due to its failure in achieving its objectives in the war against Iraq. Led by Khomeini, the radical Islamists propagated for the export of the revolution beyond the borders of Iran and thus saw Iraq (a country next to Iran with a Shi’a majority population) as the first obstacle towards the “liberation of Jerusalem” and Islamic nations from the bondage of koffar and estekbar-e jahani, the so-called unbelievers and global arrogance led by the United States.91

Additionally, radical proponents of the Islamic revolution have been utilizing all their available means of coercion to “islamize” the Iranian society in cultural, social and political aspects. In accordance with these Islamization policies, all institutions of higher education were shut down and hundreds of thousands of Iranian citizens were expelled from their workplaces as teachers, managers, civil servants, and military officials under the so-called cleansing project, or paksazi.

What are the implications of the social repression against non-political citizens? Why does the Islamic state repress ordinary Iranian women and men under the pretext of bad-hejabi and pooshesh-e gheyr-e eslami, the “improperly and un-Islamic” way of dressing, and millions of Iranian youth under the so called mobarezeh ba arazel va oubash, combat against thugs?

What makes the Iranian case unique from many other non-democracies is the regime’s use and threat of repression against ordinary citizens and against their routines of everyday life.

91 Khomeini’s Speech, Etela’at Iranian daily Newspaper, March.3. 1979: We will carry out our revolution into the whole world, because our revolution is Islamic. Our fight will continue until the Islamic faith prevails in the entire world.
Scholars of repression and mobilization suggest that repression may affect mobilization both positively (Hirsch 1990; Opp and Roehl 1990) and negatively (DeNardro 1985; Muller and Weede 1990). In the Iranian case, as elsewhere (Flacks 1988; Johnston 1991), the disruption of the so-called *quotidian* life of ordinary citizens facilitated mobilization and turned the population's masses into potential participants of anti-regime mobilization (Goldstone and Tilly 2001, Snow et al. 2010). Since its inception, the utilization of repression has been a major component of the Islamic state. In fact, the on-going repressive project against the un-Islamic behavior of millions of citizens through means like the imposition of the Islamic dress code, the prohibition of women laughing in public and riding bicycles, and the banning of dancing, drinking and holding parties has consistently been a fundamental instrument of the IRI, or at least the dominant ultra conservative factions of the state.

The Islamic state defines itself as the only legitimate protector of the “true Islamic values and norms” whose main objective is the Islamization of the Iranian society. Thus, Islamization from above has been a key component of Islamic state-making. It sees itself not only as the mere legitimate agent of coercive power, but also as the only legitimate force to determine the nature, degree, accuracy, and boundaries of the Islamization project.

Since 1979 multiple institutions were established with the sole aim to fight against the un-Islamic norms and to materialize Islamic law, or *shari’ a*. In addition, almost every state or semi-state institution and organization harbors a so-called *anjoman-e eslami*, or Islamic association, and *edareh-e harasat*, or office for protection that is in charge of policing the religious integrity of the employees of each institution. For a list and short description of the repressive organs of the IRI, see appendix 2.
The failure of Islamic state’s violent Islamization and creation of “Islamic Man” aggravated massive resistance from various segments of Iranian society and generated an anti-systemic identity. Youth, students, women, teachers, religious, and secular intellectuals increasingly resist the repressive and violent “Islamization” from above and defy the IRI’s invasion of their private sphere. Regimes that fail to achieve their declared objectives via harsh oppressive measures and interference in the everyday routines of ordinary people may alienate different groups of citizens from themselves, suffer significant losses to their legitimacy, and inevitably create space for their opponents. “Disruption of quotidian” by repression, as Snow and his collaborators called it, creates favorable condition for micro mobilization (Snow et al 2010).

The IRI’s violent “Islamization” and invasion into the very private matters and spheres of the citizens and the extension of its threat and surveillance beyond political activism function like a double-edge sword. On the one hand, it raises the cost of collective mobilization and may on a short term deter citizens from engaging in public forms of activism. On the other hand, it facilitates various forms of contentions that it fails to control. Activities such as partying, celebrating collectively, engaging in certain styles of dressing, and using substances like alcohol may be seen more or less as normal in the everyday life of citizens of many countries. These activities in Iran are punished by predictable repressive measures by the state (e.g., prison, slashes, expulsion from school or work). In fact the IRI established a plethora of local and national institutions to implement its policy of excessive social control and “educational” management by force. During the summer of 2011 hundreds of youth were arrested for participating in a public ‘ab bazi, or “water-fight-game”.

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In his “Social Change in Iran” Behzad Yaghmaian observed in the late 1990s:

The cultural transformation of society by the creation of hegemonic Islamic social and cultural norms was, from its inception, one of the pillars of the Islamic Republic. Central to this new cultural design was opposition to Western social values. Opposing Western “cultural invasion,” the state sought to eliminate all forms of cultural plurality and “non-Islamic” social behavior…Forcing the Islamic hijab on women, separating male and female students in universities, and banning all contact between them, the state sought to create a society of virtuous Moslem men and women—a society of repressed worldly desires. The Islamic Republic opposed and banned music, arts, and all cultural symbols of modern life…Now, two decades after the victory of the Islamic Republic, a growing movement for joy, a movement against the state’s cultural project is emerging. Defining and creating a personal and collective identity outside the premises of the state’s accepted behavior and codes of conduct, an unorganized grassroots social movement has taken shape (Yaghmaian 2002: 47-8).

State repression against millions of ordinary Iranians, particularly against youth, women, and students, forged a common anti-systemic identity (Almeida 2008, 2010). They all were the target of state repression and resisted in their ways this invasion in their routine activities. The longer the state’s repressive measures continued, the more the general population, especially the younger segment, was alienated from the ruling elite. Nearly 75% of the population is under 40 in Iran. The state’s brutal repression forced the populace to move every public activities into their homes and their basements, backyards, and faraway mountains and parks. The IRI’s disproportionate social policing and gender segregation (at schools, universities, and on public transportation and at public events) had the unintentional effect of creating millions of informal events and arenas that gradually rolled back the formal moral and sociopolitical sphere.

According to a recent report in Iran, nearly 80% of Tehran’s female students in the secondary education system have boyfriends.93 According to state-run media, the state’s suppression of youthfulness and fun coupled with widespread socio-economic inequality gave rise to ‘un-

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Islamic behavior’ in a magnitude unfamiliar in Iranian history. In the following passage, Asef Bayat provides an account of the outrageous outcomes of the state’s social repression:

Postwar media stories about “degenerate behavior” shocked the public: boys disguised as women walked the streets; college students refused to take religious studies courses, while others were arrested for playing loud music on their car stereos or for establishing underground popular music groups. Boys crashed cars for fun, drag-raced toward cliff edges while handcuffed to the steering wheel, or danced in the streets beside self-flagellation ceremonies on the religious mourning day of ‘Ashura. Drug addiction raged among schoolchildren, and the number of prostitutes skyrocketed by 635 percent between 1998 and 1999 (Bayat 2007: 59).

In this vein, a finding of a survey by the municipality of Tehran shows that in the very political heart of the Islamic Republic 73 percent of Tehranies do not perform their daily prayers, one of the obligatory pillars of Islam (Ibid: 99).

Led by Khamenei and Hashemi-Rafsanjani and faced with the mounting challenges of postwar Iran, including the failure of the war and the Islamic cultural Revolution, demographic structural pressures, and increasing elite factionalism, the post-Khomeini IRI needed desperately to reconfigure its economic and social (if not its political) policy.

In terms of demographic growth, Iran's population of 35 million doubled in 2000, reaching over 75 million in 2010. According to official sources, 10 percent of the population lives under the absolute poverty line and 30 percent under the relative poverty line. In a country with the world's second largest natural gas reserves and third largest oil reserves, nearly 30 percent of the labor force is unemployed, although official Iranian sources claim the rate to be nearly 14 percent.94

An overview of Iran’s GDP development during the past decades demonstrates the necessity of a restructuring program to remedy a mismanaged, war-torn economy. According to an expert of Iranian economy, Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, the economic growth and the national and

per capita GDP suffered dramatically due to the excessive state control of and intervention in the
Iranian economy especially during the first decade of the Islamic Republic and due to the
national economy’s continuing heavy dependency on the oil revenue:

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. Gross domestic product per capita in constant 2000 purchasing power Party
adjusted dollars...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 about 3.4 percent, resulting in a per
capita growth rate of just under 2 percent, is hardly an impressive record of reconstruction (Salehi-
Isfahani 2009: 6-8).

The continuously repressive regime plagued by social and economic challenges, rising
corruption and mismanagement, and a tremendous loss of legitimacy took cautious steps towards
economic opening, reconstruction, urbanization, modernization, and educational expansion. The
gradual opening of a formerly constrained and exclusionary political system provides
opportunities for millions of, as Asef Bayat aptly puts it, “nonmovement” actors who were
alienated from the Islamic State by violent Islamization from above (Bayat 2010: ix). These changing political opportunity structures and gradual and very limited liberalization offered a unique chance for the nonmovement actors with their individual ways of resistance to join the soon emerging contentious actions of collective actors, such as students, workers, women, and professionals like teachers, professors, lawyers, and intellectuals in massive protest gatherings, such as the student uprising in the summer 1999 and the nationwide post-election street mobilization of June 2009.

Popular contention against the IRI is as old as the IRI itself. Within weeks after the collapse of the Shah regime and the establishment of the provisional government by Ayatollah Khomeini, various leftwing groups and thousands of women marched on the streets of Iranian cities for political freedom and other civil rights. Nearly five weeks after the collapse of the Pahlavi regime, leftist guerilla organizations PMO and Fada’ian called for a meeting to commemorate the memory of Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq in Ahmadabad. The progressive and popular cleric Ayatollah Taleqani, the leaders of the PMO, and the representative of the Fada’ian spoke to hundred thousands of people. Major themes of the meeting were the “unity of the revolutionary forces against the global Imperialism and a radical cleansing of the counter revolutionary elements in the Army, companies, and all institutions of the country, protection and expansion of freedom and democratic rights,” and criticized the “monopolistic” policy of the Khomeini loyalists.96

Within days in March 1979, approximately 20 bookstores and libraries were attacked due to their connections to leftist groups, mostly the PFO and PMO. Attackers called themselves

95 Asef Bayat defines nonmovements as the collective endeavors of millions of noncollective actors, carried out in the main squares, backstreets, courthouses, or communities.

96 Kar, no. 1, March 9, 1979.
“Hezbollahis,” or pro-Hezbollah, an informal, semi-official vigilante group with links to the dominant Islamist faction close to ayatollah Khomeini. Chomaqdaran, club-wielding groups, or -goruh-haye feshar, pressure groups, are key instruments in the hand of the dominant radical Islamist faction of IRI against its oppositions since its inception. Whenever the Islamist faction that dominates the military organizations and the judiciary in Iran is not certain about the consequences of a direct crackdown of dissident activism by the official military and law enforcement forces, it employs its semi-official or informal hand to be able to deny its involvement in the assaults against dissidents and to avoid criticism from the moderate and reformist factions within the regime. The official organs of the regime very close to the supreme leader, such as the newspaper keyhan, or the various journals and online web pages close to the IRG would then depict the pressure groups' attacks as spontaneous actions by the loyalists of Hezbollah and the followers of the supreme leader, harkat-e khod jush-e ommate hezbollah va peyrovan-e velayat. In subsequent chapters, we will return to a discussion of the relationship between official institutions of the IRI and the countermovement “private agencies” of repression and their impact on dissident activities.  

With the intensification of the postrevolutionary struggle over power, Khomeini loyalists increased their attacks on dissidents. Soon in addition to the assault against the centers of the major leftwing groups, women, workers’ union and strikes, and student activists’ offices become the target of the Islamists.

In Tehran on March 8, 1979, on International Women’s Day, a women’s mass demonstration against the Islamic dress code and for freedom and gender equality was attacked by members of the so-called Hezbollah. The attackers shouted ya rusari ya tu sari, "either you

97 Kar, no. 1-5, March/April 1979.
wear the headscarf, or you get hit on the head." From February 1979 to mid June 1981, the Hezbollah never admitted its close connections to the Islamic Republic Party, IRG, and Islamic Revolutionary Committee. There was rarely a week without the worker strikes across the country demanding better working conditions--from the Pars company in the far south Ahvaz to Rahgostar Company in the northern city of Rasht. On one occasion, the strike of the workers of the shahrak-e san'ati-e alborz was attacked, during which two workers were killed and several others wounded. It should be noted that the workers' demands were limited to improving their working conditions, increasing their wages, and protesting the lay-off of their colleagues. The response of the IRI was a combination of violent indirect repression by the informal wing of the regime, the vigilante hezbollahi groups, and concession. While, for instance, days of strikes by 400 workers of the Gorji Company in Tehran and Rahgostar in Rasht forced the officials to rehire the laid-off workers, the waves of systematic attacks against the left activists increased rapidly.

Kar and Mojahed, the official organs of the PFO and the PMO, reported attacks against their centers, offices of other leftwing organizations, and bookstores and public meetings in Tabriz, Gorgan, Tehran, and Sanandaj. Alone in the northwestern city of Mianduab Hezbullahi burned down five bookstores and wounded eleven Marxist activists. Although the officials of the IRI denied any involvement in the attacks, the obvious link of almost every hezbollahi or paramilitary basiji to the Islamic revolutionary Guards (IRG) and the Committee of the Islamic Revolution (CIR) at the time left no doubt about the formal officials’ involvement in the assaults. Furthermore, the role of the same basij or hezbollah agents in the violent crackdown of the opposition forces in the post-June 1980 reveals the initiation and management of the repression

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by the leaders of the Islamic Republic Party, such as Beheshti, Ayat, Rafsanjani, and Khamenei, who were in charge of key institutions in the IRI at that time. Why did the IRI choose predominantly the strategy of indirect forms of repression against its opponents from 1979-1980 by private actors” but direct and overt repression since 1981?

As discussed in chapter three, during the formative stage Khomeini loyalists with no prior experience in official politics and limited resource consciously avoided any direct confrontation with relatively powerful contenders. Repression should be understood as a cost for both the state and dissidents. The state needs material sources of power to suppress and marginalize opponents. A low capacity state that provokes well-organized contenders may invite the dissidents to respond radically and therefore endanger its existence. More importantly, repression and massive violations against human rights decrease the state’s legitimacy and unintentionally increases the opponents’ popularity and opportunities for actions. The IRI at the time lacked a unified elite and strong military organization. Until November 1979, the liberal LMI was in charge of the provisional government with its leader Bazargan as the prime minister who opposed the crackdown of the opposition. Moreover, the new regime was preoccupied with a semi-civil war in Kurdistan and the invasion of the Iraqi army and its penetration into Iranian territory.

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99 The daily *Enghelab-e Eslami* (June 18, 1980) of President Banisadr published the text of cassettes known as *navarhay-e Hassan Ayat* (a member of the Central Council of the Islamic Republic Party) in which Ayat speaks of secret plans against President Banisadr and oppositional organizations. It was a huge blow for the IRP because the leaders of the Party (the most powerful faction in the IRI) always denied categorically any involvement in the actions against the opposition let alone against the acting president of the IRI. The opposition, particularly the PMO, used this affair to launch a nationwide campaign against the IRP and call it *Hezb-e Jomhuri-e Eslami Hezb-e Chomaqdar* (the Islamic Republic Party the party of the vigilante).


Aside from Kurdistan, leftist oppositions of the IRI prior to June 20, 1981 employed various forms of non-violent repertoires and strategies to carry out their activities and to maintain their peaceful political presence. The most common forms of collective actions were the performance of book and photo exhibitions, namayeshgah-e aks va ketab, predominantly at the core of the oppositional activities, namely high schools and universities. At nearly every university and major high school across the country activists organized photo exhibitions showing the worsening social conditions of workers and poor regions of the country, depicting attacks of the pressure groups against various centers of the opposition, criticizing the government’s inaction against the vigilante groups. These events at the high schools and universities provided the left with opportunities to recruit new members and to expand their organizational capacity. Another common collective performance was petitioning and open letters to officials to complain about the daily attacks of vigilante against activists and the oppression of political and social freedoms. Additional major forms of popular contention that continued until early 1981 were workers’ strikes and the collective actions of the unemployed. Once, a major force in the anti-shah movement, workers increased their mobilization capacity in the postrevolutionary era through their links to left wing organizations such as the Tudeh, PFO, PMO, and the Peykar.

Throughout the years 1979 and 1980 the contentious gatherings and collective claim making of the opposition in Iran, more reactive than active, show a rising trend. More than ever, in the aftermath of the collapse of the liberal interim government in early November 1979 and the increasing attacks against all forms of popular protest, waves of worker strikes and leftwing activist demonstrations spread across the country. The organizational resources of the leftist parties and associations at the national level were instrumental for the diffusion and the dynamic
of the popular protests. As noted in the previous chapter, the PFO and the PMO rapidly expanded their social base and had offices across the country. Postrevolutionary Iran witnessed a wave of popular protest that soon encompassed nearly 60 cities in every province of the country with an average of over 200 collective actions weekly. Students, teachers, women, and workers rallied together and demanded an eight-hour workday and five-day work week, job security, political freedom, and the legal persecution of the masterminds behind the daily harassments of the oppositions.

In response to the waves of protest rallies, the IRI, armed with the anti-US sentiments in the hostage crisis and the pretext of the Iraqi invasion, increased its systematic attacks, arrests, and the torture and killing of activists, mainly the members of the PMO, the PFO Minority, and the Peykar. Coupled with repression, war decreased the mobilization strategy and capacity of multiple challengers of the IRI simply because opponents avoided risking their legitimacy to attack a state involved in a foreign war. The war also enabled the IRI to increase its mobilization and to dispatch hundreds of thousands of workers, teachers, and students to the front against the Iraqi invasion.

The Islamist rhetoric against Saddam and its call for the export of the Islamic revolution into neighboring countries, especially to the *shi’a* majority Iraq, gave the B’athist Regime and its regional and international allies a pretext to go to war with Iran. It is difficult to imagine that Khomeini loyalists would have been able to destroy so many well-organized oppositional groups and to consolidate their position without the war. It was thus not surprising when Ayatollah Khomeini called the war a *barkat elahi*, or divine blessing. As Tilly noted, war and foreign invasion give the state an excuse to increase its military might, constrict the opportunity for contention, and increase the regime’s legitimacy (Tilly 2005: 124-25).
As time passed and Khomeini loyalists gained more ground, their strategy of repression assumed more sophisticated and overt forms. Although just months ago the IRI officially denied any connections with the para-military attacks against the opposition and Khomeini even went so far as to claim that “they [the opposition] torture themselves and blame us for this,” by the end of 1980 the Islamic Revolutionary Committee and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards interfered directly in the suppression of protest gatherings across the country. During the entire Persian calendar year 1359 March 21, 1980-March 20, 1981), there were rarely any events of the leftist and liberal organizations that were not attacked by pro regime forces, resulting in the killing and injuring of several hundred activists and the arrest of many more.102

Iran’s streets experienced a relatively long quiet phase after the intensification of state-opposition conflict, particularly the massive armed responses of the PMO against the brutal crackdown of dissidents by the IRI after June 20, 1981. Mass arrests and executions of the activists contained, after initial escalation, the oppositional activities from 1980-1988.

As noted above, the end of the war, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, and the cautious economic liberalization led by Rafsanjani altered the patterns of state-society interactions and created favorable conditions for the return of limited social activism. Oppositional actors old and new returned with new forms and strategies in the 1990s, exploiting and expanding the available opportunities for public claim making.

The Religious Semi-Opposition: From Montazeri to Soroush

Ironically, the first and most powerful challenge to the Post-Khomeini Islamic Regime was posed by the clerical and lay religious figures and factions within the Islamic state itself. An

102 See Ėnhelab-e Eslami, Kar, Mojahed, and the daily Jomhouri-e Eslami during this period for detailed information.
opposition, to be more precise a semi-opposition\textsuperscript{103}, emerged with the late Ayatollah Montazeri during the last year of Ayatollah Khomeini’s life. Montazeri criticized the socio-economic conditions in the country, the mass killing of political prisoners, and human rights violations in the Islamic Republic. After several controversial letter exchanges with Ayatollah Khomeini, Montazeri was removed from the position of the successor of the supreme leader of the Islamic Revolution. However, the inner-clerical dispute and opposition to the dominant faction within the IRI grew gradually after the death of the supreme leader and the founder of the Islamic state (Mohammadi-Reyshahri: 2010; Ayatollah Montazeri: 2001).\textsuperscript{104}

The first crucial occasion for the ousted Ayatollah Montazeri and a growing segment of his clerical supporters emerged with the search for a successor to Ayatollah Khomeini and the fierce debate surrounding this issue. As discussed earlier, many high-ranking clerics opposed Ali Khamenei’s nomination for the position of vali-e faqih, the supreme religious jurist and leader of the Islamic Revolution, with the argument that he was not an Ayatollah and an established faqih and hence was unqualified. But the dispute and criticism surrounding the question of succession soon reached a new dimension. More and more Shi’a clerics and non-clerical religious intellectuals added their voices to Ayatollah Montazeri’s denunciation of the IRI’s politics and formed one of the earliest centers of religious opposition to the Islamic State.\textsuperscript{105}

What makes Montazeri’s opposition to the policies of the Islamic Republic uniquely important is its practical implications and impact on many acting officials of the IRI. He was the

\textsuperscript{103} It is called semi-opposition because many of the individuals opposing the dominant faction in the IRI were at the time also members of a faction within the ruling elites.


second most influential cleric for the IRI as a designated successor of Ayatollah Khomeini and also a highly recognized Grand Ayatollah within the Shi’a religious scholar community. His public criticism of the regime was not without repercussions within the ruling circles. There is no doubt that in addition to his moral support and courage, his critical statements about the social and political situation in the country heavily influenced or at least encouraged the Islamic left represented in the Majles, and many other institutions, and religious intellectuals such as Mohsen Kadivar, Abdolkarim Soroush, Abdollah Nuri, and Ataollah Mohajerani, among others.

The hurried and worried reaction of the dominant Khamenei-Rafsanjani (traditional and modern right) factions to Ayatollah Montazeri’s disapproval of their policies demonstrates the moral and political weight of the Grand Ayatollah in the landscape of post-Khomeini Iranian politics. Ayatollah Montazeri’s high position within the Shi’a clergy and his frequent lucid criticism of the IRI challenged the legitimacy of a regime whose “foundations lays upon the Shi’a principles.” As we will see in chapter four, Montazeri’s active intellectual interpretation of everyday politics played a central role in the formation and consolidation of an alternative reading of Islam and a strong framing for the nascent religious opposition of the IRI. As we learn from dissident mobilization elsewhere (Alimi 2006) strong framing forges a rhetoric of action which in turn creates encouraging space for contention and anti-regime mobilization.

