

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**THE POPULARISATION OF FACTIONAL POLITICS IN THE
IRI FROM KHATAMI TO ROUHANI**

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Government of the London School of Economics for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, London, August 2016.

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ABSTRACT

The fundamental research topic of this thesis is: to determine the extent to which the emergence and evolution of factional groups and their politics have been conditioned by their conception of ‘the role of people’ in the political arena. It will also explore their perceptions of societal demands and expectations in a different period of the IRI’s short history. In other words, it aims to trace and explain the evolution of popularisation of factional politics in the IRI. To answer this question, I also elaborate another related question: the extent to which the emergence and evolution of certain factional groups have been conditioned by the character of personal relationships between key, leading actors in each group. These two interrelated issues represent the most important omissions in the academic literature on factional politics in the IRI. Therefore, by definition, I will show how, with the death of Khomeini in 1989 and the consequent decentralisation of ideological production in the IRI, forcing factional groups to reach out of the institutional context and seek popular electoral support in order to successfully compete in factional struggles within the institutions of the IRI. As a result, societal demands and/or the elite’s perception of these demands became an important element in the dynamics of factional politics in the post-Khomeini era. Various factions articulated their conceptions of ‘the role of people’ in the IRI’s politics-rooted in and justified by their respective interpretations of Khomeinism. Theses competing conceptions of the ‘role of people’ in the IRI engendered the emergence of series of discourses and slogans within the framework of Khomeinism aimed to justify the factions’ claims of being the representatives of popular demands and Khomeinism. Furthermore, the members of the elite of the IRI, both those who participated in the revolution and their offspring, have a long personal history with each other. Positive and negative feelings that emerged from any of these experiences, I intend to show, at some key points have played roles of various degrees of importance in the emergence and evolution of certain factional groups and their actions in vital political events, such as the controversial 2009 elections and its aftermath. The thesis will draw its theoretical base and methodology from the literature on hybrid regimes, faction in democratic and party-based systems, and faction in absolutist systems, in addition to the existing literature on factional politics in the IRI dealing with the institutional context.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AofE – Assembly of Experts (*Majlis-e Khobregan*)

EC – Expediency Council (*Majma'-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam*)

FPL – Friday Prayer Leader (*Setad-e Ejra-ye Eqameh Namaz*)

GC – Guardian Council (*Showra-ye Negahban-e Qanun-e Asasi*)

IRGC – Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (*Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Inqelab-e Islami*)

IRI – Islamic Republic of Iran

IRP – Islamic Republican Party (*Hezb-e Jomhuri-ye Islami*)

JRM – Society of the Militant Clergy (*Jame 'eh -ye Rowhaniyyat-e Mobarz*)

JMEHQ – The Society of Qom Seminary Teachers (*Jame 'eh -ye Mudarresin-e Howzeh-ye 'Elmiyyeh-ye Qom*)

LMI – Liberation Movement of Iran (*Nehzat-e Azadi-ye Iran*)

MEK – People's Mojahedin of Iran (*Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran*)

MII – The Crusaders of the Islamic Revolution (*Mojahedin-e Inqelab-e Islami*),

MRM – Association of Combatant Clerics (*Majma'-e Rowhaniyyat-e Mobarez*)

OSU – The Office of Strengthening of Unity (*Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat*)

SCC – Special Court of the Clergy (*Dadgah-e Vizheh-ye Rowhaniyyat*)

SCCR – Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution (*Showra-ye 'Ali-ye Inqelab-e Farhangi*)

SCNS – the Supreme Council for National Security (*Showra-ye 'Ali-ye Amniyyat-e Melli*)

SLO – Supreme Leadership Office (*Beyt-e Rahbari*)

SSO – Social Security Organisation (*Sazman-e Tamin-e 'Ejtema'i*)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I, first of all, wish to thank my supervisors, Zhand Shakibi and John Chalcraft. I am lucky to have had the chance to learn from and receive the supervision from these two exceptional scholars. I am immensely grateful to Zhand for his faith in me and this thesis, for providing me with invaluable guidance and enormous support, for showing patience since the beginning. This thesis would not have been possible without him as my mentor. I also wish to express my gratitude to the LSE and the Department of Government. I am especially indebted to colleagues and professors who helped me to develop this thesis.

I wish to express my gratitude for my friends at the Government department and elsewhere. Many thanks to Mohannad Hage Ali, Karabekir Akkoyunlu, Philipp Decker, Izabella Corrêa, Pon Souvannaseng, Shahin Nasiri and Moritz Schmoll. Your friendship, shared memories, and intellectually stimulating discussions, along with a great deal of laughter, made this doctoral journey exceptional and worth taking. I would also like to thank the Pasgar family for their continuous support during my time spent in London. I am particularly indebted to Reza Vaghei Tabar, for his company and support during the final stretches of this thesis, as well as, Makan Shamlou for his friendship and numerous insightful discussions over these years. I would also like to thank Mohsen Meshkini.

Above all, I am enormously grateful to my family, namely my mother Nassrin, my father Hassan and my brother Nima. I cannot put my gratitude into words or thank them enough for their love and support over the past years. I dedicate this thesis to them.

Introduction

Factional politics has been at the centre of political life in the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) since its establishment in 1979, in the wake of the overthrow of the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925–1979). Despite the revolutionary ideology's emphasis on United Islamism and the continuous exhortations of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the father of the revolution and the IRI, for unity amongst the varied revolutionary and regime politicians and political groups, factional politics have continued to play, a decisive role in the politics and policy-making of the IRI.

Despite the important role of factional politics, the limited existing academic research on factions falls into one of two categories. The first constitutes works such as Akhavi's *Elite Factionalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran*,¹ Siavoshi's *Factionalism and Iranian Politics: The Post-Khomeini Experience*,² and Entessar's *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran: Domestic and Foreign Policy Implications*.³ These studies are primarily descriptive, providing an outline of the IRI's political and ideological landscape and of the major factional groups and their leading personalities. As a whole, these works pay no or little attention to the causes surrounding the emergence and spread of factions. Little attention is paid to their links with the Islamic state and to the shape and form of their struggles with each other in both the electoral and non-electoral fields.

The second category consists of two major works, Bahman Baktiari's *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran: The Institutionalization of Factional*

¹ Shahroug Akhavi, "Elite Factionalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Middle East Journal* 41 (1987).

² Sussan Siavoshi, "Factionalism and Iranian Politics: The Post-Khomeini Experience," *Iranian Studies* 25, no. 3/4 (1992), 25-70.

³ Nader Entessar, "Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran: Domestic and Foreign Policy Implications," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 17, no. 4 (1994), 21-43.

Politics and Mehdi Moslem's *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*.⁴ These studies are characterised by a deeper analysis of the institutional causation of the emergence and evolution of factional groups. It is worth noting, no specialised work on factional politics in the IRI has been published since 2002. Baktiari's work attempted to take the study of factional politics to a higher level by examining the modus operandi of factions in pursuing their political goals in the legislative branch. Nonetheless, he too ended up producing a piece that was more descriptive than analytical in nature.

Moslem's book is considered the major work on this topic given his examination of the causal relationship between the nature and attributes of the Iranian State as well as the emergence and evolution of factions. He also examined how, in this context, the factions compete with one other. He believed, while factions express their differences and challenge each other's views on an ideological plane, the struggle for power among them is conducted through institutional battles. In support of this claim, he focused on a common mode of factional contest: the misuse of state institutions and their unique powers. He believed, "Rather than being an ad-hoc phenomenon, factional politics in Iran are, by and large, patterned and predictable."⁵

Moslem advanced the academic debate on this issue by drawing attention to the role played by Constitutional ambiguities of the Constitution. He also focused on fluid interpretations of Islam in creating the conditions for the emergence of factions and giving them the ideological and political opportunity to create new platforms. By forming alliances between rivals, it held to their claim of being doctrinaire.

⁴ Bahman Baktiari, *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran: The Institutionalization of Factional Politics* (University Press of Florida, 1996); Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse University Press, 2002).

⁵ Ibid. 8–9.

Amongst the other works touching on the issue of factional politics within a broader examination of the political dynamic of the IRI, *Khatami and Gorbachev: Politics of Change in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the USSR*⁶ should be mentioned. In Shakibi's examination of the politics of change under Khatami, he brought a new perspective to the dynamics of factional politics in the IRI.

Earlier works, the most important of which are introduced above, rely on the assumption that elite factional struggles are primarily guided by, and a consequence of, traditional intra-elite wrangling over political and economic power. Society and societal demands and expectations do not play a significant role in them. The people are spectators. Shakibi shows, to an extent, how the factional fighting in the immediate post-Khomeini period, spilt over into the domain of popular, electoral politics and gave birth to the Reformist Movement.

Few books concerning the factional politics have been published in Persian. Similar to the wider literature on this subject, they do not move beyond description of different factions or political history of these factions. Shadlu's *Ahzab Va Jenah-ha-ye Siasi-ye Iran-e Emruz* [Political Parties in Contemporary Iran,]⁷ similar to Darabi's *Jaryan Shenasi-ye Siasi Dar Iran* [Study of Different Political Schools in Iran,]⁸ provide comprehensive information detailing different IRI political groups and parties, their statutes and their main political figures.

However, they do not move beyond this typology. Ghazal Yaq's *Etelaf-ha-ye Siasi Dar Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran* [Political Coalition in the IRI,]⁹ attempts to move

⁶ Zhand Shakibi, *Khatami and Gorbachev: Politics of Change in the Islamic Republic of Iran and the USSR* (IB Tauris, 2010).

⁷ Abbas Shadlu, *Ahzab Va Jenah-ha-ye Siasi-ye Iran-e Emruz* [Political Parties in Contemporary Iran] (Vozara, 1379/2000).

⁸ Ali Darabi, *Jaryan Shenasi-ye Siasi Dar Iran* [Study of Different Political Schools in Iran], 4 ed. (Pazhuheshgah-e farhang va andishe-ye Islami, 1388/2009).

⁹ Iman Hosein Ghazal Yaq, *Etelaf-ha-ye Siasi Dar Jomhuri-ye Islami-ye Iran* [Political Coalition in the IRI] (Markaz-e Asnad-e Iran-e Islami, 1391 (2011)).

beyond this typology and political history of different factions and provide insight into the dynamics behind the emergence of different factions. However, it falls short of producing any rigid argument. It does not give any attention to the role of society in these political struggles. Moreover, this book follows a certain political agenda given the factional affiliation of its publisher, as well as its judgmental narrative regarding certain political factions, particularly his analysis of the political actions of the Reformists.

This thesis builds on and contributes to this literature by examining two elements of factional politics in the IRI that remain under-researched. First, by starting with Shakibi's point, concerning the spilling over of factional fighting into the electoral arena at the close of the Rafsanjani Presidency (1989–1997), I will determine the extent to which the emergence and evolution of factional groups and their politics have been conditioned by elite perceptions of societal demands and expectations in the Khatami and Ahmadinejad periods.

Therefore, axiomatically, by starting with Moslem's focus on the institutional context of factional fighting, I will show how, with the death of Khomeini in 1989 and the consequent decentralisation of ideological production in the IRI, factional groups were forced to reach out of the institutional context and seek popular electoral support to compete successfully in factional struggles within IRI institutions. Given the context, the IRI's two methods are open in elucidating societal demands and expectations, and the factions' understanding of them: 1) the speeches and slogans, especially those of electoral campaigns, of the various factions; and 2) election results.

The second element focuses on the extent to which the emergence and evolution (and sometimes destruction) of certain factional groups has been conditioned by the character of personal relationships between key, leading actors in each group.

None of the literature on factional politics in the IRI has broached this topic. The critical assumption is ideological beliefs are the catalyst for the emergence of factional groups, which then engage in struggles for power and/or economic interest. The reason for the continuing struggles remains ideological, at least in rhetorical terms.

However, the members of the IRI elite, both those who participated in the revolution and their offspring, have a long personal history with each other. The majority have either familial and/or marital links, or shared experiences in prison, the revolution, seminary, university, the Iran–Iraq War, or even, in some instances, childhood. I will show how positive and negative feelings that emerged from any of these experiences have played, at some key points, roles of various degrees of importance in the emergence and evolution of certain factional groups, their actions, and in vital political events, such as the controversial 2009 elections.

Even Persian-language literature and research on politics in the IRI that has been published in the country has not systematically examined this issue. Only recently has it been broached. Hojjataleslam Hadi Khamenei, brother of the current Leader of the Revolution, Ali Khamenei, and his political critic, in an interview with the leading sociopolitical journal, alluded to this point, which is expanded in this thesis. In response to a question on whether ideology was the main cause of the spread of factional fighting, in particular in the mid-1980s and 1990s, he stated: “No. Until now there has been no analysis on the leftist and rightist elements which would allow me to say so-and-so was a rightist and so-and-so was a leftist.” (The two main factional groups at the beginning of the revolution which were the starting groups for subsequent factions.)

“Back in 1985, someone asked me ‘What is the cause of these differences (and factional fighting)?’ I simply said to him, ‘The desire for power on the part of a

personal social group (of political players). It is only power driven by a desire to help one's friends and limit those you dislike. The desire for this power is not rooted in ideology, but rather in personal tendencies (in regard to other political players). In the end, no one is yet ready to confess to this reality.”¹⁰

This thesis examines the role of personal relationships in factional politics regarding key events and decisions in the post-Rafsanjani period. Because of the challenges involved in conducting research on this issue, this type of relationship and its influence on political events and factional politics remains unexamined. The method used here revolved around piecing together information from published memoirs, interviews and news items in leading journals and newspapers for the period under review.

I also conducted interviews with few past and present leading figures from these factions. Nonetheless, this thesis only focuses on the key IRI political players, particularly those whose roles were to a large extent significant in the popularisation of factional politics, namely Ali Khamenei, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hassan Rouhani. Therefore, to put their relationship in better context, parts of this thesis mentions the personal history of these elites and their historical background.

The theoretical and methodological guides for this thesis come from three main sources, in addition to the literature on factional politics in the IRI. First, the regime type of the IRI needs to be located in the theoretical literature on hybrid regimes. However, in this regard, the IRI differs from the general theoretical examples of a hybrid regime.¹¹ The Constitutional split between republican institutions, namely

¹⁰ *Mehrnameh*, vol. 2, Azar 1390 (January 2012).

¹¹ Houchang E Chehabi, "The Political Regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Comparative

elected executive and legislative branches, and revolutionary 'Islamic' institutions, the most powerful being the Supreme Leader Office (SLO) and the Guardians Council (GC), is checking the popular power of the republican institutions. This reflects the tension between revolutionary promises of creating an Islamic state and of establishing republicanism.

