



Social Change AND Dissent in IRAN

Haleh Esfandiari

WOMEN AS A FORCE FOR CHANGE

Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi

THE POLITICS OF REFORM

Afshin Molavi

WHAT YOUNG IRANIANS WANT

Kaveh Khoshnood

and Sahar Rooholamini

HIV AND DRUG ABUSE IN IRAN



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Social Change and Dissent in Iran

For a workshop on February 24, 2003, The Center for Strategic Studies' International Affairs Group asked five Iranian-American academics and writers to address current political and demographic trends driving social change and dissent in Iran. Their presentations are published in this paper.

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Speaker Biographic Notes

Dr. Haleh Esfandiari is the Consulting Director, Middle East Project, at The Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. She has a Ph.D. from the University of Vienna. She was an educator at Princeton University from 1980 to 1994 and is a frequent lecturer on Iranian affairs. She is the author of *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution*, and co-editor of *The Economic Dimensions of Middle Eastern History*.

Dr. Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Georgia State University and a recipient of United States Institute of Peace and Mellon post-doctoral fellowships. He is the author of *Islam and Dissent in Post-revolutionary Iran: The Religious Politics of Abdolkarim Soroush*. He has published numerous articles on the topics of Islam and science, post-modernity and Islamic movements, and globalization and human rights.

Dr. Kaveh Khoshnood is an Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health at Yale University. He is an infectious disease epidemiologist, whose major area of research has been focused on conducting and evaluating studies of HIV infection and its consequences for injection drug users. Dr. Khoshnood is in dialogue with the Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences, Tehran University, and the Iranian Ministry of Health, on HIV/AIDS and drug use in Iran.

Mr. Afshin Molavi is the author of the recently published book *Persian Pilgrimages: Journeys Across Iran*. Mr. Molavi, who has an MA in Middle East Studies from the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, covered Iran for the *Washington Post* from 1998 to 2000. He was an Iran studies fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center and worked at the International Finance Corporation, the private sector development arm of the World Bank.

Ms. Sahar Rooholamini is finishing her MPH degree at the Yale University School of Public Health. Her thesis focuses on the socio-demographic and social support characteristics of the families of drug users whom she interviewed in 2002 at an outpatient addiction clinic in Tehran.

Executive Summary

Located at the nexus between Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and South Asia, Iran has been an important regional power for more than a millennium. In the 21st century, the country's vast natural resources — including the world's second largest gas reserves and third largest oil reserves — add to its strategic weight. The United Nations Population Fund recently projected that by 2050 Iran's population would rise to 121.4 million, surpassing that of Russia.

Iranian society today is young, literate, and increasingly urban. Two-thirds of the Iranian population is under 30, one-third under fifteen. Nearly two million young Iranians are enrolled in primary and secondary schools across the country. At the university level, the number of women students slightly exceeds that of men. But a faltering economy has failed to generate enough jobs: unemployment among university graduates is officially estimated at 20%, and is probably higher.

In her presentation, *Women as a Force for Change in Iran*, **Dr. Haleh Esfandiari** described the tenacious struggle Iranian women have waged to win back the legal and social rights they enjoyed in the last years of the Pahlavi monarchy. In her view, few of the tens of thousands of women who demonstrated against the Shah in 1978 and 1979 understood the potential consequences of the establishment of an "Islamic Republic." Of all the elements of Iranian society today, women are the most vocal in their opposition to the clerical regime.

Dr. Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi noted in his talk *The Politics of Reform*, that it was the coalition of women and young people who, in 1996, rallied to Seyed Mohammad Khatami, then head of the National Library, and elected him president of Iran. Khatami's accession to power brought about what Dr. Ghamari-Tabrizi terms the "Third Republic" since the 1979 Revolution. In recent years President Khatami's efforts to reform the state from within have faltered. Riven by competing factions and sub-factions of conservatives and reformers, the Iranian political scene is in a state of near paralysis. Iranians are losing faith in the ballot box as an agent of change: in the March 2003 municipal elections, voter turn-out was only 40% in the country as a whole, and a mere 12% in Tehran. Dr. Ghamari-Tabrizi detects no enthusiasm for another revolution, however.

In *Jobs, Democracy, and Pink Floyd: What Young Iranians Want and Why it Matters to U.S. Policymakers*, **Mr. Afshin Molavi** explained that high unemployment rates, government corruption, and oppressive social restrictions are disillusioning young Iranians and causing them to mistrust authority. Those who are able to do so emigrate and among them are the country's top university graduates. Those who remain in Iran are much more practical than the 1970s' generation. Busy trying to find jobs and make a living, they are less attracted than their predecessors to the utopian ideas of Western Marxists or Islamic radicals. Young Iranians agree that "democracy" is desirable, but there is no consensus on what democracy means. They are pro-American because the hard-liners are anti-American. Young people are interested in what is going on in the West, but they have a keen sense of their Iranian national identity and pride in their cultural heritage. Their heroes are secular nationalists, such as the late Mohammad

Mossadeq, who was overthrown in a 1953 coup, and anti-establishmentarian Islamic thinkers, such as Abdol Karim Soroush. Their message, according to Afshin Molavi, is “We are nationalist Iranians, and we may even be secular nationalists.”

One consequence of political alienation and social change in Iran is an alarming increase in the trafficking and abuse of opiates, particularly heroin. **Dr. Kaveh Khoshnood** and **Ms. Sahar Rooholamini** outlined the threat in *HIV/AIDS and Drug Use in Iran: Crisis and Opportunity*. Cheap, easily available heroin from Afghanistan has become the drug of choice for young Iranians. Through sharing dirty needles and engaging in unsafe sex, intravenous drug users are highly susceptible to contracting HIV, among other diseases. UNAIDS estimates that there are 20,000 Iranians with HIV, about 70% of whom became infected through intravenous drug use. Dr. Khoshnood and Ms. Rooholamini noted that, in a move atypical of the region, the Iranian government has openly acknowledged the magnitude of drug addiction and the HIV epidemic. Treatment of addiction has been legalized and outpatient clinics have been built nationwide. Iranian public health officials are also reaching out to their counterparts in Western Europe and North America for advice. U.S. policy makers have the potential to assist them by providing financial, medical and moral support on a humanitarian basis.

Dr. Haleh Esfandiari
Consulting Director, Middle East Project
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Women as a Force for Change in Iran

To those of us who visit Iran more than once a year, the change in the physical appearance of women on the streets of Tehran is striking. In 2003 women now show their defiance of the authorities by the way they dress, wear their make-up, do their hair, and by the way they talk and walk. They are provocative, and don't shy away from confronting the morals police and the paramilitary *basiji* forces, a regime that objects to everything these women represent.

Since the early days of the Islamic Republic, women have been the most dominant group in resisting the changes imposed by the clerical regime. Twenty-four years after the Shah was deposed, women are still the most outspoken critics of a system that continues to interfere in their daily lives. In recent years women have been joined in their protests by a young generation of Iranians, male and female, who know no other system but that of the Islamic Republic (two-thirds of the Iranian population is under 30). Women and young people alike are expressing their opposition to the social restrictions imposed on them and demanding the opening up of society through political reform.

In the early years of the Islamic Republic, all one saw in the streets were masses of women wearing black or a dark, dull navy blue and men wearing black shirts and walking around with a two or three day-old beard. Today in Tehran and other Iranian cities, women wear make-up and toenail polish, show quite a bit of hair, and flaunt bracelets on their bare wrists. Their robes and scarves are mostly in pale colors, and even in some government offices women are no longer observing the rigid imposition of *hejab*, the black hood-shaped head cover. Until a few years ago, women government employees who did not observe the dress code were stopped from entering their offices. In the current *Majlis* or parliament, two women MPs broke the official dress code for high-ranking women by refusing to wear the *chador* (the long black veil); they go to parliament dressed in long coats and scarves.

The Islamic Republic has been grappling with "the women's problem" ever since it was established. When the revolutionaries took over the government in February 1979 they had not thought carefully about the status of women, nor did they envisage that this issue would dominate their immediate agenda. The clerics who came to power in 1979 were not aware of the progress women had achieved in the two preceding decades or of how far these changes had seeped down into the society, benefiting working-class as well as upper-class and professional women. Radical secularists on the left and the clerics on the right wrongly imagined that the changes in the status of women under the monarchy were superficial and benefited only a small, elite group. In 1962, for example, Ayatollah Khomeini opposed granting the vote to women in local council elections, arguing that to do so would corrupt the chaste women of Iran. The clerics frowned at women's employment alongside men, preferring a segregated society. Radical

secularists, when asked in late 1970s whether they had an agenda for women's emancipation, argued that consideration of such issues should be postponed until after the Revolution and the liberation of the masses.