Followed by Ayatollah Montazeri’s opposition to the IRI’s domestic policies and to the nomination of Khamenei as the supreme vali-e faqih, a group of clerical and non-clerical religious intellectuals, or roushanfekran-e dini, which included the goruh-e kiyan, or the Kiyan group named after the bimonthly publication, initiated profound deliberations on the role of religion in politics. Led by Soroush, a former member of the high council of the Islamic Cultural Revolution appointed directly by Ayatollah Khomeini and responsible for the Islamization of
higher education and the “cleansing” project, religious intellectuals engaged in profound debates on the relationship between the state and religion, claiming that Islam is compatible with democracy and ideas of pluralism (Soroush 1999).

By rejecting the monopolization of religious readings and their transformation into and reduction to state ideology, their interpretations foremost targeted the position of the vali-e faqih and the very principle of the IRI that claims to be the only legitimate and ultimate interpreter of the Islamic texts (Soroush 1999). The idea of these thinkers spread rapidly within state institutions and to most of the universities in Tehran and across the country. Chapter five of this study discusses extensively the intellectual trends and transformations in post-Khomeini Iran and their critical impact on the elite fragmentation and popular mobilization.

Religious intellectuals' alternative reading of Islam and their challenge to the IRI were followed by other currents in the country, namely the secular intellectuals gathered mainly in the kanun-e nevisandegan-e Iran, or Writers Association of Iran.

**Secular Intellectuals: “We are Writers”**

In a courageous open letter known as nameh-e 134 nafar, the letter of 134 writers, prominent Iranian writers, most of whom were secular intellectuals, sent an appeal to major Iranian state-run newspapers, the ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, and international writer associations such as PEN, demanding freedom of expression and publication and “the removal of all obstacles to freedom of thought.” The letter dated November 12, 1994 with the title “ma nevisandeheem,” or "we are writers," included the signatures of Iran’s most influential poets, novelists, play writers, and human rights lawyers, such as Simin Behbahani, Ahmad

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Shamloo, Mohammad Ali Sepanloo, Simin Daneshvar, Mahmood Doulatabaadi, and Shirin Ebadai. The writers protested publically the increasing repressive measures of the secret security forces against their profession and their colleagues.

At the time of the publication of this letter, the well-known Iranian writer Ali-Akbar Sa’idi-Sirjani was struggling for his life in one of the many notorious safe houses, khaneh-e amn, of the Iranian Ministry of Intelligence and the IRG for his critical letters to the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. After months of imprisonment, torture and forced confession, Sa’idi-Sirjani was ruthlessly murdered, barely two weeks after the publication of the letter of 134 writers.107

The IRI’s response to the activities of the secular intellectuals was very harsh in comparison to its treatment of the religious intellectuals. With the growing voice of the secular intellectual, a team of the ministry of intelligence under the leadership of Saeed Emami, a deputy minister of intelligence, conducted several kidnapping operations and assassinations against Iranian intellectuals known as qatlhay-e zanjireh-ei nevisandegan va fa’alan-e siasi. The chain murders of the writers and political activists started with the ruthless killing of Dr. Kazem Sami in November 1988 and stopped in late 1998 due to the interference of the reformist government and thanks to the courageous investigative journalism of Akbar Ganji, Saeed Hajjarian, and others.108 With the aim to “stop the realization of the Eastern European experience” in Iran, the agents of the Intelligence organization eliminated numerous dissidents.109 With this motto, they


referred to the crucial role played by intellectuals in the Czech Republic and elsewhere in Eastern Europe during the transition from authoritarian regimes to democracies (Noorizadeh 2000, 2002).^{110}

Why at a time of opening and reform did a faction of the regime come to the conclusion that it was necessary to use brutal violence to eliminate a group of (mostly) secular dissidents, but at the same time choose to take a softer approach to reprimanding critical journalists and religious intellectuals? What are the strategies behind these different forms and degree of repression? The harsh repression against the writers can be explained in respect to their framing and their lack of direct relationships with any factions within the regime. Not only activists but also the states learn and copy from each other. The breakdown of many regimes and the emergence of the “third wave of democratization” in the aftermath of the Cold War triggered predominantly by *glasnost* and *perestroika* sent warning signals to authoritarian rulers around the globe. Iran’s security forces and radical Islamists perceived the rising voices of writers and artists in the country as a serious threat. After all, the dissident writers played a key role in the resistance against authoritarianism and the transition to democracy in several countries of Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Africa. Iranian writers’ demand for freedom of thought and expression in their infamous letter and other writings presented more than an interpretation and analysis of political conditions of the country. Regimes perceive *action intended framing* as highly threatening (Snow and Benford 1988: 198). The writers obviously acted collectively to break the walls of restrictions and with the hope to create new opportunities for more public claim making. Tilly was right to argue that the nature of a group’s interest and framing is a key indicator for the degree of state repression (Tilly 1978: 54-57).

Furthermore, the agents of the regime thought perhaps that the elimination of these intellectuals would not evoke any reaction from the reformist faction within the regime. This was a miscalculation, as was revealed, the intervention of the reformist faction stopped the chain of the assassinations.¹¹¹

**Students: The Early Risers**

Iranian students’ resistance to dictatorship has a long and proud but bloody history. Their crucial role in the Tudeh party since the 1940s, in the National Front and nationalist mobilization in the 1950s, to the formation of the radical guerilla organization during the 1960s is undisputable. In the postrevolutionary era students remained a major force at the forefront of struggles for democracy. Thus, it is not surprising to see students once again as the early risers in the collective mobilization against the IRI.

For the examination of the (re)emergence and development of student mobilization in the post-Khomeini period, it is imperative to contextualize it within the intellectual rift within the formal and informal centers of power in Iran. Iran’s structure of power consists of a web of formal and informal institutions, foundations (*bonyads*), networks, and individuals. While on the one hand the formal institutions and offices such as the *Majles*, the president, and the judiciary branch run the routines of official politics, on the other hand many semi-statal *bonyads*, associations, prominent individuals, and senior Ayatollahs play important roles in the shaping and execution of IRI policies.

¹¹¹ See chapter four for an in-depth discussion of the controversies of the *chain murders* and the role of investigative journalists and analysts such as Akbar Ganji and Saeed Hajjarian in the disclosure of these long and highly mysterious operations against the dissidents.
The informal associations that should concern us in this chapter are the student organizations initially formed and promoted by the IRI, such as the DTV and ISA. In postrevolutionary Iran all currents involved in the revolutionary struggle, especially the leftwing groups, were keen to recruit new members and to expand their social base. Iranian universities and high schools were the prime targets in this respect.

In his interview, Sohrab Behdad--a former professor of economics at Tehran University--sheds light on the political circumstances of the universities on the eve of the Islamic Cultural Revolution. He characterizes the actual grounds of the systematic waves of attacks against the institutions of higher education as follows:

For someone like me who was present for years at Tehran University, the attacks against the universities were completely politically motivated actions. The university was a place where the Islamic Republic did not have any control. The regime saw universities as in its way. This was not an academic move. It was rather a political project to transform universities. 112

For the left, Iranian universities were traditionally the core of their activities. This explains why the first target of the Islamic cultural revolution was “paksazi”, or the purification of institutions of higher education from “un-Islamic” elements. In the course of this purging and Islamization, all universities--even the technological departments--were shut down in 1980 for nearly 3 years and thousands of students and professors were expelled, arrested, executed, or forced into exile.

But the Khomeini loyalists were aware that in order to stop the growing base and gradual domination of the leftwing organizations at the universities they also needed to establish their own student organizations. One of the earliest pro-Khomeini organizations was the so-called Daneshjooyan-e Khatt-e Emam, the Students Followers of the Emam [Khomeini] Path, known

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for their leading role in the occupation of the US-Embassy and the hostage crisis. This group also
played a key role in the violent “cleansing” of the universities from dissident activists.

The universities reopened after the consolidation of the Islamic state and the relatively
successful crackdown of oppositional currents with unprecedented and ruthless brutality. In the
course of continuing Islamization, from then on all students were subjected to direct
investigation by agents of the regime before their admission. If during the investigation, or
tahqiqat, the officials of the IRI found any signs of a “counter-revolutionary” background, the
candidate who had already passed the tough and highly competitive national exam would be
denied admission. This filtering system prevented thousands of students from acquiring a
university education. With the direct order of Ayatollah Khomeini, the Headquarters of the
Cultural Revolution and the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution were ordered to
transform the “westernized” universities into Islamic ones. In one of his speeches to the visiting
members of the Islamic Students Association, Khomeini himself describes the conditions of the
universities in the country and how they should change:

What we want to say is this: our universities are dependent; our universities are colonial
universities. Our universities educate and train westernized individuals [students]. Many of their
teachers are westernized and educate our youth in a Western manner…we say [our] university
most change fundamentally and become Islamic…we say our university turned into a war field
against us. We say even so our youth acquire scientific knowledge they lack Islamic manner…We
want to say that our university does not have Islamic moral and education. If it had Islamic moral,
it would not turn into a field of confrontation between ideas [groups] all of which are detrimental
to our country. This is because they [the groups] do not know Islam and lack an Islamic education
(Khomeini, Collection of Speeches (Sahifeh-e Emam, volume 12 chapter 6).113

In the course of the violent cultural transformation Iran’s universities and its streets were
silenced for nearly a decade. Any forms of public claim making would face mounting state
repression.

113 The multi-volume speeches of Ayatollah Khomeini are available at the website of the Foundation of Islamic
Ironically, those students and Islamists, such as Soroush, who were once the vehicles of the Islamic Cultural Revolution, and at the forefront of the attacks against the dissidents became a decade later dissidents of the very regime they violently helped form. Sympathizing with the Islamic left faction of the IRI and its ideas of Islamic justice, the DTV and the ISA distanced themselves gradually from the “liberalization and privatization” of the Rafsanjani government, an opposition for which they have been paying a high price to the present day. See chapter four for more discussion of the causes and implications of the intellectual transformation of some of the former Islamists.

In fact, the origins and initiators of the first organized and sustained collective mobilizations against the IRI after nearly a decade of terror and silence are to be found in the elite fragmentation and above all in the intra-elite intellectual strife of the post-Khomeini era. The thread of elite dispute goes through all formal and informal circles of power and to the present day generates new factions and to a certain degree street mobilization.

The post-Cultural Revolution universities in the Islamic Republic of Iran once again have turned, against the wishes of their founder, into a “field of confrontation” between contradicting ideas. The Iranian student movement has returned to the scene armed with inventive framing and, far from the Islamism of the Cultural Revolution, is eager to reform and even change the political order. Some of the architects of the Islamic Cultural Revolution (e.g., Soroush) reversed the Islamization course and do not seem out of breath from all the Revolutions. Perhaps this time the children of the revolution will devour the revolution in their course of their “de-Islamization” initiatives. Both the DTV and AIS have become vehicles for the student movements in post-Khomeini Iran. Although there were skirmishes with state officials, including the arrest of student activists like Heshmatollah Tabarzadi (once a staunch supporter of the IRI) during the Rafsanjani
tenures, the period between 1989-1999 should be seen as an era for the emerging new discourses and framings that set the ground for sustained public collective mobilization in the post-Rafsanjani era.

In addition to the above-noted forms of dissidents’ activism, the 1990s also witnessed occasional popular discontents in many larger Iranian Cities such as Tehran, Mashhad, Zanjan, Qazvin, and Shiraz. The protests called by some opposition as *khod jush*, spontaneously were reported in November 1989 in Tehran, Tabriz and Shiraz. According to both *Eghelab-e Eslami* and *Kar*, the demonstrators complained about rising prices, scarcity, unemployment, and the lack of adequate housing. The protest gathering in southern Tehran was dispersed violently by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, resulting in the death of 5 and the arrest of over 100 protesters (*Enghelab-e Eslami* 1989: Issues 216 & 223; *Kar* 1989: Issue 73). The sporadic and small scale popular mobilizations of the general population during the Rafsanjani tenure in many large cities across the country were predominantly concerned with social and economic issues, such as the rising price of food, transportation, and rent. Nearly every public protest events faced immediate state repression and could not last longer than few hours, let alone days. Nearly every issue of several oppositional newspapers from 1989-1996 has very brief and unclear reports on ‘*eterazat-e mardomi*, or the popular protests of workers, teachers, and the unemployed. The reports are imprecise because they mostly did not present the number of protesters, their clear

114 For data on popular protests before the spread of internet and online publications, I use mainly oppositional newspapers abroad, such as *Enghelab-e Eslam dar Hejrat* of the former President Banisadr and *Kar* of the PFO Majority. I do this simply because the newspapers within the country do not cover anti-regime gatherings. I do not mention if a protest event was not covered by at least two different news sources. Due to the emergence and spread of online publications since 1997, I use multiple online publications (newspapers, radio, TV, etc.) as my primary sources. In a context such as in Iran it is impossible to focus on one or two national newspapers for my collection of data (as for instance scholars use *The New York Times* or *The Guardian* in the US and UK). Surely, this would be a less time consuming and more coherent presentation of state-dissident interactions only within democratic environments where the flow of information is relatively free. I am also not presenting each single contentious gathering but rather of selected years only to illustrate the rising trend and changing forms of contentious politics in Iran. For more information, see the Data and Method section of this study.
demands, or even the exact date and locations of these gatherings. However, one important conclusion of these reports is the increasing presence and disillusionment of multiple groups of the population. The presidential election of May 1997 and the victory of the reformist candidate Seyyed Mohammad Khatami against the expressed wishes of the supreme leader Ali Khamenei confirms the extent of the popular disenchantment with the IRI politics.

There are several grounds behind the limitation of popular protest during the Rafsanjani tenure. One major reason was the weakness and near absence of any functioning opposition organizations with a sufficient mobilizing structure and national network. As we learned previously in this study, many large-scale national political parties and associations were destroyed during the massacres of the 1980s. The second reason that impeded the sporadic and local popular protests to diffuse and transform into mobilization at a national level was the regime’s determination to violently crackdown the still very weak and small scale contentions. Last but not least, the factor that prevented the emergence of large-scale and sustained popular mobilization against the IRI was the fact that many existing small opponent organizations such as the liberal LMI and the reformist semi-oppositional currents such as the religious intellectuals, the MIR, and the Islamic left faction within the regime intentionally did not engage in extra-institutional and non-conventional activities against the IRI. They still preferred the strategy of negotiation from above and electorate competitions rather than street politics.

With the election of Khatami as president Iranian politics undoubtedly entered a new phase. Thanks to the support of millions of “nonmovements,” the reformist semi-opposition conquered key positions within the power structure of the IRI.
Chapter Five

From Interpretation to Mobilization: Factionalism, Competitive Elections, and Framing

If we attend to the course of conversation in mixed companies consisting not merely of scholars and subtle reasoners but also of business people or women, we notice that besides storytelling and jesting they have another entertainment, namely, arguing.

*Immanuel Kant*¹¹⁵

The Islamic Republic is a categorical contradiction in terms— it is neither a republic nor Islamic. It is not a republic because it is a theocracy; it is not Islamic because Islam (Shi’ism in particular) cannot be in power without instantly discrediting itself [...] In these terms, Shi’ism is the quintessence of Islam as a religion of protest and can only remain valid and legitimate as long as it posits itself as a revolutionary project.

*Hamid Dabashi¹¹⁶*

God, bear witness. I, who have spent a lifetime longing for religion and teaching religion, distance myself from this despotic regime's oppression, and if I once aided the evil-doers out of error or sin, I ask for your forgiveness and absolution. Oh God of wisdom and virtue, accept our prayers...and leave not your friends in the hands of enemies.

*Abdolkarim Soroush¹¹⁷*

In his essay “The End of Islamic Ideology” Hamid Dabashi persuasively points out the vulnerability of a Shi’a theocratic state. Borrowing from Ali Shari’ati’s “Shi’a Mazhab-e ‘Eteraz,” the "Shi’a: the Ideology of Protest,” Dabashi depicts Shi’a as an ideology of oppressed and tyrannized (mazlum) people and argues that its turning into an instrument of a ruling theocracy by radical Islamists in Iran inherently questions the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic and generates discontent:

The defeat of the Third Shi'i Imam in the Battle of Karbala in 680 is constitutional to its moral and material culture. If Imam Husayn had succeeded in Karbala, Shi'ism would have had an entirely different disposition vis-a-vis political power. The defeat of Imam Husayn in the Battle of Karbala has made Shi'ism both a religion of protest and a moral manifesto against all successful constitutions of power. Shi'ism covets what it cannot attain, and thus it is a religion of protest. Shi'ism cannot attain what it covets, and thus it is a moral manifesto against all political power [...] Shi'ism cannot be in a position of political power because the state that it thus forms will have to have a claim on a monopoly of violence, and it cannot claim that monopoly without turning every mode of opposition to it as the de facto versions of Shi'ism. The reigning Shi'i state, a contradiction

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¹¹⁵ Cited in Calhoun 1992: 1

¹¹⁶ Dabashi 2007: p 217

in terms, makes of all its mortal enemies a more legitimate contender to Shi'ism than itself (Dabashi 2000: 484-85, 488).

Dabashi’s explanation helps us understand in the explanation that follows why once again a new discourse based on a modern and democratic reading of Shi’ism became the most powerful framing for the mobilization of masses of Iranians against a theocratic state that lost its legitimacy in its failed attempt to monopolize both the Shi’a Islam and “political authority [Gewaltmonopol]”.

For this reason, any examination of contentious politics in the postrevolutionary Iran would certainly lack accuracy if it failed to focus on the new religious reformist discourse and the impact of its framing on the emergence of collective mobilization in contemporary Iran.

In the study of collective mobilization in authoritarian context, scholars of contentious politics predominantly emphasize the impact of exogenous factors such as competitive elections (even if very limited), institutional access, available elite alliance, and the capacity of the state. In their list of opportunities they also include demographic transformation, social and educational expansion, and elite division as additional elements that facilitate mobilization and create favorable conditions for popular contention (Gamson 1975; Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1994, 1996; McAdam 1999, Wiktorowicz 2004). Primarily, in their analyses these scholars emphasize institutional changes and the regime’s openings as the most important factors for the emergence of contentious politics in illiberal political environments. Accordingly, in their studies of popular struggle they focused on the changes in state policy. As a result, little attention has been devoted to endogenous factors in the creation and expansion of opportunities for social mobilization like activists' framing, narrative, and their chosen strategy and tactics in response to state repression. Rather than seeing framing as a means directly utilized by certain movement actors for a given movement in a given time, this chapter presents framing as a long interpretative process and a narrative of resistance and rights in active interactions with the Islamic state in Iran.
This study argues that emerging top-down or structural opportunities may facilitate collective mobilization but they do not necessarily determine the formation of collective action. After all, the recognition of a circumstance as a favorable or unfavorable condition is subject to dissidents’ interpretation, understanding, and perception. This chapter pays particular attention to the role of dissidents' framing and narratives for the emergence and development of sustained popular contention in post-Khomeini Iran. Needless to say, institutional access and limited competitive elections are not irrelevant but these were rather strategically utilized to create new opportunities in the face of continued state repression. This chapter claims that the intellectual transformation of a significant segment of the ruling Islamists and their alternative reformist Islamic discourse are chief factors in the emergence of popular protest and its development.

**Factionalism and Competitive Elections**

Elite fragmentation, institutional accesses, and “competitive” elections are key components of the political process approach in the study of popular mobilization. All three exogenous elements are strongly present in the Iranian context and available only to the “loyal” opposition, namely different religious reformist currents. In addition, the demographic and social transformation, growing urbanization, and social and educational expansion in Iran also created favorable conditions for collective mobilization (see chapter 4). Again, these available features of political opportunity structure in Iranian politics or elsewhere will not necessarily determine political action unless actors perceive them as opportunities and take active advantage of them. As noted earlier in this study, the discourse of reformist intellectuals, journalists, and activists played a key role in the formation of popular contention in post-Khomeini Iran due to the nature of the Iranian politics. This discourse was particularly effective during the time of elections. The limited
competitive elections available were innovatively exploited by the reformist groups to spread their ideas. Here again the IRI is haunted by its philosophical and institutional contradictions and factional division. Its republicanism is translated into holding regular elections for the Majles, presidency, Assembly of Leadership Experts, and municipality. Although competition is limited and a significant number of the candidates do not pass the GC’s filtering procedure, the factional character of the IRI and the heated debates during the campaigns creates a discursive arena and encourages public participation.

The union of different radical Islamists once united around Khomeini started to break away after his death (see previous chapters). Only Khomeini’s charismatic authority and skilful performance put aside the emerging factionalism within the IRI. Once in charge of all state institutions, the Islamists founded political parties and associations as ways to secure their position within the postrevolutionary circumstances since all of their major contenders were organized in political parties and associations like the liberal LMI and the radical left, such as the the PMO and PFO.

The Islamic Republic Party, Hezb-e Jomhouri-e Eslami (IRP), was the first and most important organization in the Islamist camp, founded by prominent Khomeini loyalists like Mohammad Hossein Beheshti, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and the current supreme leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei. The party had also prominent members such as Mir Hossein Mousavi, Hassan Ayat, and Ayatollah Mousavi Ardebili. Founders and members of the IRP were soon the dominant force within all cultural, economic, and political institutions of the IRI.

The next major political party within the political establishment was the Mojahedin of Islamic Revolution, Mojahedin-e Engelab-e Eslami (MIR), founded by Islamic leftists. These
two initial organizations basically are more or less the origins of all currently existing factions in the Islamic Republic (discussed in previous chapters and below).

The IRP was dissolved upon the “mutual agreement” by Khomeini in 1987 when its different factions could not agree on many issues in domestic and foreign policy. In his illustrative work on the structure of power in Iran Wilfried Buchta describes the factional politics in the Islamic Republic during the early 1980s:

The umbrella for Iran’s theocratic-Islamic groups was the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), founded in February 1979 by a number of clerical followers of Khomeini […] Following the consolidation of their monopoly on power, however, fierce tensions began to emerge between the IRP’s right and left camps. The right camp consisted of religious traditionalists, socio-politically conservative clerics, and a number of religious technocrats, and it supported a pragmatic domestic foreign policy oriented toward consolidation of what had already been attained. The left camp recruited from among social revolutionary, left-leaning Islamic clerics, and religious laypersons. The members of this camp voted along more dogmatic lines, especially in connection with their support for a state-controlled and egalitarian economic policy and the export of the revolution, two key--and for them indispensable--ideological goals of the revolution. (Buchta 2000:12)

It should be noted that the factional politics immediately after the departure of Ayatollah Khomeini became more complex, diverse, and increasingly intensified. The early two right and left blocs have since been divided in multiple factions and disputed domestic and foreign policy issues continue to generate new factions within these two early general orientations.