The IRI was established and legitimised as a hybrid regime, a concept redefined here as a derivative of neither democracy nor authoritarianism, but rather a distinct political structure embodying both republican and authoritarian institutions that coexist with and exert pressure on each other. These characteristics distinguish it from the regimes coined hybrid in the literature.¹²

Since electing the Reformist Presidency of Mohammad Khatami in 1997, there has been a tendency to view the IRI case in the context of literature on a transition to democracy. Moreover, the literature on hybrid regimes is grounded in said literature.¹³

Perspective," *Government and Opposition* 36, no. 1 (2001); Leonardo Morlino, "Are There Hybrid Regimes? Or Are They Just an Optical Illusion," *European Political Science Review* 1, no. 2 (2009); Matthijs Bogaards, "How to Classify Hybrid Regimes? Defective Democracy and Electoral Authoritarianism," *Democratization* 16, no. 2 (2009); Payam Mohseni, Leah Gilbert, "Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes," *Studies in Comparative International Development (SCID)* 46 (2011).

¹² For general information about the hybrid regime and their categories within the dichotomy of authoritarian/democratic regimes see:

Larry Diamond. "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes," *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (2002): 21-35.

¹³ The transitional approach was the dominant perspective, especially in Comparative Studies during the 1980s and 90s. From the late 90s until present, to break this "transition paradigm," some scholars considered these countries "neither democratic nor in transition toward democracy" and called them "authoritarianism with adjectives," such as "competitive authoritarian" or "electoral authoritarian." Main works on the transitional approach see:

S.P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991); Dankwart A Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics* 2, no. 3 (1970): 337-63; J Grugel. *Democratization: A Critical Introduction*. (Palgrave, 2002).

For critical overview of transitional paradigm see:

Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm," *Journal of Democracy* 13 IS, no. 1 (2002); 5-21.

Within this framework and debates on path dependency of democratisation see:

J.J Linz and A.C. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

For this shift to authoritarianism with adjectives see:

A. Przeworski, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950-1990*, (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Larry Diamond, "Thinking About Hybrid Regimes."

This study takes the position that neither of these approaches is appropriate to the IRI case.

Therefore, this thesis is foremost about factional politics and their overflow into electoral politics. In other words, the popularisation of factional politics. It then touches on democratisation, but as an element and a weapon of factional politics. This thesis is not about democratisation, but rather factional politics, which emphasises a more dispassionate approach, avoiding the dominant cultural ideological and teleological trappings of contemporary democratisation and transition studies. The objective here is 'simply' to understand the causes, the nature and the outcomes of various processes of change in factional politics in the IRI as they were reflected in the country's sociopolitical landscape and institutional structure, without presuming a final destination such as Western liberal democracy.

Second, this redefined concept of hybridity is the starting point for understanding the emergence of factional politics and for finding the proper theoretical and methodological approaches for its examination and analysis. In other words, the hybridity of the IRI means factional politics are also hybrid. The IRI shares characteristics of factional politics in democratic and semi-democratic states, given the holding of elections and the existence of political associations and parties participating in the electoral field.¹⁴ The literature on factional politics in democratic and semi-

Journal of Democracy 13, no. 2 (2002): 21-35; S. Levitsky and L. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes After the Cold War* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁴ Frank P. Belloni, Dennis C. Beller, ed., *Faction Politics: Political Parties and Factionalism in Comparative Perspective* (ABC-Clio, 1978); Kim Eric Bettcher, "Factions of Interest in Japan and Italy: The Organizational and Motivational Dimensions of Factionalism," *Party Politics* 11, no. 3 (2005); Belloni. *Faction Politics* 339-58; Françoise Boucek, "Rethinking Factionalism: Typologies, Intra-Party Dynamics and Three Faces of Factionalism," *Party Politics* 15, no. 4 (2009): 455-85; S.W. Schmidt, ed. *Friends, Followers, and Factions: A Reader in Political Clientelism* (University of California Press, 1977); Gary W. Cox, Frances McCall Rosenbluth, and Michael F. Thies, "Electoral Reform and the Fate of Factions: The Case of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party," *British Journal of Political Science* 29, no. 1 (1999): 33-56.

democratic states makes a contribution to the theoretical approach to IRI factions, but weak political party structure and their links to the revolutionary institutions of the IRI limit their usefulness.

Third, the IRI factional politics shares significant similar dynamics with those of absolutist systems in which power is held by one figure. A useful example of this is France's Louis XV and Louis XVI, whose existing research on its factional politics, offers a methodology relevant to researching one aspect of the IRI's factional politics.

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These studies mainly look at factions as a social entity, whose members have joined together to advance their interests through generally legitimate and legal means.¹⁶ These groups were formed based on blood, patron-client relationships, or other bonding relations, either long or short-term. What is interesting in these historical periods is how factions operate in power struggles outside the party organisation, and mostly as a social group, but within the political sphere.

The importance of this literature is its focus is on the role of factions in absolutist or authoritarian systems where the ultimate source of power is a single individual, such as a king, or, in the Iranian case, the Supreme Leader. In these systems, factions not only organically emerge as a result of the centralisation of absolutist power, but their emergence is encouraged by that absolute power. In short, the old modus operandi of divide and rule. However, if a faction is not skillfully handled by the absolute power, it can lead to weakening, paralysis and even collapse of the state. Some examples of this are the role of a faction in bringing about the closing

¹⁵ Roger. Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV's France* (B. Blackwell, 1988); John Hardman, *French Politics, 1774-1789: From the Accession of Louis XVI to the Fall of the Bastille* (Longman, 1995); Julian Swann, *Politics and the Parliament of Paris under Louis XV, 1754-1774* (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁶ Geoffrey Pridham, "Party Systems, Factionalism and Patterns of Democratization: Cross-National Comparisons in Southern Europe," *Democratization* no.21 (1995): 27.

of the Parliament of Paris under Louis XV, or in the weakening of the Bourbon state under Louis XVI, which led to the bankruptcy and the implosion of the French absolutist state.

In sum, the two fundamental and inherently related research topics of this thesis are:

- 1) To determine the extent to which the emergence and evolution of factional groups and their politics have been conditioned by their perceptions of societal demands and expectations in the Khatami and Ahmadinejad periods.
- 2) To determine the extent to which the emergence and evolution of certain factional groups has been conditioned by the personal relationships between key, leading actors in each group.

These two interrelated issues represent the most important omissions in the literature on factional politics in the IRI. In the investigation of these two topics in this thesis, a new dynamic/process is introduced called the popularisation of factional politics. Throughout this thesis, the popularisation of factional politics refers to several interrelated points.

First, it refers to the increasing attention of competing factions and political elites to electoral/republican institutions and consequently the ways through which they tried to gain control of these institutions. Second, it highlights the elite's increasing emphasis on popular demands or what the people want. Or in political discourses of some factions, what the people should want. Third, popularisation inherently implies a process or trend. However, this evolution is not linear or deterministic. It is both a part and a reflection of the dynamics of change in wider political dynamics. Thus, in itself, this thesis considers popularisation to have no intrinsic value. For instance, popularisation does not necessarily mean a move towards

Western liberal democracy.

According to political circumstances and conditions at certain points of this study in addressing the issue of the popularisation of factional politics and the role of personalities, focus swings from factional competition to inter-elite competition. Given the significant role of elites in factional struggles, it should not be forgotten that inter-elite competition is generated by the process of popularisation and at the same time adds to the popularisation of factional politics which is the underlining theme of this thesis. Given the fluid nature of factions, the role of elites becomes significant. While inter-elite competitions create opportunities for different social groups to pursue their political and social agenda and political factions to increase their power at the top, at the same time, the claims of being a representative of certain popular social demands have been increasingly used as a tool in inter-elite politicking and factional politics.

In order to show the evolution of the popularisation of factional politics and provide the situational and contextual elements necessary for the comparative analysis of these variables, this thesis follows a chronological framework. It is not, however, a comprehensive study of the political history of modern Iran. Its goal is to move beyond this narrative and use it as a context to investigate systematically and analytically the two main research questions mentioned above.

The thesis will draw its theoretical base and methodology from the literature on hybrid regimes, factions in democratic and party-based systems, and factions in absolutist systems, in addition to the existing literature on factional politics in the IRI dealing with the institutional context. To address the process of this popularisation of factional politics and the role of personal relations in this process, a wide variety of primary sources, the bulk of which have not yet been used in political studies of the

IRI, are utilised.

In dealing with these primary sources, a few points have been taken into the account given the methodological and empirical approach of this thesis and the nature of this literature. Firstly, for the quotations and/or statements of political groups and/or political elites mainly three different sources were used: official websites, autobiographies or memoirs, newspapers or news websites. If a quotation has been taken from an official website, the complete link of that particular quotation is mentioned in the footnote. In using the quotation from newspapers, the factional affiliation of the newspaper has been considered. These factional affiliations are introduced when different factions are investigated in different chapters. Regarding the memoirs, care has been given to the fact that the views of the person may be biased about himself and/or others.

Secondly, the principal methodological prerequisites of qualitative historical research concerning primary sources has been taken into account. This is true, particularly in the study of the dynamics of factional struggles and elite interactions during the Ahmadinejad and Rouhani periods. There has been little, if any, comprehensive studies or literature on the personalities and IRI political dynamics of these periods.

For instance, the factional affiliation of different newspapers or websites or media, as well as other forms of primary sources, have been taken into account in analysing, criticising or rejecting certain arguments as well as presenting an alternative argument or presenting a narrative. In addition, context, namely time and place, has been carefully taken into account in these cases. For instance, the information about the neo-Conservative, Saeed Jalili, and his views are extracted from his writings, including his PhD thesis and/or journals affiliated to the neo-Conservatives.

In this vein, memoirs of IRI political elites contributed to the main arguments of this thesis as well as explaining the dynamics of the popularisation of factional politics. Rafsanjani's detailed memoirs provide great insight into the factional dynamics from the viewpoint of one of the key IRI political players.¹⁷ They also show the evolution of his personal views and his powerful position in the first decade of the revolution.

However, since these memoirs are published with almost a 25 year gap, they do not cover the main portion of this thesis's timeline. Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri's memoir, as the Secretary of the main Conservative organisation, JRM, and the main rival of Khatami in the 1997 Presidential election, provides an insight into the way he and thus the Conservatives interpreted the emergence of the Reformists.¹⁸ Hassan Rouhani's memoirs about the time he was the secretary of Supreme Council for National Security (SCNS) and in charge of the negotiation with the Western countries and IAEA about the IRI nuclear programme, on the one hand, provides a glimpse of the IRI decision making process with regard to national security issues.

On the other hand, it gives great details about the evolution of Iranian nuclear program. It also, to a certain degree, sheds light on the extent to which factional politics have played a role in the trajectory of IRI nuclear programme directions from the perspective of a person in a supervisory position.¹⁹ The memoir of Mohammad Javad Zarif, IRI foreign minister (2013-current,) provides great detail into how foreign policy was interpreted by different factional groups.²⁰ Mahdavi Kani's memoir, in addition

¹⁷ A series of his memoirs have been published beginning in 1981. The latest published volume of his memoirs was in 1991. Full list of these memoirs are provided in Bibliography.

¹⁸, Morteza Mirdar, *Khatarat-e Akbar-e Nateq Nouri* [Memoir of Nateq Nouri] (Markaz-e Asnad-e Enghelab-e Islami, 2005).

¹⁹ Hassan. Rouhani, *Amnyiat-e Melli Va Diplomacy* [National Security and Diplomacy] (Majma-e Tashkhis-e Maslahat, 2012).

²⁰ Mohammad Mehdi Raji, *Agha-ye Safir* [Mr. Ambassador] (Nashr-e Ney 2013).

to the memoirs of Mohammad Rayshari and Nateq Nouri, added to the understanding of the viewpoints and ideologies of the Conservatives and their main political organisation, JRM, from the perspective of some of its leading members.²¹

Given the complex nature of IRI politics and the empirical approach which has been implemented throughout this thesis, it will not be possible to provide any tentative conclusion without the contribution of a wide range of academic literature touching on different aspects of the IRI politics, society, economy and culture. The full details of this literature are provided in the bibliography.

Nonetheless, the analysis of Katouzian²² and Gheissari and Nasr²³ about the relationship between the state and society in the IRI contributed to the arguments of dynamics of factional politics and its popularisation in this work. Arjomand's²⁴ and Martin's²⁵ studies on the Khomeinism and the role of ideology in the IRI politics contributed to the debates about the Khomeinism and its role in the emergence of factions and popularisation of factional politics.

Mirssepasi²⁶ and Dabashi's²⁷ works on trajectories of various intellectual discourses and the relationship between them and modernity in the formation of the IRI were helpful arguments in understanding the emergence of different political discourses explained in this thesis and its influence on factional politics.

²¹ Mirdar, *Khaterat-e Akbar*; Mohammad Mohammadi Reyshahri, *Khatere-ha*, [Memories]. 5 vols.: (Markaz-e Asnad-e Enghelab-e Islami, 2007); Gholamreza Khaje Sarvi, *Khaterat-e Ayatollah Mahdavi Kani* [Memoir of Mahdavi Kani] (Markaz-e Asnad-e Enghelab-e Islami, 2008).

²² Homayou Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (Yale University Press, 2010).

²³ Ali Gheissari and S.V.R. Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

²⁴ Saeid Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of New Iran* (I. B. Tauris, 2000).

²⁶ Ali Mirsepasi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2000); Ali Mirsepasi, *Democracy in Modern Iran: Islam, Culture, and Political Change* (NYU Press, 2010).

²⁷ Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (Transaction Publishers, 1993).

Keshavarzian's²⁸ insightful work on the evolution of the Bazar and Bazaris class and the dynamics of their relationship with the IRI helped to better understand the social support base of certain factions. In addition to this literature, there is much literature in which different chapters of this thesis speak of.

As briefly mentioned above, the emergence of Khatami and the Reformists, on the one hand, prompted scholarly works exploring this movement, mostly through the framework of mainstream democratisation theories, particularly as a case study for the examination of theories of transition to democracy.²⁹ It became a case study to reject the claims of an impossibility of the emergence of democracy in the Middle East and Iran.³⁰

However, the demise of the Reformists and the rise of Ahmadinejad to power encouraged scholars of democratisation studies to investigate different factors shaping their claimed idea of an Iranian path of transition to democracy. The role of personality and the leadership of Khatami in the emergence and demise of this movement were highlighted.³¹ Several works placed the Khatami Era in the context of IRI history. For instance, this period was considered as a phase in a long process of state building

²⁸ Arang Keshavarzian, *Bazaar and State in Iran: The Politics of the Tehran Marketplace* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²⁹ Hossein Bashiriyeh, "Civil Society and Democratisation During Khatami's First Term," *Global Dialogue* 3, no. 2/3 (2001); Said Amir Arjomand, "Democratization and the Constitutional Politics of Iran Since 1997," *Polish Sociological Review* (2001); L. Boroumand, "Prospects for Democracy in Iran," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 4(2)(2003): 99; Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Islam, Muslim Polities and Democracy," *Democratization* 11, no. 4 (2004); Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (OUP USA, 2009);

³⁰ For these claims that democracy is alien to Islam and the Middle Eastern mindset see: Heather Deegan, *The Middle East and Problems of Democracy* (Open University Press, 1993); Steven Dorr, "Democratization in the Middle East," *Global Transformation and the Third World*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993): 131-57; Elie Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture* (Routledge, 2013).

For critical view on this approach see: Nasser Momayesi, "Iran's Struggle for Democracy," *International Journal on World Peace* (2000): 41-70.