In 1978, the clerics and traditional elements in Iranian society welcomed the large-scale participation of women in marches, demonstrations, and revolutionary activities that ultimately led to the overthrow of the monarchy. Tens of thousands of women of all ages — some wearing the long black veil, others wearing a scarf, some in Western dress — marched through the streets of Tehran and other Iranian cities alongside men. I believe the majority of those demonstrators did not know what kind of a regime was implied by an Islamic Republic. I feel sure that the women who took part in the protests against the monarchy did not expect that, shortly after their political victory, all the progress they had achieved would be reversed. Indeed, only a few months after the fall of the monarch, women once again were demonstrating in the streets of Tehran. But this time they were protesting the imposition of the *hejab* in the workplace. That women under the Islamic Republic would demand greater rights came as a surprise to the revolutionary leaders — just as the dismantling of the gains women had made in previous decades came as a shock to Iranian women.

The Status of Women on the Eve of the 1979 Revolution

To explain how and why women resisted the turning back of the clock, let me talk briefly on where women stood on the eve of the Revolution in 1978. Iranian women had secured the right to vote and be elected to parliament in 1963. The Family Protection Law, passed in 1967 and amended in 1973, gave women the right to seek a divorce and gain child custody. It raised the age of marriage for girls and boys, and, made polygamy difficult. Education was compulsory for girls and boys and while government schools were segregated, some private schools and all universities were co-educational.

Women worked in the public and private sectors, and employers were required to provide day-care facilities for their female employees. Labor laws were improved to accommodate the needs of working women. Women were encouraged to seek decision-making positions. By the time the Revolution took place in 1979, Iran had two women ministers, and a number of women deputy ministers and directors general. Women were serving abroad as diplomats and at home as mayors and as heads of companies. There were women in the police force, directing traffic. Women served in the Iranian army as part of the health, literacy, and construction corps. There were women writers, journalists, artists, university professors, doctors, engineers, lawyers, and teachers. One woman, whom I interviewed for my book several years ago, put all this in a nutshell when she said, “We Iranian women felt there was nothing we could not do. We were on the move and nothing could stop us.” Of course, there were many barriers, legally, socially, and politically, but women had the sense that the path before them lay open.

The Islamic Republic Turns Back The Clock for Women

As I noted earlier, the first open confrontation between women and the new Islamic regime occurred in March 1979 when the religious authorities announced that women working in government offices would be required to cover their hair, i.e., observe the *hejab*. Ironically, the announcement was made on March 8, on the occasion of International Women's Day. Thousands of women, mostly middle-class professional women, poured into the streets of Tehran and demonstrated in front of the prime minister's office. Club-wielding thugs confronted these women, while other women wearing the *chador* labeled the demonstrators "western dolls" and "puppets." First *hejab* became obligatory in public places. Then the *chador* became mandatory. The government was regulating women's appearance in the public sphere, and it was soon obvious that the revolutionary government was going to implement laws and regulations affecting women's lives in other ways.

The revolution affected women in three domains: legal, social, and political. Let me go over each area very quickly and then explain how women managed to bend or ignore regulations, overcome obstacles, and eventually force the government to modify the harsh laws passed regarding women's rights.

In the legal sphere, the Family Protection Law was suspended and once again men secured the unilateral right to divorce their wives. Child custody was automatically given to the father in compliance with Islamic law. The age of marriage became nine for girls (the age of puberty according to Islamic law), polygamy became legal, and *sigeh* (temporary marriage) was encouraged. The Family Courts in charge of settling family disputes were closed. Women no longer could work as judges. The Islamic Law of Retribution was passed in 1981, legalizing the punishment of women by flogging for wearing immodest dress, and their death by stoning for committing adultery.

In the social and employment domain, women were constantly harassed. Revolutionary committees set up checkpoints on the streets and stopped cars to make sure that women were only in the company of male relatives. Buses were segregated as were schools and male teachers could no longer teach girls. Segregating government offices and university classes was tried but soon abandoned as impractical. Nevertheless, to this day, in some government offices women sit in a separate room from men. Women were barred from a number of university fields such as agriculture, veterinary science, and some engineering fields. The government denied scholarships to single women to study abroad. Women in managerial positions in government and the private sector were purged, given early retirement, or demoted. Day-care centers were closed, making it difficult for women to work. A number of women just took their children to work. To this day, you walk into a bank, hospital, or government office, and you see children of employees playing on the floor.

In the political domain women fared a bit better. They kept the right to vote and to be elected to the *Majlis* or parliament. Four women were elected to the first parliament of the Islamic Republic in 1980. Of the 72-member assembly responsible for drafting the constitution of the Islamic

Republic there was only one woman, Ms. Gorgi. She appeared in the assembly wearing a black *chador* and announced she was not there to represent women's views. The new constitution devoted only four out of 175 articles to women, and they were only within the context of the family and the framework of Islamic law. The constitution specifically barred women from becoming judges and/or Supreme Leader. The constitution did not exclude women from joining the cabinet and is vague as to whether a woman can be president of the republic. Over the years a number of women have advanced their names as candidates for the presidency. Each time they have been rejected, allegedly not because of their sex but because they failed to satisfy the qualifications demanded for the office.

Iranian Women Struggle to Regain Their Rights

The government tried to dismantle the gains women had made in the previous decades, but it did not succeed, for a very simple reason. Women refused to be relegated to the position of second-class citizens inferior to men as conceived by the leadership of the revolution and as specified in the law. Nor would they agree to shelve the progress they had achieved in previous decades. In virtually every field — family law, employment, the public sphere, the arts and sciences, and even in matter of dress — the government was eventually to give in to the demands made by women. Women had expected to gain from the revolution and were not going to put up with less than what they had had before it. The women who pushed for change came from different backgrounds and classes, including working and middle-class women, educated and less-educated women, and even daughters and wives of the new clerical and non-clerical leadership in the government.

I will focus on the three domains I mentioned earlier and discuss the changes that women have forced on the government in the legal, social, and political spheres in the last decade and a half. In the legal sphere, women fought the suspension of the family law by writing to the offices of high clerics, to women MPs, to the president, and to the judiciary. Women's magazines such as Zanan and Zan-e Rouz, and newspapers such as Zan (before it was closed down by the authorities), together with a number of women MPs and prominent women activists publicly pressed for changes in the Family Law. They were critical of the lower age of marriage for girls, polygamy, the unilateral right to divorce for men, and the automatic award of child custody to men.

In recent years there have been slight modifications in Iranian Family Law. Some parts of the former Family Protection Law have been reinstated but in modified form. A husband still can divorce his wife, but only with the court's permission. Family Courts have replaced Family Protection Courts. Male judges preside over these courts and generally rule in favor of the husband. Child custody is decided by the presiding judge, and, unless the husband proves to be totally unfit, he gains the custody of the children. Nevertheless, these Family Courts do sometimes rule in favor of women. In recent years, some 100 women lawyers have been appointed as special counselors to the presiding judges in Family Courts.

As a big concession to women in family matters, the government published a model marriage contract which couples may voluntarily adopt when getting married. It gives a divorced wife the

right to secure half the property obtained during the marriage. Another article gives the wife the right to seek in advance a power of attorney from her husband to initiate divorce on 12 different grounds. In 1994 parliament enacted a law giving a divorced wife the right to monetary compensation for the number of years she was married, provided the husband instigated the divorce and the wife is not at fault. The government recently announced the suspension of death by stoning as the punishment for women who commit adultery. Suspension or abolition of stoning was one of the conditions set by the European Union for discussions with Iran on a trade agreement and expanded relations with the EU.

Some Progress Under President Khatami

In the 1997 Iranian presidential elections, gender issues were debated for the first time in a national election campaign. Although the election of reform candidate Ayatollah Mohammad Khatami was secured by the votes of women and young people, the position of women remains full of contradictions. Politicians across the spectrum understood that they could no longer ignore women's issues or take the women's vote for granted. At the same time, the conservatives attempted to block the reforms pushed by President Khatami. Despite the hope that he would appoint a woman to his Cabinet, Khatami did not do so. He did, however, appoint a woman, Massoumeh Ebtekar, as one of his seven vice-presidents, to be responsible for environmental affairs. Unlike ministerial appointments, vice-presidents do not require parliamentary approval. Following the example of former president Rafsanjani, Khatami also appointed a woman, Zahra Shoja'i, as his Special Advisor for Women's Affairs. Zahra Rahnavard, a writer and commentator who is the wife of former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Musavi, became Chancellor of Al-Zahra University, a women's university. She is the first woman in Iranian history to head a university. In government ministries there are three women under-secretaries and a number of women directors general. Women's representation in the *Majlis* has increased to 14.