Furthermore, the left played down its propagation of the export of the Islamic Revolution and its ideological foreign policy and advocates for a normalization of the relationship with West, particularly with the US.

The most recent faction worth mentioning is the emerging rift within the so-called ossulgarayan, the principalists who supported President Ahmadinejad. The principalists, which will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter, belong to the camp of the supreme leader Khamenei, the so-called traditional right. Pro-Khamenei principalists criticize the nationalistic tendency and the emphasis on the maktab-e Irani, the Iranian school of thought supported by President Ahmadinejad and his close advisors, such as Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei. They call them
ossulgaran-e enherafi, deviant principalists, whereas the members of Ahmadinejad-Mashaei faction call themselves ossulgaran-e pishroo, the progressive principalists. It should be added that the president’s camp calls its counterparts within the principalists camp enhesartalaban-e egtedargara, the authoritarian monopolists. As the tensions between the two camps has escalated, a prominent principalist Muhammad Reza Bahonar, the influential deputy of Tehran in the Majles, predicted that the next “fetneh-e bozorg,” great sedition, will be caused by the proponent of the Iranian School of Thought (of nationalist Iranian ideology as opposed to Islamic ideology) from within the circle of the principalists “who claim to be principalists but reject both the seminary schools, houzeh-e ’elmiyyeh, and the Shari’a law. This gigantic sedition is taking form now. Its emphasis of the Iranian School of thought and liberal thought in cultural affairs should serve in this vein.” He meant clearly the close advisory circle of the President and, more importantly, his influential chief of staff Mashaei.118

As noted in chapters one and four, the electoral competition between the conservative right, modern right, and the left reached its peak during the presidential election of 1997 that led to the rise of the reformists. As mentioned previously, this dissertation’s discussion of factionalism aims to help better understand the impact of the intra-elite fragmentation on popular participation, mobilization, and the reformists’ constitutional struggles within the framework of the IRI. In what follows, I present a brief outline of three major orientations in post-Khomeini Iranian politics: the Islamic Left, the Modern Right, and the Traditional Right. This categorization is based on each faction’s political, cultural, and socio-economic policies. More importantly, the actors in Iran use these categories to describe various factions and themselves (See Moslem 2000: 82-141).

The Islamic Left (the core faction of the reformist movement in Iran) represented by Majm’ā-e Ruhaniyyat-e Mobarez (the Association of the Combatant Clergy, hereafter ACC), the MIR, and Jebhe-e Mosharekat-e Iran-e Eslami (the Islamic Participation Party of Iran, hereafter IPP), and the student association DTV. Respectively, each of these factions was lead by individuals including Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, Mehdi Karrubi, Mohammad Mousavi Kho’iniha, Behzad Nabavi, Abbas ‘Abdi, and Saeed Hajjarian. They all served as high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic from 1979-2005 and played crucial roles in the success of the reformists with their influence within the IRI institutions and newspapers like ‘Etemad, Salam, Sharg, ‘Asr-e ma, Khordad, and Sobh-e Emrooz. The Islamic Left bloc also includes influential politicians like Mir Hossein Mousavi, one of the leaders of the Green Movement, who served as Prime Minister for two terms in the 1980s. The left, later known as the reformists, also enjoyed a parliamentary majority from 1980-1992 and from 2000-4. This faction recognizes cultural diversity and supports Islamic democracy, freedom of the press and associations, and rights for the large ethnic and religious minorities of the country. It supports a highly state interventionist economic policy with strong social welfare net and state subsidies for domestic and imported merchandise, much like the German and Scandinavian social market economies. This explains why the social base of the left is composed of students, workers, women, intellectuals, and minorities. As formerly radical revolutionaries and proponents of the export of the revolution, the prominent members of the left argue for a normalization of the relationship with the West, political and cultural exchange, and respect of international law.

The next major orientation in the IRI politics is the Modern Right with Rafsanjani as the most prominent figure who arguably served the IRI since its inception as the second most powerful politician in leading positions, including speaker of the Majles, commander in chief,
two terms as president, a member of the Council of the Leadership Experts, and chairman of the Expediency Council.

The central agenda of the Modern Right was, as it name betrays, social and economic modernization with an organization founded during the parliamentary campaign in 1996, *Kargozaran-e Sazandehgi*, the Servants of Reconstruction, led by the ousted and trialed mayor of Tehran Gholam Hossein Karbaschi (discussed in chapter 4). This faction emphasizes the importance of private sectors, modern and strong political institutions, and foreign investments for the economic development of the country and advocates a limited Islamic democracy and pragmatic foreign policy in relation with the Arab World and the West and is supported mainly by Islamic technocrats and industrialists. Through newspapers and journals such as *Hamshahri*, *Ettela’at*, and *Zan* the Modern Right argues for more rights and participation of women, downplays the role of religion in political decision making, and campaigns for the adjustment of *Shari’a* to the needs of modern times.

Finally, the militant and ideological faction of the Traditional Right, the leading bloc of the IRI, is in essence the faction of the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. It is the strongest faction economically, politically, and militarily in the IRI. Since the controversial presidential election of June 2009, the Traditional Right increasingly utilizes its dominance to oust all other factions from the polity. It is dominating Iranian politics simply because its members and supporters are in charge of major economic institutions of the country like the powerful *Bonyads* and the oil sector, and it has the control over Iranian military and para-military organizations, such as the IRG and the *Basij*. Above all, this radical Islamist faction is in charge of the judiciary brunch, the powerful GC, and the *Nahad-e Rahbari Engelab-e Eslami*, the Institution of the Leadership of the Islamic Revolution, constitutionally the highest office in the
power hierarchy of the IRI. The Khamenei camp is represented by groups and associations, including Jam’eh-e Ruhaniyyat-e Mobarez, the Militant Clergy Association (MCA), and Hey’athay-e M’otalefeh Eslami, the Coalition of Islamic Associations.

Taking into account the Iranian political landscape in late 2011, one could perhaps say the Traditional Right is the IRI itself. Since the presidential election of 2005 this faction calls itself Ossulgarayan, the principalists. It rejects economic and social liberalization, opposes political freedom and principles of democracy, categorically rejects any rapprochement with the US, and provides support for radical Islamic movements like the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestinian Hamas. It is the main constitutional and political obstacle of the reform movement in Iran and is heavily involved in the suppression of dissident activities and the violation of human rights. In addition to controlling national broadcasting, the Traditional Right also utilizes multiple journalistic organs, such as the Keyhan, Resaalat, Jomhouri-e Eslami, Shalamcheh, Abrar, and Shoma, whereby in the repression strategy of the IRI the daily Keyhan and the Iranian National Radio and Television play an indispensable role. Keyhan is the mouthpiece and the propaganda machine of the supreme leader par excellence. Whenever the representative of the supreme leader Hossein Shari’atmadari publishes in Keyhan an editorial against any person or newspaper, his targets become the subjects of judicial persecution and harassment by the vigilante. It is known that Ayatollah Khamenei gave Shari’atmadari the nickname “tak tirandaz,” the sniper, to thank him for his “extraordinary” work against the dissidents.119

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119 I received this information from interviews with two members of President Khatami’s team who were present at the beyt, an Arabic term for the house that in the jargon of the IRI means the house and office of the supreme leader. They saw that Khamenei greeted very warmly his representative in keyhan with “salam taktirandaz.” My analysis of the factional politics in Iran is drawn from online Iranian sources, such as http://www.majlis.ir/, archives of http://www.roozonline.com/, http://www.iran-newspaper.com/, and most importantly my discussion and course with Professor Nasser Hadian (a guest faculty from Tehran university) in the academic year 2004-2005 at Columbia University. I also consulted on this matter relevant works by Buchta 2000 and Moslem 2002.
All the above-outlined factions were actively engaging in the election campaigns and discussing multiple subjects including the role of religion in politics, economic and political development, and foreign policy. The IRI has been holding different forms of elections since its founding in early 1979. Only recently the supreme leader and some MPs of the Majles proposed the likelihood of removing the office of the president and turning the system into a “nezam-e parlemani,” or parliamentary system. This consideration is perhaps due to the regime threatening waves of protests in the aftermath of the presidential elections in the summer of 2009 and growing tension among the principalists with Khamenei on one side and president Ahmadinejad on the other side.120

Generally, authoritarian regimes hold elections to increase their legitimacy and stability. Some incumbent authoritarian regimes share power through elections on a very limited and controlled level to reduce tension with factions within the ruling circle, to co-opt some moderate opposition, and to isolate the radicals (Linz 2000; Lust-Okar 2006). The relevant point here is not actually why authoritarian regimes hold elections and why the members of the semi-opposition or opposition participate but rather what can they both achieve in this process. As illustrated below, in the Iranian context they achieved quite a lot. Both the government and the opposition use elections as a platform to mobilize the public and to legitimize or delegitimize their own or others’ actions. States also permit some groups to participate in the limited and non-competitive elections to avoid radicalization of their challengers. Additionally, the formal participation of the opposition allows the state to better manage its control over the activities of its challengers (Huntington 1991: 6-10; Wiktorowicz 2001: 10-16).

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The question is then why do members of the opposition participate in an election that they know from the start is a lost game? More importantly, they are aware that with their participation they make themselves visible to the state’s controlling gaze. The answer is this: the opposition in many illiberal and highly repressive environments see participation as the only way to survive and to maintain a minimum degree of organizational structure. The position furthermore takes this opportunity to demonstrate to the public its ability for political action and the recruitment of new members. By playing within the rules, the opposition tries at the same time to contest the rules. In other words, it recognizes that if you want to change the system, you must join it (Wiktorowicz 2001).

This notion is complicated by the fact that in the Iranian context the reformists were originally part and parcel of the IRI to begin with. They are a segment of the elite that aims to reform the government but that does not mean that the reformists in Iran were not facing repression. Despite the many limits and barriers, the reformists partook in all of the elections and won the presidential elections in 1997 and 2001, municipal election 1999, and the Majles election 2000. They repeatedly used two distinctive strategies to challenge the dominant Khamenei camp: top-down negotiation and popular mobilization. Iranian reformists made the most of the available electoral opportunities and expanded them through their innovative framing and new interpretation of Islam. They utilized their growing social media and mobilized public support for the reformist agenda. The press and new generation of intellectuals and investigative journalists were certainly the initiators and early risers of the reform movements. They used the elections as vehicles of participation and their meetings, public lectures, and newspapers as powerful instruments for mobilization. The new press beginning with Salam, Payam-e Daneshjoo, Khordad, Asr-e Ma, Hamshahri, Jam’eh, Tus, and Sobh Emrooz, among others,
courageously transgressed the IRI’s defined redlines and touched on subjects that were taboo in the official Iranian politics, such as the limitation of the power of Vali-e Faqih and the normalization of the IRI’s relationship with “sheytan-e bozorg,” “the great Satan” US.

For over two decades, former radical Islamists who turned into “Islamic reformists” found space in the post-Khomeini Iran to engage in arguments and counter-arguments on issues of domestic and foreign policy. Returning from a long disastrous war and recognizing the legitimacy challenges faced by the IRI due to its genocidal elimination of dissidents, many Khomeini loyalists reconsidered their notion of the permanent revolution and turned their attention to the more pressing domestic matters of the country. As former members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards (IRG) and other institutions of the IRI, the ideologically transformed officials pursued professional academic carriers at universities, as students or teachers, or worked as journalists. Here at the universities, the very heart of the Islamic Cultural Revolution, a new opposition to the IRI began forming, ironically by some of the original perpetrators of the Islamic Revolution. Hence, it should not be surprising to see religious intellectuals, students, and a growing number of journalist and newspapers as the makers and organizers of the increasing public actions against the IRI since the late 1990s.

This phenomenon raises some important questions. Why at certain times and spaces does the framing of some dissidents create and activate opportunities while others fail? To what extent is the success or failure of a movement contingent on the nature of its framing? And what makes the reform-minded clergy the greatest threat to the Islamic Republic? As we will see in the following pages, the emerging competing discourses of religious intellectuals spread rapidly through two important vehicles, the universities and social media. The available action intended arguments and discourses of these intellectuals, journalists, and women activists, coupled with the
existing “critical mass” forged by the state’s social repression of ordinary activities (discussed in chapters one and four) posed a serious challenge to the IRI’s dominant faction led by the supreme leader Khamenei. One of its immediate results was the 1997 victory of the reformist in the Presidential election.

The landslide victory of Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, a hojjatoleslam, or proof of Islam (the title for a low-ranking cleric) on May 23, 1997, with the votes of nearly 70 percent of over twenty million eligible voters demonstrates the strong popular demand for desperately needed reform in the country. It was also an obvious vote of "no" for the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei who had Nateq Nuri, a conservative loyalist cleric, in mind as his favorite candidate. Although the Guardian Council allowed only 4 of the 238 applicants to run for the presidential election, the voters found in Khatami a candidate who was perhaps least identified as a member of the conservative IRI establishment. The last days prior to the polling day, the election campaigns were sharply polarized between the candidate of the supreme leader who sought to maintain the IRI as it is and to continue with the politics of Islamization and a challenger who advocated for reform and political opening.

Certainly it was Khatami’s biography that helped him receive strong popular support. Born in 1943 in a family of renown clergy in Ardakan of the province Yazd, Khatami frequently cites Western intellectuals and philosophers, emphasizes intellectual dialogue with the West, and propagates a pluralistic religious democracy, hokumat-e mardomsalar, or rule of the people. After finishing his school education, he moved to Isfahan where he studied philosophy at the university while also attending the seminary school for religious studies. As a student, he was awarded a scholarship for study abroad and remarks “I choose Lebanon, Egypt, and the USA.”121 According

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to his reports, he lost the grant due to his anti-Shah political activism at the university. He not only brings with him a combination of the traditional Islamic and modern scholarships but also a mixture of theoretical and practical knowledge in politics. He authored several works on democracy, political development, and religion and freedom. In his book *Mardomsalari*, Democracy he explains his notion of freedom and its relationship with religion:

> What is our message for the world at the threshold of the 21st century? Our message is that if religion embraces freedom, this could promise the advent of a new era in human life. Religion without freedom is the experience of medieval Europe and freedom without religion has been at least for four centuries experienced in our world. Today at the end of the 20th century we can view these previous four centuries and see what freedom without spirituality and superlative values did to the humanity. Do we want to go backward and denounce freedom? Do we want to pay no attention to the centuries of experience of humanity and denounce religion?... Our message to world of today is the unification of religion with freedom….There are different opinions for religion and for freedom. We do not have any other options but to accept the law, *qanun*, as a foundation of our actions (Khatami 2001: 29).

Throughout his works Khatami emphasizes the importance of a democratic understanding of religion, modern democratic law, and dialogue among different groups, peoples, and civilizations. Perhaps the gravest mistake of Khatami was to believe that the Islamic Republic would be reformable with an undemocratic constitution and its profound contempt for freedom and human rights.

As for practical politics, Khatami served in the first *Majles*, appointed as the representative of Khomeini in the *Keyhan* Foundation (in charge of all publications of the Keyhan group); and from 1982-1982 he held the position of Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance. He had to give up this position due to the increasing pressure of the conservative right against Rafsanjani’s economic and cultural policies of cautious opening (discussed in chapter 4).

Khatami’s victory did not arrive overnight. It was the outcome of nearly a decade of intellectual debate, factional rifts within the regime, failures and achievements during the Rafsanjani tenures, and the increasing alienation of the majority of Iranians from the IRI. If one

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may call Rafsanjani’s terms (1989-1997) a period of emerging new discourse within the IRI, cautious and limited socio-economic liberalization, and the peaceful coexistence of multiple factions within the IRI, the Khatami era was certainly a time of more radical framing and increasing factional tension, political opening, and the routinization of popular contention in Iranian politics.

**Framing Process: From Interpretation to Mobilization**

Since the 19th century, Iranian intellectuals (poets, directors, play writers, novelists, and academics) of different orientations (socialist, nationalist, Islamic) played a central role in the socio-political affairs of their country. They participated actively in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, in the nationalist mobilization during the 1940s and 50s, and in the revolutionary struggle against the Shah regime in the 1960s and 70s. Among the intellectuals involved actively in the anti-Shah resistance were various branches of Islamic intellectuals from Shari’ati to Bazargan, including Ayatollahs Taleqani and Khomeini. Iranian intellectuals’ quest for democracy has a long history and notably for this very reason they joined the revolutionary movement in 1979. After all, one of the major objectives of the revolution was azadi, freedom, followed by esteqlal, independence, and jomhouri-e “eslami.” However, in the postrevolutionary Iran and with the ascendance of radical Khomeini loyalists the intellectuals became a main target of Islamization and repression. Only months after coming to power, Khomeini attacked the “irresponsible and deviant” writers and journalists:

I have to suggest that some tongues are worse than clubs. The clubs of the tongue [chomaq-e zaban] and the clubs of the pen [chomaq-e qalam] are the most dangerous clubs and their corruption is a hundred times worse (Sahifeh-e Emam Vol. 14: 144).

The weapon is in the hand of bad individuals. Consider all kinds of weapons! The pen is itself a weapon. This pen should be in the hand of good and informed people. If the pen comes into the hands of a bunch of thugs and corrupt individuals, it will disseminate corruption. Now the pen is in
the hands of thugs…These brute people of the pen, *ahl-e qalam-e arazel va na-saleh* utilize this trick, their writing, and misrepresents everything…Break these kinds of pens! (Ibid, Vol. 3: 306).

The press should work in the service of the country and not against the revolution of the country. The press that is against the revolution of the country is a traitor…We see some of the press agents as the conspirators. Because they write long and extensive comments on matters that are beneficial to the counter revolutionaries, *zed-e engelabha*, and they either do not write about subjects that are in line with the revolution or they only briefly mention them. This kind of press is not acceptable for the nation (Ibid, Vol. 6: 193).

Both Khomeini and his successor Khamenei repeatedly launched public verbal attacks against intellectuals and freedom of thought. The presses, including newspapers, journals, and book publications, were the main victims of the IRI’s censuring measures (see more below).

After his death, a group of Khomeini's former followers found an opportunity to publically engage in philosophical, theological, and political debates. The journalists with their presses continue to represent a powerful force in post 1989 Iranian politics. In addition to a majority in the *Majles* since 2000, the conquest of the executive brunch, and the broad social base, the reformist social media was another important component for the emergence and development of the reformist movement in the 1990s and the reform government from 1997-2005.

A new generation of reform-minded journalists emerged during the 1990s, including figures such as Akbar Ganji, Mashallah Shamsolvaezin, Issa Saharkhiz, and Emadoddin Baqi who were armed with newspapers like *Salam, Hamshahri, Assr-e Ma, Jam’eh, Tus, Neshat,* and *Sobh-e Emrooz* that courageously discussed a range of social and political issues. Soon these newspapers became the most important forum for dissident activists and intellectuals in their struggle for democracy, particularly during the election campaigns.

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In his most recent work *Iran’s Intellectual Revolution* Iran scholar Mehran Kamrava writes:

There is a new revolution brewing in Iran. It is not a political revolution, although it was caused by one. And it is not necessarily an economic or cultural revolution, although its consequences certainly reach into both economics and culture. It is a revolution of ideas, a mostly silent contest over the very meaning and essence of Iranian identity, and more importantly, where Iran and Iranian ought to go from here (Kamrava 2008: 1).

Kamrava refers to the ideological transformation of countless number of individuals, more importantly of the ruling figures in Iran that set the ground for public popular struggle against the increasingly exclusionary and oppressive Islamic Republic. When students, youth, and women gather at different meetings and rallies in Tehran and elsewhere in Iran and demand, justice, freedom of expression, free election, and respect for human rights, they demonstrate the importance of the notions of equal citizenship, democracy, and free competitive elections as the key objectives of their movement. The slogans that they chant and transmit as their demands in their interactions with the authorities in Iran are shared meanings constructed in long and sustained interpretative processes by the intellectuals with the intention to mobilize different groups of the population for change.

One of the most influential discourses in this regard is shaped by the works of the reform minded religious intellectuals whose alternative and pluralist interpretation of Islam has been playing crucial roles in the emergence and development of popular mobilization in post-Khomeini Iran. This chapter does not claim that this is the only let alone the most progressive discourse available today in the country. I am very much aware of other discourses, such as of the roushanfekran-e melli mazhabi, the religious nationalist (liberal) intellectuals, the secular intellectuals, and the multiple radical left-wing discourses of the opposition in exile. I argue that due to the nature of the political opportunity and threat in the postrevolutionary Iran, the reformist religious intellectuals were more or less the only actors who could cautiously participate in the
conversation on many social and political matters and expand the available public sphere in the postwar and post-Khomeini Iran. After all, nearly all of the central individuals of the religious reformist intellectuals belonged to the Islamic establishment and thus enjoyed relative protection from the state’s reprisals in comparison to the radical left and the liberals.

**The Clerical Dissidents: The Initiators and Makers of Opportunities**

The composition of what Dabashi calls two contradictory principles *Islamic* and *Republic* proved to be the major source of intellectual disagreement among different factions, which had dire implications for the post-Khomeini politics of the IRI. Hence, it should not be surprising that the origin of the elite conflict is foremost philosophical. This is why the framing of the reformist religious intellectuals plays such a central role in the emergence of anti-IRI collective mobilization.

The theological-political discrepancy among the various groups of Khomeini loyalists opened fierce debate about questions, such as how the function of religion in politics should be defined. How should the supreme Islamic jurist and leader, the *vali-e faqih*, be chosen? And who is an appropriate person for this position as a successor of the founder of the Islamic state? Ironically, one of the earliest opposing answers came from the first designated successor of Khomeini, Ayatollah Montazeri. For decades Montazeri was a close companion of Ayatollah Khomeini and a highly respected cleric among seminary school students and scholars. In forms of religious decree and in public speeches and statements he complained about the increasingly dictatorial rule of the IRI.

By reducing the credentials of the supreme leader from Grand Ayatollah and *marja’ taqlid* to a low ranking *hojjatoleslam*, the IRI leadership moved away from one of its original and
foundational theological principles, namely the appointment of a supreme *mojtahed* and *marja’* as the successor of Khomeini. The ultra conservative Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi offers the following explanation for this decision:

In the past when the assumption of power seemed remote, esteemed theologians called for rule by someone who as a *Marja’-e taqlid* could best serve Muslim Society. Today thanks be to God, the groundwork has been prepared for someone to assume power that is more qualified than others, and this blessing deserve much gratitude…When Imam Khomeini was alive, we were fortunate (to have both the *Vali-ye Faqih* and the *Marja’-e Taqlid* in the same person). Today most unfortunately, we do not enjoy the same blessing. The Almighty has continued to bless us with *Velayat-e Faqih*…in the person of Ayatollah Khamenei (Cited in Kamrava 2008: 110).