³¹ Shakibi, *Khatam*; Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform* (I.B.Tauris, 2009); Jahangir Amuzegar, "Khatami's Legacy: Dashed Hopes," *The Middle East*.

attempts and promotion of democracy.³²

Another approach considered it a continuation of ‘Constitutional politics’ and another phase of the IRI revolution.³³ The emergence of new literature on a hybrid regime challenging the dichotomy of autocracy/democracy introduced a new framework for investigating the Iranian Reformist's experience.³⁴ This period was also investigated through the lens of discourse analysis.³⁵

Moreover, in another series of literature on this period, the intellectual discourse of the Reformists and/or ‘religious intellectualism’ was placed in general debates of the relationship between modernity and religion. The history of intellectualism in Iran and its experience with Western notions of modernity was, therefore, revisited and re-investigated. These works also contributed to a wider literature responding to the claims of the incompatibility of Islam and democracy imposed by culturists that had acquired momentum following the 9/11 attacks.³⁶ Sociological, economic and anthropological outcomes of this period were also investigated.³⁷ Factional politics of this period were mentioned in a large number of these studies, however, they have not been substantially studied in themselves.

Given the contemporary nature of the Ahmadinejad period, domestic politics of this period has not been fully studied. Few works touched on the examination of his

³² Gheissari and Nasr, *Democracy in Iran*.

³³ Arjomand, *After Khomeini*.

³⁴ Payam Mohseni and Leah Gilbert, "Beyond Authoritarianism: The Conceptualization of Hybrid Regimes," *Studies in Comparative International Development (SCID)* 46 (2011).

³⁵ Mehran Kamrava, *Iran's Intellectual Revolution*, vol. 29 (UK: Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 2008).

³⁶ Mirsepassi and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity* (Lexington Books, 2004); F. Jahanbakhsh, *Islam, Democracy and Religious Modernism in Iran, 1953-2000: From Bāzargān to Soroush* (Brill, 2001); Kazem Alamdar, "The Power Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran: Transition from Populism to Clientelism, and Militarization of the Government," *Third World Quarterly* 26, no. 8 (2005).

³⁷ Behzad Yaghmaian, *Social Change in Iran: An Eyewitness Account of Dissent, Defiance, and New Movements for Rights* (SUNY Press, 2002); Mehri Honarbin-Holliday, *Becoming Visible in Iran: Women in Contemporary Iranian Society*, vol. 14 (IB Tauris, 2013).

personality and the emergence of the neo-Conservatives as a new faction.³⁸ Nonetheless, given the concurrence of Ahmadinejad's second term Presidency with the eruption of the Green Movement, although only a short time has passed since these events unfolded, a large body of literature has emerged exploring the different sociopolitical and cultural aspects of this movement, its emergence, the question of its demise and its future. Inside Iran, the state media outlets, including national TV and radio, propagate the official narrative of events.

Additionally, a large number of mostly state-sponsored books were published propagating this official narrative of events. In return, many expatriate activists, including those who had to leave Iran because of their involvement in the protests, propagated their own narratives, which were published in IRI opposition journals and/or in the new media outlets established after 2009. Most of the academic works, however, were written in English or French and published outside Iran, given the political sensitivity of the regime.

This literature investigates various elements of this uprising from different perspectives and within different schools of thought. The emergence, evolution, dynamics and characteristics of the collective identity amongst the protestors,³⁹ as well as the movement, were discussed mostly from the perspective of the social movement theories.⁴⁰ The effect of social media on this movement and its dynamics was

³⁸ Anoushiravan, Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the Rise of Its Neo-conservatives: The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution* (I. B. Tauris, 2007); Jahangir Amuzegar, "Islamic Social Justice, Iranian Style," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 3 (2007).

³⁹ Omid Payrow Shabani, "The Green's Non-Violent Ethos: The Roots of Non-Violence in the Iranian Democratic Movement," *Constellations* 20, no. 2 (2013); Shabnam J Holliday, *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance* (Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013); Elisabeth Jane Yarbakhsh, "Green Martyrdom and the Iranian State," *Continuum* 28, no. 1 (2014); Arash Reisinezhad, "The Iranian Green Movement: Fragmented Collective Action and Fragile Collective Identity," *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015); Elisabeth Yarbakhsh, "Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance," *Asian Studies Review* 39, no. 2 (2015).

⁴⁰ Ali Ansari, Daniel Berman, and Thomas Rintoul, "Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election," *Chatham House and the Institute of Iranian Studies, University of*

discussed.

Some argued these new technologies have influenced the mobilisation of protestors whilst also providing a tool for regime surveillance and the easier targeting of the dissidents,⁴¹ and how social media led to an increase in the price of oil, and consequently indirectly helped the regime in their suppression.⁴² The class structure this movement, as well as its tactics and the use of symbols, was also explored.⁴³ This movement was compared to the recent Arab uprisings.⁴⁴ The relationship between these events and factional politics have not been fully investigated. These events while resulting from popularisation of factional politics, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, also became a turning point in the process of the popularisation of factional politics.

Vitally, this movement was interpreted and used by different people. They have a varying degree of discontent of the status-quo, ranging from the Khatami Reformists to secular Iranians whose roots go back to before the revolution. However, there is no data on the arrangement of participating groups. In other words, the Green Movement was a broad coalition from religious Reformists to secularists to anarchists.

Moreover, numerous works covering this period (2005-current), focused on IRI foreign policy. IRI foreign policy, particularly regarding the Western countries, has been the subject of many studies since the establishment of the IRI in 1979. A wide

St Andrews 21 (2009); Nader Hashemi and Danny Postel, *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future* (Melville House Pub, 2010); Hamid Dabashi and Navid Nikzadfar, *The Green Movement in Iran* (Transaction Publishers, 2011); Payam Akhavan et al., *Civil Society and Democracy in Iran* (Lexington Books, 2011).

⁴¹ Saeid Golkar, "Liberation or Suppression Technologies? The Internet, the Green Movement and the Regime in Iran," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies and Society* 9, no. 1 (2011).

⁴² Kevin Cross, "Why Iran's Green Movement Faltered: The Limits of Information Technology in a Rentier State," *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 3 0, no. 2 (2010).

⁴³ Kevan Harris, "The Brokered Exuberance of the Middle-Class: An Ethnographic Analysis of Iran's 2009 Green Movement," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2012): 435-455.

⁴⁴ Jubin M Goodarzi, "Middle East Authoritarianisms: Governance, Contestation and Regime Resilience in Syria and Iran, ed. Steven Heydemann and Reinoud Leenders (Stanford University Press, 2013); Civil Society in Syria and Iran: Activism in Authoritarian Contexts, ed. Aarts Paul and Cavatorta Francesco (Boulder, Co: Lynne Rienner Publishers), *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 02 (2014).

variety of literature has covered different aspects of IRI foreign policy through different schools of thoughts within various disciplines, including history, international relations, politics, social theories, international law, and conflict studies. Socialisation of IRI revolutionary foreign policy has been one of the main questions attracting academic attention, particularly in the disciplines of international relations and politics.

With the election of Khatami in 1997 and his continuation of the normalisation approach of the Rafsanjani period, certain theories gained momentum with regard to the socialisation of the IRI underlining the inevitability of international socialisation of revolutionary regimes.⁴⁵ These arguments were similar to the same approach to the end of history paradigm which considered liberal democracy as the inevitable end point of political regimes. However, the significant change of rhetoric with regard to the West during the Ahmadinejad Presidency undermined these arguments. In other words, Ahmadinejad's comments, as well as following a new direction in the IRI relationship with the IAEA, over development of IRI nuclear programme, resembled a return to the revolutionary foreign policy of the first decade of IRI. This puzzled these academics.

To explain this continuation of revolutionary foreign policy different theories were introduced. Some put more weight on international elements such as the lack of systematic pressure,⁴⁶ lack of information to the leader,⁴⁷ or structural geopolitics.⁴⁸ Others underlined the importance of Constitutional structure and domestic ideological

⁴⁵ Shah Alam, "The Changing Paradigm of Iranian Foreign Policy under Khatami," *Strategic Analysis* 24, no. 9 (2000): 1629-53.

⁴⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, "Reflections on Theory of International Politics," *Neorealism and its Critics* (1986): 327.

⁴⁷ S.M. Walt, *Revolution and War* (Cornell University Press, 1996).

⁴⁸ Trita Parsi, *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the United States* (Yale University Press, 2007).

settings.⁴⁹ However, with the election of Hassan Rouhani as President (2013), once again the IRI diplomatic approach changed towards the direction of international socialisation. This U-turn is reflected in the diplomatic resolution of disputes over the nature of the IRI nuclear programme between the IRI and the Western countries and UN. Thus, most of the recent works on IRI politics focused on the IRI foreign diplomacy and/or the extent to which international sanctions has influenced the IRI foreign policy.⁵⁰

Numerous works on IRI foreign policy agree, there is a close connection between the IRI domestic politics and the trajectory of its foreign policy.⁵¹ The importance of factional politics in the investigation of IRI foreign policy is not a new subject. However, this thesis introduces popularisation of factional politics, necessary to investigate the symbiotic relationship between these dynamics, as well as the foreign policy of the IRI, especially with regard to the West. With the exacerbation of factional politics and spread of ideological production of the IRI, gradually, the issue of foreign policy became an important element in the popularisation of factional politics.

In other words, foreign policy became popularised. Groups with certain political views, be it conservatives or liberal, have transformed their foreign policy views into slogans and goals and have campaigned on them knowing that there is

⁴⁹ Fred Halliday, *Revolution and World Politics: The Rise and Fall of the Sixth Great Power* (Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵⁰ S.H Mousavian and S. Shahidsaleh, *Iran and the United States: An Insider's View on the Failed Past and the Road to Peace* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014); K. Simpson, *U.S. Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran: From the War on Terror to the Obama Administration* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015); B. Kaussler and G.P. Hastedt, *Us Foreign Policy Towards the Middle East: The Realpolitik of Deceit* (Taylor & Francis, 2017).

⁵¹ Rouhollah K Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East* (JHU Press, 1988); Anoushiravan Ehteshami, "Iran's New Order: Domestic Developments and Foreign Policy Outcomes," *Global Dialogue* 3, no. 2/3 (Spring 2001): 45-52.

For a very recent investigation of this relation see:

Maximilian Terhalle, "Revolutionary Power and Socialization: Explaining the Persistence of Revolutionary Zeal in Iran's Foreign Policy," *Security Studies* 18, no. 3 (2009): 557-86; Thomas Juneau, *Squandered Opportunity: Neoclassical Realism and Iranian Foreign Policy* (Stanford UP, 2015); Baktiar, *Parliamentary*; Arjomand, *After Khomeini*.

viable a constituency. Given the role of people in the centre of these debates and the characteristics of the IRI, there is no consensus on the definition of national interest of the IRI beyond near region. This, in turn, means national interests are increasingly popularised. It is hoped this dynamic could contribute to debates about the IRI foreign policy and its relationship with domestic politics.

For the purpose of this study, we need to determine what constitutes a faction in the context of the IRI. In general, factions are highly dependent on the sociocultural and political context. There is, therefore, no single general definition of factions. Yet factions can not be defined based only on their organisational characteristics.⁵² In other words, they often work as a “cluster of personal relationships” rather than “disciplined collectives.”⁵³

This thesis, largely based on the literature of factions in the IRI, initially considers factions in the context of the IRI as sociopolitical entities with a loose organisational structure. While the factional identity remains based on a shared ideology, it is also based on shared strategies, shared objectives and personal ties. One is considered to be affiliated with a particular faction if one identifies oneself with that faction, and/or is perceived to be affiliated with that faction by society and/or other elites. Indeed, these two do not always coincide. In most cases, however, they do correspond with each other. In sum, factions in the IRI emerge as reflections of ideologies and as personal relationships. In the body of this work, a clearer definition of what constitutes factions will emerge.

Certain characteristics make factions different to political parties in the context of the IRI. Factions in the IRI have a low scale of clarity and transparency in their organisational structure and are thus less accountable for their decisions and actions

⁵² Belloni, *Faction Politics*, 3-16.

⁵³ Schmidt, *Friends, Followers*, 7-8.

compared to political parties. Factions in the IRI are more inclusive, yet more elusive than parties, given they have no fixed or clear boundaries.

An example can help explain the complexity and elusiveness of the IRI factions and their dependence on the sociopolitical context. Rafsanjani is one of the founding members of ‘The Society of Militant Clergy’ (*Jame’h-ye Rowhaniyyat-e Mobarez*, JRM), a political organisation affiliated to traditional Conservatives. However, he is also considered the father of the Modern Right faction, a technocrat faction which emerged in 1994–95, despite the fact that he is not even a member of the main political party of this faction, *Kargozaran*. Rafsanjani was also considered a Reformist in the 2009 and 2013 Presidential elections by part of society and the political elites. In Persian, ‘*band*,’ ‘*jenah*’ or even ‘*hezb*’ (party) refer interchangeably to factions, depending on the context.

Iran does not have a history of true political parties. Iran experienced a Constitutional Revolution in 1906, which made sufficient provisions for the emergence of a political party system was to be the base of the new political order. However, during Pahlavi rule (1924–1979), except for a brief period (1941–1953), no genuinely independent parties were allowed to operate. After the Revolution, the new Islamic Republic created a single party, the Islamic Republic Party (IRP), which collapsed in 1986 due to internal divisions.

A myriad of causes have played a role in the lack of institutionalisation and durability of political parties in Iran in the context of authoritarian regimes.⁵⁴ As this thesis shows, the issues of official political parties are very sensitive since they represent a division of the political body into competing groups. Such divisions go

⁵⁴ Javad Etaat, "Zamineh-ha va Mavan'-e Tahazzob Dar Iran," [Obstacles for Party Institutionalisation in Iran] (Hamshahri 1378/2000).

against the idea of an Islamic Movement based in unity. Nonetheless, with the popularisation of factional politics, one can say factions or their correspondent political organisations, act as prototype political parties, to an extent.

To set the framework for understanding the ideological causes of factional struggles, Chapter One, ***Khomeini and Khomeinism***, introduces the ideological components of Khomeinism and the contradictions in this ideology that emerged as a result of Khomeini's reaction to changing circumstances and events. It outlines the institutional hybrid structure of the IRI. This hybrid structure, in turn, produces intense factional struggles and provides the conditions for the emergence of two forms of factional struggles, one in the electoral arena, the other within the institutional context around the Supreme Leader, simultaneously conducted by factions.

The last section provides an outline of the main characteristics of two major factions during the Khomeini period and the ideological causes for their struggles. Collectively, these three sets of analysis provide the institutional, historical and ideological background of the IRI and factional politics necessary for an examination of this thesis's main research questions, dealing primarily with the evolution and dynamics of factional politics from the end of the Rafsanjani period (1997), and with the influence of personal links and relationships on such evolution.

Chapter Two, ***The Emergence of Popularisation of Factional Politics***, details the socioeconomic and geopolitical challenges facing the IRI after the death of Khomeini and the end of the Iran–Iraq War, in the context of its Constitutional contradictions. Ideological dynamics and rivalries among political elites — specifically, between Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the President, and, Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader — constituted the first steps towards popularisation of factional politics. The Rafsanjani Presidency (1989–1997) played a vital role in this

process.