Within the last two years, the *Majlis* has enacted several laws important to women. These include a provision for adjusting the value of the *mahr* (the monetary sum the husband pledges to his wife in the marriage contract which is payable on divorce) in keeping with the rise in the cost of living, and a law permitting women civil servants to retire after 20 years' service. Parliament also passed a law allowing single women to study abroad. However, a conservative backlash against Khatami's reforms has also produced two laws that women regard as retrograde. The first, an amendment to the Press Law, makes it a punishable crime to print pictures or material that will "exploit" women, insult women, encourage women to "ornamentation," or further friction between men and women. The second law mandates a segregated health care delivery system, in which medical practitioners are permitted to treat only members of their own sex. Both bills were approved against the opposition of Khatami's government, women activists, and women's magazines. The medical bill was also opposed by many doctors. It was originally sent back to parliament by the Council of Guardians (a body that can review, veto, or mandate revision of legislation) on the grounds that the government lacked the funds to create a two-track health care delivery system.

In 1999, some 300 women were elected to local councils in many major Iranian towns and cities. In some cities women secured the highest number of votes. Of the 15 members of the Tehran City Council, three are women. In the 2000 parliamentary elections, among the 6,860 candidates who were running for 290 seats were 504 women. In Tehran 153 women among the 1,273 registered candidates.

Today in Iran, as in the past, girls and boys have equal access to education. While elementary and secondary education is segregated, higher education is mixed. The number of women university students actually is slightly higher than that of men. Women have access to employment, although women make up a mere 12% of the total active work force. As in most Middle Eastern countries, women are employed mainly by the state. Today in Iran, women account for over 30% of the government work force but of those, nearly 84% are concentrated in education, and health-related occupations.

President Khatami's tenure has also provided Iranians with a sense of greater liberation in the social sphere. Men and women feel freer to move about, to mix and mingle. University students of both sexes now dare to address one another on campuses without fearing the wrath of the Islamic committees set up to watch over them. Women's robes are growing shorter and their trousers are getting tighter. Even the universities and government offices no longer stop women from wearing looser scarves and make-up. The morals police and paramilitary *basiji* appear less inclined to interfere with the manner in which people conduct themselves in public.

Iranian Women: Continuing to Force Change

A clever Iranian entrepreneur started a food court in Tehran a year ago. The food court, a carbon copy of those you see in the United States, has become the gathering place for young people in Tehran. Every so often you hear that the security forces have closed down the cafes and made a number of arrests but at most times the young gather at the food court unimpeded. Depending on the political climate, intrusion by the authorities into people's lives sometimes resumes; and once again women's attire becomes an issue, and mixing of young men and women in public becomes a punishable offence. Once again the conservative press starts writing about the dangers of so-called Western "cultural onslaught" on Iranian society. People, especially the young and women, shrug their shoulders and get on with their lives.

Until a few years ago the government had to deal only with women as an instrument for change, but these days they must also take into account the very significant numbers of men and women in the younger generation who are pressing forcefully for opening up Iranian society. Throughout much of the country, people now have access to satellite dishes, foreign videos, foreign radio stations, and even the Internet. The number of Internet users and providers in Iran is mushrooming. Recently, the security forces arrested three journalists who posted supposedly unacceptable stories on their websites. But there is no way the authorities can control the chat-rooms, the exchange of e-mail, and the access to the information on the Internet.

Let me sum up: I believe Iranian women have come a long way since the first few years of the Revolution. They have forced the state to retreat at each stage by their presence and perseverance in

the public sphere; by enduring harassment in the places of work and on the streets; by fighting legal impediments in the courts; by ignoring the attempts to impose on them a dress code and mode of behavior; and by putting up with the humiliation in their daily lives. They insisted on holding on to their jobs and professions and remaining visible in the public sphere. It was the women who used Islam as a vehicle to improve their status by arguing that Islam is not against women's rights, and that everything depends on how and by whom Islamic law is interpreted.

What is interesting is the admiration for these women expressed by people from both traditional and non-traditional groups. They all agree that had it not been for the women's continuing struggle to retain their rights, Iranian women today would be relegated to their homes, to the traditional gender stereotypes of women's work and to the traditional roles of women in society.

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Iran: A Solution Rather Than a Problem: The Politics of Reform

During an official state visit in Tehran, on New Year's Eve in 1977, U.S. President Jimmy Carter saluted the Shah of Iran and called his country "an island of stability" in the Middle East. One year later, a popular revolutionary movement forced the Shah into exile and, in February 1979, ended the Pahlavi monarchy.

By all accounts, the Iranian Revolution remains an unfinished project. The intense factionalism of Iranian politics, in addition to ongoing friction between the state and civil society in the last decade, is reflected in various aspects of social and political life. While influential factions within the clergy have succeeded in hampering the flourishing of democratic institutions (free press, electoral politics, civil liberties), they have also failed to establish theocratic totalitarianism. The present Iranian government is not theocratic because it does follow a constitution, (albeit with contradictory assertions about the institutional sources of power) and it draws its legitimacy from a popular political process. Nor can it be regarded as totalitarian, because genuinely competing interests within the polity do not allow any one faction to dominate all of the instruments of power.

A glance at a statistical depiction of changes in the last 25 years highlights Iran as a transforming society with deeply contradictory elements. For example, as Table 1 shows, while the press in Iran is one of the most vibrant in the region, far freer than it was under the Shah, it must also deal with rigorously constraining judicial bodies, which constantly attempt to limit the freedom of the press. Although Iran now has the highest number of female university students in the region (55% of the incoming students in 2001), women occupy only 15-20% of all jobs in the country. Iranian women's participation in politics and their role in civic associations are comparable to those of men, but there is still a lack recognition of their basic rights, particularly in family and criminal law.

IRAN	1976	2001
Population	34M	64M
Illiteracy rate	52% (2 to 1 women to men ratio)	17% (1% under the age of 18)
Average income	\$100 (per month)	\$60.5 (per month)
Exchange Rate	70 (rials) to 1 (\$)	8,000 to 1
Total university graduates	440,000	4.8 million
Unemployment	2.9%	12.5%
Licensed Newspapers	7	Starting 87, Ending 48
No. of mosques in Tehran	1,800	2,300
Status of women	No mandatory dress codes. Equal rights under the criminal and family law. 2 to 1 illiteracy rate (women to men)	Mandatory <i>hijab</i> . Loss of equal rights in inheritance, family, and criminal law. 55% percent of all incoming university students. 15% workforce.
International film awards	3	118 (1989-2001)

TABLE 1. Statistical Comparison of Socio-Economic Condition in Iran

Source: Haleh Anvari, *Guardian*, September 25, 2001

Iran in 2003 is an emerging democratic society with competing social and political forces that seek, on the one hand, to accelerate democratization, and, on the other, to contain and ultimately repress such trends. I would argue that the Islamic Republic of Iran has the greatest potential for offering a stabilizing force in the region, one which will not necessarily undermine American and European interests. In order to appreciate this somewhat counterintuitive assertion, one needs to understand the Iranian situation in its specific cultural, historical, and political circumstances.

In this briefing, I shall try to show some of the inherent complexities of the Iranian political system. In particular, I will discuss how the post-revolutionary regime has shown flexibility as well as rigidity in accepting or rejecting democratic institutional changes.

In the last quarter century, Iran has gone through three discernable Republics, each of which assumed power with an agenda and a dominant ideology. As show in table 2, the First Republic, “State-Building,” dates from 1979 to 1989; the Second Republic, “Institutionalizing,” dates from 1989 to 1997; and finally the Third Republic, “Transforming,” dates from 1997 to the present.

	Period	Doctrine	Main Objective
1 st Republic	1979-1989	Ideological	State-Building
2 nd Republic	1989-1997	Pragmatic	Institutionalizing
3 rd Republic	1997-Present	Transformationist	Building Civil Society

Table 2. Iran’s three Republics

The First Republic (1979 to 1989), which overthrew the Pahlavi dynasty, was characterized by the project of post-revolutionary state-building led directly by the leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini. During this period, the Iranian state consolidated its power by eliminating and de-legitimizing competing groups. Khomeini and his allies ridiculed liberal nationalists for their Western propensities. The Islamists and the left accused them of betraying the anti-western core of the revolution for refusing to be committed to an emerging Islamic political lexicon and for resisting revolutionary actions such as nationalization plans and support for anti-imperialist and Islamic revolutionary movements around the globe. Some 50 to 70 thousand people were executed in summary trials, tens of thousands were tortured and imprisoned under inhumane conditions, and more than one million Iranians were exiled.