The separation of political rule, *velayat*, from *marja’iyyat* should be seen as a critical blow to IRI legitimacy. A regime that claims to be the only legitimate Islamic rule whose supreme leader apparently receives his mandate from the twelfth Imam, appoints a cleric as the head of the very Islamic state who is not the highest *faqih*. The representative of Ayatollah Khomeini in Yazd and an influential Ayatollah, Mohammad Sadouqi describes the leader of the Islamic state in this way:

> The supreme God delegated powers to the Prophet, and the Prophet to his successor; his successor delegated those powers to the leader, the chief and the imam of the community, and to him who has vice-regency….The *faqih* can carry out those very tasks that God and the Prophet carried out….Whatever orders the government gives must be implemented and are just, [and] no one has the right to object (cited in Bakhash 1995: 101).

For this very reason, the prominent pro-Khomeini Ayatollahs agreed unanimously that the leader of the Islamic state should be a recognized *Mojtahed*, a qualification Khamenei obviously lacks (Ibid: 101-103). Therefore, it was not unanticipated that this legitimacy challenge will make the IRI susceptible to inner clerical and religious criticism. After all, Ayatollah Montazeri as the successor of Ayatollah Khomeini was called by him a *faqih-e ‘aliqadr*, the most prestigious and distinguished jurist, before he was removed from his position. This vulnerability made clerical dissent against the IRI nearly inevitable, something that was impossible during the First Republic under the charismatic authority of Ayatollah Khomeini. Shaul Bakhash remarked:

> …this development introduced a structural fault line in the constitutional foundations of the Islamic Republic, in the very concept of the legitimacy of the state. This is a dilemma which has not been resolved and is unlikely to be resolved in the near future (Ibid: 104).
Since then, the inner elite and clerical tensions not only have not diminished but have assumed new dimensions simply because the placement of Khamenei at the very top of the power hierarchy of the Islamic state was not persuasive for many clerics.

The clerical opposition, tacitly led by high-ranking clerical dissident Montazeri, gained more force since the mid 1990s after the death of senior Grand Ayatollahs, such as Kho‘i, Golpaygani and Araki. Montazeri continued his criticism of the IRI officials and attacked directly the position of the vali-e faqih:

“If two or three people sit and make all the decisions for the country, it will not progress in the contemporary world. “Republic” means “government of the people.” Of course I should mention: In the same way that people must have political parties, they must have organizations, at the time of elections they should be awake, they should choose people intelligently, insightfully, and independently … You [Khamenei] are not of the rank and status of a marja’ … The Shi‘i marja’iyat was an independent spiritual authority. Do not try to break the independence of the marja’iyat and the seminary circles into government employees. That is harmful to the future of Islam and Shi‘ism. Whatever your supporters may claim, you give no evidence of filling the scholarly position of Imam [Khomeini], may God have mercy upon him. Do not allow the sanctity and spirituality of the seminary to become mixed up with political work of [government] agencies (Excerpts of Montazeri’s speech on November 1997 in Qom cited in Kurzman 2001: 347).

The ruling jurisprudent [vali-ye faqih] can be the leader of all Muslims in the world, provided he is elected by the majority of the people as the most worthy, theologically most highly educated [al-a’lam], and politically most astute candidate. What is decisive is that he be elected by the people or by experts chosen by the people (Cited in Buchta 2000: 93).

Montazeri’s unequivocal statements surpassed the religious debate of the theologians about the religious credentials of the supreme leader by demanding political freedom and free elections. As a Grand Ayatollah and Marja’-e Taqlid with a significant constituency among the general population and support in the seminary schools, he was perceived as a highly potent threat to the stability of the regime. Criticism against an oppressive regime by such influential and popular religious figures provides crucial spiritual and moral momentum to other dissidents for the justification of their activism. More importantly, Montazeri disapproved of the procedure for nominating the Vali-e Faqih and its transformation into the velayat-e motlaqeh-e faqih. His criticism questioned the very philosophy of the IRI particularly because he played a crucial rule in
integrating the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* in the 1979 constitution (Kamrava 2008: 113). Kamrava distinguishes Montazeri’s concept of *Vali-e Faqih* from the ruling conservative’s factions of the IRI in three respects:

First, he maintains that the *Vali-e Faqih* must also necessarily be a *marja’-e taqlid*. Second, he strongly refutes the notion of *Velayat-e Mutlaq-e Faqih*, arguing that the concentration of power embodied within this position easily lends itself to various corrupting influences. Third, he calls for the position of the *Velayat-e Faqih* to be an elected one, maintaining that *entesab* [selection] might have suited a time and a place when elections were not possible, but that is no longer the case (Kamrava 2008: 113).

Ayatollah Montazeri leaves no doubt that he believes in Islamic democracy and pluralism, a notion his disciples and other reformists have been arguing for in their interactions with the dominant conservative factions.

As noted, Montazeri’s criticism was not limited to the matter of the *Vali-e Faqih*. With the growing brutality of the IRI against the dissidents, particularly against the protesters of the Green Movement since in the summer of 2009, the Ayatollah intensified his condemnation of the repressive measures of the regime:

> A regime that uses clubs, oppression, aggression against [the people's] rights, injustice, rigged elections, murder, arrests, and medieval or Stalin-era torture, [a regime that] gags and censors the press, obstructs the media, imprisons intellectuals and elected leaders on false allegations or forced confessions... – [such a regime] is despicable and has no religious merit.\(^{124}\)

His explicit attacks against the Islamic regime and active engagement in major political events earned him the title “*pedar-e m’anavi-e jonbesh-e sabz,*” the spiritual father of the Green Movement, from the dissidents.

In response, the IRI institutions and officials attacked Ayatollah Montazeri and his followers in several ways. State-run newspapers released statements and editorials criticizing Montazeri, vigilante groups organized frequent anti-Montazeri demonstrations, and the IRI officially put the Ayatollah under house arrest (1997-2003). Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, the

intellectual guide of Mahmood Ahmadinejad and one of the most influential proponents of the violent suppression of dissidents, called the IRI constitution a sacred and the most progressive document of its kind and threatened all counter revolutionary elements who opposed it with severe consequences (see Zakariaei 2000:1-88): “Islam gave every Muslim the right to shed the blood of a person who insults his sanctities (Ibid: 63).” These attacks were not limited to Montazeri himself. Many of his followers and disciples were harassed, arrested, and placed on trial by the notorious dadgah-e vizheh-e ruhanniyat, the Special Court for the Clergy, among them Mohsen Kadivar and Abdullah Nuri (see below).

As an outspoken critic of the IRI’s dominant conservative faction and supporter of the Green Movement, Kadivar joined his teacher’s explicit disapproval of the IRI politics and went so far as to compare the Islamic Republic with the ousted Shah-regime and to demand freedom of debate in the country as it is an established tradition in the Shi’i seminary schools in Qom and elsewhere:

In the seminaries, we don’t have absolute obedience at all in our social relations. So when we see that some of the official spokesmen mention absolute obedience and such like as religious values, this can only be understood as a continuation of authoritarian relations and thinking among the leadership of the country (Cited in Kurzman 2001: 349).

This sophisticated argument was utilized to extend the available space for debate and disagreement at seminary schools to the broader public sphere in the country. It is obvious that with this kind of comparison and debate Kadivar and other clerical dissidents aimed to move beyond mere academic discourse and to reach to broader population. As we will see below, both clerical and non-clerical religious intellectuals utilize newspapers and journals, online publications, and public lectures for the diffusion of their ideas and more importantly to put their words into actions. Otherwise, why should clerics like Kadivar accept the risks of regime reprisals and engage in provocative public debate beyond the walls of the seminaries?
What adds to the weight of Kadivar’s ideas as an active public intellectual is his organic link to two important centers of learning both traditional and modern, the houzeh ‘elmiyyeh, the religious seminary school, and daneshgah, the secular center of learning, the university. Born in 1959 in Fasa, a small town near Shiraz in the southwestern province of Fars, he attended the standard modern school and university and studied for a short while electrical engineering. However, after the revolution and influenced by the revolutionary fever, he decided to continue his education in Islamic law and philosophy at the seminary school in Qom where he met Ayatollah Montazeri, his later mentor. At the same time he attended the University of Tarbiyyat-e Modarres and received a doctoral degree in philosophy in 1999 and has taught at several universities in Tehran (Rudi-Kadivar 2000).

Kadivar’s direct involvement in both the houzeh and the university provided him with a unique opportunity to exchange ideas with two of the most influential dissident groups of the IRI, the clergy in the seminary schools and students in the universities. In Kadivar's and many of his comrades’ view, if the revolution of 1979 united religion and state, it was now time to combine the Islamic state with democracy and to adjust to the changes of modern times. He demanded in his works the creation of a new social contract appropriate to a modern and dynamic Islamic society like contemporary Iran, a contract that limits the power of the rulers, tolerates religious pluralism, institutionalizes democratic rights, and respects universal human rights.

These religious scholars see themselves as roushanfekran-e mas’ul, responsible intellectuals, in Shari’ati’s Marxian sense. They aim to go beyond insular interpretations as academics and engage actively in social and political affairs as intellectual activists for change.

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In the words of Kamrava “one of their [the reformist religious intellectuals’] central preoccupations is to present an alternative interpretation of religion as compared to the official interpretation presented by the state. This alternative interpretation seeks to remove barriers to independent, civic organizations” (Kamrava 2008: 124).

In this vein other clerical voices such as Abdullah Nuri, Hassan Yusefi-Eshkevari, and Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari criticized vociferously the politics of the IRI, most of all its harsh and humiliating treatment of Ayatollah Montazeri. Explicitly, Nuri defended Montazeri’s rights of intellectual freedom and stressed his importance for the guidance of the country. As we have seen, the debate on the nature of the Vali-e Faqih initiated by Montazeri, escalated and extended to other political matters. As a result of the IRI’s treatment of Montazeri, the state’s repressive measures and dictatorial policies become another major subject in the discourse of these public intellectuals. Step by step since the late 1980s these intellectuals expanded the public sphere with their inventive interpretative strategies.

Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari is another cleric and Islamic scholar to be mentioned in this respect. Born in 1936 in a clerical family in Shabestar, a small city in the northwestern Province Azerbaijan, Shabestari studied Islamic and Western philosophy, particularly German philosophy, for nearly two decades. He argues that the actual Islam he has been studying in his lifetime is a religion that respects freedom, human rights, and more importantly is a religion highly capable of adapting to scientific and philosophical innovations and development. He thus opposed the compulsory laws of Islamic governments. In a recent interview, he elaborates on these matters:

I see this as very negative. What we are seeing in Islamic countries is that the young people especially have turned their backs on religion completely because this kind of religion, formulated and interpreted as a number of compulsory laws, just is not acceptable. That is the challenge. It is a situation that needs to be rectified. That is what we are doing. What we are saying is that these rules from earlier times, for example, do not represent a basis for faith. They were something specifically intended for a particular society and are only comprehensible within their own historical context. If that were understood in the historical context, it would mean that, in a religious sense, Muslims nowadays could have a different social system in a political and economic sense, different from what
it was back then… To my mind, that was a distortion. We don’t see the Prophet criticising any woman because she is not wearing a veil, nor do any of the other caliphs. The beginning of this distortion came with the Abbasid period. The situation did improve subsequently, but the last 23 years have once more seen an increasing deterioration… My impression is that many of the curbs on freedom in Muslim societies have been justified on religious grounds and that this has resulted in societies that reject religion, although it is something that is constantly spoken about. It’s a schizophrenic situation.

Back then these were not separate spheres. These distinctions between religion, politics and economics did not exist. This was true almost everywhere in the world. Religion was a sort of great umbrella under which politics and economics were joined. That was also the case with Christianity. Over time we began to create distinctions within religion. Nowadays, people see religion, art, economics and politics as very different things. Nowadays, they are separate entities. Now our task is one of specifying and clarifying, defining what the core of faith is, and what it is that God requires of us as religious beings.127

This is an explicit attack on the routine social repression perpetrated by the agents of the Islamic state in Iran, the violence of top-down Islamization. Human freedom, including the freedom of religion and the fundamental equality of human beings independent of their faith, is a central concern of Shabestari’s thought. More importantly, his unambiguous views about religion and the prophet cost him severe attacks from the camp of the radical Islamists and his position as a professor at Tehran University in 2005--a price he paid for his statements that “religion is perfect but not all encompassing and it is not perfection for religion to function as a substitute for science, technology, and human deliberation”128 and “that Prophet Muhammad was perfect in his mission, which was bringing people to God, but he had shortcomings as a human being.” 129 Shabestari’s challenging pluralistic and accessible interpretation of Islam unsettles the fundamental principal of the Islamic state by claiming that the prophet is not a perfect human being in all matters and in our modern time other elements, facts, and values independent of religion exist to shape our way of


life, including science and technology. As noted above, the IRI’s official theologians characterize even the supreme leader as a perfect human being who is the representative of the prophet and the twelfth Imam Mehdi, infallible and accountable only to God.\footnote{For the role of the religious intellectuals in the post-Khatami era, see chapter 5.}

**The Special Court for the Clergy: The Theocracy’s Response to Theologian Resistance**

In the process of Islamization and consolidation, as noted previously, the Islamic Regime created multiple revolutionary foundations and institutions, among them a revolutionary Islamic court that deals with the transgressions of only the clergy. *Dadgah-e Vizheh-e Ruhaniyyat*, the Special Court for Clergy (SCC) was established in the early 1980s as an ad hoc committee for “special treatment” of clerical dissidents but was upgraded to an independent court within the judiciary system of the country by a decree of Ayatollah Khomeini in July 1987.\footnote{See *Sobh-e Emrooz*, December 23, 1998, *Keyhan* July 7, 1987, *Ettela’at* July 12, 1987.} According to the doctrine of the Islamic state, the clergy enjoys a privileged and high status in the Iranian society therefore the persecution and trials of the clergy can be done only by clerical judges. No lay individual should be in the position to deal with the transgressions of the clergy. However, an institution that was seen originally as a privilege for the treatment of the clergy, became a vital instrument of the IRI to counter growing dissident clergy, particularly during the tenure of President Khatami.

The fact that the IRI early on established a special court for the persecutions and trials of the clergy demonstrates its highly sensitive disposition towards the clerical opposition. Moreover, the judges of this court in Iran and with branches in at least 10 other cities in Iran are appointed by the supreme leader and accountable to him only, unlike the judges of all other courts who are
appointed by the head of judiciary branch. It employs 6000 personnel with its own security forces, administrators, and prisons. (Shirazi 1997; Mohammadi 2008; Buchta 2000). Buchta’s account presents an outline of the actions of this court:

The Special Clerical Court has executed more than 600 clerics and theologians since 1988 and has stripped a further 2,000 clerics of their religious titles, banning them from clerical duties. It has also punished more than 4,000 other clerics with a combination of beatings, fines, and prison sentences (Buchta 2000: 97-8).

Soon high-ranking clerics and former state officials were put on trial for violating the principles of the Islamic State and for hostility against the supreme leader. The trials of dissident clerics and their defense, such as Kadivar and Nuri, turned into formal cases against the dominant conservative faction of the IRI. However, the first highly controversial trial by the SCC was against Mehdi Hashemi, a relative and follower of Ayatollah Montazeri. Mehdi Hashemi, a low-ranking radical cleric and a member of the IRG, was accused of betrayal due to his role in the disclosure of the arms deal between Iran and the USA (the Iran-Contra Affair). Out of necessity during the war against Iraq, Iranian leaders entered a controversial arms deal with the US to increase their military capability. Hashemi opposed any deal with the US no matter the conditions. As a result, he revealed this secret deal, known as the Iran-Contra affair, which was thwarting for the IRI, a regime whose supreme leader called the USA the “Great Satan.” Hashemi was executed in September 1987 after a month of interrogation and forced confession in spite of Ayatollah Montazeri’s intervention to stop his execution (Buchta 2002).132 Hashemi’s execution was condemned by Ayatollah Montazeri and his followers and triggered explicit disapproval of the SCC:

Even if it [the SCC] was founded under the pretext to reform and purify the clergy, behind its formation hid the surely political objectives of certain persons, for whom it [the SCC] should serve as an instrument for the crackdown of political opponents. Even if some individuals under the guise

132 For more information about the SCC and the trial of Mehdi Hashemi see Buchta 2002.
of the clergy are accused of material and moral corruption, what are the reasons to deny them their rights to a trial by an independent court? (My translation from German, cited in Buchta 2002: 76)

Referring to the articles 107, 110, and 111 of the constitution, Montazeri questions the legal status of the SCC and argues that its establishment violates the constitution because nobody has the right to act outside of the law of the country and all citizens including the supreme leader are equal before law.  

The SCC became a subject of debate and criticism in the oppositional newspapers and international media due to its increasing role in the suppression of clerical dissidents. But at the same time the trial of mostly reform-minded clerics provided them a platform to attack the radical Islamist faction of the IRI and to bring its violation of human rights and its monopolistic policies to the attention of the public through the reformist media. Two major trials captured the attention of domestic and international media, namely of Kadivar and Abdullah Nuri, the minister of the Interior under Khatami.

Kadivar’s numerous writings and interviews prompted the radical Islamists, in charge of the judiciary brunch, to launch direct repressive measures against his person. On February 27, 1999, Kadivar was arrested – after a series of interviews with him conducted by the reformist newspaper *khordad* on February 14, 15, and 16 – on charges of activities against the Islamic state and of questioning the foundational principles of the state proposed by the supreme leaders Ayatollahs Khomeini and Khamenei. Kadivar’s arrest soon triggered student protests in Shiraz and Tehran for his release. However, the more powerful response came from the reformist clerics in Qom, journalists and editors who published repeatedly open letters to President Khatami and other officials and wrote critical articles condemning the “illegal arrest” of Kadivar and demanding a fair trial.

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public trial and his release.\textsuperscript{134} Forty-seven days after his arrest in a closed door trial by the SCC Kadivar was found guilty and sentenced to 18 months of prison—a term he served to the end. Kadivar’s defense and the high level of publicity surrounding his arrest and trial provided occasions not only for his supporters to mobilize public protests in the forms of petitions and meetings for him but it offered him a unique opportunity to use the activated public sphere for his critical views against the dominant radical Islamists faction of the IRI. In his indictment, the attorney persecutor claims:

\begin{quote}
Regrettably, in a sensitive situation where our nation needs unification and disclosure of the plans (conspiracy) of our enemies, Mr. Mohsen Kadivar as a cleric with his speech and interviews under the title A Review of the achievement of Islamic Revolution after 20 years attacked the sanctities and religious beliefs of our people…He compared our sacred Islamic regime with the monarchical system and concludes that only the name of the regime changed whereby the Islamic republic replaced the Shah regime (Rudi-Kadivar: 2000).
\end{quote}

The Khamenei loyalists noticed immediately that Kadivar’s critical interviews, writings, and speeches were highly efficient in a time where the reformist movement won the presidential election and possessed numerous newspapers and journals with strong readership. They realized that in addition to the use of systematic propaganda and counter framing against the growing march of the reformist currents via the National Radio and Television and conservative newspapers, such as \textit{Keyhan}, \textit{Resalat}, and \textit{Jomhouri-e Eslami}, they have to recourse to the state’s repressive instruments. In his defense Kadivar rejected all accusations against him and stressed that he wants to defend both principles of the IRI, namely \textit{jomhourriyyt} and \textit{islamiyyat}, and that the people’s consensus should play a fundamental role in the governance of our country.\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{134} For an informed account of Kadivar’s trial and defense, see numerous issues of the newspapers \textit{Salam}, \textit{Khordad}, and \textit{Hamshahri} from late February to late April 1999. See also \textit{Bahay-e Azadi} (the Price for Freedom), Kadivar’s Defense at the SCC against charges against him, available at: \url{http://kadivar.com/?cat=384}. Accessed January 21, 2011.

Rather than helping the regime to contain the rising dissents of the clerics, the trials of clerics such as Kadivar, Nuri, Eshkevari and many others contributed to the diffusion of the views of these intellectuals. Nuri’s defense presents in this vein another account of the intellectual clash between the dominant conservative discourse and the reformist discourse. For example, Abdullah Nuri, a former Interior Minister in the cabinets of both Presidents Rafsanjani and Khatami, was accused of anti-Islamic activities and propaganda against the Islamic state and was arrested in November 1999. He was sentenced to five years in prison. Nuri was impeached by the dominant conservative Majles in June 1998 after which he founded a newspaper called khordad, named after the third month of the Persian Calendar, a month reminiscent of the Qom uprising that led to the exiling of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1963, and more importantly of the month and the movement in and through which Khatami won the presidential election. Nuri’s move to leave the official political institutions and to join the growing critical public sphere nearly two years after the reformists’ victory in the presidential election provoked the conservative Islamists (the traditional right) who were behind his impeachment with the hope of silencing him. Instead of containing Nuri’s activities, the impeachment and trial process provided Nuri an exceptional occasion for propagating his notions:

Nuri’s trial turned into a head-on public clash between the two competing ideologies. In the course of his defense – reported in detail by the reformist newspaper – Nuri effectively used the trial to raise the stakes. He made a strong case for democracy and articulated the views of the radical reformists, which they would not have dared to utter during their election campaign. Despite his conviction his defense was immediately published as a book, *The Hemlock of Reform*, which became a runaway bestseller and the unofficial reformist manifesto for the forthcoming Majlis elections (Mir-Hosseini and Tapper 2006:137)

Contrary to the expectations of the radical Islamists faction, Nuri’s trial gave him a golden opportunity to reach a broader public and to challenge the SCC and the dominant conservative faction of the regime. Nuri confronts the regime with his explicit defense of reformist ideas:

> Based on my analysis, I have reached the conclusion that for the supporters of the [political] system, there is no endeavor more essential than the peaceful and fearless critique of the political order.
Through reforms, and the granting of the right to criticize the real holder of power, namely the people, the system will only enhance its own legitimacy and popularity…The substance of my argument in this defense is reformism. My goal in reforming the Islamic Republic is to bestow power to its rightful heirs and to deepen the system’s political legitimacy. Presenting a compassionate and logical picture of Islam, and the attraction of large segments of the population, only become possible when we reform the levers of political power (Cited in Kamrava 2008: 131).

Nuri’s defense presents another powerful account of intellectual confrontation with the regime. He turns his defense into the defense of people’s rights of criticism free of fear and reprisals. This is the public sphere he and many other intellectual aim to form and to expand. Engaging in dialogue with a regime that seriously suffered from a legitimacy crisis and responds to any alternative religious and political interpretations with various methods of repression can only further delegitimize the regime and increase the opportunities for its dissidents.