This chapter explores the relationship between Rafsanjani and Khamenei, and their personalities and shared experiences until the death of Khomeini. It examines how social and economic challenges in the context of the IRI institutional set-up shaped and influenced ideological challenges. In other words, how the IRI, similar to other revolutionary and/or ideological states, faced the challenge of reconciling its ideology with the reality of governing an increasingly complex society. Finally, it examines how the interaction of human agency, factional struggles and hybrid characteristics of the IRI formed a dynamic resulting in an increasingly influential role of popular politics in the political life of the IRI.

Chapter Three, *Popularisation of Factional Politics (1997–2005)*, investigates how various factional groups attempted to define and implement competing concepts of the ‘role of people’ in IRI politics. It examines the roots and extent to which these attempts have influenced society’s public opinion and the dynamics of power within the IRI framework in this period. The election of Mohammad Khatami as President in 1997 marked a new phase in the popularisation of politics.

The question of ‘the role of people’ in IRI politics — or the republican aspect of the IRI — became an underlining theme of the debates in this period. This question had always been a significant element in IRI politics. From this period on, the responses to this question offered by factions, exercised a strong influence on societal expectation, as well as societal and elite perception. By presenting these factions with new political and ideological context, it also serves to concern the question and ultimately the nature of the IRI.

Khatami sought to strengthen republican institutions justified by his interpretation of Khomeinism and based on slogans such as the importance of civil

society. In response, Khamenei and the Conservatives propagated a different definition of the ‘role of people’ in politics rooted in their interpretation of Khomeinism, and conception of the revolution’s values. These two divergent trends — empowering the Islamic/revolutionary pillar versus the republican dimension — influenced factional politics, intellectual debates, public discourses and the types of societal demands each faction propagated in this period.

Therefore, this chapter explains the importance of Khatami’s election and reviews Khatami’s political thoughts and the theoretical premises of the ‘role of people’ in his discourse. It reviews the main intellectual debates surrounding the ‘role of people.’ Finally, it investigates the extent to which these different responses and slogans have concomitantly evolved into the institutional battles in the IRI, and influenced the dynamics of factional politics and personal rivalry.

Chapter Four, *Populism and the Neo-Conservatives (2005–2009)*, investigates the emergence of the neo-Conservatives as a new faction in the popularisation of factional politics. The neo-Conservatives emerged with their interpretation of Khomeinism that stressed social justice and socioeconomic concerns. Their emergence can be contributed to two broad factors. On the one hand, they emerged to fill the vacuum created following the disappointment of a large part of society in the ‘political development’ paradigm of the Reformists and/or in the Reformist’s ability to provide sustainable political or economic change. The eight-year experience of the Khatami period taught the Conservatives the importance of popular support and its role in acquiring power in the republican institutions.

By capitalising on the populist aspects of Khomeinism, part of the Conservatives successfully increased their popular support. In sum, this chapter explores the causes behind the emergence of the neo-Conservatives and their political

identity and place in a factional setting. It briefly introduces the key members of this faction and their relationships with the main political elite actors, namely Khamenei and Rafsanjani. Lastly, it examines the extent to which the populist policies of Ahmadinejad have influenced society, factional politics and the concept of the ‘role of the people’ in IRI politics.

Chapter Five, *Popular Politics from Below (2009–2013)*, investigates the influence of the 2009 popular uprising called the Green Movement. It also examines the participants of the Green Movement and ‘sedition’ (*Fetneh*, hereafter, *Fetneh*) in the IRI’s official narrative, on factional politics. Additionally, this chapter presents the IRI’s hybrid characteristics, while examining the new challenges it presented for the system. The controversial 2009 Presidential election was a turning point in popular politics and the popularisation of factions in the IRI. It represented the confrontation of social forces demanding change in the IRI political attitude regarding the ‘role of people.’

These contentious events were suppressed and, consequently, the guardian institutions, and Khamenei gained great institutional authority at the cost of their/his popular legitimacy. Furthermore, to address the challenges of the system engendered by these events, the IRI placed at the centre of its propaganda campaign the nuclear programme.

This chapter also investigates the dynamics and main figures in the 2009 electoral debates. It aims to investigate the consequent institutional and legitimacy challenges this election and subsequent events imposed on the regime. It explores the reactions of the regime and the extent to which these reactions have influenced the popularisation of factional politics, and led to new international and domestic sociopolitical consequences. Finally, the embedded institutional contradiction

between the electoral institutions and the guardian ones are evaluated under the new power balance.

Chapter Six, *Foreign Policy and Factional Politics*, explains the processes that led to the electoral popularisation of foreign policy witnessed in the 2013 election. It explores the important elements of Khomeinism that played a role in the rhetorical popularisation of IRI foreign policy in the post-Khomeini era. It examines the main issues regarding foreign policy after Khomeini's death, why these issues were important to different factions, and how different factions treated these issues in the subsequent elections of Khatami and Ahmadinejad.

This chapter aims to investigate the symbiotic relationship between the popularisation of factional politics and IRI foreign policy. The chapter also examines the international context in which these factional discourses evolved. It is not possible to state, the popularisation of foreign policy took place only in a reaction to domestic politics. The last section provides a review of the two main approaches in foreign policy by the time of the 2013 Presidential election. This chapter focuses on IRI foreign policy doctrine with regard to the West and the US from the domestic perspective, given its role in IRI ideology.

Chapter Seven, *The Rouhani Presidency (2013–current)*, investigates how, when faced with increasing domestic and international challenges, the IRI once again changed its official policy agenda and allowed limited political openness. It pays particular attention to the extent to which the resilience embedded in the hybrid characteristics of the IRI has allowed these sudden shifts of policies.

During the Presidential election of 2013, Khamenei opened the political space, given the increased social discontent, international isolation and worries over the regime's legitimacy, which faced him. The sanctions on the IRI's nuclear programme

during this election and foreign policy, had become major elements in factional politics. Electoral debates in this chapter also explore the extent to which the interrelated issues of the popularisation of the IRI's nuclear programme and geopolitical conditions have influenced the popularisation of factional politics and the fate of negotiations on the Iranian nuclear programme.

The seven chapters of this thesis, including the Introduction, set a comparative framework and adequate analytical arguments to offer answers to the main topics of this research. It aims to provide a comprehensive definition of the factions, factional politics and popularisation of factional politics in the IRI, in order to answer the main research questions of this thesis. Additionally, this study contributes to the literature on hybrid regimes, contentious politics, factional politics, and democratisation and change.

The transliteration system is that of Iranian Studies. Established Anglicised form has been preferred to the transliterated version (i.e., *Majlis* instead of *Majles*).

Chapter One

Khomeini and Khomeinism

The ideology of Khomeinism has no single definition. Although in principle, Khomeini's speeches, writings and remarks could provide a guide to understanding its dynamics. Khomeini himself changed the ideological parameters of Khomeinism in the pre- and post-revolutionary periods because of fluctuating circumstances.¹ Therefore, as this thesis shows, a myriad of contradictions are at the base of Khomeinism allowing politically diverse figures, such as the Reformist President, Mohammad Khatami, the populist, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mir Hossein Mousavi, the leader of the Green Movement, and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Leader of the Revolution and Khomeini's successor, to claim to represent the true ideals of Khomeinism. Moreover, Khomeinism has evolved since the death of Khomeini as a result of the factional struggles.

The goal of this section, therefore, is to present the themes and contradictions in Khomeini's thinking and politics that lay at the base of his struggle against the Pahlavi monarchy, and of its successor state, the IRI. These themes and contradictions provide the theoretical and ideological framework in which the factional groups emerge, evolve, and struggle with each other.

Khomeinism was, and is, foremost an attempt to create a universal utopian modernity superior to that of the West and, until 1991, that of the Communist East. Khomeini claimed, through the religionisation of society led by an Islamic state, the disinherited masses, disoriented by the consequences of the Pahlavi rapid

¹ For Khomeinism and a different interpretation of Khomeinism, see also: Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic* (University of California Press, 1993); Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran* (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

modernisation project, would create an Islamic utopian modernity in this life which would also offer them rewards in the afterlife.

A new interpretation of Islam is at the centre of Khomeinism. In the 1960s, Khomeini offered a political reading of Islam under the name of *velayat-e faqih*. His views were, at the time, contrary to mainstream *Shi'i* tradition.² Most of the *Shi'i* *Ulama* considered the direct involvement of clerics in politics and governance to be demeaning to their clerical religious role.

Khomeini rejected this view: “Some began to propagate that Islam is an ideology about praying and a personal relationship between the people and the creator. Therefore, it has nothing to do with politics... due to intense propaganda, even the clerics believed that Islam has nothing to do with politics; or with governance.”³

Khomeini placed the establishment of an Islamic government as one of the historical pillars of Islam and the duty of Muslims during the time of occultation of Hidden Imam – the last of the *Shi'a* saints.⁴ “The idea that Islam should govern is not a new idea. It was part of the initial plan of Islam to establish divine government worldwide. However, because of the negligence of Muslims, as well as exploiting attempts of colonialists, [this idea has been marginalised] ...”⁵. In his book, *Islamic Government*, he defined *velayat-e faqih* as follows: “If some efficient person, who is endowed with the two characteristics of leadership, rises and establishes a government, he will possess the same guardianship which the noble Prophets had in directing the

² For an analysis of Islamic state in Khomeini's ideology and in Shia tradition see: Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of New Iran* (I. B. Tauris, 2000).

³ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam* (The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, 1983-1990): vol. 4, 16.

On another occasion, Khomeini stated: “The clerics were not supposed to get involved in any affairs related to politics and the sociopolitical problems of an —Islamic country.” Ibid., vol. 14, 159.

⁴ In Persian, different names refer to last Shia Saint. Throughout this thesis the title of ‘Hidden Imam’ is mainly used.

⁵ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 21, 74.

society, and all the people will have to obey him.”⁶

Khomeini considered Islam a key ideology offering a comprehensive response to the people’s needs. In other words, Khomeinism claimed to represent an Islam of a new historical era that was an ideological base for a superior universalist modernity. Khomeini underlined: “Islam and the Islamic government are divine phenomena that ensure the utmost happiness of its followers in this world and the afterlife... [these two] could end the oppression tyranny and repression, and corruption and ... create perfect humans.”⁷ Khomeini claimed that, Islam is a “substantial guide” which has responses to all of the issues of human life, and it is what is missing in almost all of the current prevalence ideologies—Capitalism and Communism.⁸

From the Iranian perspective, both Communism and liberal-Capitalism are elements of the West. Khomeini emphasised universalist characteristics of this Islamic modernity, arguing his audience were not only Iranians but all Muslims and ‘downtrodden’ (*Mostazafin*).⁹ Khomeini, therefore, saw nationalism as something alien to Islam and a device created by the West to divide the Islamic community; “Enthusiasm for nation and nationalism, is baseless in Islam... It is Islam which is the basis (of all).”¹⁰ Despite this stress on universalism and hostility to nationalism and specifically Iranian nationalism, domestic political circumstances forced the IRI to accommodate Iranian national feelings.

At the centre of this ideological project was the creation of a new person.

⁶ *Fundamentals of the Islamic Revolution Selections from the Thoughts and Opinions of Imam Khomeini (R)*, trans. M. J. Khalili and S. Manafi Anari (The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works (International Affairs Department), 2000), 143.

⁷ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 21, 393.

⁸ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam: An Anthology of Imam Khomeini’s Speeches, Messages, Interviews, Decrees, Religious Permissions, and Letters* (The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Works (International Affairs Department), 2008), vol. 15, 481–2.

⁹ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 13, 144–5.

¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 14, 307–8.

Khomeini placed this creation of a new person in a religio-historical framework “[The prophets] sought to make a new person. Whenever this new person was made, everything else would be achieved... Different [pro-West] regimes, linked to foreigners, and similar to them did not want eastern countries to construct a new person” This new person he referred to should have certain characteristics which would enable him to be at the forefront of Khomeinism and to play the vital role in the triumph of Khomeini’s project on different levels.

“A (true) man is trustworthy. He acts for the sake of Allah and he is for Allah. His life is for Allah. His death is for Allah. Such a being can never be a servant to the foreigners and act against his country.”¹¹ This new person, *homo Islamicus*, would be the building block of his ‘Islamic ideal society’ (‘*jame’h-ye ideal-e Islami*’). In this man-making project, Khomeini assigned a special role to the *Ulama*.¹²

The main aspects of Khomeinism dealt with the moral purification of society and propagating an Islamic identity while giving attention to social justice. Khomeini argued, the moral purification and the purification of the soul are means to stop tyranny and cut the roots of all the revolts (*toghyan*).¹³

Khomeini believes humans, if left unattended, will inevitably be evil: “If (the carnal soul of) man is left unharnessed, he is bound to claim: —I am your Lord and the Highest! The purpose of the ‘*besat*’ (selection of prophet by God) is to harness this defiant and rebellious soul and to purify it.”¹⁴ Khomeini believed, “The religion of Islam, at the same time of telling man to worship Allah and how to worship Him, tells him also how to live... There is no movement or act done by the individual or the

¹¹ Ibid., vol. 8, 60–62.

¹² Ibid., vol. 6, 352–3.

¹³ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-Ye Imam an Anthology*, vol. 14, 333–5.

¹⁴ Ibid., vol. 14, 336.

society without lacks a relevant Islamic precept.”

Therefore, the *Ulama* should play a role in all the affairs of the society, “since Islam undertakes the guidance of the society in all affairs and dimension,”¹⁵ Khomeini emphasised the need to restructure all aspects of state institutions. He proclaimed, we “should transform our educational and judicial systems, as well as the ministries and government offices that are now run on Western lines or in a slavish imitation of Western models and make them compatible to Islam. Thus demonstrating to the world true social justice and the cultural, economic and political independence.”¹⁶

The Islamisation of educational institutions became an important pillar of his project, as he considered universities and schools to be the main institutions for making the new person, *homo Islamicus*. They were amongst the sensitive areas targeted by enemies of the IRI: “...we are not afraid of an economic blockade, we are not afraid of military invasion. What frightens us is cultural dependence. We are afraid of an imperialistic university. We are afraid of a university which educates our youth in such a way to make them serve the West.”¹⁷ He believed: “If teachers are left free to train our children and our youth in any way they desire, it is bound to lead to deviation and is also against the sublime teachings of Islam.”¹⁸ He demanded that “Universities are to be fundamentally changed. They must be rebuilt anew so as to educate our youths Islamically. Together with acquiring knowledge, there should be Islamic education. There should not be a Western education.”¹⁹

Khomeinism gave special attention to cultural elements. Historiography, literature and art were to be modified with the aim of helping to create the *homo*

¹⁵ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 116.

¹⁶ Hamid Algar, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini* (Mizan Press, 1980): 226.

¹⁷ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 221.

¹⁸ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-Ye Imam an Anthology*, vol. 14, 147–8.

¹⁹ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 221.