The takeover of the American embassy in Tehran in November 1979 was the culmination of the first phase of the consolidation of power by the militant clergy. The seizure of the embassy served two purposes for the new regime: first, it forced the liberal provisional government of Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan to resign; second, it defused the secular left's critique of the clergy as too accommodating to Western powers. The take-over of the American embassy in Tehran was not a carefully designed confrontation with the United States; rather, it was motivated by domestic considerations of state-building. Holding the American diplomats hostage for 444 days was an unintended consequence of the invasion. The militant Muslim students who stormed the embassy, originally wished to salvage the Revolution from competing secular leftist and liberal factions. A conjunction of international and domestic forces pushed the students into a more radical posture with no obvious way to end the embassy occupation. The students' actions made the new regime vulnerable to American military retaliation and economic embargo. In effect, the American hostage crisis, and later, Iraq's war on Iran, conditioned the process of state-building, thereby opening the path for repression.

Brutality intensified when the secular leftists, who contributed to the elimination of the liberal faction, withdrew their support and began to organize against the Islamist regime. The new regime initiated a campaign of repression and executions, which by the mid 1980s assured the monopoly of state power in the hands of a governing elite unified by their commitment to the principle of *velayat-e faqih*, or the rule of the Islamic jurist. The Supreme Leader — first Ayatollah Khomeini, then Ayatollah Khamenei — is referred to as the *faqih*.

In the period after the end of the Iran-Iran War in 1988 and Ayatollah Khomeini's death in June 1989, the Islamic Republic enjoyed relative stability. It was free from serious internal challenges; its principal foreign military threat was kept at bay. Before his death, Ayatollah Khomeini set the stage for the emergence of the Second Republic.

The Second Republic (1989-1997) is primarily associated with the two-term presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. In a decree issued in 1987, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini laid out the main ideological foundations of this new state-formation. In a pragmatic move based on the old *Shi'ite* notion of *maslaha* (expediency), Khomeini pronounced that the Islamic government (the elected body) "was the most important of the divine commandments and has

primacy over all derivative divine commandments . . . even over prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage to Mecca.” Furthermore, he declared, “In order to build a road, the state is justified in demolishing a mosque.” Khomeini intended to counter the dogmatic tendencies within the regime, prominently represented by the Guardian Council, which determined the constitutionality of legislation passed in the *Majlis* (parliament) and has been dominated by traditionalist, mostly apolitical, ayatollahs.

In 1988, Khomeini institutionalized his decree by creating a procedure for settling disputes among the conservatives of the Guardian Council, the parliament, and the state. He ordered the establishment of *Shura-ye Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nizam* (Council for the Expediency Discernment of the [Islamic] Order, known as the Expediency Council). The Expediency Council initially consisted of 13 members of the *Majlis*, the executive branch of the government, and the Guardian Council. Since its establishment in 1988, the Guardian Council’s members have consistently represented a minority position during the Expediency Council’s sessions.

After the establishment of the Expediency Council, the Head of the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Safi, presented his resignation to Ayatollah Khomeini. In his letter of resignation, Safi expressed his dissatisfaction with the idea of prioritizing the expediency of the Islamic state over the *Shari’ah*, and declared that he could not fulfill his duties under such a pretense. Ayatollah Safi’s resignation reflected the most profound doctrinal differences within the Islamic Republic; it was a turning point in the institutional separation of religion and state.

Khomeini’s institutionalization of the means of arbitration between different governing factions was designed in anticipation of his eventual demise, which occurred in June 1989. He was conscious of the crisis that might emerge in the absence of his charismatic authority. Therefore, he rendered problematic what had heretofore been regarded as Islamically sanctioned practice in jurisprudence; he turned it into a *negotiated* matter that would be fought over in the Expediency Council. With Khomeini’s death, the absolute political authority of the *faqih* was gone.

The Second Republic was officially inaugurated with the ascension of Ayatollah Khamenei to the office of *vali-e faqih* (Supreme Leader) and the subsequent election of Rafsanjani to the presidency. In his inauguration speech, Rafsanjani emphasized that with his presidency the Revolution was entering a “reconstruction phase.” The country, he said, needed to recover from the economic devastation caused by the eight-year war with Iraq, America’s embargo, and the international isolation following the Islamic Revolution. During Rafsanjani’s first term, the revolutionary rhetoric of the redistribution of wealth and social justice disappeared from his political lexicon. Instead, he advocated the notion of the Islamic virtues of prosperity and economic success. Rafsanjani intended to dilute the revolutionary core of the regime with a pragmatic policy that would encourage domestic as well as foreign investment in Iran. He attracted many technocrats to his administration and embarked on an economic reform program, albeit without a corresponding political reform. Not only did Rafsanjani use the power of his office to realize his agenda, he also encouraged the organization of an emerging technocratic intelligentsia whose main goal was to establish support in civil society for his agenda. To a great extent, Rafsanjani played an important role in moving Iran away from its Jacobin phase of state-

building, and bringing it to an era when the objectives of the Revolution could be discussed again without the threats of blood and iron.

The Third Republic (1997 – present) emerged unexpectedly as a response to the Second Republic's inability, or unwillingness, to engage institutions of civil society in its proposed agenda of "reconstruction." In 1997, with President Rafsanjani completing his second term, Nateq-Nuri, Speaker of the *Majlis* was the status-quo candidate of the conservative clerics and expected to be a sure winner. However, Seyed Mohammad Khatami, a liberal ayatollah who held the insignificant position of Head of the National Library, won in a landslide obtaining close to 70% of the popular vote. More than 85% of eligible Iranian voters participated in the election. In his campaign Khatami pledged to strengthen the foundations of civil society by making the state and all ruling parties accountable to the constitution and to popular demands.

President Khatami's stunning victory was made possible by a strong coalition of women's and youth movements. These groups were organized in student and professional associations and neighborhood organizations. Their strength became evident when Khatami's campaign offices were closed in Tehran only a week prior to election day. Within two days after the closure, women's organizations mobilized more than 250,000 women to march on the streets of Tehran in support of his candidacy. University students, although not in as great a number, also played a crucial role in mobilizing the populace to participate in the election. Students set up campaign offices even in rural and remote areas of the country to assure a high participation and a landslide victory for Khatami.

Significantly, the leaders of the Second Republic conceded their defeat and handed over the office of the presidency to the candidate of the loyal opposition. At the time, in 1996, the "reconstructionists" of the Second Republic were considering a referendum for a constitutional amendment to allow Rafsanjani to run for a third term, and in effect, turn himself into another Middle Eastern President-for-Life. But the decision to abandon the project shows that the regime was flexible enough to absorb the shocks of the change of power among competing factions. It also demonstrates that the popular legitimacy of the regime continues to be a foundational element of the Islamic Republic.

Khatami's Third Republic set out to transform the regime from within by (1) increasing the power of the Office of the President; (2) making the Supreme Leader (*vali faqih*) accountable to law and the constitution; (3) containing the extra-judicial and arbitrary powers of rogue elements within the security forces (with close ties to the Ministry of Information and the Judiciary); (4) implementing more permissive Islamic codes of ethics and behavior in the public sphere; and (5) advocating equal rights for men and women under family and criminal law.

The first two years of the Third Republic saw a burgeoning of new print media and the formation of interest groups in civil society. The promising first two years encouraged more participation in the electoral process, and in both the 1999 municipal and 2000 *Majlis* elections, respectively,

close to 75% of the eligible voters cast their ballots. The Third Republic demonstrated that the frictions inside the regime are genuine, and participatory politics remains an instrument for solving social problems in the country.