The paradigm shift and intellectual revolution mentioned earlier include above all one non-clerical theologian, Abdolkarim Soroush. Once a staunch proponent of the Islamic regime and its compulsory Islamization in the First Republic, Soroush’s intellectual transformation became the driving force of the emerging and expansion of a new discourse, *nou andishan-e dini*, the modern religious thinkers.

It is crucial to note that these public intellectuals in the limited available public space for debate are relatively influential within the masses of the educated urban population in comparison with the secular and religious nationalist intellectuals simply because they posses networks that others lack. Many of the reformist intellectuals even prior to Khatami’s tenure were acting politicians, professors, journalists and clerics and part of influential informal associations, such as the *Bonyads* and Islamic Associations of Students, Engineers, and Physicians, and political organizations like the MIR, MRM, *Jebh-e Mosharekat-e Iran- e Eslami*, or the Iranian Islamic Participation Front, which had direct avenues of connection to the multiple groups of the population. These enabled them to mobilize their social base through their organic link and
communication with the public. We witnessed a show of forceful presence of their social constituencies on the Iranian streets in the aftermath of the presidential elections in June 2009.

The Lay Religious Intellectuals: Preparation for Mobilization

In *Democracy in Modern Iran* Ali Mirsepassi argues that the best chance for the realization of a functioning discursive democracy is the institutionalization and perhaps routinization of reasoning and dialogue within the multiple segments of the Iranian population. He remarks:

Iranians need to ask themselves first, whether there is a necessary causal relationship between the philosophical and epistemological foundations of modern knowledge and the establishment of democratic institutions, behavior, and relations. In other words, is modern reason, as a philosophical concept, the foundation on which a democratic society should build? And if this is so, in order to achieve democracy in Iran, must Iranians first go through an epistemological transformation? Second, even assuming that Iranians are able to deeply and thoroughly domesticate and internalize the Western tradition of political liberalism within intellectual circles, how can they extend that understanding to the sphere of public communication? My answer to these questions is simple. Even though philosophical quarrels are enlightening and might even sometimes indirectly influence some policies, and even though they are certainly necessary within the realm of academic and intellectual circles, they do not have any direct bearing on what is needed in order to establish democratic institutions in Iran. What is needed is to engage Iranian citizens in a cultural and political dialogue within the public sphere of society (Mirsepassi 2010: 84-5).

This is what in fact the reformist Intellectuals had partially established through their active presence in the social media, public lectures and events. In addition to their particular impact on policies, their debates and dialogues in general created a new conversation paradigm and shifted the general orientation of the intellectual debates from subjects such as Western imperialism, *gharbzadehgi*, westoxification, the export of the revolution, and Islamization to dialogue and intellectual exchange with the West, and *mardom salari*, democratic rule, to put it simply, engaging with thinkers from Marx, Lenin, and Che Guevara to Kant, Mill and Popper (Ibid: 110).

As the transmitters of the ideas of reform and the information arm of the reform movement, lay intellectuals like Abdolkarim Sorouch, Abbas Abdi, Akbar Ganji, Saeed Hajjarian, Alireza Alavi-Tabar, and Hamid-Reza Jala’ei-Pour played a crucial role in the success of the
reformists in four major elections (the presidential election of 1997 and 2001, the municipal election of 1999, and the parliamentary election of 2000).

These intellectual debates may be divided into three groups, first the above mentioned theological criticism of the IRI (Montazeri, Shabestari, Kadivar), second the non-clerical academic-philosophical discourse (Soroush), and finally the public social and political discourse (Hajjarian, Ganji, Abdi among others).

Soroush is perhaps the most prolific former Islamist whose views on the role of religion in politics, the compatibility of Islam and democracy, and the nature of *Velayat-e Faqih* profoundly shaped the political discourse in Iran since the early 1990s. Born in 1945 in Tehran, Soroush studied pharmacology and analytical chemistry in London. After receiving a master's degree, he devoted his intellectual interests to philosophy and history. After the 1979 revolution Soroush returned to Iran to become a member of the notorious High Council for the Islamic Cultural Revolution, appointed directly by Ayatollah Khomeini. Soroush gradually distanced himself from the IRI’s Islamization policy and left the High Council in 1983. Once a devout insider within the ruling Islamists, he turned into a radical opponent of the IRI. Soroush’s initial critical inquiry was his debate on religion and ideology and fierce attack on the dictatorial nature of the ruling theocracy in his country. He accused the ruling clergy of monopolizing religion and reducing the reach and diversity of a pluralistic religion like Islam to a state ideology in the service of one single interpretation, namely that of the ruling theocracy:

> You contemplate the law of religion, I bid you to comprehend the law of the law; you have seen the water, now look through the water to see the water. You speak of bodies forcefully subdued; I bid you to think of hearts that submit freely. You respect uniformity, emulation, and obedience to religious jurisprudence and jurists, I implore you to appreciate the complexity and colorfulness of belief, liberty, subtly, and the agility of faith and volitions. How inferior is body to soul, dirt to hear! Truly the religious community is plural and pluralistic by nature. The plurality of religious sects and

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factions is but a coarse, crude, and shallow indicator of the subtle, elusive, and invisible pluralities of souls. Only after one enters that realm will one experience the wisdom of these sagacious words. There are as many paths toward God as there are people [or even as many as people’s inhalations and exhalations] (Soroush 2000: 145)

What Soroush proposes is a religion that is far richer and expansive than an ideologized apparatus in the service of repressive state institutions. His views became the vibrant force for a group of rising modern reformist intellectual movements, *nou andishan-e dini*, that would shake the philosophical foundation of the Islamic state from within with continuing dramatic and *destructive* aftershocks. In one of his most important works, *Qabz-o Bast-e Theoric-e Shari’at* (The Theoretical Expansion and Contraction of Religious Law], Soroush challenges the dominant clergy’s reading of Islam and questions its legitimacy. Dabashi elucidates Soroush’s intellectual impact very well:

The principle argument of this book is that before any discussion of a conservative or progressive interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, or any other aspect of any other religion, the primary task is to address the implicit question of religious hermeneutic, or how a religion is read, received and interpreted in a given time and place. What Soroush proposed here was a rather innocuous idea, simple (if not simpleminded) and modest in a comparative context; the historicity of any form of understanding. But in the suffocating context of an Islamic Republic, permeated by a hermetically essentialist and violently politicized conception of “Islam,” the suggestion quickly became iconoclastic…In the context of the Islamic Republic Soroush’s suggestion rightly emerged as the most subversive idea challenging the essentialist claim to Islam and Islamicity that was the very reason *d’être* of the Islamic elite. Whatever the innate merits of Soroush’s ideas, in the immediate domain of the Islamic Republic they were seen as an eruption of theoretical resistance to and ideological defiance of the Islamic Republic (Dabashi 2007: 191).

Undoubtedly, the interpretative and intellectual contribution of Soroush and other reform-minded thinkers laid the framing foundation of the reformist movement in post-Khomeini Iran. Soroush continues to be a fierce critic of the IRI and, particularly since the turbulent post-election protests in summer 2009 known as the Green Movement, Soroush’s voice sounds much more like a radical revolutionary thinker than a reformist philosopher.

In a series of articles and open letters to the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei he explicitly demands the end of the theocratic regime and argues for radical democratization and change, accusing his regime of crimes:
Mr. Khamenei,

In this drought of virtue and justice, everyone has complaints against you, but I thank you. Not that I have no complaints. I do, and many, but I have set them before God. Your ears have become so full of the praises and caresses of sycophants that they have no room for the voices of those with grievances. But I thank you greatly. You said, 'The sanctity of the regime has been rended' and it has been disgraced. Believe me, in all my life I had never received such good news from anyone. My compliments to you for announcing the misery and affliction of religious despotism. I am joyous that finally the sighs of morning prayers have reached the celestial spheres and awakened the fires of divine vengeance. You were prepared to allow God to be shamed, to preserve yourself from shame. To have people turn their backs on piety and religion, but not turn their backs to your guardianship.

Mr. Khamenei, I know that you are passing through bitter and hard times. You have committed an offense, a severe offense. I explained this offense to you twelve years ago. I told you to choose freedom as your method. Forget that it is virtuous and just; choose it as a method of successful governance. Is this what you want? Why are you doing things backwards? Why do you send denouncers and spies among the people to look into their hearts and pull words from their mouths through trickery, and then report lies and truths to you? Leave the press, political parties, associations, critics, teachers, writers... alone... And now you are under the spell of nothingness and have become the prisoner of a closed regime that you yourself created long ago, in which neither criticism, nor opinions, nor science, nor information flourish. You think that by reading confidential bulletins or listening to subservient advisers, you will grasp the reality of what is going on. Both the election of Khatami and the green election of Mousavi must be obvious to you, otherwise disdain and the charms of despotism would not have chased away the knowledge and shrewdness within you. And now, to make up for that sin, which is due to ignorance and despotism, you are turning to even greater crimes. You are washing blood with blood in order to regain purity. Treason and fraud were not enough, you turned to murder and crime. Treason and crime were not enough, you added the rape of prisoners to everything else… Mr. Khamenei, I want to tell you that the page has turned and the regime's fortunes have shifted. It has been disgraced. [...] Even God has turned His face and taken His light from you. Those acts you committed in secret places and behind curtains have been revealed. [...] Even the path of repentance has been closed to you. Religion will not intercede in your favor, you who have lost legitimacy. The green Iran will no longer be that black Iran of devastation. This movement's whiteness and greenness have taken precedence over the blackness of your tyranny. The earth and water and fire and clouds and winds... are aligned against you on God's orders.¹³⁷

Such explicit, powerful, and poetic rhetoric against a despotic theocracy by once a devout supporter of the Islamic regime and influential thinker empowers the anti-IRI framing.

Soon after Soroush’s initial publication and debate in the early 1990s a group of his disciples, collaborators, and colleagues spread his ideas through newspapers, online publication, and public meetings. The core of this intellectual circle was the *Kiyan* group named after the bimonthly

publication. Led by Soroush it became the first most important platform for reformist thinkers in the IRI. Members of this circle were initially active in Keyhan-e Farhangi, a journal published by the Keyhan Foundation, which was directed by Seyyed Mohammad Khatami. Nearly all of the writers of the Keyhan Farhangi were formerly or at the time still involved in the official institutions of the IRI. As noted above, Soroush, the central figure of this group, had a leading position in the Islamic Cultural Revolution. Others such as Saeed Hajarian and Akbar Ganji were active in Iran’s notorious Ministry of Information and Security or in the IRG. In postwar Iran, these intellectuals initiated debates on matters such as the relation between religion and politics, Western political thought, Islam and freedom, and the notion of democracy. Perhaps the most significant essay published in Keyhan Farhangi was Soroush’s serial articles Qabz-o Bast-e Theoric-e Shari’at (The Theoretical Expansion and Contraction of Religious Law) discussed above. The publication of these kinds of provocative and critical essays prompted harsh criticism from the radical Islamists and increased the internal rift among members associated with the Keyhan-e Farhangi. As a result they left the periodical and founded a new journal, Kiyan.138 This journal turned rapidly into the most powerful intellectual platform of the critical reformist intellectuals.

There is no doubt that the influential contribution of these thinkers paved the way for Khatami’s landslide victory in May 1997 and the subsequent wave of popular mobilization. During Khatami’s tenure this intellectuals founded numerous journal and newspapers that formed a bastion in defense of the reformist government and against the mounting pressure of the radical Islamists. The emergence of Kiyan and other critical journals and newspapers during the 1990s

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illustrates once again the centrality of intellectual rift and factionalism in the formation of collective mobilization in post-Khomeini Iran.
Chapter Six

Reform and Political Opening: Mobilization and Counter-mobilization, 1997-2009

I sent a message to President Mohammad Khatami and told him if I were you, I would go to the supreme leader [Khamenei] and tell him that with all my respect for you, 22 million people voted for me. This people knew that the supreme leader of this country supported somebody else [Nateq Noori]. These 22 million voters said we do not accept what you [supreme leader] say. We do not agree with this system [tashkilat].

A regime that uses clubs, oppression, aggression against [the people's] rights, injustice, rigged elections, murder, arrests, and medieval or Stalin-era torture, [a regime that] gags and censors the press, obstructs the media, imprisons intellectuals and elected leaders on false allegations or forced confessions... – [such a regime] is despicable and has no religious merit. 139

_Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri_

When at 5 in the morning I went to take a short nap, I was informed that I have by now 25% of the votes and all other candidates are below 20%. However, after two hours when I woke up it was like the wake-up of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, I realized everything has changed.

_Shaykh Mehdi Karrubi_

in his letter to Ayatollah Khamenei contesting the result of the Presidential election in 2005 141

The main winner of this election with high votes is me. The people voted for me and we, based on reports received from provinces and villages, acknowledge this result as final.

_Mir Hossein Mousavi_ 142

Street challenges [protests] after the election are not a good thing. I ask all to end this manner. If you do not end it, you will be responsible for its consequences.

_Ayatollah Ali Khamenei_ 143

In the aftermath of the largest student uprising in the history of the IRI in July 1999, 24 high-ranking IRG commanders sent an open letter to President Seyyed Mohammad Khatami and urged him to counter the growing threat to the existence of the Islamic system or “we will take

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action. Our revolutionary patience has reached its end." (Shoma July 22, 1999).\textsuperscript{144} What the most prominent IRG generals asked the newly elected president to do was nothing other than to oppose the mounting march of popular mobilization in the country. The waves of protests of students, women, youth, teachers and workers, actors that through their participation in a highly limited election and the exploitation of elite division pushed their way to the center of the polity and used both institutional and extra-institutional venues to achieve their objectives of freedom and justice.

The relevant point here is not the letter itself but rather what in essence the demand of the many IRG generals reveals, namely deep disagreement among the ruling factions in their treatments of the dissident activism. Both the president and his like-minded reformist colleagues on the one side and the IRG Generals on the other side contributed to the development of the social protests in their country, the former with their new alternative Islamic discourse and the latter with their decades of excessive repression. The millions of alienated youth, students, and women who denounced the state’s top-down violent Islamization found a unique opportunity and joined a segment of the ruling circle that heard their voice and sought reform. The presidential election of May 23, 1997, linked these two forces with one another and gave birth to what is known as \textit{jonbesh-e dovom-e khordad}, named after the second day of the third month in Persian calendar.

After nearly 15 years of silence, the Iranian streets witnessed a growing sustained presence of collective protests across the country and it continues to the present day. The routinization of collective public claim making in Iran in the face of brutal state repression reminds us that--contrary to the expectations of many scholars of contentious politics--social resistance can maintain its presence for a long period in illiberal environments. Scholars have

argued that authoritarian regimes, particularly high capacity states, are by nature hostile to social movements and see them as a serious threat to their stability. Therefore, these regimes use all available instruments of power to oppress them and even utilize massive preventive strategies to thwart them from forming (Tilly 1978, 2006; Przeworski 1991; Tarrow 1998).

As was shown in the previous chapters, the Islamic state itself and multiple other factors facilitated to different degrees the emergence and development of the collective mobilization in Iran. Scholars of contentious politics call the routinization of social protest in the democratic environments social movement societies (Tarrow and Meyer 1998) and the institutionalization of collective actions (McCarthy and McPhail 1998). They argue that collective action can sustain itself in a liberal context for a long time because the legal and institutional features of democratic societies allow them to found and maintain relatively independent social movement organizations. But the pattern in Iran demonstrates that in an illiberal context social movements can also form and maintain their organizational structures by a sophisticated instrumentalization of framing, available electoral competition, and elite factionalism. Factionalism is a key feature of post-Khomeini Iranian politics due to the absence of national political parties. As discussed, the interpretative strategies of reform-minded dissidents took advantage of the elite division and inter factional debates, which allowed them to sustain their presence in Iranian politics for a long period.

The centrality of framing in the emergence of collective contention may also be referred to as the state’s repressive policy towards the social movement organizations. Furthermore, political parties in the reform era existed at the surface to a certain degree, where they resemble a parliamentary faction more than traditional political parties with membership and branches across the country.
Khatami’s landslide victory in the 1997 presidential election was the fruit of decades of interpretative process and factional politics. This victory was followed by electoral triumphs in the municipal elections of 1999, the parliamentary elections of 2000, and the presidential election of 2001. However, within the complex structure of power in the Islamic Republic winning elections with a historical turnout and votes may not be translated into victory in actual politics. After initial success, the reform movement lost its momentum due perhaps to two key reasons. First, reformists faced mounting resistance and constitutional obstacles in their institutional struggle. In the power hierarchy of the IRI, the supreme leader and GC are above the judiciary and executive branches and thus were able to block repeatedly any decision they perceived as “not compatible with Islamic law and norms.” Moreover, the supreme leader can constitutionally remove the president from his office. Ayatollah Khomeini used this prerogative in 1981 and ousted President Banisadr from office. President Khatami complained once that there are centers in the country that create a crisis for his government every nine days.\(^{145}\) Furthermore, as one of the key allies of Khatami, Behzad Nabavi of the MIR has said, in the power structure of Iran Khatami’s position is very weak because he possesses only 10 to 20 percent of the sources of power (Buchta 2000: 201). The second but perhaps more important reason for the reform movement's loss of momentum was due to the fact that the reformists did not mobilize their constituencies to increase pressure from below. In his private conversations with his advisors, Khatami said that he wanted to avoid bloodshed and chaos.\(^ {146}\)


\(^{146}\) From my conversations with some of president Khatami’s advisors in Europe. I do not mention their names for their safety reasons.
The electoral victory of the reformist candidate and his reform agenda, *hokumat-e qanoun*, the rule of law, *pluralism-e dini*, religious pluralism, and *jam’eh-e madani*, civil society—support by two powerful voting blocs, namely students of secondary and higher education and women—soon faced repressive responses from the extremist right, *rast-e efrati*, as the reformists call them.\(^{147}\) As a reminder, the GC intervened prior to the election and prevented 234 candidates from running for the presidency.

Why did the GC allow Khatami to run at all? This question should be answered by considering the domestic and international perspectives of the regime. The authoritarian faction of IRI may not have seen Khatami as a potential winner of the election. In comparison to his conservative running mate, Nateq Nuri, Khatami was not well-known. Nuri was the Minister of Interior in the 1980s, speaker of the *Majles* from 1992-2000, and moreover, enjoyed the backing of the supreme leader. As the election result demonstrated, the electorates did not vote for a person but rather for a program. After nearly two decades of repression, war, and ideological politics, the majority of the voters yearned for political opening and freedom. They surely also remembered Khatami’s terms, nearly 10 years as the Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance where customary state censure were relaxed and new books, journals, and films flourished. The other consideration of the GC not to ban Khatami from the election was conceivably the belief that Khatami is not a radical and thus if elected would not seek fundamental changes and restructuring of the system. As some observers of Iranian politics argued:

\[\text{Khatami was elected by the oligarchy before being elected by the people. Of 238 candidates to the presidential elections of 1997, only four were approved by the Council of Guardians, dominated by the conservatives and the Supreme Leader. Therefore, Khatami's accession to power is not the outcome of a social power struggle, even if the electorate sanctioned it subsequently. Furthermore, the political philosophy from which Khatami's project originates is... in line with the ideology of}\]

\(^{147}\) In order to avoid redundancy, I use interchangeably Traditional Right, radical Islamists, conservative right, ultra conservative, Khamenei loyalists to describe the pro-Khamenei faction.
the regime. That is why Khatami does not advocate any constitutional reform (Boroumand and Boroumand 2000: 336).

It is not an exaggeration to blame the dominant extreme right as the main obstacle towards reform in Iran. However, Khatami’s two terms as president and his allegiance to the concept of Vali-e Faqih provides enough proof that he did not aim to change the constitution but rather to act within existing law and make the state officials more accountable (Buchta 2000; Arjomand 2010).

As for the international reasons behind the decision of the GC to permit Khatami’s candidacy, we should remember the growing pressure of the Western governments and the world media on the IRI for its involvement in the massacre of the Iranian-Kurdish opposition in Berlin as a result of the Mykonos trail in early 1997. The trial found the Iranian leadership responsible for this crime. A reformist face and a “competitive” election would certainly present a more positive image of the IRI in the world at a time of growing isolation.

There were rumors about a failed assassination attempt against Khatami and the basij and IRG commanders considered arresting overnight many high-ranking reformists involved in Khatami’s campaign if Nateq Nuri--the candidate of the supreme leader--lost the election. This raises the question of why the IRI chose not to recourse to the engineering of the election results in 2001, as it would do in the subsequent two elections (Buchta 2000: 33, 123). One possible consideration by Khamenei loyalists may have prevented them from opting for electoral manipulation prior to the 2005 presidential elections. Through its strategic repression of more radical close allies of Khatami, the regime was able to contain or even to stop reformist agenda.

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without touching the president himself. Khatami even once said that he was reduced to a
tadarokatchi-e nezam, or butler, of the regime and asked for more power, although years later he
denied ever making this statement.149

Backed by the supreme leader and armed with the GC, IRG, basij, and vigilante like
Ansar-e Hezbollah, the propaganda platforms of thousands of Friday Prayers across the country
and conservative newspapers, such as Keyhan, Resalat, Abrar, Jomhouri-e Eslami, the dominant
Islamist faction chose systematic repression in its interactions with the reformist government and
movement. When the reformists gained control of the executive branch and won a majority in the
Majles in 2000, they intensified their constitutional struggle for more opening of the political
system. The Islamist faction in turn increased its institutional pressure on the reformist
government by blocking laws passed by the Majles through the veto prerogative of the
conservative GC or by imposing conservative ministers on Khatami (Arjomand 2010: 90-111).

Khamenei loyalists had the majority of seats in the fifth Majles (1996-2000) during the
first three years of Khatami’s first term--a legal instrument they frequently used to intervene in
Khatami’s cabinet building. Consequently, many close allies of the president were arrested,
reformist newspapers shut down, and one of his key advisors Saeed Hajjarian nearly killed in an
assassination. The growing pressure against the reform government and the rapid intensification
of factional rifts were not without consequences for street mobilization.

Facing increasing obstacles to their intuitional venues for participation, Iranian activists,
like activists elsewhere, choose the streets and other public arenas in their struggle for freedom
and justice. From 1998-2005, Iran’s streets, universities, factories, and schools witnessed nearly

3,000 contentious gatherings of workers, students, women, teachers, and ethnic minorities, with an approximately 35 percent share held by students. While for instance in 1998 there were approximately 400 contentious gatherings, this number increased in 2003 to over 550 public acts of claim making.\(^{150}\) Although the labor protests with their ca. 50 percent share form a significant part of the contentious politics in post-revolutionary Iran, this group is not included in my study due to the scope of this project. Despite the “defeat” of the reform movement with Khatami at the top as the president of the country, the time during his terms was an era of rising popular struggle for democracy that changed the pattern of state-dissident interactions. A close examination of the politics of this era will allow us to see the reason behind the rise and fall of the reform movement and the emergence of Mahmood Ahmadinejad and the growing centrality of the IRG in the Iranian Politics.