Islamicus. For instance, media, cinema and theatre were viewed suspiciously as imported Western tools only serving the exploitative West. “Radio, TV, the press and cinema and theatre are effective means of doping and ruining nations, especially the young. Within the past century, particularly in its second half, no effort was spared in using these means to blacken Islam and the clergy, while propagating for the Western and (Communist) Eastern imperialists...”²⁰

Therefore, similar to the Stalinist approach, he promoted the idea that artists and their works should be in the service of Islam and the spread of revolution.²¹ Khomeini stressed: “We will uproot all Western cultural influence and will set up a just Islamic government. Western laws must be uprooted and replaced by Islamic ones.”²²

Khomeinism granted itself the right to interfere in the private sphere of its subjects to ensure adherence to its norms. Personal behaviour became the government’s interest. Khomeini attacked different Western lifestyles and called for state intervention in order to save the *homo Islamicus* from corruptive Western influences so *homo Islamicus* could concentrate on making a utopian society. Different youth activities and entertainment were banned, including singing, dancing, playing chess or billiards, and drinking alcohol, while casinos and cabarets were closed.

Khomeini proclaimed, in regard to entertainment, “Islam opposes whatever leads man to futility and to estrangement from himself. Drinking wine is prohibited in Islam, and films turning man away from his high morality are also prohibited.”²³ The IRI expanded local mosques and religious libraries to replace these banned activities. The IRI also made the people’s attire a matter of state intervention. It introduced an

²⁰ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 21, 436–8.

²¹ Ibid., vol. 21, 139.

²² Ibid., vol. 5, 119–20.

²³ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 256.

Islamic dress code and criminalised non-adherents. Wearing the veil (*hejab*) for women became mandatory, and men could not wear short-sleeve shirts or shorts in public, or shave their beards. However, Khomeini seemed to contradict himself when he issued a decree obliging officials to respect the private sphere of the people.²⁴ The boundaries of the private sphere and the state's jurisdiction played a significant role in the popularisation of factional politics in the post-Khomeini era.

Social justice for the masses was another main pillar of Khomeinism. Khomeini argued: "The history of the prophets is well known. They emerged in order to mobilise the needy... to establish social justice."²⁵ He stressed, the issue of social justice distinguished the IRI from other regimes: "The issue of social justice is the main difference between the humane Islamic regime and other regime forms."²⁶ Given the role social justice played in the mobilisation of Khomeini's support base, in addition to its inherent popular characteristics, it became one of the major issues in the dynamics of the popularisation of factional politics.

To deliver the promises of social justice, Khomeini criticised the Western and Soviet economic models, while propagating an Islamic economy. "It is the responsibility of the *Ulama* and the scholars of Islam to prepare constructive plans and programs covering the interests of the deprived and the bare-footed, to replace the unjust economy ruling over the world of Islam... Naturally, to carry out the objectives of Islam in this world."²⁷ However, he considered the main goals of the revolution to be their religious, spiritual ones. "Yet, popular legitimacy of Khomeinism was to a significant degree dependent on the IRI's ability to provide the conditions for

²⁴ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 17, 139.

²⁵ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 430.

²⁶ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 8, p. 255.

²⁷ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 204.

economic growth, social justice, and a decent standard of living.”²⁸

For Khomeini, the spread of revolution became a part of the revolution which would ensure the endurance and success of the new regime.²⁹ “We shall export our experiences to the whole world... without the smallest expectation in return. It is certain that exporting the experiences will result in nothing but the blossoming of victory, independence and the application of the precept of Islam for all the nations in chains.”³⁰ He underlined that the revolution is not confined to Iran and the people should endure hardship while the state strove to export its revolution.

Our authorities should know that our revolution is not confined to Iran. The revolution of the people of Iran is the starting point of the great Islamic Revolution of the world, under the banner of the Imam al-Mahdi (Hidden Imam)... So that Allah may bestow His favour upon Muslims and all the people of the world by deciding his appearance to take place in the present age... The government of the Islamic Republic is to do its best to manage the people... but it does not mean to divert them from the great objectives of the Revolution, i.e., the establishment of a worldwide Islamic government.³¹

Almost a year after the revolution, Iraq invaded Iran. By 1982, the war entered a new phase after Iran regained control of territories initially captured by Iraq. In this context, Khomeini was propagated as the leader of a universal Islamic revolution that would stand against the two superpowers to prove to all Muslims they can be liberated from the yoke of oppressor regimes that are ‘puppets of US government.’ Khomeini placed war as one of the major aspects of the revolution whose goal was a victory by eliminating all ‘seditionists’ (*Fetnehgaran*) from the world.³²

However, by 1988, the continuation of the war seemed impossible, given Western support for Iraq and rising domestic socioeconomic difficulties. Nonetheless,

²⁸ Shakibi, *Khatami*, 94.

²⁹ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 17, 381; Ibid., vol. 19, 23–4.

³⁰ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 383.

³¹ Ibid., p. 385.

³² Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 17, 112.

ending the war without reaching its goals seemed a serious ideological and legitimacy challenge to Khomeinism. It was seen as a defeat and a retreat from the revolutionary rhetoric propagated since Iraq's invasion.

In January 1988, Khomeini issued a decree to address a domestic political deadlock, which several months later used as one of the justifications for accepting the ceasefire. "Khomeini solidified and institutionalised the concept of 'state interest' (*maslahat*) that subordinated the interests of religious and universalist Islam to those of the Islamic Iranian state."³³

The government, which is a branch of the absolute guardianship of the Messenger of Allah (s), is one of the primary laws of Islam, and it takes precedence over all secondary laws including prayer, fasting and Hajj. The ruler may demolish a mosque or house along a highway... The ruler can unilaterally annul religious contracts forged with the people in case the contracts are against the interest of Islam and the country. He can prevent any affair—devotional or else—whose occurrence is against the interests of Islam as long as it is so. The government can temporarily stop the performance of Hajj, which is one of the important religious obligations, at times when it is against the interests of the Islamic country.³⁴

This decree also provided more room for the expansion and intensification of factional politics, as is shown in subsequent chapters.

Khomeini also effectively used different democratic slogans during and after the revolution. He emphasised the importance of freedom, democracy and the participation of the people in politics. However, as was shown, this was a reflection of his own interpretation of these concepts.

Shortly before the success of the revolution, he proclaimed, freedom of expression and of belief were among the main elements of the emerging regime: "Islam, more than any other religion, and more than any creed, gives freedom to

³³ Shakibi, *Khatami*, 88.

³⁴ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam an Anthology*, vol. 20, 426–7.

religious minorities, as they, too, must enjoy their natural rights which Allah has granted to all humanity... In the Islamic Republic the Communists are free to express their beliefs.”³⁵ Khomeini also underlined the compatibility of Islam and democracy: “Democracy is inherent in Islam. The people are free in Islam, both in expressing their ideas and in practicing them, so far as there is no plot and so long as they do not propose issues that may misguide the Iranian generation.”³⁶

Just a few months before the triumph of the revolution, he defined the role of people in the new government: “It is every nation’s primary right to decide their fate and to decide the form and the kind of their government by themselves.”³⁷ In December 1978, in response to a question about the characteristics of the new regime, he proclaimed: “We intend to replace the monarchical regime with an Islamic government in its true sense. We will hold a referendum on the republican system and since the Iranians are all Muslims, they will vote for it. After their confirmation, the Islamic Republic will be established.”³⁸

On different occasions, he made people the main supervisor of the regime. “The whole nation is duty-bound to exercise supervision over these (state’s) affairs... If I took a wrong step or made a wrong move, it would be the people’s duty to tell me so, to tell me to watch my step,” but, this supervisory role was mainly to ensure the IRI did not deviate from Islamic norms: “It is the duty of all to supervise all the affairs that concern Islam.”³⁹ He also referred to the dual characteristics of the IRI: “Briefly speaking, government is the government of Islam and people. The *Majlis* is from the people; vote is from the people and no one is under the command of any official or

³⁵ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 291.

³⁶ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam an Anthology*, vol. 5, 455.

³⁷ Khomeini, *Fundamentals of the Islamic*, 307.

³⁸ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam an Anthology*, vol. 5, 140.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 8, 5.

officials.”⁴⁰ On another occasion, he highlighted popular sovereignty: “All must know that there is no power today that is able to impose one single representative on the nation... Therefore, today the responsibility is with the nation.”⁴¹

Seemingly in contradiction to these statements, he made clear: Islam was to be the base for this new superior modernity and clerics had a special role in its construction. After the victory of the revolution, he changed his position somewhat: “We have changed our mind about what we said in the press interviews. Temporarily, the country will be run by the *Ulama*, but when it can be run by the non-*Ulama*, the *Ulama* would return to their posts of guiding the people... and hand the executive establishments over to those who are working for Islam.... Let them say: It is the country of the *mollahs*, the government of the *akhunds*, and the like... but no, we will not go out of the arena.”⁴²

The role of Khomeini in the future regime changed over the years. In the 1960s, when Khomeini introduced the thesis of *velayat-e faqih*, he considered the role of *faqih* as the head of the state apparatus. During the time he spent in Paris at the time of the revolution, Khomeini described his future role: “In future, I will continue the role that I have right now. I will guide and direct. If the need arises, I will intervene. If treachery emerges, I shall struggle against it. But I shall not have any role in the government.”⁴³

However, after the revolution, he became the head of state and institutionalised the role of *vali-ye faqih*. Thus, “such statements created a degree of ambiguity about the political and institutional relationship between the position of the religious leader and the state. This issue would become paramount once he passed away in 1989.”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Ibid., vol. 18, 277.

⁴¹ Ibid., vol. 12, 158.

⁴² Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 16, 302-3.

⁴³ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam an Anthology*, vol. 3, 174.

⁴⁴ Shakibi, *Khatami*, 90.

While Khomeini emphasised the importance of republicanism and the role of *foqaha* in the government, he left an ambiguity about the institutional and political relationship between them. This became a catalyst for the factionalisation of politics and their popularisation.

Institutionalised Khomeinism

During the revolutionary period, Khomeini promised an Islamic Republic. He also promised the creation of a new universal modernity, rooted in Khomeinist Islam. Although, he did not specify how the Islamic and republican elements would coexist within a Constitutional and political framework. The institutionalisation of Khomeinism reflected both these goals and their political tensions and contradictions with each other. The state was divided into revolutionary and republican institutions, which continue to play a large role in the factional and popular politics of the Islamic Republic.

Revolutionary Institutions

Just a few months after the Iranian revolution, on the 1 April 1979, Iran was officially declared an Islamic Republic.⁴⁵ Khomeini proclaimed this the “first day of God’s government.”⁴⁶ In an election on 3 August, 73 people were selected as members of an Assembly of Experts (AofE) to review the draft of a new Constitution. On 3 December 1979, the Constitution was ratified after a series of intense debates. Khomeini attempted to institutionalise his perception of the Islamic Republic.

Thus, he used his authority to integrate the *sharia* into the Constitution. In his

⁴⁵ In a two-day nationwide referendum, 98.2 percent of Iranians voted ‘yes’ to the new form of Iranian government, known as an Islamic Republic.

⁴⁶ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 5, 233.

decree to the AofE drafting the Constitution, he underlined the need to “Make sure that our Constitution is within the framework of the law of the *sharia*. If any one or all the members negate the *sharia*, they are not our representatives.”⁴⁷ As a result, despite the presence of republican institutions in the Constitution, “The revolutionary, clerical-run institutions held real power. The force limiting the power of all institutions was Khomeini’s charismatic authority and unique position above them.”⁴⁸

Khomeini’s original thesis of ‘Islamic Government’ put emphasis on the absolute power of clerics, the leader and Islamic governance. Once the revolution gained momentum, he modified his rhetoric. Speaking of an Islamic Republic, he gave the impression at the time the role of republican institutions being sometimes superior or equal to revolutionary institutions. However, after the revolution succeeded, and by the end of his life, he returned to his original thesis. Therefore, he attempted to integrate republicanism and religious *sharia* law in the Constitution. He also ensured the clergy gained a significant role.⁴⁹ However, the tensions in Khomeinism between republican and revolutionary institutions remained.

Khomeini’s institutionalisation of *vali-ye faqih*, symbolised the supremacy of revolutionary and Islamic pillars over the republican institutions. The attempts to institutionalise the principle of *vali-ye faqih* were reflected in seven articles of the IRI Constitution.⁵⁰ Article 5, written and proposed by Mohammad Beheshti, the leader of IRP and Khomeini’s confidante, underlines the *faqih*’s authority over the people: “In the Islamic Republic of Iran... The sovereignty of the command [of God] and religious leadership of the community [of believers] is the responsibility of the jurisprudent

⁴⁷ Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, 269.

⁴⁸ Shakibi, *Khatami*, 114.

⁴⁹ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 16, 302–3; *Ibid.*, vol. 21, 423–4.

⁵⁰ Articles 5, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111 and 112 of the IRI Constitution.

(*faqih*) who is just, pious, courageous, knowledgeable about his era, a capable administrator, and is recognised and accepted by the majority of people as leader.”⁵¹

In addition to these characteristics, he should also have “scholarly qualifications and piety for issuing religious rulings (*fatva*) and serving as the *marja*,” as well as “political and social insight, courage, power and sufficient administrative abilities for leadership.”⁵²

The Constitution also established the Assembly of Experts, which comprises high-ranking clerics who are elected after a vetting process. Its main responsibility is the selection of the Supreme Leader and even has the authority to dismiss the leader if “he is incapable of fulfilling his legal responsibilities,” or “becomes deficient in one of the qualifications,” or “from the offset he has been lacking in some of the qualifications.”⁵³ However, since the vetting of this assembly is exercised by the Guardian Council (GC), whose members are directly appointed by the Supreme Leader, he can use his authority to ensure the composition of the Assembly remains loyal to him.

According to Article 110, the authority of the Supreme Leader is almost extensively over all institutions and official bodies of government. He has power over the military, the GC, the judiciary, the economic foundations and religious institutions. He also signs the decrees appointing the President after an election and dismissing him after impeachment. This Constitutional preparatory made the Supreme Leader the main pillar of the regime.

In this Constitution, the position of Supreme Leader was tailored for Khomeini. The criteria of being sources of imitation (*Marja'-e Taqlid*) made the Supreme Leader

⁵¹ The IRI Constitution Article 5 (1979), trans. Firoozeh Papan-Matin, "The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1989 Edition)," *Iranian Studies* 47, no. 1 (2014): 159–200.

⁵² The IRI Constitution Article 108, *Ibid.*

⁵³ The IRI Constitution Article 111, *Ibid.*

respected due to his religious credentials. However, the additional criteria requiring the Supreme Leader to be proficient in administrative issues made him a political figure who should guide the nation to its historical/revolutionary goal of reaching the utopian vision, whilst standing above the factional infighting as a spiritual mentor.

Khomeini “fulfilled this dual function, given the respect he inspired because of his roles in the revolution and the establishment of the IRI, in addition to his clerical ranking and charismatic authority. Khomeini, as the leader, sat above all other institutions and factions, leaning primarily on no-one, and playing one against another.”⁵⁴ Yet, no successor could have played such a role fully, given that any successor would lack the charismatic authority of the father figure of the revolution.