One of the most important, although unintended, consequences of the Islamic regime in Iran has been the emergence of a new class of Muslim intellectuals who advocate a more hermeneutical and open interpretation of Islam. It is a rare occurrence that the controversial issues of hermeneutics profoundly and directly impact the everyday life of a nation. Iran is passing through such a historical moment. The trial of a newspaper editor to custody battles in family

	Main actors	Main events
First Republic (1979-89)	-Clerical establishment: Ayatollah Khomeini (Leader) -Liberals: Mehdi Bazargan (Provincial Prime-Minister) -Secular Left and <i>Mojahedin</i>	-Invasion of American embassy -Iran-Iraq War -Civil war in Kurdistan -Executions and exiles -Complete suppression of dissent
Second Republic (1989-97)	-The President: Rafsanjani -The leader: Khamenei -The emerging dissident intelligentsia -New social movements (youth & women)	-Constitutional amendment. -Privatization efforts. -Emerging civil society
Third Republic (1997-Present)	-The Reformists: President Khatami -Abolitionists—Transformationist -Traditionalists & Pragmatist Alliance: -The Judiciary / security forces -Office of the Leader -The Guardian Council -The Expediency Council-Stal -Student and Women's movements	-1997 election and the peaceful transfer of power to the loyal opposition candidate -Student riots of 1999 -Burgeoning of new papers and the struggle to keep them open - emate of the reform

Table 3. Main actors and the main events during each Republic

court, from regulations of parliamentary elections to gender-segregated bus seats — all have become issues for Qur’anic exegesis and competing renditions of the *Shari’ah* (the Islamic penal and civil law). These developments have taken theological debates and issues of jurisprudence out of the closed quarters of seminaries into a large public sphere of lay men and women. Not only did this “Reformation” movement facilitate the emergence of the Third Republic, it also represents an unprecedented reflective understanding of Islam and its institutional presence in Iranian society. Iranians have never before been so deeply and so widely engaged in debates about democracy and culturally specific issues of rights.

Iranian Politics in 2003: Reformists versus Conservatives

Factional politics in Iran today are complex. Broadly speaking, there are two groups: the reformists and the conservatives. But each of these camps is divided internally. There are politicians in each camp that are closer to others in the opposite group than to some elements of their own. In the reformist camp there are what I call “accommodationists” and “abolitionists,” and in the conservative coalition there are “concessionists” and “autocratic abolitionists.” Figure 1 below is a summary of what each of these groups envisions for Iran.

President Khatami leads the reformist “accommodationists” who want to transform the Iranian regime into an Islamic democratic state, maintaining the concept of *velayt-e faqih* (Supreme Leader). This group acknowledges its sluggish progress but seeks to continue political transformation from within. The group argues that institutional change requires time and may only be sustainable through the wide participation of society.

Others within the reformist group have lost faith in Khatami’s ability to bring about change in the current climate of political stalemate. These are the “abolitionists” who no longer believe that the Islamic Republic can be reinvented based on the rule of law and the recognition of basic civil liberties, and wish to abolish Khatami’s reform project. As the “abolitionist” faction gains support among the reformers, electoral participatory politics loses its significance. The poor voter turn-out during the March 2003 municipal elections is symptomatic: about 40% in the country as a whole and a shockingly low 12% in Tehran voted. Although none of those who lean towards abolishing Khatami’s reform project speak of overthrowing the regime, one needs to be conscious of possible violence by a small group. While a great number of Iranians are disillusioned by Khatami’s reformist agenda, they are not willing to participate in another bloody regime change.

Heading the “concessionists” in the conservative camp is former president Rafsanjani, who is now leader of the Expediency Council. This faction seeks accommodation with the reformists, as it believes that the regime still needs the legitimacy afforded by the popular electoral process. “Concessionists” are conscious of Iran’s image in the global financial markets and international community, and therefore do not advocate the establishment of a totalitarian theocracy. Maintaining a debilitated reform movement would add to the credibility of the “concessionists,”

domestically and internationally. They have calculated that a total disregard for popular demands would be detrimental to the sustainability of their political power.

Finally, the most hard-line group among the conservatives is the “autocratic abolitionists,” formed from factions within the leadership of the Revolutionary Guards, the Guardian Council, and the Assembly of the Experts. They wish to eliminate reformists from all organs of power and rule by coercion, rather than lead by consent. The leadership of the Revolutionary Guards probably resents the reform movement less for reasons of ideology than because of the threat it poses to the Guards’ political and economic power. Political transparency and accountability (which a strong civil society demands) would necessarily expose the intricate web of relationships which make the Guards such a potent force in the Islamic Republic. Within the conservative clergy, including some members of the Guardian Council, are those who fundamentally oppose democratic government. In their view, an Islamic state should be accountable only to God. As the masses are ignorant of the divine interest, the clergy has an obligation to annul popular mandates if it judges them un-Islamic.

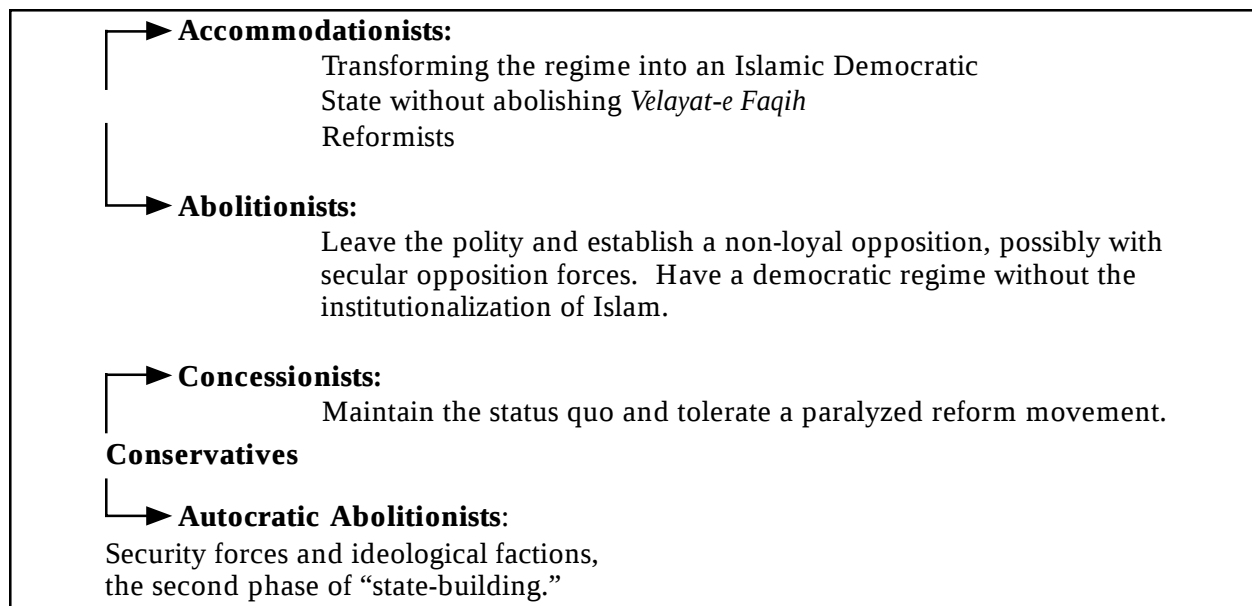


Figure 1 What Does Each Faction Envision?

The Islamic Republic and the September 11 Tragedy

Iranians were the only Islamic people in the Middle East who poured into the streets of major cities and held candlelight vigils in honor of the victims of the attack on the Twin Towers. Not only did the regime refrain from interfering with the public ceremonies of mourning, it also officially extended its sympathy and condolences to the American people. September 11, 2001, had two significant consequences for Iranian-American relations. First, the Iranian regime saw the tragedy as an opportunity to exonerate itself from involvement in the global networks of terror. The Islamic Republic had long been hostile to the al-Qaeda terrorists and their Taliban supporters in Kabul. Second, September 11 gave another chance to the Islamic Republic to

move closer to the U.S. through assuring a peaceful and smooth transition in post-Taliban Afghanistan. In both fronts, Iranians were successful. They did not oppose military action against Afghanistan or the expansion of American military presence in Central Asia, and furthermore, offered Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) assistance to American forces operating near Iranian territories.

In December 2001, the Iranian delegation played a crucial role in the Bonn conference convened to determine the composition of the interim government in Afghanistan. The Iranians forced their own ally, the former President of Afghanistan, Burhanuddin Rabbani, to withdraw in favor of Hamid Karzai who was supported by the U.S. This was one of the rare moments when the Iranian President was able to assert his leadership in regard to Iran-U.S. relations without significant resistance from his conservative opposition. Unfortunately, the Bush administration did not recognize the magnitude of the Islamic Republic's gesture. Not only did the administration fail to acknowledge the Iranians' role, but President Bush further dampened the overtures emerging from Iran by lumping Iran together with Iraq and North Korea in the "Axis of Evil."

Afshin Molavi

Journalist and author of *Persian Pilgrimages : Journeys Across Iran*

Jobs, Democracy, and Pink Floyd: What Young Iranians Want and Why It Matters to U.S. Policymakers

Thanks to CNA for gathering us today to discuss topics of great importance to understanding contemporary Iran.