**Students: The Relentless Activists**

Dissatisfied with the slow pace of reform and faced with mounting legal obstacles and repression, students gradually shifted their struggle for democracy from institutional efforts to extra institutional actions, such as public protest meetings and demonstrations. From their inception, the radical clerics perceived universities as potential threats to the stability of the regime. If we consider the reformist Islamic discourse and reformist press as the key triggers of the popular mobilization in post-Khomeini Iran, certainly students are the *early risers* and perhaps the first actors who extended the inter-elite debate to the Iranian streets and challenged the Islamic state.

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\(^{150}\) For more details, see the chapter on data and methods. It is possible that other research may arrive at a different number. I counted those actions that were mentioned at least in two sources independent from each other. What I believe is important to consider is the rising trend. From 1997-2005, collective contentious events increased each year.
After nearly three years of closure as a result of the Islamic Cultural Revolution, the loyalist Islamists were the only group allowed to operate at the universities when they reopened. Therefore it can be argued that the dissenting students were organically linked to the Islamic state and belonged to the informal circle of the ruling factions. Essentially two major student organizations were acting at the centers of higher learning on behalf the IRI, the *Anjoman-e Eslami-e Daneshjooyan*, the Association of Islamic Students, and *Jahad-e Daneshgahi*, the university Jihad, and were actively engaged in the *paksazi*, the purging project at the universities. The Islamists currently at the universities united in one organization, the so-called *Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat Anjomanhay-e Eslami*, the Office of Consolidation of Unity of Islamic Associations, apparently due to the recommendation of Ayatollah Khomeini and his emphasis on *vahdat*, or unity (Sahifeh-e Emam, vol. 6: 8). Before discussing the student movement in Iran, we need to answer the following question. What made students the early risers and the most determined activists?

Scholars dealing with student movements argue that the chief factors behind the emergence of student movement are access to organizations, networks, and the campus ecology (Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978; McAdam 1982; Parsa 2000; Zhao 2010). The campus life and its separation through walls from the ordinary spaces of cities, the relative autonomy of the universities, and the spatial arrangement of campuses provide students with resources to consistently interact with one another and discuss matters other than their academic subjects. In his analysis of the 1989 Chinese student uprising Dingxing Zhao remarks:

In Beijing, most universities are located in and around the Haidian District…By 1956 Beijing had 31 universities with an enrollment of 76,700, compared with 13 universities and total enrollment of 17,442 in 1949. This tendency continued. By 1989, Beijing had 67 institutions of higher learning with 162,576 boarding students at undergraduate and graduate level…Most students live in campus dormitory. Six to eight students live in each dormitory room…They usually chatted in the dormitory room for one to several hours each day. Although politics and political grievances were not always the topic, they did constitute a major theme when the socioeconomic situation in China worsened (Zhao 2010: 193-94).
It is true that the relative autonomy of the universities and their physical arrangement offer
students a ready-made network for mobilization but this opportunity can only be translated into
actions if the general national context is perceived as favorable for actions. The relative freedom of
expression and communication within the walls of campus does not guarantee immunity from state
repression. The favorable physical space is available almost everywhere to students without similar
student mobilization. This explanation may be true for protests that end within a short time or
perhaps on the same day. In this vein in his comparative examination of the student movement in
Iran, Nicaragua, and the Philippines Misagh Parsa argues:

Highly concentrated in colleges and universities, students possess extensive communication
networks, which facilitate their collective action. Students in higher education often benefit from
universities’ relative autonomy…Given the considerable prestige and respect that students and
universities usually enjoy in society, student mobilization has the potential to escalate conflicts in the
rest of the country, even though students may be concentrated in only a few major cities (Parsa 2000:
94-5).

These explanations may help us understand the “sudden” protest march of the student, but they do
not account for the durability of student movements in the face of state repression such as
expulsion, kidnapping, torture, and killing. In order to arrive at a more viable explanation we need
to move beyond the campus ecology arguments by contextualizing and analyzing student
mobilization in correlation with other key elements like the relationship between students and
other dissidents, their access to extra university organizations and institutions, and more
importantly their framing.

The post-Khomeini Iranian student mobilization cannot be properly understood if we do
not consider the previously discussed intellectual rift among the ruling circles, the ideological
transformation of the first generation of student activists involved in the movement, and more
importantly the nature of the state repression. Other scholars, such as the late Iranian sociologist
and activist Mehrdad Mashayekhi, present a more persuasive account of the emergence and
development of student movements in Iran. Although Mashayekhi emphasizes the impact of spatial arrangements on the rise of student mobilization, his analysis takes into account elite factionalism, mobilizing structure, educational expansion and to some extent the available framing, but fails to explain the reasons for the sustained student mobilization in spite of state repression (Mashayekhi 2001).

It is true that factionalism and, more importantly, available action intended framing affects the dynamic of mobilization. We still need to examine the impact of elite division and disagreement on variables such as repression. As noted in the introductory chapter, high capacity incumbent authoritarian regimes (which have access to strong military and economic sources) are capable of suppressing challengers only if a uniform will and propensity to repression is at work. As we witnessed during the massive popular mobilization in the Soviet Union and many Eastern European contexts, one of the key factors in the dynamic of the mobilization was the ruling elites’ hesitation in oppressing their opponents. These states all possessed a high capacity of repression and many of them (including East Germany in 1953, Hungary in 1956; and Czechoslovakia in 1968) “successfully” contained social protests in the past (Przeworski 1991; Beissinger 2002).

Originally anti-leftist activists and part of the Islamist vigilante who were the main force behind the hostage taking of the US diplomat in Tehran, the Daneshjooyan-e Khatt-e Emam, or Students of Imam’s [Khomeini] Path, transformed into promoters of reform and democracy in Iranian politics since the mid 1990s. Behzad Yaghmaian characterizes this transformation as “originally a movement against rights to a movement for rights.” His eyewitness account presents this dimension of the student political activism very well:

Those who had supported the destruction of pluralism during the early years of the revolution now campaigned for tolerance of others. Soldiers of intolerance became crusaders for pluralism and diversity. “Political development” substituted for “economic development,” and democracy became the new buzz-words of the development discourse (Yaghmaian 2002: 19).
Twenty years after its transformation of universities into sites of surveillance and control, the state lost the unconditional support of the official student movement. Its pillars in the universities challenged the tenets of the system they once helped fortify. The Islamic state was questioned. It lost its social legitimacy. And the students revolted. That was July 8-14, 1999 (Ibid: 89).

It is imperative to note that undoubtedly the students’ defiance was foremost a cultural rebellion against their own past shaped by blind and ideological violence against the cultural and political other. As the combination of two contradictory systems, the Islamic and the Republic became a subject of fierce debate. The agency within this paradoxical ideological apparatus was soon confronted with this contradiction in actual politics and plunged into an identity crisis. Many of the Islamic Republic's supporters sought to define the identity of the system as more democratic—within which they would seek to materialize their ideals of freedom and social justice. While apparently serving as devout revolutionaries and believers struggling for justice and freedom, many former Islamists found themselves being used as instruments for the formation and continuation of an illegitimate and unjust oppressive regime responsible for the ideological slaughtering of dissidents, an act that was unprecedented in the modern history of the country.

Heshmatollah Tabarzadi a leading Islamist student in the 1980s who turned to a leading pro-democracy student activist a decade later describes this crisis as follows:

Like Marxism that has a utopia … a utopia was shaped in the minds of Moslem and revolutionary forces. Our utopia was to establish a world Islamic government. In the Islamic government we were to have justice, equality, ethics and spirituality, and the victory and rule of the oppressed in the world … In this environment, civil society was meaningless … The Islamic movement could itself present a new model. For example, in our model the leader had a special and superior position. He was viewed and propagated as a charismatic and sacred person. Revolutionary forces … were judged by the degree of their closeness to the ideas of the leader… This is contrary to civil society… Power is distributed based on people’s vote in a civil society…The system of velayat-e [faghih] showed its limitations in the political, economic and administrative system especially after [signing] the resolution [ending the war between Iran and Iraq]. It became clear that [despite] many of the slogans …like justice and the defense of toilers and the deprived … the country was pushed back instead of approaching its utopia and achieving more justice and equality. Injustice led to deep class differences. It was there that first sparkle of self-questioning and criticism were surfaced and intellectual debates found their space in the society (Hoviyyat-e Khish May 1, 1999, cited in Yaghaian 2002: 86-7).

As time passed, the Students of Imam’s Path transformed into a faction [Islamic Left] of the regime. Therefore, they worked within the framework of the left wing, whereas we originated from a different background, namely from the Islamic associations of the years 1989 to 1993. At this time I was a member of the general council of the Tahkim (DTV) and later acted as the chairman of
the organization where a minority faction [within the DTV] was formed that consisted of the Islamic Associations of the universities Umran, Khajeh Nasr, Elm va San`at, Shahid Beheshti, and other universities. This minority faction recognized that there are some differences between them and the majority faction, namely the Student of Imam’s Path. The minority faction that included students of Elm va San`at, such as Ahmadinejad … and some from Tehran University like Dr. Sadr, Elham, and Mokhber. In fact the Imam’s Path faction became the left and our minority faction [predominantly right wing] then was divided into three currents. One current was close to M’otalefeh and Society of Combatant Clergy and the other group who was sympathetic to niruhay-e faqahati [faqih sympathizers]. And finally our group, the third group sought to follow a policy more independent from the right wing [Traditional Right] … In 1989 we started with the seasonal publication of the journal payam-e daneshjoo [Student’s Message] and then from 1994 we published it weekly. We did not have a plan and had not thought that these things will happen with us [persecution and arrest]. He was arrested during the student uprising in summer 1999 and spent nine years in prison. He was arrested again in 2010 and is currently serving his second 9 year term. At any rate, it was during the second term of Mr. Rafsanjani that the growing gap between classes became an issue of debate. We entered this debate as idealist revolutionaries and without noticing that, from 1994 onward with the publication of the weekly payam-e danshjoo, we transformed into a generation that rebelled against itself. 151

Tabarzadi’s vivid depiction tells us that the earliest form of student activism was formed from within the regime. Trapped in the battle-field of factionalism in post-Khomeini Iran, many members of the elite were gradually pushed into semi-opposition and even radical challengers of the regime. Student activism continues with varying dynamics since the late 1990s as a result of this ideological rift and evolving new ideas for change and opening.

Student utilized all available avenues of participation to impact the politics of post-Khomeini Iran. Elections, particularly the presidential election of 1997, were one of the avenues students used to express their displeasure with official politics. While for instance approximately 20 percent of eligible voters did not cast their vote in the 1997 election, only 5 to 7 percent of students according to a poll said they would not participate in election. According to a study, nearly 5,000 students were involved in Khatami’s election campaign (Mashayekhi 2001: 297). The reformist victory paved the way for the emergence of a wave of new print media and relatively independent new associations and civil society organizations. Said Amir Arjomand’s account presents the following observation:

The number of political associations rose from 35 in 1997 to 130 by 2001. The number of professional and advocacy NGOs, including women’s (230 by 2000, 330 two years later), youth, and environmental, exceeded 2500 after 2001. The Student’s office of Consolidation and Unity [DTV], whose leaders had earlier acted like officials of the revolutionary government, began an impressive news agency, ISNA, to publish a national student newspaper, Azar, and some 700 local ones. And sponsor some 1,437 cultural, scientific, and social associations (Arjomand 2009: 93).

Students have always been at the very center of dissident activism. However, their active participation and the following election victory have awoken new hope for change through ballot. But it did not take long that the dominant Islamists responded with all their power to forcefully push back the rising waves of new press, student organizations, and women associations. Between 1997 and 2002, 108 newspapers were banned; journalists and reform-minded thinkers such as Abbas Abdi, Hamid Reza Jalaipour, Akbar Ganji, Mohsen Kadivar, and Abdullah Nuri were trialed and sentenced to relatively long prison terms.

As discussed in chapter four, during the late 1990s, agents of the Ministry of Information [the identity of the perpetrators was initially unknown] kidnapped and killed several, most of them secular, intellectuals in order to put the reform government under pressure. Through the research of investigative journalists Akbar Ganji, Emadoddin Baqi, and Saeed Hajjarian (a key advisor to Khatami) it was revealed that agents of the Ministry of Information and Security were behind the vicious assassinations. As a result of these revelations, Khatami insisted that the perpetrators regardless of their position should face trial and the public should be informed of this matter. It took weeks and the Ministry of Information admitted that several “rogue elements” in the ministry “who worked for foreign intelligence services” were the masterminds of these crimes.152 The key individual behind these assassinations was Saeed Emami, a deputy in the ministry who was

arrested but “committed suicide” under suspicious conditions. In response, the reformist newspaper *Salam* published a letter by Saeed Emami in which he warned the regime about the danger of the reformists press. The letter was published on July 5 during a time when the *Majles*, dominated by conservatives, recently passed a bill to restrict the authority of the Ministry of Culture in issuing licenses for new presses and instead transferred this right to the revolutionary court. The regime responded quickly and banned *Salam*. The closure of *Salam* and the ongoing repression of reformists and even some MP of the *Majles* ignited massive student protests the day after the closure of the daily on July 8. Students in the thousands from all major universities joined together to leave their dorms and campus walls marching through the main streets of Tehran chanting slogans against the regime and demanding freedom. The regime acted swiftly and in order to deter students from further actions, raided overnight a major student dormitory of Tehran University. During the insidious overnight invasion that in the memory of students is recalled as *faje’eh-e kouy-e daneshgah*, the dormitory catastrophe, nearly 2000 students were arrested, hundreds were wounded, and several disappeared. The overnight raid not only failed to deter protests, it escalated them. A day after the brutal incursion, students across Tehran and in many other larger cities like Shiraz, Hamadan, Babul, Tabriz, and Rasht joined the protest waves in solidarity with their classmates with increasingly explicit slogans. Slogans that were completely new to the ears of the authorities: *marg bar estebdad, zendeh bad azadi*, (death to the dictator, long live freedom), *ansar jenayat mikonad, rahbar hemayat mikonad*, (Ansar commits crimes, the supreme leader supports them), *majles-e farmayeshi molgha bayad gardad* (dissolve the unelected


show parliament), and *eslam-e talebani nemikhahim*, (we do not want the Islam of the Taliban).

The slogans of the students and their radicalism certainly exceeded the politics of the DTV and the reformist government. As they condemned the violent raid against the student dorm, they both distanced themselves from the movement and asked the students to avoid any act of violence and radicalism. More importantly, the student rallies were fortified by the solidarity of ten thousands of the general population. The week-long student protests and the brutality of the IRG, the police, and the plainclothes agents of vigilante groups such as *Ansar-e Hezbollah* directed against students were published widely inside and outside of the country and plunged the IRI into a serious security and legitimacy crisis. Soon the event of the *faje’eh-e kouy-e daneshgah*, or dormitory catastrophe, became the most heatedly debated subject in the country. All factions of the IRI entered the debate and accused the PMO, the United States, and each other of being responsible for this violent clash. The supreme leader blamed factionalism and above all elite conflict as the main reason behind the eruption of the student protests:

> Let me share also one point with the different political paths and groups. You gentlemen, who are the heads of political paths and orientations, now come to this point that we mentioned. When you *khudiha* insiders clash with one another over nonsense subjects, the enemy takes advantage of it. Please take a look; this is one example; you saw how the enemy exploited this event? Did you see how they beat us? Leave aside your political differences. Of course, I am not insisting that all should think in the same way. But you have to set a boundary and redline for your political work and differences (*Sobh-e Emrooz* July 13, 1999).

The warnings of the supreme leader betray once more the centrality of the elite fragmentation in the eruption of street mobilization. As time passed and more influential voices such as those of Ayatollah Montazeri and nationwide university professors expressed their support and solidarity with the students, both major factions of the IRI also altered their strategy. Khatami, who initially condemned the uprising, showed understanding for some of the demands of the students and urged those responsible for the attack to be put on trial.
In order to contain the escalation of street mobilization, the dominant conservative faction used a sophisticated strategy of harsh repression and soft counter-mobilization. On the one hand, the security forces gradually arrested many activists involved in the protests and increased their pressure on the reformist press and actors. But on the other hand, they tried to demonstrate understanding for and solidarity with the students and mobilize their supporters on the street. In this vein, the supreme leader invited hundreds of students to his beyt and publically before the camera of the national broadcasting network launched a conversation with “invited” guests. While sounding mournful and sympathetic, he remarked in a conciliatory tone:

My dear brothers and sisters are very welcome. There are many things to say, but one subject that I think is more important than any other and has preoccupied my mind is the attack on the students' dormitory. This bitter incident broke my heart. This was an unacceptable incident in the Islamic Republic. An attack against the house and home of the people, particularly during the night while praying collectively, is not acceptable at any rate… Whoever violated the law, whether in the uniform of the law enforcement force or otherwise must face consequences (Sobh-e Emrooz July 13, 1999).

While speaking to students like a father to his underage children, he warns them to be alert and not to become an instrument in the hands of enemies:

Be aware of the enemy, recognize the enemy and you should never neglect your awareness of the enemy… There are foreigners who position themselves in the line of khodi [those who belong to our line as insiders]. Find them out, see their hidden hands. The enemy has targeted students and has tried for years to confront students with the system… I have told the people and the responsible officials that the enemy tries to penetrate into our line. Wherever it finds a window, it will enter. Increase your awareness. The enemy has targeted our national security (Ibid).

The obsession of the supreme leader with the interferences of omnipresent “enemies” is reminiscent of the German philosopher Carl Schmitt’s definition of the political. The political is defined as a permanent antagonist condition between two forces, friend and enemy:

The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien… (Schmitt 1996: 27)
In a perfect Schmittian sense, the IRI officials--above all the supreme leader--consistently attempt to paint a bleak image of the world in which all of life and humanity is reduced to a sole struggle for existence which no political entity (“kein Volk”) is able to avoid. In nearly all of their public performances since the early 1980s the IRI officials have been warning the nation of the “danger of the enemies who persistently seek to destroy us.” By declaring a potential provisional condition of conflict as a permanent condition, the IRI employs this rhetoric in the service of its repression against the other, gheyr-e khudi, the enemy.

As it is customary in the IRI after each major anti-regime collective mobilization, Tehran and other cities’ streets are “spontaneously” occupied by the rallying supporters of the regime, who chant slogans against the domestic and foreign enemies and urge the punishment of counter revolutionaries. Days after student protests, the IRI mobilized a massive popular demonstration in Tehran to dismiss the dissidents' claim that the regime lacks popular support. It uses these public events to demonstrate “its popular support” and to show that any repressive measures against the dissidents are consequences of our nation's will for peace and the protection of the Islamic Revolution from the conspiracy of many enemies. Of course, the ‘religious’ justification for violent crackdown of the dissidents is delivered by the ultra conservative clerics like Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi.

The nationwide Friday prayers are the key public platforms the IRI uses to prepare the public for its actions, to propagate its agenda, and to justify the regime’s domestic and foreign policies. The supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei determines the Friday prayer leader for Tehran and every single city of the country and makes sure that all of them are his devout loyalists. A few weeks after the student uprising, Mesbah-Yazdi who serves as the Friday prayer
leader of Tehran, tried to provide historical and religious justification for the use of harsh violence against the dissidents of--in his words--"God’s government":

The state of God is formed; whoever opposes it must be oppressed. First you offer them guidance and words [to give up their resistance]. If they did not accept this, then we use the sword. We cannot ignore the right of God which is above the rights of Moslems just because violence is deplorable. Who said that? Here violence is obligatory (vajib), the most important obligation among obligations (aujib-e vajibat). The rioters must be stopped with force…Here we must exercise violence…The enemies of Islam must feel the power and violence of Islam. We must destroy the idol of violence-is-bad-and-tolerance-is-good (Resalat, August 7, 1999).

The demand for the harsh and violent crackdown of the dissidents indeed reveals the weakness of the IRI. It shows that one week of student protests had threatened the foundation of the regime. Neither the conservatives nor the reformists anticipated this degree of radicalism and intensity of public discontent.

Student protest gatherings were not new to the authorities. During the early 1990s the sporadic student revolts were centered on inter-factional clashes between several Islamic student associations on student-related matters. However, with the reformist electoral victory and the resistance of authoritarian factions to the reform agendas of Khatami’s government, student mobilization took a more political and sustained form. From early 1998 to the July 1999 student uprising, there were approximately 250 contentious events launched by students mainly in Tehran, the political and economic heart of the country.

But what was unique in the July 1999 student uprising was its radicalism and magnitude. It surpassed the factional and reformist line and demanded regime change. Their slogans death to dictator, and down with the “Islam” of Taliban, and the claim that the supreme leader stands behind the crimes of the vigilante alarmed all factions of the regime, which could no longer could control the streets and the consequences of its factional conflicts. This explains why all organs of the IRI rushed to the scene to condemn the uprising for the first time since the 1981 crackdown of
leftist activism. An overview of the reactions of multiple IRI institutions to the student protests helps us understand the impact of this public mobilization on Iranian politics.

Following the reactions of the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei, the Assembly of Leadership Experts issued several press releases and expressed its concern over the “current incidents.” Like the supreme leader, the Assembly starts its press release with the condemnation of the raid on the student dormitory but quickly moved to address the increasing threats to the national security and growing qanoun gorizi, or violation of or alienation from law:

The occurrence of this regrettable incident at a time when the Islamic system is in need more than ever of tranquility and actions within the legal boundaries of the country, is completely questionable…In a situation where all concerned and responsible individuals in the country ask for calmness and emphasize the importance of order and security for the success of the government, the violent actions of some elements who have been seduced with the backing of estekbar-e jahani-e sahyunism-e beynolmelali [arrogant global Zionism] reveal the hidden dimensions of this conspiracy (Khordad July 13, 1999).

In fact those who deploy their pen and tongue against their leader in the Islamic society and instead of acceptable scientific dialogue in a calm environment enter the scene with noise and uproar. What is the base and principle of their actions?…Honorable and great nation of Iran! The same old elements reemerged once again with the repetition of the old slogans and the employment of new social media due to the information deficiency of some of our youth and perhaps the [existing] conflict among the nitruhay-e khodi, the insiders (Khordad September 9, 1999).

In the words of Ayatollah Hashemi-Rafsanjani the student protests were clearly a radical shift in the contemporary history of Iran:

One of the bitter effects of this incident was the attack on the veneration and sanctity of our supreme leader and the velayat. This kind of incident had no precedence even prior to the revolution under the rogue regime [of the Shah] (Ettela'at July 24, 1999).