Though, to accommodate political reality, certain political and institutional aspects of this Constitutional position had to be changed. By the time of his death, Khomeini ordered the establishment of a new assembly to revise the Constitution in order to solve increasing institutional deadlocks and utilise the Supreme Leader’s institution for the possible successor.

In the new Constitution, the leadership council and condition of being the grand Ayatollah (*Marja'iyyat*), were dropped and the main criteria became the Leader’s sociopolitical knowledge. The responsibilities of the Supreme Leader were expanded in two ways. He came to determine the overall policies of the IRI after consultation with the Expediency Council; and, “Supervision of the proper execution of the general policies of the system.”⁵⁵ Although the goal of this revision was to solve the inherent Constitutional contradictions between different state institutions, the new Constitution left many of them untouched. Therefore, these moves added to the existing complexity of the context of factional politics and gave momentum to the future popularisation of

⁵⁴ Shakibi, *Khatami*, 121–122.

⁵⁵ The IRI Constitution Article 110, Papan-Matin, *The Constitution*.

factional politics.

The institutionalisation of Khomeinism created several revolutionary institutions, touching on almost all aspects of social, cultural, economic and political life. These institutions gained their legitimacy through the need to safeguard the revolution or its Islamic nature. Sitting on the top of these guardian institutions remained the Supreme Leader with his institutional authority.

Three months after the revolution, Khomeini issued a decree establishing the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC). Its mission is to safeguard the revolution. The IRGC was established to organise revolutionary armed groups which emerged during the revolution. They were meant to be an alternative military force to the army, given the Khomeinists' lack of confidence in the army and their fear of a possible coup.⁵⁶ Article 150 of the Constitution institutionalised the role of the IRGC: "The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps... will remain in effect in order to continue its role of protecting the revolution and its achievements."⁵⁷

The ambiguities hidden in the term "guarding the revolution and its achievements" gave the IRGC enough room to justify its different interventions and policies over time. When Khomeini was alive the IRGC could not act independently. However, after his death, and with the pluralisation of Khomeinism, the IRGC justified its activities under the claims of defending the revolution and its achievements based on its claims of having the correct interpretation of Khomeinism. The republican pillars have little or no scrutiny over the IRGC. Efforts during the Rafsanjani and Khatami eras to bring it under the control of the Executive Republican branch were unsuccessful.

⁵⁶ Afshon P Ostovar, *Guardians of the Islamic Revolution Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979--2009)* (University of Michigan, 2009).

⁵⁷ The IRI Constitution Article 150, Papan-Matin, *The Constitution*.

However, in response to these attempts of the Executive branch, and due to the dynamics of factional politics, the links between the IRGC and the Supreme Leadership Office (SLO) increasingly strengthened, given their institutional ties. The Supreme Leader enjoys the IRGC's loyalty in exchange for providing them protection against the republican bodies. With its financial empowerment and sociopolitical activities, the IRGC became a very influential player in factional politics and in the institutional power balance of the post-Khomeini era.

The revolutionary/Islamic pillar of the IRI encompasses a political-economic system to ensure the protection of its economic and political interests. The main pillars of this system are economic foundations (*bonyads*). These institutions emerged to fulfil socioeconomic promises of the revolution for part of its main supporters. Some of these foundations represented the institutionalisation of part of the traditional religious role of clerics, such as management of endowments and religious incomes of holy shrines and their estates.

Similar to the leftists' push for social justice, Khomeini's slogan of the "government of 'downtrodden'" was one of the main factors in unifying the lower and lower-middle-class' support behind the revolution. Thus, soon after the revolution, these foundations were established to respond to the socioeconomic needs of these groups. They are charity organisations independent of republican institutions. They soon evolved into one of the main political and financial sources of the revolutionary institutions. For instance, weeks after the revolution, *bonyad-e Mostazafan* (later *bonyad-e Janbazan va Mostazafan*) the Foundation of the Downtrodden, was established.

The *Mostazafan* Foundation soon became one of the IRI's financial behemoths

with assets of more than 20 billion dollars by the late 1980s.⁵⁸ Even though the combined budget of the foundations is almost half of the state budget, the Executive Branch has almost no oversight over their activities. The foundations are accountable only to the SLO. Their dependence on the SLO provides them with certain protection against the attempts of republican institutions to reform their special conditions of tax exemption and/or their financial activities. These foundations play a crucial political and economic role, given they employ a large part of the labour force directly or indirectly and offer certain social welfare services to the families of the lower class and the families of their workers.

The SLO ensures the protection of the political and economic interests of the revolutionary institutions in other ways. The SLO, as commander of all armed forces, controls the security, police and military institutions. Amongst these forces, such as *Basij* and IRGC, some are autonomous from the oversight of any republican institution, and a few are unofficially linked to the SLO, such as *Ansar-e Hezbollah* and plain-clothes militia, ('*lebas shakhs*').

‘*Harasat*’ is a division in all state administrative organisations and educational institutions, responsible for matters of security, and controlling the personnel’s adherence to IRI cultural and political norms. Purging Committees ‘*Gozinash*,’ responsible for ensuring the morality and Islamic revolutionary adherence of the personnel, are active in government organisations and educational institutions. Importantly, the Organisation of Islamic Propaganda is under the control of the SLO. Its main duties are “propagation of Islamic thoughts”, “defending the Revolution’s ideals” and “uncovering the cultural conspiracies of IRI’s enemies.”⁵⁹ Islamic

⁵⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 178.

⁵⁹ Statute of Organisation of Islamic Propaganda, <http://old.ido.ir//myhtml/sazman/sazman.aspx>.

associations in the industries and other state organisations empower this control over society.

In the universities, in addition to *Harasat* and the Purging Committee, the University *Basij* and representatives of *vali-ye faqih*, the University *Jihad* had been established after the revolution following the cultural revolution with the responsibility of Islamicisation of the universities under the direct supervision of the Supreme Council for the Cultural Revolution (SCCR). The Friday Prayer Leader (FPL) is another important position playing a significant role in state propaganda and protecting the political-cultural interests of the revolutionary institutions. The Supreme Leader directly appoints its Leaders.

Thus, they enjoy greater authority compared to state representatives, such as mayors and governors. After the revolution FPL became the symbol of the IRI's "ideological power on the local level, [which] concentrates on propagation and the defence of the concept of *velayat-e faqih* and the expression of the political viewpoints of the regime's top political clerics in the revolutionary institutions."⁶⁰

The 12-member GC, the upper house of parliament, is a main revolutionary supervisory body that checks the power of the republican lower house of parliament, the *Majlis*. The GC comprises six jurists in Islamic ordinance, appointed directly by the Supreme Leader and six specialists in the IRI civil law. The civil jurists are nominated by the head of the judiciary and appointed by the *Majlis*. Based on the Constitution, the GC has two main responsibilities. First, it must ensure legislation passed by the *Majlis* is compatible with the Constitution and the Islamic precepts.⁶¹

If the GC finds passed legislation against the Constitution or Islamic criteria, it will send it back to the popularly elected *Majlis*. Second, the GC considers itself

⁶⁰ Shakibi, *Khatami*, 122.

⁶¹ IRI Constitution Article 94.

responsible for ‘supervision’ and oversight of almost all state elections and referendums, from the Presidency to the AofE. A series of deadlocks soon emerged between the GC and other republican institutions, in particular, the *Majlis*. The GC judges legislation based on its interpretation of Khomeinism. Thus, with the emergence of different readings of Khomeinism, the tensions between the GC and the *Majlis* escalated over time. During the Khomeini era, these disputes were mostly settled by the direct or indirect intervention of Khomeini. However, after his death, settling these deadlocks became another source of tension between different factions, and the subject of public debates.

The GC’s supervisory role in elections is one of the main reflections of tension between revolutionary guardianship and different aspects of republicanism. It is a tool which enables the GC to influence the elections directly by implementing a selective approach towards different political groups. This prerogative of the GC has been the subject of many factional and political debates.

Initially, the GC used to vet the cases of only those proposed candidates whose credentials were rejected by the ‘Supervisory Committee.’ The Supervisory Committee was a body under the control of the Interior Ministry responsible for vetting *Majlis* candidates. Thus, the GC could theoretically expand the competitive aspects of the election. However, the GC changed its vetting process which all the candidates had to pass. Thus, the GC used its position as a powerful political tool to contain and to control the power of different political groups. By the election to the second *Majlis*, in 1984 the GC eliminated moderate liberal MPs, claiming they were against the *velayat-e faqih* thesis. Later on, in 1991, the GC interpreted its supervisory role as ‘mandatory’ (*estesvabi*) and ‘comprehensive’ (*'am*) supervision.

Consequently, it expanded its control over the electoral processes even further.

The GC expanded its vetting criteria to approve only those potential candidates who had shown their Islamic convictions and loyalty to the regime and importantly the *velayat-e mutlaqeh-ye faqih* thesis.⁶² The GC increasingly used its revolutionary institutional power for political purposes. The members of the GC, actively involved in factional politics, used their institutional prerogative for political and factional purposes.

Through vetting, they removed their factional rivals.⁶³ The changes in the GC's responsibilities faced the opposition of the *Majlis*, but mostly due to the Khamenei's intervention as the Supreme Leader, these regulations passed. However, the attempt to reform the election law and the GC's prerogatives remained one of the main factional political issues reflecting deeper tensions between the revolutionary element and the republicanism of the IRI.

One of the main reflections of the republicanism of Khomeinism is the lower house of parliament, the *Majlis*. Based on the Constitution, the *Majlis* enjoys a wide range of duties and responsibilities, including legislative and "examining all the affairs of the country."⁶⁴ MPs are elected through multi-candidate elections and each MP "has the right to express his views on all internal and external affairs of the nation."⁶⁵

The *Majlis* establishes laws, drafts and passes legislation, and approves International treaties, protocols, contracts and agreements.⁶⁶ It is responsible for the examination and approval of the annual budget, approval of government's "taking and giving of loans or grants-in-aid, domestic and foreign,"⁶⁷ and approval of any state-of-

⁶² The IRI's *Majlis* Election Law passed (7/9/1378) (28/November/1999). Article 28, Section 3.

⁶³ Asghar Schirazi, *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic* (IB Tauris, 1998).

⁶⁴ IRI Constitution Article 76, Papan-Matin, *The Constitution*.

⁶⁵ IRI Constitution Article 84, *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ IRI Constitution Article 77, *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ IRI Constitution Article 80, *Ibid.*

emergency. All ministers need to obtain a vote of confidence from the *Majlis*. The *Majlis* can remove ministers and even the President from office. Khomeini continuously emphasised the importance of the *Majlis*. He called it “the head of the establishment of the IRI.”⁶⁸ In the post-Khomeini era and during the Khatami period, the Reformists propagated themselves as true Khomeinists. They referred to these expressed views of Khomeini to push their agenda. However, Khomeini’s position, as well as that of the Constitution, remains ambiguous.

The question of the IRI’s source of sovereignty was discussed in the debates prior to the ratification of the Constitution in 1979 and in the debates during its revision in 1988. During the Khatami era, this ambiguity in the Constitution of the IRI’s source of sovereignty became a hotly debated political and factional issue. Article 2 of the Constitution considers divine sovereignty as the main source of the IRI legitimacy.

It defines the IRI as its belief in “one God (“There is no God but God”), the exclusive attribution of sovereignty and the legislation of law to Him, and the necessity of surrender to His commands.”⁶⁹ Article 56 reaffirms, “absolute sovereignty over the world and the human being belongs to God.” However, it also considers God made people “sovereign over their social destiny. No one can take this divine right away from human beings or apply it to the interests of a special person or group.”⁷⁰ Expressly, people are considered “trustee[s] of sovereignty.”

Khomeini strengthened the SLO by considering its ‘guardianship’ (*velayat*) ‘absolute,’ which was then institutionalised in the revised Constitution under the new title of *velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*. This made the question of sovereignty further ambiguous. This Constitutional contradiction translated into tension between

⁶⁸ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol.17, 115.

⁶⁹ IRI Constitution Article 2, Papan-Matin, *The Constitution*.

⁷⁰ IRI Constitution, Article 56, *Ibid*.

revolutionary and republican state institutions.

During the Khomeini era, the winner of the disputes between the *Majlis* and the GC largely depended on the position of Khomeini and not on the power of the people or their elected MPs. Although, after Khomeini's death, this dynamic changed, to an extent. The institutional authority of the *Majlis* increased. Due to the escalation of factional politics and disputes between the *Majlis* and the GC, once again the settlement of the disputes was tied to the Supreme Leader's intervention. However, given the new Supreme Leader did not enjoy the same charisma and authority of Khomeini, the justification of these interventions became a catalysing element in the popularisation of factional politics.

Khomeini took several actions to resolve the legislative gridlock between the *Majlis* and the GC. In 1981, in the disputes between the *Majlis* and the GC over the bill of land reform, Khomeini gave the overriding right to the *Majlis* with reference to issues of the secondary ordinance, if the *Majlis* could reach a two-thirds majority.⁷¹ Khomeini's decree strengthened the *Majlis'* position in relation to the GC.

However, given the GC's power to influence the political affiliation of candidates through pre-election vetting, in practice, *Majlis* remained in a weaker position compared to the GC and other revolutionary institutions. Khomeini's intervention also confirmed the reliance of the *Majlis* on Khomeini's unique position in its disputes with the GC. During this time, the *Majlis* had not yet evolved into an independent source of power rooted in its popular mandate. Rather, it remained mostly an assembly of the regime's elites, which gained its legitimacy from MPs' adherence to Khomeini and to the rhetorical revolutionary stance.

Khomeini's decree did not end the disputes between the GC and the *Majlis*.

⁷¹ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-Ye Imam an Anthology*, vol. 15, 255.

These disputes were largely rooted in the different ideological views between the majority of the *Majlis* at the time and the GC. The *Majlis* was dominated by the Leftists, who believed in a strong central state nationalising many industries and economic sectors, as well as in the state's role in establishing social justice. However, the GC's conservative *faqihs* found the expansion of the role of the state, in particular, taxation and nationalisation, to be against the sanctity of private property in Islam. As a result, in February 1988, Khomeini ordered the establishment of a committee to settle the disputes between the GC and the *Majlis*.

Khomeini's order was accompanied by another controversial decree in which he prioritised 'state interest' (*maslahat*) over religious ordinances mentioned earlier. Thusly, in the revision of the Constitution in 1989, this committee was integrated as a new institution in charge of settling disputes between the GC and the *Majlis* and also consulting the Supreme Leader of the IRI's general policies.⁷²

Following the prioritisation of 'state interest' by Khomeini's decree, and the establishment of Expediency Council, the state interest became institutionalised. Identifying the 'state interest,' in addition to two pre-existing sources of the law: the Constitution and *sharia* law weakened, in theory, the GC's power. Nonetheless, although the Expediency Council is an upper body which can contain the power of the GC and support *Majlis* decisions, the structure of the Expediency Council guarantees the higher hand of the clerical revolutionary — guardian — elements of the IRI over its republican pillars. More than 28 members out of 32 or so permanent members of the Council are appointed by the Supreme Leader.