I believe everyone in this room understands the significance of the demographic situation in Iran right now: two-thirds of the population is under the age of 30, one-half is under the age of 21, one-third is under the age of 15. This is an extraordinarily young population: of Iran's 65-70 million, about 45 million either were not yet born or were mere children at the time of the 1979 Revolution against the Shah. One must also look at the demographic distribution in Iran today. From 1954 to 2000 the urban population increased from one-third to roughly two-thirds of the population. The movement of Iranians from rural areas into the cities impacts some of the political issues that Professor Ghamari-Tabrizi, mentioned such as the ability to mobilize with relative ease 250,000 women to demonstrate on behalf of then-presidential candidate Khatami. It's important to understand what this large, mostly urbanized, youthful population in Iran wants.

I worked in Iran for the *Washington Post* from 1999 to 2001. I traveled to about 20 cities and villages, where I engaged with Iranians from a wide cross-section of socio-economic backgrounds, and I engaged with many young Iranians. I know that American policymakers have been grappling with what young Iranians want. I will start with an illustrative anecdote. As a reporter I attended many rallies: pro-democracy rallies, reformist rallies, hard-liner rallies. One particular hard-liner rally protested against a student play.

An Iranian student wrote a play satirizing the college entrance examinations, or *concours*, which more than 1.5 million Iranians take every year. Only about 150,000 to 200,000 are accepted at universities, so you can imagine the stress this places on the students and their families. In the play a young man is studying for the *concours* and in the middle of the night, the Imam-e Zaman, the Shi'a messiah figure appears to him and says, "I have come here to save the world, and I've selected you as my helper." The young man looks at this seminally important figure in religious history and says, "I have the *concours* tomorrow. Can we start saving the world next week?"

Although this play was only published in an obscure student newspaper and was never performed, a member of the conservative *basiji* youth volunteers found the work blasphemous. He brought it to the attention of some of the hard-liners linked to the judiciary who then instigated the *basiji* to rally against the play and the young playwright. There were about 1,000 people at the rally I attended, a far lower number than at the pro-democracy student rallies or the rallies on behalf of editors who have been jailed or newspapers that have been closed. But the rally was significant nevertheless because the hard-line minority does have a loud voice.

At the rally, some young people were standing to the side observing. One of them came up and questioned me. When he found out I worked for an American newspaper, he became quite agitated, saying, "This is not fair. You Americans come here, you take pictures of these hard-liners, you take pictures of the burning flags and everybody thinks we're crazy fanatics. This is not fair." He went off in a huff. The next incident was interesting and comical at the same time. When I pulled aside one of the hard-liners to discuss the protest, he started questioning me instead: "Who do you write for?" I replied, "The *Washington Post*." His eyes sort of lit up and a group gathered around him, and he continued: "How long have you been here?" to which I responded, "A few months." He asked if I lived in Iran and I said, "I do now." Then he asked me if I had an American passport. I told him I did. I was beginning to get somewhat apprehensive, but then he asked, "How can I get a green card?" When you have young hard-liners seeking permanent resident status in the United States, something is afoot in Iran.

I sought out the first young man again: "You walked off in a huff. I'm a journalist. I'm supposed to cover these types of events. If you have a message, tell me what it is." He said, "We don't hate Americans, of course you know that. If there's anybody we hate, it's these hard-liners who are strangling our country. I would love to see America back in Iran. I would love to see American companies doing business here. I don't understand why Americans don't like us. Why do they block us from World Bank loans? Why do they sanction foreign companies from doing business here? Why do they try to hurt us economically? I have so much respect for America and American freedoms, but I am confused by their actions in Iran."

When Americans do go to Iran, they're treated in a sense like rock stars. I remember a student from Wyoming who was traveling across Iran with four young men from Holland. The Dutchmen complained, "Everywhere we go people are polite to us, but when they find out this guy's an American they embrace him; they treat him like a rock star. So from now on, we're going to tell everybody we're Americans." It is important to note that the Iranian "Street" is by far the most pro-American in all of the Middle East right now. I just came back from the Arabian Peninsula; you should hear some of the sentiments expressed by the "Streets" of our allies over there.

But, we must understand the source of some of the pro-Americanism in Iran. It's not necessarily due to what we've done here in America; it's the idea that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Iranian conservatives and hard-liners have been bashing America for so long, the reformers think we must be doing something right. By embracing that young man from Wyoming, his Iranian counterparts were making a political statement and taking a subtle jab at the conservatives. We have a unique opportunity to reach out to this young generation of Iranians, and I think it's up to the people in this room to come up with the ways of doing it.

Finally, I think it's very important to remember that Iran is a natural regional power despite its relative decline over the past 25 years. Iran is three times the size of France, with vast natural resources, and a large, educated population. If the recent estimates of the United Nations Population Fund are correct, Iran will have a population of 120 million by the year 2050. This is a country that needs to be taken seriously, and what's on the minds of young Iranians needs to be taken seriously.

Six issues preoccupy young Iranians:

The Economy:

The first issue is the state of the economy, and jobs, jobs, jobs. To borrow a phrase from the first Clinton presidential campaign: “It’s the economy, stupid.” Unemployment in Iran is high — about 20% according to the economists I’ve talked to; some even say it could be as high as 25%. Even those who are employed are often poorly paid. I can’t tell you how many times I met young Iranians with masters degrees driving taxis, physicians moonlighting as traders and engineers moonlighting in other businesses, because the economy is in such bad shape and current wages do not correspond with the cost of living. Poor economic prospects encourage brain drain. The IMF estimates that nearly one in every four Iranians with college degrees is working outside the country. That figure is probably too high, but those who leave are often the best and the brightest. Only the most qualified can get student or work visas from the Australian embassy, or the Canadian embassy, or the New Zealand embassy, or even the embassies of the U.A.E. and Syria. Seeking a better life abroad has become a rite of passage for young Iranians. The state-dominated nature of the economy, plus a widespread perception of government corruption, has led to a massive mistrust of authority among Iranian youth and this, in turn becomes a propellant for change. There is also sporadic social unrest among industrial workers who haven’t been paid and teachers who feel that their wages need to be raised. Professor Ghamari-Tabrizi put up an interesting statistic relating to exchange rate of the Iranian *rial*. Iranians use the term *toman*, which is one tenth. Everywhere you go in Iran, people say, “Before the Revolution, one dollar was 7 toman. Today, it’s 800 toman.” You also hear people all over Iran say, “Before the Revolution I could travel to Europe, and now I can barely travel to Armenia or Turkey.” So there is a widespread sense of disillusionment with the state of the economy.

Democracy as a Unifying Political Idea:

There seems to be a gradual emergence among Iranian youth of a unifying political idea which is, broadly speaking, “democracy.” Not everyone understands all of the implications of democracy. For some, it means social freedoms: the ability to go into a park and play the guitar, or walk with a boyfriend or girlfriend and not be accosted by the morals police. For others, it means the sort of political freedoms that all of us in this room understand as a real functioning democracy. But what I think is important is the recent student demonstrations on behalf of the Professor Hashem Aghajari who was jailed recently on blasphemy charges. For the first time, we saw students calling for secular democracy quite openly. From 1997 and the election of President Mohammad Khatami until this year, the leading student groups were essentially Islamists and reformists, who spoke of “Islamic Democracy.” Now, in 2003, prominent student leaders are saying things like, “We want democracy without a prefix or a suffix.” By that they are saying, “We want democracy but we don’t want it necessarily cloaked in Islamic terms.” Is there a widespread secular democratic movement? It is hard for me to say, as I’m not there now, but I have noted increased use of the symbols of Iran’s secular past—for example, the singing of the old Iranian national anthem — at many of the student rallies. These are important symbols because they’re directed at the conservatives in the Islamic

Republic. The students are saying: “We are nationalist Iranians, and we may even be secular nationalist Iranians.”

Less Attraction to Leftist Utopian Ideas:

It is also important to note that among Iranian youth today, there is less of a tendency to embrace of the sort of leftist, utopian ideas of the 1970s’ generation of young people and intellectuals. In place of the Che Guevara posters which proliferated on Iranian university campuses in the 1970s, you now see posters for computer classes and English lessons. Iranian students today are really practical. As one said to me, “We don’t have the luxury of being leftist, we’re too busy trying to find jobs and make a living.” This is also true of young working-class Iranians. They are less attracted to Islamic utopian ideas and banner slogans such as “Islam is the solution.”

Questioning the Clerics:

In the past it would have been extremely rare for the sons and daughters of working-class Iranians to question what a cleric might have to say. Now, you find young working-class Iranians, who — thanks to the Iranian education system, are literate and much better informed than their parents were at the same age — questioning religious leaders and saying, “No, that’s not right.” Many are attracted to Sufi Islamic philosophers, such as Abdol Karim Soroush, who are seen as anti-establishment. I doubt that many young Iranians fully understand the esoteric nature of Soroush’s arguments, but as he is considered anti-establishment, they pack his public lectures. While I was in a village in Iran, a young man said to me, “There is a difference between *mazhabe-Ma* (our religion) and *mazhabe-dowlat* (state religion).”