General Naqdi of the IRG condemned the “riot” and blamed the US as the actual force behind the counter-revolutionary movements:

The conspiracy that caused the riot in Tehran was backed by American dollars and some of the corrupt press and garbzadeh accomplished the counter-revolutionary operations of the United States…The enemies succeeded in replacing national unity, harmony, and unanimity with conflict, and division, and factionalism with unity (Keyahn, July 21, 1999).

President Khatami criticized the “illegal actions” and distanced himself from the student movement:
The incidence of the university dormitory was extraordinary bitter. This action was an insult to the university and the scientific community. This violent act against the students was unbearable for all of us...After a few days a deviant current emerged due to this incident and I believe this current does not wish good for the country and its objective is to weaken the foundation of the system and to create tension in society. Fortunately, the student community has distanced itself from this current, because the committed acts are not compatible with any principles. Additionally, it came out that some of those arrested weren’t even students (’Etela’at July 14, 1999).

And finally 24 commanders of the IRG demanded swift and efficient actions from Khatami. They admitted that the attack on students in their dormitory was wrong, but in their view what was more wrong was the attacks and slogans against the sanctity of the Vali-e Faqih:

Mr. Khatami, a few nights ago when it was said that a group of people moves with slogans against the supreme leader of the revolution towards the Shahid Motahhari compound, our precious children looked in our eyes and implicitly were asking us what happened to your honor?...Mr. Khatami, you know very well that we are powerless in spite of our capability because of the reservations of some friends. Is there anyone who does not know that today monafeqin [a derogatory term for the PMOI supporters] and infidels under the name of the students join the line of this conspiracy and some of the hateful and opportunistic khudiha, [friends of us, insiders] helping them to ignite fire? (Shoma July 22, 1999)

These chains of reactions in the condemnation of the student uprising from the authoritarian faction of the regime were not unexpected but what was surprising to the students was Khatami’s “betrayal.” Although Khatami explicitly demonstrated his solidarity with the victims of the dormitory raid, his disapproval of mobilization and pressure from below perhaps was one of the main reasons for the failure of the reformist movement—a movement with no determined leadership that lacked strong national parties and was faced with mounting repression and constitutional obstacles.

The 1999 uprising was followed by other backbreaking waves of student protests starting in November 2002 when an Islamic court issued a death sentence for the reform-minded professor Hashem Aghajari for his speech at an Iranian university. Aghajari, a former Islamists, a member of the MIR, and a veteran of Iran-Iraq War, criticized the ruling clergy for monopolizing Islam and questioned the very foundation of the Shi’a clergy, namely the institution of the Marj’a-e Taqlid,
or source of emulation by claiming that Muslims “should not follow Islamic clerics like monkeys”- -upon which the conservative clerics quickly declared him the Salman Rushdie of Iran. Students of universities in Tehran and other major cities in Iran protested against the death sentence and asked for the immediate release of Aghajari and all other political prisoners. In a symbolic act of resistance, students of 14 universities in Tehran called for a referendum on the ruling Islamists. In the same gathering, several speakers criticized the supreme leader and found him responsible for the suppression of students. After weeks of student protests, the supreme leader issued a decree in which he asked for the reevaluation of the Aghajari case. The protesting students, who used the Aghajari trial and death sentence as an opportunity for their anti-regime actions, continued more or less with weekly protest gatherings mostly in Tehran until the end of Khatami’s term in summer 2005. In a series of nightly protests in June and July of 2003, students in Tehran took to the streets to protest against the rising tuition. The protest quickly turned into a challenging political event when thousands of students chanted “death to Khamenei” and clashed with security forces. Since the 1990s, there has been rarely a month in which Iranian universities have not witnessed some form of public claim making. They frequently use any opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the politics of the IRI.

Whenever officials of the IRI visit Iranian universities to deliver public speech, students attend the gatherings, chanting anti-regime slogans that turn the events into public claim making.


A prime example is when President Mahmood Ahmadinejad visited universities in Tehran in December 2006 and May 2010. During one of his visits to the Polytechnical University, one student displayed a poster with a slogan: "In our university there is no place for a fascist president."158

On another occasion, in a heated debate with Khatami at the University of Tehran in December 2004, students accused Khatami of breaking his promises and of betrayals for ignoring the people’s demands for freedom and democracy. In response, Khatami suggested that he has always said that he is a reformist who seeks to change the Islamic republic within the existing constitution and that he believes the Islamic Republic was one of the best achievements of human history resulting from a popular revolution.159

The violent crackdown of student protests, which included killings, expulsions, arrests, and long prison terms for hundreds, if not thousands, has not prevented students from protesting. Instead, it has changed the patterns of state and students interactions. On the one hand, protesting students learned that the regime is not reformable through institutional struggles. On the other hand, they realized the reformists in power, or at least President Khatami, when confronted with two choices, namely maintaining the IRI or the demand for radical democratization, would choose the former. So ironically it may sound perhaps like Iranian reformists in power were aware that like elsewhere in the world (e.g., the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) serious reform would eventually devour its fathers in a country where revolutions had devoured their children more than


once. Hand in hand with students, Iran’s mostly young and educated women are among the
millions of children of the revolution who seek to “devour the Islamic revolution.”

**Women: The Artists of Resistance**

In a recent decree the director of Iranian National Radio and Television banned a female
moderator from interviewing men because “she was very friendly and got too intimate” with a
male guest in a live program. Iran’s official and conservative clerics persistently warn women
over loudly laughing and talking or biking in public with the argument that the lure of women's
voices and bodies deviate men from the so-called *strait path*. In April 2010, the Imam of the
Friday prayer in Tehran, Hojjatoleslam Kazem Sadiqi, complained about the increasing *badhejabi*,
or improper veiling, of women and designated their “violation of Islamic law” as responsible for
earthquakes and other natural catastrophes. As discussed in chapter four, Iranian women are
potential targets of state control and daily harassment due to their “improper and non-Islamic
appearance and behavior.” A woman’s body and “its protection” from the eyes of *namahram*, or
strangers, was at the center of postrevolutionary Islamization becoming once again a key subject
in the struggle over power and control in Iranian society since the violent secularization process
under Reza Shah in the 1930s. As a scholar of women rights in Iran argues:

> From the early twentieth-century to the present, controlling women’s sexuality remained at the core
> of the power struggle between rival groups in the political system and its religious contender, the
> clerical establishment (Sedghi 2007: 201).

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160 As some activists say in Iran: *Roozi enqlab farzandanash ra khord va hala noubat-e farzandan hast keh enqelab ra bekhorand* (Once the revolution [Islamic] devoured its children now it is our turn to devour the Islamic revolution.

161 Entekhab October 14, 2011, *Mosahebeh-e yek khanom-e mojri ba mardan mamnou’ shod*:

162 BBC Persian May 6, 2010, *Aya zelzeleh ba badhejabi ertebat darad?*:
The state's systematic politicization of women’s bodies, including the way they dress, rendered them a powerful means of dissent. As a result of the state’s Islamization and purification, masses of women face on daily basis the violent fist of the Islamic state under the pretext of *badhejabi*. However, the state’s excessive and abominable surveillance, discrimination, and segregation of women has backfired and turned the mere public presence of women into signs of resistance. The *repertoire of badhejabi* became a routine action employed silently by Iranian women in their everyday life to denounce the IRI’s “moral crusade” and its invasion in their very private matters.

Like the movements of religious intellectuals and students, the favorable context for women's resistance in the post-Khomeini Iran was facilitated unintentionally by the IRI’s violent top-down Islamization and factionalism. Women activism in Iran has a long and proud history. Their participation in the Constitutional Revolution, in the nationalist mobilization led by Dr. Mosaddeq, and above all their forceful presence in the anti-Shah movement illustrates their refusal to be silenced by the systematic repression of the IRI. In spite of vicious repression, Iranian women managed to play a leading role in the struggle for freedom and gender equality in today’s Iran. What distinguishes post-Khomeini women activism in Iran from the women's mobilization in prior decades is its feminist nature. In the past, women were predominantly part of nationalist, socialist, and Islamist mobilization. The discourse of contemporary Iranian women and their negotiations with the Islamic state center primarily around women’s rights, gender equality, and the struggle against gender segregation. Below I will briefly discuss the routine social and political obstacles Iranian women face and demonstrate how they innovatively translate these many obstacles and constraints into opportunities used to patiently negotiate their rights with the authorities.
Islamization and Compulsory Veiling as Opportunity

Iran’s educated secular women were arguably by and large the first and biggest losers of the Islamization after the collapse of the Shah-regime. Overnight they lost many rights they had enjoyed for decades. Suddenly, they were prohibited from appearing in public without proper “Islamic” veiling, and they lost the rights to file divorce, become judges, and travel alone or leave the country officially to study abroad without the permission of their husbands. During the first wave of Islamization, many thousands of mostly secular and professional women left the country for Western Europe or settled in the United States. Many thousands of them who remained in the country and joined the nationalist, or predominantly the radical left opposition of the IRI, were silenced, imprisoned, and slaughtered in the thousands. In the time of war, consolidation, and violent Islamization, women's activism that was predominantly organized through the radical left organizations was muted as a result of the destruction of the organizational structure of the leftist opposition.

Like their male counterparts, women had to wait until the departure of the all powerful and charismatic founder of the Islamic Republic before they could resume public claim making and collective mobilization. The emerging and growing factional debate within the IRI polity, cautious economic liberalization, and the advent of the reformist religious discourse allowed certain groups of women, mostly religious reformists, to participate in the political process and gradually enhance their presence and their organizational capacity. As discussed in the previous chapters, due to the particular characteristics of the political opportunity structure, only those groups and individuals with links to a faction of the Islamic Republic would find space for intellectual debates and social and political activities. Consequently, the reformist religious women's associations and organizations are among the first that entered the political arena as both
opposition and semi-opposition. It should be noted that the secular reformist women's associations, NGOs, and collective actions came onto the scene in the late 1990s and fortified their presence during the two terms of the reformist president Seyyed Mohammad Khatami. Regardless of their religious backgrounds, women's activism in contemporary Iran is predominantly reformist, utilizing both institutional and extra institutional avenues in its negotiations with the Islamic state. For instance, while some religious reformist women run for municipal parliamentary elections, others prefer to utilize street campaigns or petitions to carry out their activities. The One Million Signature Campaign is a prime example in this regard.

What distinguishes women's activism from student or labor movements is their less frequent utilization of street mobilization, although female students, teachers, workers, and professionals have played a central role in national popular mobilization such as the Green Movement. Due to the nature of the state’s repressive policies and some structural challenges and obstacles in their struggles, street mobilization is not a routine avenue of collective actions for women activists. The first and most important factor for this phenomenon is their lack of organizational capacity. Iranian women do not possess a national party and are not a significant segment of a national organization that acts within the country. As discussed earlier, due to constraints on political conditions, national political organizations are not tolerated. Although there are many political parties and fronts, such as the MIR, the Iranian Islamic Participation Front, and the Combatant Clergy Associations, they were or remain more or less factions in the Majles. Women activists are either marginally part of the structure of these organizations, somewhat more involved in the Iranian Islamic Participation Front, or active exclusively in civil society organizations and NGOs since the early 1990s.
According to the United Nations Development Program, the number of Iranian women’s NGO skyrocketed from only 40 NGOs in the early 1990s to nearly 5000 in the early 2000s. These NGOs were mostly dedicated to educational and social matters and were formed with the confirmation and in cooperation with related governmental institutions.\footnote{For more details, see Namazi 2000.} As a result of these NGO activities and government policy, the number of educated women in Iran increased dramatically.\footnote{Markaz-e Asnad-e Engelab-e Eslami, December 8, 1979: \textit{Nehzat-e savad amouzi}: \url{http://www.irde.ir/fa/calendar/88/default.aspx}. Accessed May 4, 2011.} The official census report in Iran illustrates a mounting rise in the literacy rate of women and their completion of secondary and higher education. While in the late 1970s nearly 9 percent of rural women were literate, their number increased to over 90 percent by mid 2000. This increasing trend is even more impressive in the areas of secondary and higher education. According to the Center of Iranian Statistics, nearly 5 million women between the ages of 20 to 30 had received degrees from institutions of secondary or higher education in mid 2000 as opposed to ca 460,000 in the 1970s. As of 2011, 68 percent of the enrolled students in Iran are female. The tenfold increase in the number of women with a degree of secondary or higher education is even more impressive considering the twofold increase in the population, from 37 million on the eve of the revolution in 1979 to 72 million in 2006.\footnote{See Statistical Centre of Iran, Yearbook 2006: \url{http://amar.sci.org.ir/}. And \url{http://www.amar.org.ir/default.aspx?tabid=52}.}

While the Islamic state’s obsessive Islamization limited women’s rights in terms of their social and professional development, particularly during the First Republic (1980-1989), it on the other hand opened the door to education for “veiled and Islamic” women. In one of his earliest statements regarding women's rights, Ayatollah Khomeini stated in March 1979 that women
should not be banned from working in the state institutions provided they respect the Islamic dress code:

Certainly, in Islam a woman has to wear a *hejab*. From the beginning [since the foundation of the IRI] some people have attacked the government for its attempt to prevent *badhejabi* [improper veiling]. I heard that in some state offices and institutions women still look like women under the westernized and indecent Shah-regime. We should not allow *m'asiat* [sin] in Islamic institutions. Unveiled women should not be allowed to enter Islamic institutions. Women should be allowed to work if they wear the *hejab* and respect the *Shari'a* orders (Sahifeh-e Emam, Vol. 6: 329).

In the otherwise conservative and traditional discourse of pre-revolutionary Iran, hundreds of thousands of women were dissuaded from attending “the corrupt and westernized” schools and universities. With the formation of an Islamic state and *paksazi*, or purification of the education system and segregation of schools through the massive Islamic Cultural Revolution, women were even encouraged to attend schools and attain professional degrees. As a result, as Sedghi argues, “the percentage of female students [at schools] climbed from 14.85 percent to 16.58 percent to 26.6 percent in 1976, 1986, and 1996, respectively” (Sedghi 2007: 235). In a nationwide project of the so-called *nehzat-e savad amouzi*, or literacy movement launched by a decree of Ayatollah Khomeini in late 1979, thousands of volunteers were dispatched to rural and poor regions of the country to educate people. As a result, millions of the traditional lower and middle class, particularly women, gained access to education.166 This educational expansion was fortified by the establishment of hundreds of new state and private universities, the so-called *Daneshgah-e Azad-e Eslami*, or Open Islamic University (discussed in chapter 4).

The army of millions of educated women soon joined private and state institutions across the country and with their forceful presence gradually conquered an irreversible position within Iranian society. The educational and social expansion coupled with the changing political opportunity structure since the tenure of Hashemi-Rafsanjani and emergence of reformist religious

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discourse enabled women to increase their institutional and extra-institutional efforts for the advancement of their interests. The available new Islamic reformist discourse and the economic necessity of the postwar Iran provided these masses of educated women with unique opportunities to penetrate the otherwise male-dominated social arenas. It also allowed them to outmaneuver steadily many obstacles they faced as a result of gender segregation and discrimination. While millions of men were on the front during the war, women advanced their social role by replacing men as the main income source of families and left the walls of their homes as mothers and daughters to become active social actors. One scholar’s study presents the following observation:

Nationwide, the total of employed women consisted of 1.2 million, 975,000, and 1.7 million in 1976, 1986, and 1996, respectively. In urban areas, women’s employment increased: 460,000, 525,000, and 991,000 for the same years... By 1996, women’s employment in both public and private occupations was greater than in 1976... Women’s employment in the state sector grew from 30 percent to 42 percent to 60 percent in 1976, 1986, and 1996, respectively (Sedghi 2007: 234).

The increase of female participation in the labor market from ca. 9 percent in late 1988 to over 20 percent in mid 2000 not only helped women improve their economic conditions but more importantly their growing social presence allowed them to confront their male counterparts on the streets, in centers of higher education, and in state institutions as active citizens, students, and employees. 167 Asef Bayat explains that “the economic conditions of families made housewives more publically visible than ever before.” With what Bayat calls a "moral crusade" against women that included the regime’s obsession with violent gender segregation, the IRI failed to prevent women from entering otherwise male dominated areas--even in recreational pursuits such as jogging, biking, and other professional sport activities (Bayat 2007: 74).

With their newly won power and greater than ever presence in sports, education, and social organizations and associations, a new generation of female actors was born. With their daily

and “individual” resistance to the moral crusade of the IRI, the “quiet encroachment” (Bayat 2010) of millions of women into the educational and social centers of the country was soon followed by their vociferous negotiations and interpretations for securing and expanding their legal rights. The employed the very strategies used by their male reform-minded intellectuals, spreading their ideas through the vehicles of universities, public meetings, and above all social media.

By taking advantage of the newly emerging discourse and growing factionalism, these women, in what Bayat describes as “individual nonmovements” (Bayat 2010: 19-26), transformed into a powerful collective force through the means of their newspapers, journals, and online publications, like Zanan, Payam-e Hajar, Farzaneh, and Zan-e Rooz.

Through the medium of the press and within the framework of Islamic discourse, the reform-minded Islamic activists argued for freedom and gender equality. It should be noted that many of these religious reformists refuse being called feminists perhaps to avoid the state’s stigmas of being labeled an agent of the West or westernized. Mehrangiz Kar, a leading lawyer and women's rights activist, provides the following answer for this decision of many Iranian female activists:

All of the women who discuss women's questions in contemporary Iran are following one defensive system. Before expressing a word, they say: I am not a feminist. They make such shocking statements only because they want to avoid the consequences of belonging to [the notion of] feminism. In the perception of the various factions of Iranian politics, feminism is a curse and means gharbzadehgi, moral corruption, enmity with religion, anarchy and the creation of conflicts between the two genders; in one word it is the formation of a political system ruled by women, nezam-e zansalar (Kar 2002: 38).

In her words, this is the “negative aspect of censure and repression” that compels women to hide their actual identity. Some scholars argue against the characterization of feminism of what Bayat calls the “post-Islamist” women's movement because they believe the reformist religious women movement differs from the secular democratic notion of historical feminist movements (Moghissi 1999). Since the late 1980s, men are no longer the predominant writers on matters related to
women's questions. The political and social issues of women in Iranian society were reflected mainly in the works of male Muslim intellectuals, such as Ali Shari’ati, and Mortaza Motahhari. Yet with their participation in the revolution, war and the postwar reconstruction and with their gradual march through the country's formal and private institutions, women started to assume leadership in the intellectual and legal construction of their rights.

Azam Taleqani, a former MP of the Majles and the daughter of the highly popular and progressive Ayatollah Taleqani, is among the first public women intellectuals who engaged in the discursive negotiation for women's rights. With her weekly Payam-e Hajar, or Hagar’s voice, she and other contributors discussed women’s right and argued that women are a substantial part of society and that without addressing their problems the country would not be able to enhance its society culturally, socially, and politically. In this vein she founded the Islamic Women Association to increase women’s efforts for more influence and change. In her interview with the Iran scholar Hamideh Sedghi and in response to the question of why she applied to run for the 2001 presidential elections for which she was banned by the conservative GC, she argued that “Islam and Qur’an allow gender equality in political leadership” (Sedghi 2007: 266). Payam-e Hajar was banned in the mass-shut down of reformist newspapers in April 2000.

In no other document the intellectual development of women and their discourse is so vividly represented as in the Zanan, Women. With the formation of Zanan, Shahla Sherkat, an experienced journalist and editor, provided women with a platform which very soon proved to be the most important voice for Iranian women in their struggle for equality. With its critical coverage of marriage and divorce rights, polygamy, political participation, and alternative democratic interpretations of the Qur’an, Zanan and other women's newspapers increased the awareness of the masses of Iranian women who played a crucial role in the century old struggle
for democracy alongside their sons, fathers, brothers, and husbands. They realized that in their legal and discursive struggle they also needed their own political organizations to challenge and change cultural and social demands.

The growing presence of the press in the cultural and social affairs of the country enabled Iranian women to play a crucial role in the presidential election of 1997 that brought the reformists to power. Additionally, thanks to the decades-long struggle and intellectual efforts of women, in no other election in the history of the Islamic Republic were women's issues so much the subject of the campaigns. As discussed in the previous chapters, Khatami's emphasis on religious pluralism, the rule of law, equality before the law, and the political participation of all citizens earned him the strongest support from millions of Iranian women who strived for change and relaxation of the rigid rules of segregation and everyday street terror. In addition to this domestic momentum, the female struggle for gender equality and the rule of law enjoyed powerful international momentum when one of its leading lawyers and activists, Shirin Ebadi, received the Noble Peace Price. This peace price was followed by many other prestigious international awards for Iranian dissidents like Ahmad Zeydabadi, Akbar Ganji and Parvin Ardalan. The electoral victory combined with sweeping international recognition and solidarity for Iranian dissidents, particularly for women, offered these activists a golden opportunity to intensify their struggle for their rights.

Women’s progressive march into social and cultural fields was very limited in comparison to their achievements in legal and broader political reforms. As discussed previously, in the course of the crackdown of newspapers and the bloody oppression of student and intellectual reformist movements many actors came to the conclusion that the Islamic Republic was not reformable through top-down constitutional struggle and choose other venues to challenge the authorities. Faced with three powerful institutional obstacles, namely the supreme leader, the GC,
and the judiciary, many reformist actors shifted their efforts to extra-institutional activities, like street rallies, sit-ins, and petition campaigns. Yet increased state repression against the dissidents was not limited to institutional obstacles. As we learned throughout this study, since the late 1990s arrests, trials, and imprisonment of dissidents became routine actions of the authoritarian faction of the regime in its interactions with dissidents. The state’s crackdown of women activism included not only the arrest of activists and journalists like Friba Davoodi-Mohajer, but also targeted female reformist member of the Majles, Fatemeh Haqiqatjoo, who was arrested and sentenced to 22 months in prison in 2001 for her solidarity with protesting students in the Majles. 168

As a result of the new strategic consideration, a group of women took advantage of International Women's Day on March 8, 2003, and took to the streets in Tehran to demand freedom and gender equality. On another occasion, a more powerful protest event of several thousand women and men took place in front of Tehran University. The gathering that was organized by human right organizations and women's NGOs on June 12 in the middle of the presidential election demanded once again gender equality and protested against the growing repression of dissidents and the closures of newspapers and NGOs. The sophisticated choice of time and location attracted the attention of domestic and international public opinion.169 The election was watched closely by the public and the location of Tehran University was historically a place that symbolized democratic resistance for generations of Iranians. Both these factors were undoubtedly one of the main reasons behind the rapid solidarity that developed across the country around this event. The successful gathering was commemorated one year later in June 2006 when


participants repeated their demands and condemned the mounting pressure against dissidents and
the deteriorating political environment for legal activism. The IRI responded harshly and arrested
nearly 50 participants.\textsuperscript{170} The continuing arrest and harassment of activists triggered yet another
shift in their repertoire of protest. As they shifted their legal actions to street mobilization due to
the increasing legal obstacles, they now considered a new strategic move to reduce the cost of their
activism and to enhance their popular base. This consideration led to the birth of an impressive
nationwide battle, the One Million Signatures Campaign.