⁷² IRI Constitution Articles 112 and 110.

Executive Power

Another republican aspect of Khomeinism is the Executive Branch. According to the Constitution, “after the leadership, the President of the Republic is the highest official of the country. He is responsible for executing the Constitution and heading the executive power.”⁷³ The Presidents elected in direct elections to a term of four years. He is limited to two consecutive terms. The GC is responsible for supervising the election and vetting candidates. GC’s vetting is one way revolutionary institutions practice control over the republican institutions and influence the procedure and the future outcome of the head of the republican institution.

Based on the revised Constitution, the President still enjoys a good degree of authority. He has the responsibility of forming the cabinet, implementing legislation and appointing “directors of the Plan and Budget Organisation,” “the National Bank,” and the “National Iranian Oil Company.”⁷⁴ He has the ‘authority to sign treaties, protocols, contracts, and agreements.’ He is a member of the Expediency Council, and the Chair of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), which is responsible for national security, defence, intelligence and foreign policy.

Once a candidate passes the vetting process of the GC and becomes the President by popular vote, he will have a power base separate from revolutionary institutions. However, this does not mean his popular legitimacy and/or his Constitutional authority can protect him and his political space from the influence of the revolutionary institutions.

This brief introduction to the institutions of the Islamic Republic shows the

⁷³ IRI Constitution Article 113, Papan-Matin, *The Constitution*.

⁷⁴ With the revision of the Constitution, the role of the Prime Minister was eliminated due to the escalation of continuous conflict between the President and the Prime Minister. For Constitutional prerogative of the Executive Branch see: IRI Constitution Ch.9.

unique institutionalised hybrid nature of the IRI state. This hybridity not only leaves open the issue of the form and extent of republicanism and Islamism with the regime, it also produces intense factional politics and blends the two forms of factional politics described in the Introduction.

Political Groups and Factions

To understand the evolution of factional politics in the contemporary period, it is necessary to outline the dynamics of factional groups during the Khomeini period. This includes their main members and the major issues over which they fought. It is necessary to examine how Khomeini, as the father of the revolution and the IRI, struggled to manage their factional disputes.

By 1983, Khomeini had purged the political arena of all groups opposing his idea of an Islamic Republic in which revolutionary institutions, and, in particular, the position of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, dominated the country's political life. Despite broad agreement amongst the various factions over the basis of these revolutionary institutions, from the beginning, they divided into two major factional groups: Conservative/Right, and Radical/Left. Throughout this thesis, the term 'Conservative's refers to a faction which includes various conservative political groups. This is also applicable to all other factions, namely the Leftists, the Reformists, the Modern Right and the neo-Conservatives.

Conservatives

The main clerical figures in this group at this time were Ahmad Azari Qomi, Ahmad Jannati, Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani, Lotfollah Safi, Abolghasem Khazali, Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, Mohammad Imami Kashani, and the present leader, Ali Khamenei. The Conservative's social base consists of traditional groups, such as merchants,

landowners, traders and the peasant population.

The alliance of merchants, traders and conservative clerics has a long history in Iranian politics. It was this alliance that opposed both the Qajar and the Pahlavi states and their moves in regard to state building, state taxation and ultimately economic modernisation. As the next chapter shows, this issue played a vital role in the split within the Conservative group during the mid-1990s, into 'Old Right' and 'Modern Right.'

The Conservative group has institutionalised its political power through the creation of political organisations through which they lobby the state and participate in electoral politics as allowed by the IRI Constitution. Their main organisations are: (1) The Society of Militant Clergy (JRM), (2) The Allied Islamic Society (hereafter *Mo'talefeh*), (3) *Hamsu*, (4) The Islamic Society of Engineers, (5) *Zeynab* Society, (6) The Islamic Society of Labourers, (7) The Islamic Association of Trades and Guilds, (8) The Islamic Society of Universities, (9) The Islamic Society of Students, (10) The Islamic Society of Teachers, (11) The Society of Tehran Preachers, (12) The Society of Qom Seminary Teachers (JMHEQ)

JRM, *Mo'talefeh* and JMHEQ are the most important and politically active. Furthermore, their political positions have not evolved fundamentally since the Khomeini period. Their main propaganda outlets include the following newspapers: *Kayhan*, *Resalat*, *Abrar*, *Jomhourieslami*,⁷⁵ *Qods*, *Parto Sokhan*, *Feyziyyeh*, *Harim*, and *Siasat-e Ruz*.⁷⁶

The JRM was established in 1974. Ayatollah Beheshti and Ayatollah Motahhari used it to establish a network capable of coordinating and spreading

⁷⁵ This is the official newspaper of the IRP. After the dissolution of the IRP, it became the JRM's journal.

⁷⁶ Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 47–77.

Khomeini's speeches and writings. During the revolution, it played an important role in mass mobilisation, and after the revolution, in the consolidation of Khomeini's power.

Members of this organisation who played— and, in most cases, still play—an important role in factional politics are Ali Khamenei, Mohammad Javad Bahonar, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Mofatteh, Mahdavi Kani, and Hadi Ghaffari. With the evolution of popularisation of factional politics, some of these members including Rafsanjani became the influential figures in newly emerged factions.

Radicals

The Radicals or the Leftists were influenced by Western ideas of social revolution but within an Islamic context. Morteza Mardiha, one thinker in Iran, summed up their belief system: “political authoritarianism, anti-Westernism, a search for an Islamic utopian modernity, use of violence to achieve goals and great sensitivity to morals and especially sex... and the absolute defense of clergy as a historical duty.”⁷⁷ They regard imperialism, moral corruption and capitalism to be their main targets. At the beginning of the revolution, they enthusiastically supported the idea of creating a *homo Islamicus* and the cultural revolution's methods and goals were similar to cultural revolutions in Stalinist USSR and Mao's China.

The leading members of this group, many of whom still play important roles in the IRI, are Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mohammad Mousavi Khoeniha, Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur, Behzad Nabavi, Mir Karim Mousavi Ardabili, Mehdi Karroubi, Saeed Hajjarian, and Mohammad Hossein Beheshti and Hossein Ali Montazeri. Their main social support base were the lower and lower-middle-classes, and the young

⁷⁷ Morteza Mardiha, *Miras-e Chap-e Mazhabi* [Legacy of Religious Left] (Tehran), 15.

generation of clerics who “were heavily drawn from humbler, rural and small-town backgrounds. For them, the Islamic Revolution would create avenues of rapid upward social mobility.”⁷⁸

Besides constituting an important faction in the Islamic Republic Party before its dissolution due to factional fighting, they institutionalised their political presence within the following organisations: (1) The Crusaders of the Islamic Revolution (*Mojaheddin-e Enqelab-e Islami* MII), which was an armed organisation at the beginning of the revolution; (2) The Office of Strengthening of Unity (*Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat* OSU); and (3) The Committee of the Islamic Revolution.

In 1988, a new powerful organisation was added, the Association of Combatant Clerics (*Majma’ Rohaniyyat-e Mobarez*, MRM). By the mid-1980s, personality and ideological differences in the JRM had paralysed it, which convinced its Leftist clerical members to split from it and create MRM. This moment was of particular importance because even Khomeini proved unable to maintain personal and ideological unity in the most important clerical political organisation. The major clerics establishing it were Karroubi, Mousavi Khuiniha, Doaei, Mohammad Tavassoli, Mohammad Khatami, Mohammad Jamarani, Hassan Sane’i and Sadeq Khalkhali. The split in the JRM mirrored that of 1987 in the IRP, due to increasing personal and political tensions between the two factions.

Besides the personality clashes which played an important role in the evolution of factional politics, several major ideological issues divided them, namely economic policy, foreign policy, social policy and ultimately the source of Islamic jurisprudence and therefore Islamic governance. The role of personality clashes is examined in the following chapters. The goal here is to outline the ideological and political sources of

⁷⁸ Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 21.

conflict to contextualise factional politics in the post-Khomeini period.

Despite Khomeini's emphasis on the necessity of establishing and perpetuating Islamic characteristics in all areas of policy, he provided little theoretical or practical advice regarding specific policies. The first major, ongoing clash touches on economic policy. The Leftists/Radicals, who believed the establishment of social justice was a primary goal of the Islamic Revolution, supported state intervention in the economy and in the redistribution of wealth.

This followed Khomeini's emphasis that the revolution should serve the material and social interests of the downtrodden. For this group, Islam meant social justice. The Conservatives opposed this role for the state. They believed, as did their social base, class differences were divinely ordained. They also believed the state had no real role in wealth redistribution, including land reform, owning parts of the economy, and tax collection. Mohammad Reza Bahonar, the prominent Conservative, an MP for eight terms, and First Deputy Speaker of the ninth *Majlis* (2011–2012), considers economic differences to be the main issue that gave momentum to factional politics in this period. At this time he was an active member of the political elite:

The formation of the Left and Right... was based on economic issues which then evolved to include other areas like politics and finally led to [the formation of the] Reformists and neo-Conservatives (of today)... The issue was that some believed that the People's Labour should belong to the people themselves. While others believed that the state should have the right to use its power and position in something larger, called the national interest (in other words the achievement of social justice). We who believed in the former have been called the Right and those who supported the latter were called the Left... We believed in the private sector and they believed in the state's (central) position in the economy.⁷⁹

The battle between these groups started soon after the victory of the revolution.

⁷⁹ *Etemad* 7/2/1391 (26/April/2012).

In 1981, Radical/Leftist members of the *Majlis* suggested a land reform bill to distribute “land to landless peasants” similar to the one the Shah introduced as part of his White Revolution.⁸⁰ It was controversial since Khomeini had opposed the Shah’s land reforms, calling them contradictory to Islam.⁸¹ The bill was rejected by the GC.

Rafsanjani, then Speaker of the *Majlis*, sent a letter to Khomeini asking him to mediate between the two legislative bodies. Khomeini replied: “The enactment or execution of those laws, which will be necessary for the endurance of the Islamic Republic regime, are permissible on a temporary basis and so long as there is an overriding rule.”⁸² With this decree, Khomeini not only greatly boosted the political fortunes and strength of Mousavi and the Leftists, he also forced a public retreat by the Conservative-dominated GC. The Rightists were outraged, but they were limited in what they could do against Khomeini. In the end, Ayatollah Safi Golpaygani, in a letter implicitly criticised Khomeini’s action.⁸³

Despite his first decree, tensions remained between the two groups, and in particular between the *Majlis* and the GC. The *Majlis*, frustrated with Conservative obstructionism, once again asked Khomeini for direct intervention. In a message on 13 March 1983, after praising the performance of both these institutions, Khomeini stated, the *Majlis* has priority in legislative matters and it “is situated on top of all other institutions.”⁸⁴

It was at this time, Khomeini gave the *Majlis* the GC ‘veto-busting’ right mentioned in the previous section. Although Khomeini’s message and move seemed

⁸⁰ Khadija V. Frings-Hessami, “The Islamic Debate about Land Reform in the Iranian Parliament, 1981-86,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, no. 4 (2001): 136-81.

⁸¹ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 8, 124.

⁸² *Majmo’eh-ye Nazarat-e Showra-ye Negahban Dawreh-ye Avval*, 1359–1365 [Collection of the Opinion of the Guardian Council First period 1980/81–1985/86], 73, 74.

⁸³ Arjomand, *After Khomeini*, 30-31.

⁸⁴ Khomeini, *Sahifeh* vol. 17, 202.

to temper the tension between the two bodies, factional battles soon reappeared. This time, the struggle was over labour law, *Tazirat* (discretionary punishment) and the nationalisation of foreign trade, issues which touched on the role of the state and threatened the interests of groups supporting the Right.⁸⁵ During the First *Majlis* (1980–1984), the GC sent back 102 out of 370 bills; during the Second *Majlis*, 118 out of 316; and during the Third, 96 out of 245. The majority of the rejected bills dealt with some aspect of economic policy.

The factional struggles over economic policy also involved a battle between Khamenei, the president, and Mousavi, the Prime Minister. They are cousins who even before this confrontation had a history of personal confrontations in a familial context. Regarding economic issues, Khamenei was a Rightist while Mousavi was a Leftist. In 1985, in the aftermath of his re-election to the Presidency, Khamenei moved against the Leftists and refused to re-appoint Mousavi as prime minister despite Khomeini's open support for Mousavi.

Khamenei, however, could not stand up to Khomeini, especially after his publication of a letter in which Khomeini stated: "I consider Mr. Mousavi a religious and responsible person. Despite the country's complex situation, his government has been successful. I do not believe that the change in government is in the best interest of the country, given the current situation..."⁸⁶ Mousavi remained despite Khomeini's support not only of Mousavi, but also the Leftists' approach to economic policy.

The Conservatives in the *Majlis*, especially in the GC, continued to assail him and the Leftists over economic issues.⁸⁷ As detailed later, this public humiliation of Khamenei at the hands of Khomeini, and to the benefit of Mousavi, not only greatly

⁸⁵ Three versions of this bill were rejected by the CG in the first *Majlis*.

⁸⁶ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 19, 213.

⁸⁷ *Ettela'at*, 7/9/1366 (8/December/1987).

exacerbated existing personal and ideological hostility between these two men, it also played no small role in Khamenei's opposition to Mousavi in the 2009 Presidential elections.

Khomeini's frustration with the ongoing factional politics over economic policy and the Rightists' continued attempts to undermine leftist economic policies reached another peak in 1987. In December of that year, the Leftist Minister of Labour, Abolqasem Sarhadizadeh, with the support of Mousavi and out of frustration with the GC, sent a letter to Khomeini asking him whether the government could provide services such as water, telephone and electricity for the private sector, and in exchange have the private sector operate within rules and regulations established by the Ministry.

In his response, Khomeini said, "The government can impose such necessary conditions." Khomeini once again acted publicly in support of the Leftists, including Rafsanjani, against the Rightists. Sarhadizadeh then announced, "given Khomeini's decree, the state can regulate prices as well as exercise control over medical and socioeconomic services."⁸⁸

The Rightists, not happy with this repeated public support of the Leftists, sent a letter asking Khomeini to provide more detail on this latest decree. The letter asked whether it was true that the state was now empowered to replace traditional Islamic laws and socioeconomic systems as a result of this decree. Khomeini repeated his decree and stressed the right of the state to regulate medical and socioeconomic services.

A few weeks later, at Friday prayer in Tehran, Khamenei provided his interpretation of Khomeini's decree. The President stated, although the state enjoyed great power, its field of action was limited by the parameters of 'holy Islamic

⁸⁸ Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 73.

injunctions.' A few days later, Khomeini once again publicly humiliated Khamenei by saying, 'Clearly he did not understand my ruling.'⁸⁹

Although Khomeini could not put an end to the factional and personal struggles associated with the making of economic policy, he stepped in at key moments to back the Leftists against the Rightists. Yet he still did not state a clear position with regard to the elements of an Islamic economic policy. Given this ambiguity, Khomeini ensured the factional and personal struggles over this issue would play a large role in the IRI's political arena after his passing.