A Keen Sense of Iranian Identity:

Iranian youth have a keen sense of their national identity. While conservatives argue that a liberalized system would tempt young Iranians into discarding their traditions in an orgy of consumption of Western movies and music, in fact, young Iranians are quite proud of their culture. It is a great source of pride when Iranian films win international awards – which they do with increasing frequency. I remember when I was in an internet café in Tehran, and a young man came in with a Madonna CD and said, “Look at this selection— Madonna singing Rumi!” He was delighted that Americans were recognizing the genius of this 13th-century Persian poet who has become all the rage in Hollywood guru mystical circles these days.

Rising Tide of Nationalism

There is a rising tide of nationalism among Iranian youth. It often manifests itself in a desire to learn about Iran’s pre-Islamic past. Books about Cyrus the Great are popular, and discussions and lectures about Iran’s pre-Islamic past are over-subscribed on campuses. Iran’s soccer victories also offer occasions for demonstrations of nationalist pride unaffiliated with the government. The young men on the national soccer team don’t wear beards. In Iran’s politics of personal appearance, a

beard is an important symbol of solidarity with the goals of the Islamic Republic. Whenever these young, clean-shaven men win big games, Iranians go out into the streets and sing nationalist songs, using a sports victory as a means to protest against the government and the conservatives. There has also been a revival of interest in former Premier Mohammad Mossadeq, who was overthrown in 1953 in a CIA-supported *coup d'état* after he nationalized British oil interests. Dr. Mossadeq, a Qajar dynasty aristocrat educated in Europe, was a secular nationalist who clashed not only with the Shah but also with senior clerics. For young Iranians, he is a compelling liberal nationalist hero.

The Significance of Pink Floyd

When I was living in Iran, one of the most popular books in the country was a volume of the lyrics of the British rock group Pink Floyd translated into Persian. Pink Floyd has been a hit in Iran for quite some time (the band has been in existence since the 1960s) but the fact that a Persian translation of their lyrics has recently become a best-seller is revelatory. Let me read you some of the lyrics of Pink Floyd songs: “Goodbye, cruel world, I’m leaving you today, goodbye, goodbye, oh you people there’s nothing you can say, to make me change my mind, goodbye.” Another song laments: “Hey, you out there in the cold, getting lonely, getting old, can you feel me?” These are lyrics of existential angst, disillusionment, pain, and loneliness. Some Pink Floyd songs celebrate the drug culture, which we will hear about next. The fact that Pink Floyd has captivated so many Iranian youth at this point in time says something worth investigating.



HIV/AIDS and Drug Use in Iran: Crisis and Opportunity

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Introduction

On behalf of my colleague and co-author Ms. Sahar Rooholamini, let me begin by thanking the Center for Strategic Studies at The CNA Corporation, for organizing this workshop. Let me also thank all of you for being here.

My name is Kaveh Khoshnood and I am an assistant professor at Yale School of Public Health. For over 12 years, I have devoted my professional career to understanding and responding to the epidemic of HIV/AIDS, particularly among drug users. My work began in New Haven, Connecticut in the late 1980s and has since expanded to Russia, China, Tajikistan, and Iran.

Today I am here to share with you what I know of the twin epidemics of drug addiction and HIV/AIDS in Iran, the country of my birth. I also hope to convince you that the massive epidemic of drug addiction and the impending explosion of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Iran and its neighbors present both a crisis and an opportunity for US policymakers.

One of the continual challenges for public health researchers has been to maintain effective communication with policy-makers and other government sectors, so an opportunity such as this is both rare and welcome.

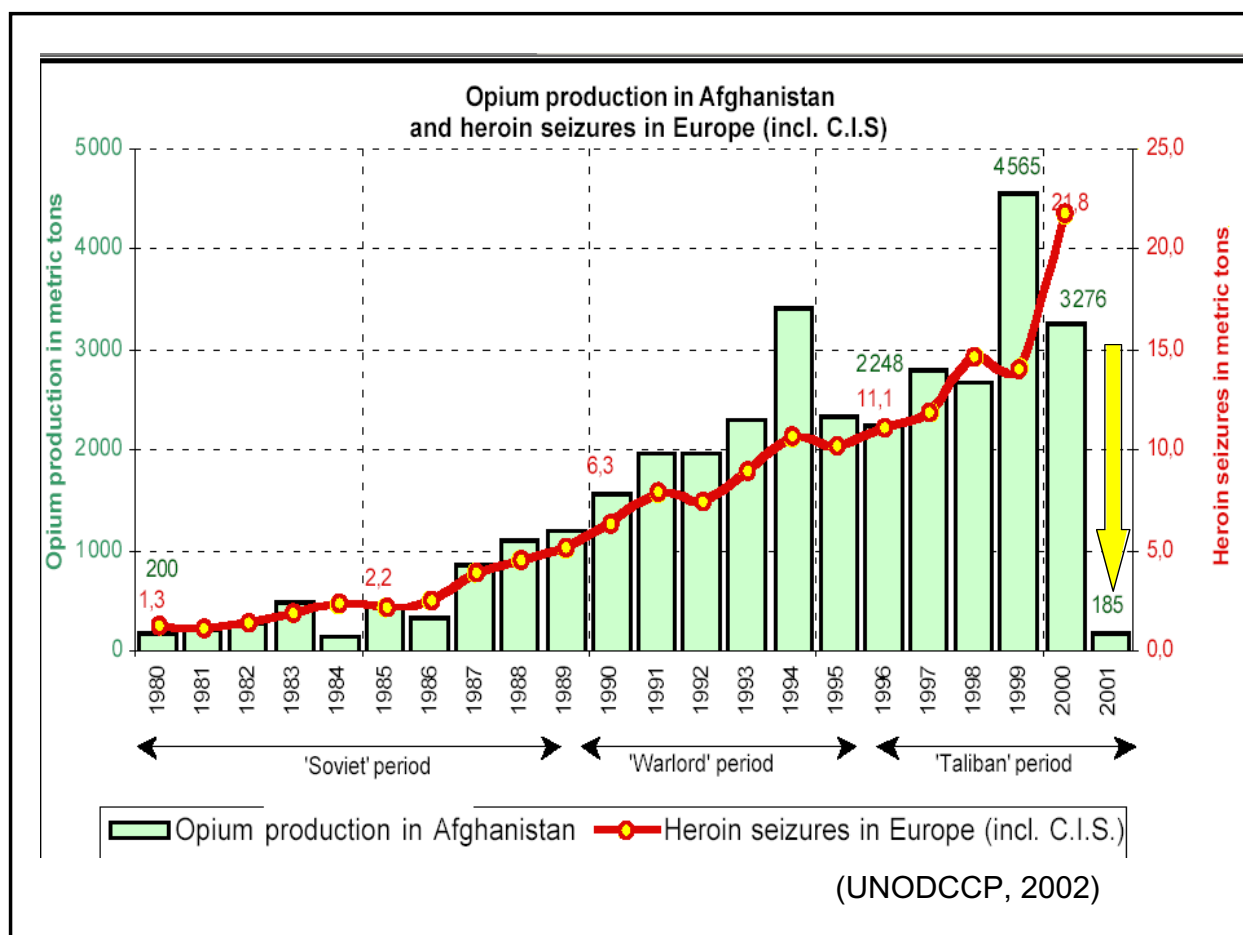
Strategic Location of Iran



Iran is a corridor for drugs from Afghanistan to the Persian Gulf, Europe, and Central Asia

Iran is strategically positioned as a neighbor of Afghanistan, the largest producer of opium in the world. The opium produced in Afghanistan is trafficked through Iran and finds its way into markets in Central Asia, Western Europe, and the Persian Gulf states. Drug production and trafficking is a multinational, cross-border, and extremely lucrative business estimated to be worth 100 billion dollars annually. Approximately two-thirds of all opiate abusers in the world consumed illicit drugs from Afghanistan in the second half of the 1990s.

According to Iran's own estimates, only 20% of all drugs smuggled into Iran are confiscated. Moreover, the Iranian border patrol has paid a heavy price for this and according to UNDCP estimates, in the last 2 decades, more than 3,000 Iranian border police have lost their lives in anti-narcotics operations.