Disillusioned with the regressive development and the stagnation of the legal top-down
reform, particularly since the “electoral victory” of Mahmood Ahmadinejad in the 2005
presidential election, a group of women activists, notably Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, Parvin
Ardalan, and Mansoureh Shoja’i, launched the One Million Signatures Campaign to organize
grassroots mobilization for gender equality and against discriminatory laws in the Islamic
Republic. Susan Tahmasebi, a campaign activist, summarizes the objectives of the campaign:

\begin{quote}
The One Million Signatures Campaign officially launched on August 27, 2006, aims to collect one
million signatures in support of a petition addressed to the Iranian Parliament asking for the revision
and reform of current laws which discriminate against women. One of the main aims of the
Campaign is to educate citizens and particularly women about the negative impact of these
discriminatory laws on the lives of women and society as a whole. Those who agree with the aims of
the Campaign can support it by signing the petition. Those who are interested in becoming more
involved can become involved in local groups working on the Campaign. The Campaign uses a face-
to-face education approach in promoting awareness about the laws, and Campaign activists after
going through a training course on the laws, and face-to-face approach, can become more involved
by collecting signatures from fellow citizens. To date, nearly 1,000 individuals have been trained in
this method, but there are countless others who have downloaded the petition from our site or have
received it from friends and who are engaged in signature collections. The Campaign is officially
active in over 15 provinces. In Tehran, the Campaign is organized in a committee format, where the
bulk of the activities of the Campaign are carried out. In the provinces, local volunteers decide the
structure of the Campaign and how to carry out its work based on local needs and resources.\textsuperscript{171}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{170}\textsuperscript{Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, June 13, 2006: Police Forcibly Disperse Women’s Rights Protest in Tehran:
\url{http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1069121.html}. Accessed May 10, 2011.}

\textsuperscript{171}\textsuperscript{Change for Equality, February 24, 2008: One Million Signatures Campaign: Answers to Your Most Frequently
Due to its decentralized and low-cost nature, the campaign captured the attention of thousands of Iranian citizens, particularly from women and students across the country, and soon it also gained support from senior Ayatollahs, such as Yusef Sane’i. According to the official campaign webpage, within weeks activists started collecting signatures in nearly 20 of Iran’s 31 provinces. Alarmed by the successful development of the campaign that attracted women and men across ideological and class lines, the state responded by arresting and harassing the campaign activists. Consequently, an important online platform Zanestan was closed down and its editor Maryam Hosseinkhah was arrested. In its continuing effort to counter the spread of the campaign, the Zanan magazine as one of the most important voices for women's rights in the country for nearly 16 years was banned in January 2008. The campaign webpage reports of continuing arrests of its activists across the country, the last of which took place on September 9, 2011, when the authorities arrested the campaign activist Fereshteh Shirazi in Amol, a town in the Caspian Sea province of Mazandaran.

Faced with daily state repression, the campaign not only was able to maintain and increase its presence across the country, it also received powerful recognition from prestigious international organizations, such as the Olaf Palme Award and the International Human Rights Award of Italy followed by the Simone de Beauvoir award for Women’s Freedom, the Global Women’s Rights Award by the Feminist Majority Foundation in the US and the Anna Politkovskaya Award.

172 See the official webpage of the Campaign: [http://www.change4equality.net/english/](http://www.change4equality.net/english/).

No other explanation can provide a more persuasive answer to the reasons behind the rapid diffusion of the campaign across the country than the account of one of its founding members, the committed activist Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani:

Now, several years later, the One Million Signatures Campaign has attracted many allies and activists. It has created a loose, unofficial network and has opened wide new horizons as a fresh type of civil movement. In charting the path and pioneering the methods that it has, this movement has transformed established local and regional notions of what an advocacy campaign can be and do; it is trying to foster change…[It] is a living thing. Every day people join while others leave or at least become temporarily inactive. It has no particular headquarters or central command; it is nowhere and everywhere, placeless yet ubiquitous. Some come, work for a time, and raise awareness of the problematic laws among other women in their hometowns and provinces. Others leave the network and return later. Still others take part wholeheartedly in the campaign, making it their own, and then leave it behind for any number of reasons. At every juncture, new people enter or step up their activity. Thus, a live and dynamic though unstructured and unfixed network of participants is moving forward ceaselessly. No one person can regulate the pace of this movement (Ahmadi Khorasani 2009: 6-7).

In their long and thorny struggle, Iranian women have been innovatively utilizing various methods to negotiate their rights with the authorities. In response to the changing political context, Iranian women activists employed the proper strategy to enhance their agenda step by step. While in the 1980s and 1990s with their individualistic “quiet encroachment” these female actors empowered their cultural and social presence, in the year after the 1997 presidential election they shifted their efforts to more collective and public claim making. With the mounting pressure since the ascendance of Ahmadinejad and the IRG against the dissidents Iranian women activists, the choice of One Million Signatures Campaign proved to be a highly sophisticated strategy to outmaneuver state repression. As Ahmadi Khorasani stated, this "micromobilization" allowed them to diffuse quickly across the country simply because it did not require large scale organizational resources and mobilization efforts. Furthermore, it is an open platform where every single citizen can enter, contribute, and leave. Thus, they keep the spirit of resistance alive with their penetration into the daily routines of people's lives and with their imagination for change.
Conclusion

Over three decades has passed since a sweeping revolution toppled the Shah and led to the establishment of an inherently contradictory system, the Islamic Republic, a regime that many of its former supporters in the reformist factions currently characterize as neither Islamic nor republican. The struggle over power and the discourse on the foundational principles of the Islamic Republic continues to generate popular contention and divisions in the Iranian polity. The preceding chapters of this dissertation have explained how in postrevolutionary Iranian politics a radical faction of the clergy was able to marginalize all other competing challengers, capture state power, and consolidate its position. By assessing the structure of prerevolutionary alliances and the historical development of oppositional groups to the Shah, I demonstrated that the radical clergy led by Ayatollah Khomeini was able to dominate political discourse and form and consolidate a strong state that survived serious domestic challenges and a foreign war. It was able to accomplish these feats partially due to its ideological domination prior to the collapse of the Shah regime.

Through highly sophisticated anti-imperialist and anti-Western discourse coupled with Khomeini’s religious charisma, the IRI was able to rally a large segment of the Iranian population behind its agenda and intellectually disarm its major opponents in the liberal and leftist camps. We have seen in the preceding pages how radical Islamists led by Ayatollah Khomeini utilized the hostage crisis to dominate the postrevolutionary competition over active presence and influence in Iranian politics that helped them corner their liberal challengers in the postrevolutionary interim-government led by the religious liberals of the LMI Mehdi Bazargan, otherwise known as Mohandes Bazargan. I subsequently demonstrated how the initiation and implementation of the so-called Cultural Revolution helped the radical Islamists target the
universities, the core of the leftist opposition, and start a violent top-down Islamization. I argue that although this Islamization initially helped Khomeini loyalists marginalize their contenders and consolidate their position, in the long run the regime’s excessive control and highly repressive measures generated new forms of opposition and resistance to the Islamic state. The new regime’s intervention in the very private matters of citizens, such as dressing, drinking, celebrating, backfired and turned masses of youth, women, and students (the three major targets of the Islamization politics) into the most relentless anti-regime actors.

As has been shown, the opposition to the Islamic state experienced a new and boosting dynamic when the long Iran-Iraq war ended without favorable outcomes for the IRI—a war the Khomeini loyalist used to channel the available public enthusiasm in the immediate postrevolutionary era in their favor and to accelerate the process of Islamic state making. The hostage crisis, Islamic Cultural Revolution, and the war against Iraq enabled the radical Islamists to “successfully” marginalize and diminish their opponents. As a result, public collective actions against the Islamic state disappeared from the streets of Iran for nearly a decade. However, the collective and sustained popular contention against the Islamic state started gradually to reemerge in the early 1990s in spite of the IRI’s repressive capacity and its utilization against its dissidents.

One of the central aims of this study is to explain why a postrevolutionary state with a high capacity of repression tolerates at certain junctures a limited degree of dissident activism although it was able to successfully demobilize all of its contenders from moderates to radicals. I have shown that the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, cautious economic liberalization, social and educational expansion, elite division, and limited competitive elections created favorable conditions for social mobilization and public claim making. However, the key argument of this
dissertation is that unlike the predominant assumption in social movement theories, the existence of facilitative factors for collective actions will not necessarily trigger social protests. As illustrated throughout the preceding chapters, it was rather the action intended framing of a segment of former Islamists who transformed into reformists that created discursive opportunities, gradually expanded the public sphere, and ignited popular contention.

By analyzing popular mobilization and de-mobilization in post-Khomeini Iran, my dissertation demonstrates that the political opportunity structure is not a unitary national opportunity and varies by social groups, demands, and contexts. The changing political context and opportunity structure during the Rafsanjani and Khatami presidential terms has not altered the patterns of the interactions between the Iranian state and its many liberal and radical contenders. In spite of the emergence of thousands of NGOs and civil society organizations and ongoing and deepening elite fragmentation, only groups and factions within the reformist camp were tolerated to some degree; the political environment has not opened to liberal and more radical dissidents of the regime.

Faced with a mounting economic and political crisis, the increasing alienation of the masses of Iranian people due to violent Islamization and repression, and above all the growing internal contradictions within the state, different factions of the IRI reconsidered their radical Islamism of the 1980s and were able with their innovative discourse and the utilization of institutional (e.g., participation in elections) and extra-institutional means (e.g., the presses and public speeches) to conquer the executive and legislative branches of power. However, after 16 years of presence in official Iranian politics during the tenures of Rafsanjani and Khatami (1989-2005), the pragmatic technocrats around Rafsanjani and the reformist factions led by Khatami
were systematically marginalized by the authoritarian faction of the regime led by the supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei.

As was illustrated, repression and institutional obstacles were certainly not the only reasons for the failure of the modern right and the reformists. With their mere focus on top-down bargaining, the reformists failed to utilize their only strength, namely popular mobilization, particularly of women and millions of students who formed two of their most important voting blocks. While the authoritarian faction led by Khamenei *actively* used all means of repression to suppress the movements of reformist intellectuals, students, and women and to push back the reformists in power, the reformists led by Khatami insisted on their strategy of *aramesh-e fa’al*, or quiet (passive) activism. This vague and confusing strategy proved to be disastrous for the reform movement in Iran, a movement that lacked functioning national parties and faced strong constitutional obstacles. Instead of utilizing mass mobilization and pressure from below for the removal of institutional obstacles, Khatami even went so far as to condemn the student uprisings against the increasing repression led by Khamenei loyalists. Khatami and his teams’ inability or perhaps their very unwillingness to challenge the supreme leader and to initiate perestroika after years of glasnost is arguably the main reason behind the stagnation of the initially successful reform movement, which frustrated and alienated its constituencies.

Concerned with the growing presence of popular protests across the country and uncertain about the management of the outcome of the escalating factional fragmentation, the dominant conservative camp extended its repressive measures against street protesters to include intra elite challengers.

The presidential election of 2005 was undoubtedly the beginning of a new phase in the factional politics of the Islamic Republic. The defeats in the previous four presidential elections
left no doubt for Khamenei loyalists that the population's support for the regime had faded and in order to maintain their power they would have to alter the customary rules of the game, namely the limited competitive election. The manipulation of the election results that were contested by Rafsanjani and Karrubi in their open letter to the supreme leader marks the beginning of an exclusionary process in the IRI and the increasing militarization of politics with the IRG as the most powerful force within the regime. It shows that the IRI would no longer tolerate factional rifts and would employ all of its instruments of power to oust any contending factions from the polity. Particularly since the controversial presidential election in June 2009 and the “victory” of Ahmadinejad for a second term, factional politics in Iran took a violent turn and plunged the regime into a serious legitimacy crisis since the two major running mates of Ahmadinejad, namely Mousavi and Karrubi, did not accept the election results. After initial demands for a recount and the rejection of this proposal by the supreme leader and the GC, the candidates of the reformist camp turned to street mobilization as the last venue for their claims. Soon the Iranian streets witnessed massive waves of popular protests against the manipulation of the election, a movement that has come to be widely known as the Green Movement.

Like analysts of Iran during the 1970s, current observers of the Green Movement overwhelmingly described the outbreak of massive protests in the aftermath of the controversial presidential election on June 12, 2009 as surprising and unpredictable. Yet many actors on the ground accurately anticipated the post-election turbulence. Shortly before the election, as rumors about possible election fraud spread through text-messaging and online media, masses of supporters of Mousavi and Karrubi shouted slogans such as “agar taqallob besheh Iran qiamat misheh,” or “if there is going to be cheating [in the election], Iran will explode” (Fassihi 2009). When state officials declared Ahmadinejad as the clear winner the next day, claiming that he had
received 62% of the votes, millions of Iranians poured into the streets shouting “r’aye man kojast,” or “where is my vote,” to express outrage over what they perceived to be electoral fraud. Since then, many protesters across Iran have been killed and thousands arrested. Several hundred activists have left the country to escape state repression.

The Green Movement is the result of intensifying elite divisions that have existed in the Iranian polity since the 1980s. While fragmentation among the elite was contained by the immediate interference of Khomeini, the unifying leader of the 1979 revolution, the absence of his charismatic authority since the 1990s has increasingly factionalized the Islamic Republic and shaped the nature of popular contention in Iran.

As was shown in this dissertation, the most significant implication of the deepening divisions within the elite after the death of Khomeini in 1989 was the emergence of a public sphere which eventually paved the way for collective actions. Competing factions in state institutions conducted heated debates about social and political issues, which created a discursive space for dissent that soon spread to universities, religious centers, and the streets of Iranian cities. Increasingly, religious intellectuals, women, and students used the changing political opportunity structure for collective claim making, employing strategic interpretative framing to engage in the gradually emerging public sphere and challenge the Islamist faction of the regime. The available opportunities provided by the increasing fragmentation of the ruling elite and the ideological transformation of many high ranking state officials into staunch proponents of reform generated a semi-free public sphere that led to the emergence of hundreds of associations and organizations and the publication of a plethora of critical books, journals, and dailies.

The limited electoral competition and the subsequent electoral manipulation and repression utilized by the radical Islamist faction of the regime to exclude other competitors from
the polity provided a unique opportunity for other factions within the state to mobilize the streets for their objectives. The Iranian Green Movement is the meeting point of many actors and strata of Iranian society that have been targets of repression by the Islamic state since its inception. This permissible but limited contesting space allowed women, workers, students, teachers, and secular and religious intellectuals to find allies in the elite. The ongoing elite struggle over power and the ultimate attempt of the radical Islamists to use violence to oust all other factions from the polity compelled many reformists to take to the streets as a last resort in their negotiations with the Islamic state. Regimes that use force to restrict political rights after a long and sustained period of opening risk eliciting resistance from dissidents who have already gained organizational resources to challenge the state’s violent closing (Goldstone and Tilly 2001, Tarrow 1998). As noted in preceding chapters, the tenures of Rafsanjani and Khatami (1989-2005) were accompanied by significant economic and political changes that led to a relative liberalization (Bayat 2007).

If the protests in the aftermath of the controversial election were predictable, they had surprising consequences for both the state and its dissidents. The state witnessed the oceanic outbreak, diffusion, and radicalization of the Green Movement. Dissidents experienced the brutality of the regime’s repressive measures against activists. Regardless of the potential long-term outcomes of state-dissident interactions in Iran, in the short-term radical Islamists violently restricted the political environment for dissident activism, and protesters moved from the reformist slogans of “where is my vote” to demanding radical changes, including the removal of the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic. As the regime increases its repressive measures against street demonstrations, activists of the Green Movements are employing online
publications and protest meetings at the universities, their homes, and other venues to reduce the cost of their struggle for change.

While a growing number of the opposition leadership, which was formerly part of the ruling elite, is imprisoned and the IRI responds harshly to any signs of anti-regime resistance, elite conflict and the regime’s further fragmentation should still be seen as a key component for analysis of contemporary Iranian politics and state-opposition interactions. What makes my study unique is its examination of the impact of elite fragmentation on popular mobilization in contemporary Iran. As mentioned earlier, no scholarly works on Iran have looked at the consistently changing and fluid factionalism in Iran and its implication for social resistance against the Islamic state.
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Newspapers, Weeklies, and Websites

Aftab News
BBC News Website
BBC Persian Website
Ettela ‘at
Fars News Agency
Enghelab-e Eslami dar Hejrat
The Guardian
Jonhouri-e Eslami
Kar (www.kar-online.com)
Keyhan
Khordad
Mardom
Neue Zürcher Zeitung
New York Times
Rah-e Tudeh
Rooz (www.roozonline.com)
Salam
Shoma
Der Spiegel
Süddeutsche Zeitung
Voice of America Persian
Wall Street Journal
Washington Post
Youtube

Appendix

Data and Methods

For this research I used various sources—primarily Persian media—published inside and outside of Iran. I have selected some outside sources for the following reasons: first, due to strict state control, newspapers or other media are not allowed to cover protest events. Secondly, the majority of the existing news sources within Iran is state or semi-state-run and thus does not report reliably on anti-state activities. They either do not find these activities attractive or worthy enough to write about them or—as is most often the case—they do not wish to become a platform for dissident activists. Even when certain state-run news sources pay attention to collective gatherings, such as demonstrations, strikes, sit-ins, or meetings, they often misrepresent the nature, demands, and numbers of participants in those events. Furthermore, Iranian journalists and their newspapers make up a substantial part of the contentious protest events and are thus a major target of state repression themselves. Since the late 1980s, hundreds of newspapers, journals, and magazines have been closed down and many hundreds of journalists have been warned, arrested, or forced into a life in exile.

There is no need to present a long list of differences and similarities between contentious politics and the examination of protest events in democratic und undemocratic settings. Most scholars generally agree that the nature of threats and opportunities faced by dissidents operating under an authoritarian regime differs significantly from those within a liberal democracy. The existence of a plethora of non-governmental organizations, free access to unions, a free and independent press, functioning oppositional parties, freedom of speech, and access to members of the local and central parliaments provide activists with consistently available opportunities for mobilization and collective claim-making. Conversely, an authoritarian state controls the flow of
free information, determines the rules of the game for participation within the limited public
arenas, arrests or kills activists, does not permit the free operation of non-governmental
organizations, and violently suppresses all forms of dissent as “illegal” acts.

I have also interviewed 20 activists, 5 officials of the IRI who were employed in either
the former President Khatami’s office, the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and Culture, or the
Islamic Revolutionary Guard, and 5 individuals who worked as both journalists for newspapers
like Jam’eh, Hamshahri, Sobh-e Emooz and as university professors or lecturers. All interviews
were conducted outside of Iran, in Berlin, Paris, Prague, and New York City. Unfortunately, due
to my own activist background I have not been able to travel to Iran since the late 1980s.

Opportunities for dissident activism: Factors that facilitate social mobilization and may
determine collective actions

- Alternative intellectual discourse, action intended framing (expansion of public sphere)
- Dissidents’ organizational structure
- Limited Competitive elections
- Elite Fragmentation and factionalism
- Favorable international and regional environment (Arab Spring)
- Legitimacy crisis of the regime
- Demographic transformation
- Intellectual ideological transformation of a significant segment of the ruling elite
- Increasing modernization and urbanization
- Social and Educational Expansion

Threats to dissident activism: Factors that increase the cost of social mobilization and may
impede collective actions

- High capacity state (unified elite, strong military organizations, and economic sources)
- Multiple organs of repression: Islamic Revolutionary Guards, Basij, Setad-e Amr-e Beh
M’arouf va Nahy az Monker (Moral Police), Jahad-e Daneshgahi (University Jihad),
Daftar-e Omure Tarbiati dar Madares (Office for Moral Issues at Schools), Namaz-e
Jamaat dar Madares (daily compulsory collective praying at schools), Edarehe Harasat
(the Protection Office), Edarehe Amaken Omumi (Office for Public Arenas), Niruye
Entezami (Law Enforcement Force), Vezarat-e Ettelaat va Amniyyat (Ministry of
Information and Security), Dadgah-e Enqelab-e Eslami (Islamic Revolutionary Court),
Dadgah-e Vizheh-e Ruhaniyyat (Special Court for Clergy), Bonyad-e Emam Khomeini (The Imam Khomeini Foundation), Bonyad-e 15 khordad (The Foundation of 15 Khordad), Bonyad-e Mostaz’afan (The Foundation of the Dispossessed), Bonyad-e Shahid (The Martyr Foundation), Maddahan-e Ahl-e Beyt (The Preachers of the Family of the Prophet)

- The Press Watchdog Committee (hey’at-e nezarat bar matbu’at) is an official state organ in the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in charge of issuing licenses for the media or, in many cases, banning critical news sources. It is a key instrument of the state for exercising “soft” repression against journalists, bloggers, etc. The Department of Culture and Islamic Guidance has been a critical tool in the hand of the Islamists for the crackdown of oppositional presses and had denied the publication of thousands of books, hundreds of movies, and other works by intellectuals and artists. This committee is composed of the representatives of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance and Culture and Iran’s judiciary branch.

Actors in Protest

1) Students/youth (secondary and higher education)
2) Women
3) Workers
4) University professors
5) School teachers
6) Cultural professionals (artists, writers, performers, etc.)
7) Journalist/bloggers
8) Legal professionals
9) Clerics/religious intellectuals
10) Religious and ethnic minorities

Action Forms

17 categories of actions are identified in this project

1) Demonstrations
2) Legal actions (petitions, court appeals)
3) Public statements by organizations and individuals, press conferences, letters of protest
4) Protest gatherings in front of prisons and courts.
5) Petitions by organizations and individuals and open letters to authorities.
6) Organizing meetings (speeches, celebrations of anniversaries)
7) Picketing, flier distribution
8) Strikes
9) Sit-ins
10) Violent confrontations with authorities.
11) Attacks on public or private property.
12) Self-harming forms of protest (hunger strikes, suicide)
13) Gatherings of Mourning Mothers and Widows (in cemeteries, in front of prisons, and parks)
14) Nightly *Allah-o Akbar* gatherings and shouting from the roofs of houses slogans
15) Religious gatherings
16) Nights of poetry reading meeting (*shab-e sh’er*)
17) Hacktivism and other forms of online activism
18) Eskenas Nevisi (writing anti-regime slogans on banknotes, etc)