Opium production in Afghanistan and heroin seizures in Europe (incl. C.I.S)

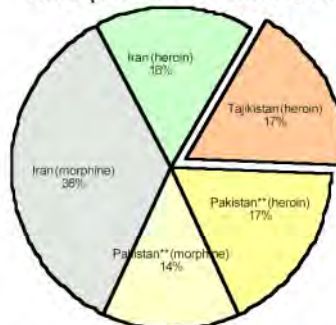
As you can see in this chart, the green bars represent opium production in Afghanistan, which increased steadily throughout the 1980s and 1990s, with proportional increases in heroin seizures in Europe, indicated by the red line. The yellow arrow points to the sudden decrease in production after the Taliban ban on opium poppy cultivation in 2001. This decrease was only temporary in its ramifications. The UN agencies responsible for drug control have reported evidence of ample stocks of heroin and opium, and a UN survey in 2002 showed that opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan after the war has resumed with the potential to reach mid-1990s levels (UNODCCP, 2002).

Public health consequences of drug supply fluctuation

- Drug supply fluctuations lead to changes in drug quality, purity, and price
- When drug prices soar, drug users turn to injection as a more cost-effective practice
- Shift from smoking opium to injecting heroin
- Heroin injection is often associated with criminal activity and serious health consequences including Hepatitis B, C, HIV infection and drug overdose

52% of all Heroin and Opium Seizures Occur in Iran

Heroin and morphine seizures in immediate neighborhood of Afghanistan in 2001 (Total: 24.7 metric tons*)



* Data for "other Central Asia" for 2001 - which accounted for 3% of heroin/morphine seizures in 2000 - are not as yet available.
** Pakistan's heroin/morphine seizures amounted to 7.8 tons, accounting for 31% of heroin/morphine seizures in the region in 2001. The heroin / morphine split is based on reported individual seizure data.

(UNODCCP, 2002)



The epidemic of drug addiction in Iran

- 1.2 - 2 million people are addicted to opium and heroin
- 300,000 are estimated to be injection drug users
- Typical opium addict: middle-aged married, employed male
- The picture is changing: more youth, women, homeless, injection users, involvement in petty crime

Iran is also experiencing a massive epidemic of drug addiction, conservatively estimated by the government to be between 1.2 to 2 million of its nearly 70 million citizens. In comparison, there are an estimated 1 million opiate addicts in the United States, which has more than 4 times the population of Iran. Some 300,000 of all drug users in Iran consume drugs through injection.

The stereotypical opium user in Iran is a middle-aged, married, and employed man. This picture is rapidly being replaced with an increasing number of heroin users who are young, women, homeless, and involved in drug-related petty crimes.



Iran at Present: Young and Vulnerable

- Population: 66 million
- **44 million are under the age of 30**
- High rates of unemployment
- Limited opportunities for higher education
- Inadequate recreational opportunities
- Increasing rates of depression

This changing picture of drug use in Iran is particularly alarming given the substantial youth population. Nearly 70% of the population is under the age of 30. This young population faces: high rates of unemployment, limited opportunities for higher education, lack of recreation and increasing rates of depression (Mokri 2002).



Drug Policy in Iran 1979 – early 1990s

- Opium poppy cultivation banned and eradicated
- All drug treatment centers closed by 1981
- Harsh penalties for drug users
- Mandatory detention at “rehabilitation” centers

The post-revolutionary Iranian government’s first response was to ban and eradicate opium production, close down and ban drug treatment centers, and incarcerate drug addicts.

Harsh penalties were imposed for drug possession and selling. Prisons were quickly filled with small-time drug dealers and even an island in the Persian Gulf was set aside for incarcerating drug addicts.

These policies did not work. Not only were drug users not deterred from their addiction, but the epidemic grew. Prisons soon became the breeding ground for new infectious disease epidemics. Outbreaks of HIV, hepatitis and tuberculosis have been reported from several Iranian prisons.



Drug Policy in Iran Mid-1990s – present

Paradigm Shift

- Official acknowledgment of the magnitude of drug addiction and failure of previous policies
- Acknowledgment of drug use and need for demand reduction
- Treatment of addiction legalized
- Outpatient clinics built nationwide

This paradigm shift is fragile!

In the mid 1990s, however, there was a paradigm shift in the Iranian government's response to the massive growing epidemics of drug addiction and HIV/AIDS. Government officials openly admitted the magnitude of drug addiction and the failure of their previous policies. This was perhaps in response to the larger political, economic and social forces that have been discussed by our colleagues. For the first time since the 1979 Revolution, the treatment of drug addiction was once again legalized.

The Iranian medical and public health community seized this opportunity and responded vigorously. They quickly educated themselves and reached out to their professional colleagues in Europe and North America to learn of effective models in dealing with the twin epidemics of drug addiction and HIV/AIDS. Within a few years, dozens of outpatient clinics were established for treatment of addiction throughout the country.

This opportunity has also been seized by non-governmental and grassroots organizations such as Narcotics Anonymous modeled after the American prototype.

However, this paradigm shift for policymakers in Iran is by no means permanent. Recent news releases have revealed plans to “round up” addicts who were formerly in prison, sending mixed signals about the tenuous nature of drug control and treatment policies in Iran (IRNA 2003). This is a red flag that could indicate a return to more repressive and ineffective drug policies of the past.



HIV/AIDS in Iran

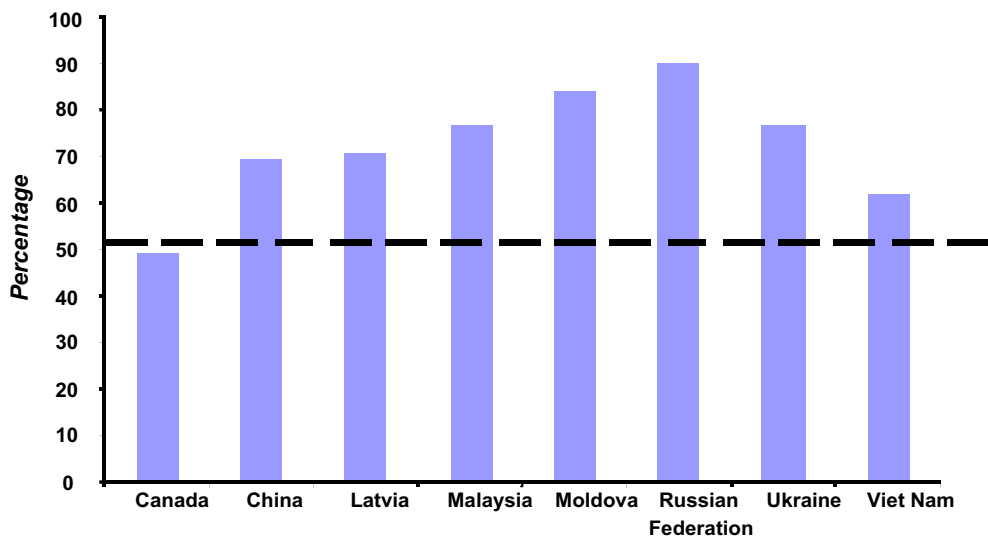
- First AIDS case in Iran: 1987
- Iran Ministry of Health (2002):
 - **3277** HIV-positive individuals
 - 403 AIDS cases, 300 deaths
 - **65%** of HIV/AIDS cases are **male IDUs**
 - **72%** of HIV/AIDS cases are **ages 20-49**
- UNAIDS (2002):
 - **20,000** people* living with HIV/AIDS
 - **Three fold increase** in infections in 2001, compared to both 2000 and 1999
 - "HIV/AIDS accelerating at an alarming rate"

* adults and children

HIV/AIDS was first identified in Iran in 1987, 6 years after its recognition in the United States. Iranian Ministry of Health officials have estimated that, as of April 2002, over 3,000 people have been infected with HIV. The UNAIDS office in Geneva, however, estimates that there are currently **20,000** adults and children living with HIV/AIDS in Iran.

About 70% of the AIDS cases in Iran are attributed to injection drug use. According to the latest UNAIDS report, the HIV epidemic in Iran appears to be accelerating at an alarming rate. In 2001, there were over 1,100 new cases of HIV infection and AIDS diagnosed in Iran, showing a three-fold increase in comparison to both years 2000 and 1999.

Proportion of all new HIV infections that are in injecting drug users, selected countries, 1998-1999



(Data from National AIDS Programs)

What is a likely scenario for the AIDS epidemic in Iran in the next few years?

As depicted in this slide, in countries from various regions, 50-90% of all new HIV infections have been reported among injection drug users.



Summary

- **Drug addiction and HIV/AIDS in Iran are growing public health problems, with real potential for destabilization for Iran and the region.**
- The recent change in government drug policy is a positive but fragile development.
- Capable, accountable, and willing groups of individuals within academia, civil society, and the government are courageously tackling these challenges.
- **US policy-makers can strengthen and support the efforts of these progressive groups.**



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