The second issue dividing the Left and Right, towards the end of the Khomeini period, was the type and the extent of social restrictions imposed from above in pursuit of the construction of *homo Islamicus*. The Rightists considered social and moral restrictions to be at the heart of the Islamic Revolution. By 1987, the Leftists, although still wary of Western cultural and moral influences, lobbied for a lessening of such restrictions. Some 30 percent of *Majlis* bills rejected by the GC in the period 1985–1987 reflected attempts to lessen these restrictions. Khomeini was finally pulled into this struggle. He issued a decree lessening some social restrictions.

The Rightists protested. Khomeini humiliated his rightist critics: 'I must express my regret at your interpretation of holy decrees. Based on your views, modern civilisation must be annihilated and we must all go and live forever in caves and the desert. I advise you to take God into account and not be influenced by 'pseudo-religious' and 'uneducated clerics' (*akhunds*).'⁹⁰

Similar to economic policy, despite his support for Leftist attempts to be more flexible on social issues, Khomeini did not provide theoretical and practical principles

⁸⁹ *Ettela'at*, 26/9/1366 (17/December/1987); 10/10/1366 (31/December/1987); 19/10/1366 (9/January/1988).

⁹⁰ *Ettela'at* (5 October 1988), quoted in Shakibi, *Khatami*, 97.

with regard to the extent of this flexibility. This lapse ensured social issues would become a major dividing line between the groups. By publicly humiliating the Rightists, he ensured they would seek some form of revenge on the Leftists once the father of the revolution had passed away.

The third issue is foreign policy. The Conservatives, although anti-imperialistic and wary of signs of Western, and especially the US, political influence over the country, did not believe in a perpetual struggle between the Islamic Republic and the US. Moreover, they were not great supporters of the export of the revolution. The Leftists had a more radical approach to foreign policy. They believed in the export of revolution, regarding it as necessary for its survival, and condemned any form of relations with the US.

The Leftists were the ones who took over the US embassy in November 1979, to the surprise of Khomeini and the Rightists. Only after seeing the great popular support for taking the embassy staff hostage and the great public animosity towards the US, did Khomeini and other Rightists begin to adopt a more radical approach. Nonetheless, during the Khomeini period, they remained more pragmatic towards the West and the US in particular. At the same time, the rhetorical popularisation of foreign policy became a tool for the regime to mobilise the masses around the regime.

Although Khomeini was attracted to the Leftist approach to foreign policy, he nonetheless remained a political realist. At the height of the Iran–Iraq War, Tehran needed arms and military spare parts from the US. In 1985, a secret deal was made between Washington and Tehran according to which the US would indirectly provide Iran with these. In exchange, Tehran would use its influence in Lebanon to obtain the release of US hostages held by *Hezbollah*. Khomeini's and Reagan's names were kept out of these negotiations and eventual agreement.

A group of Leftists were outraged over this move by Rightists particularly Rafsanjani. Thus, in 1986, Mehdi Hashemi, a Leftist cleric who was the brother of Ayatollah Montazeri's son-in-law, leaked the news of this double-dealing with the US to a newspaper, which started the scandal known as Irangate or Iran-Contra. The IRI political establishment, fearful of public reaction, was shaken to its core. While calling on people to chant 'Down with America' after Friday prayers, the elite was making secret deals with 'the Great Satan.' Khomeini denied any knowledge of the deal. He did, however, have Mehdi Hashemi brought to trial on another charge. One year after the leaking of the deal, Mehdi Hashemi was found guilty of being 'a sower of corruption on earth' and was executed.

In sum, before his death, Khomeini left ambiguity over how to approach the US. His actions indicated, if it was in the interests of the state, the IRI could deal with the US. However, in rhetorical terms, he remained a firm opponent of the US, an enmity which remained a bedrock of IRI ideology. This left ample room for factional struggles over the re-establishment of relations with the US, which were exacerbated by the importance of this issue as the rhetorical popularisation of foreign policy gradually evolved into electoral popularisation from the end of the 1990s, as subsequent chapters show.

The principal issue from which these issues and the consequent divisions arise revolves around Islamic jurisprudence and thus Islamic governance. The debate was, and remains, framed around the concepts of traditional (*sonnati*) and dynamic (*puya*) religious jurisprudence (*feqh*). The difference between these two concepts is in their response to the question of how *feqh* and *ejtehad* should respond to modern-day issues. Traditional *feqh* rejected any major changes in the basic tenets of IRI ideology and claimed, to construct the ideal society in this world. Additionally, it claimed the IRI

must advance towards a political and social system that existed during the time of the Prophet Mohammad. All the necessities for governing society, in order to reach the ideal Islamic society, exist in the main sources of *Shi'ia* Islam: Quran and *Sunnah*. The Rightists support this traditional *feqh*.

Dynamic *feqh*, supported by the Leftists, acknowledge Islamic doctrines can offer a comprehensive base for the IRI. Broadly speaking, they believe jurisprudence is similar to other disciplines of knowledge. Thus, it is influenced by new findings and the accumulation of knowledge in other areas. They argue, similar to other social sciences, the epistemological conception of *feqh* should be changed over time and the modern philosophical tools of thinking, such as logical reasoning, should be applied in *feqh*. As a result, they believe Quran and *Sunnah* can provide enough theoretical and ideological material in governing society, provided new sources of *ejtehad*, like time and human experience, are taken into account.⁹¹

Consequently, followers of *fiqh-e puya* argue, in order to fulfil the socioeconomic and political ideals of revolution, republican and/or revolutionary aspects of the IRI should be adapted to modern forms by the use of secondary ordinance. This is in contrast to followers of *feqh-e sonnati* belief “that it is revolution, the society, and the governing principles of the Islamic Republic that must adapt to the orthodox historical *Shi'i* jurisprudence.”⁹²

Khomeini, who left contradictory statements relating to this issue, seemed to be more concerned with the extent to which this debate was fueling factional struggles and exacerbating the personality clashes between the groups. “When those faithful to the revolution fight over the issues of traditional and dynamic *feqh*, they must

⁹¹ *Ettela'at* (3 May 1998).

⁹² Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 50.

understand that this division is a symbol of enemy infiltration.”⁹³ Despite his warnings, the factional groups continued to struggle over this issue, for its resolution would influence the politics of the IRI in all socioeconomic and political spheres.

At times, Khomeini supported dynamic *feqh*:

I am in favour of the traditional jurisprudence and Jawahiri *ejtehad* and do not allow for infringement of them. *Ejtehad* is the same correct method but it does not mean that the jurisprudence of Islam is not dynamic. Time and space are the two determining elements of *ejtehad*. An issue having a ruling in the past is apparently the same is⁹⁴ sue that a new ruling can possibly be found on the dominant relations of politics, society and economics of a system... The mujtahid should be knowledgeable of the issues of his own time.⁹⁵

On another occasion, by connecting *ejtehad* to sociopolitical insight, Khomeini underlined that the conventional *ejtehad* is not enough:

In the Islamic government, the gate of *ejtehad* must always be open and the nature of the revolution and the system always requires deductive-juristic views in various areas... Yet, what is important is the correct understanding of the government and society on the basis of which the Islamic system could set a program for the benefit of the Muslims wherein the unity of the policy and action is necessary, and on account of this that the conventional *ejtehad* in the religious seminaries is not enough. In fact, if one person is the most learned in the specified sciences in the religious seminaries, but could not identify the interest of the society or could not distinguish the righteous and important persons from the unrighteous ones and, in general, lacks the correct insight and power of decision-making on social and political aspects, that person is not mujtahid on social and governmental issues and cannot administer the affairs of society.⁹⁶

Yet, he also expressed his strong support of *feqh-e Sonnati*:

⁹³ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 21, 145.

⁹⁴ It refers to Shaykh Mohammad Hasan ibn Baqir an-Najafi who passed away in Sha’ban 1266 A.H. He was renowned as Sahib al-Jawahir; literally meaning the ‘Owner of the Jawahir,’ He was a great *faqih* (jurisprudent), as well as a prominent source of religious imitation. His reputation as Sahib al-Jawahir was for writing the book, *Jawahir al-Kalam*, on various subjects of *fiqh* (jurisprudence).

Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam an Anthology*, vol. 21, 289–90.

⁹⁵ Ibid., vol. 21, 289–90.

⁹⁶ Ibid., vol. 21, 171–2.

The academic matter should be such that the traditional jurisprudence is not forgotten. That which has preserved Islam up to now has been the same traditional jurisprudence. All efforts must be exerted to preserve jurisprudence as it is. It is possible for some individuals to say that a new jurisprudence should be conceived, and that is the beginning of destruction of the theological seminaries. One must be vigilant about it.⁹⁷

In his will, he stressed,

I humbly and earnestly advise the Muslim community to follow the infallible Imams and the political, social, economic and military teachings and culture of these great guides to humanity with devotion, sincerity and sacrifice. I would like to enjoin all of you to safeguard and observe the *feqh-e sonnati* (traditional jurisprudence) or religious canons. These set forth the schools of Prophetic mission and *Imamate* and guarantee the growth and development of the nations through their primary and secondary decrees.⁹⁸

In sum, Khomeini's approach to this issue provided factions with the ability to advocate contradictory versions of this issue while claiming to be representatives of true Khomeinism.

Conclusion

In sum, the first section of this chapter introduced the components of Khomeinism and the contradictions emerging as a result of Khomeini's reaction to changing circumstances and events. This sets the framework for understanding the ideological causes of factional struggles. The second section outlined the institutional hybrid structure of the IRI, which is divided between republican and revolutionary Islamic institutions, both of which symbolise the dual promises of republicanism and Islamism at the heart of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary ideology.

This hybrid structure, in turn, produces intense factional struggles and provides the conditions for the emergence of two forms of factional struggles, one in the

⁹⁷ Ibid., vol. 20, 179.

⁹⁸ Ibid., vol. 21, 405.

electoral arena, the other within the institutional context of the Leader, simultaneously conducted by the groups. The last section provided an outline of the two major factions during the Khomeini period and the ideological causes for their struggles. Collectively, these three sections have provided the institutional, historical and ideological background of the IRI. They also provide insight into the factional politics necessary for an examination of this thesis' main research questions. It deals primarily with the evolution and dynamics of factional politics from the end of the Rafsanjani period, as well as with the influence of personal links and relationships on this evolution.

Chapter Two

The Emergence of Factional Politics

This chapter details how the socioeconomic and geopolitical challenges facing the IRI after the death of Khomeini and the end of the Iran-Iraq War, in the context of its Constitutional contradictions, ideological dynamics, and rivalries among political elites, specifically, between Rafsanjani, the President, and Khamenei, the Supreme Leader, led to the expansion and popularisation of factional politics. In this process, the Rafsanjani Presidency (1989–1997) played a vital role.

During this Presidency the political landscape was, to a significant degree, demarcated by four interacting elements: 1) social, economic and geopolitical challenges facing the IRI; 2) ideological ideas and paradigms inherited from Khomeini; 3) the institutional structure which engenders factional politics; and 4) human agency, with particular emphasis on the relationship between Rafsanjani and Khamenei.

This chapter first explores the relationship between Rafsanjani and Khamenei, their personalities and shared experiences until the time of Khomeini's death. The second part examines how social and economic challenges in the IRI institutional structure, shaped and influenced ideological challenges. Particularly, how the IRI, similar to other revolutionary and/or ideological states, faced the challenge of reconciling ideology with the reality of governing an increasingly complex society. The third part examines how the interaction of human agency, factional struggles and hybrid characteristics of the IRI formed a dynamic that resulted in an increasingly influential role of popular politics in the political life of the IRI.

Rafsanjani – Khamenei

The post-Khomeini Era has been overshadowed by the presence and actions of two main political figures: Ali Khamenei and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. In the wake of Khomeini's death, these two men formed a political union that aimed for dealing with the myriad of challenges mentioned above, implementing corresponding but limited changes in the IRI's political and ideological agendas, and restricting the power of the Left which had benefited from Khomeini's protection. Despite an old friendship that dated back to the early days of the struggle against the Pahlavi regime, both men hold different ideological and political views that are reflections of their individual life experiences. Thus, these differences, and the consequent power struggle between figures and institutions supporting them have influenced their relationship in the time covered here.

Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani (b.1934-2017) born to a well-off family of pistachio grove traders and owners. Rafsanjani became a student of Khomeini in 1956 in the Qom Seminary. After the exile of Khomeini in 1964, Rafsanjani took charge of the finances of Khomeini's Movement until the success of the revolution in 1979. This responsibility strengthened his relationship with members of the Bazar. Additionally, he held some responsibility for establishing contact between Khomeini's Movement and other opposition groups.

Consequently, he endured several prison sentences under the Pahlavi regime. During the 1978-79 uprising against the Shah, Rafsanjani was an active member of the Revolutionary Council, a position that led to a growing closeness between him and Khomeini. After the unexpected collapse of the Pahlavi state in January 1979, he played a major role in the consolidation of the new Islamic state. He was specifically involved in the purging of Bani Sadr (the first President of the IRI impeached in 1981);

the taming and containment of *Tudeh*, the main Communist party; and struggling against one of the leading threats to Khomeini, the ‘*Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalgh-e Iran*’ (hereafter MEK).¹ Khomeini had great trust and confidence in Rafsanjani, a fact which added greatly to his formal and informal power.

Although he was the Speaker of *Majlis*, his real formal and informal power was greater than the power which came with this position. For example, during the war, he assumed charge of the armed forces to manage the ongoing differences between their myriad branches. Given his special relationship with Khomeini, he became his representative in the armed forces. He was involved in the Iran-Contra affair and played an influential role in persuading Khomeini to end the Iran-Iraq War.²

Seyyed Ali Khamenei (b.1939) almost five years younger than Rafsanjani, was born in a religious family. In contrast to Rafsanjani, he was raised in a poor family. His father was a seminary teacher. He and two of his brothers followed their father’s path and became clerics. He joined Khomeini’s Movement in 1962 when he was a student of Khomeini in the Qom seminary (1959-1964). It was during this time he met Rafsanjani.

After Khomeini’s exile, Khamenei, given his strong ‘oratorical skills,’ became active in spreading Khomeini’s Movement, which led to his imprisonment and torture by SAVAK, the intelligence agency of the Pahlavi regime, and his subsequent exile to Sistan and Baluchestan in 1977. Although Khamenei was not in the initial core of the ‘Revolutionary Council,’ he joined the council soon after the revolution. After a short

¹ MEK is an Islamic Leftist group which helped Khomeini in the overthrowing of the Pahlavi regime, but later came in conflict with the Khomeinist regime. As the conflict escalated, open war was announced on the IRI regime.

² Akbar Rafsanjani, *Payan-e Defa Aghaz-e Baz Sazi* [End of Resistance Beginning of Reconstruction] (Tehran, Iran: Nashr-i Ma'arif-i Imam, 2011).

For Iran-Contra see: Daniel K Inouye and Lee H Hamilton, *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair: With the Minority Views* (CA: Three Rivers Press, 1988).

period as Minister of Defence in 1980, and following his survival of an assassination attempt, which left his right hand paralysed, he became President for two consecutive terms (1981-1989), enjoying Khomeini's support. Importantly, at this time, the President's office was less prominent than the Prime Minister's office. With Khomeini as the leader, Rafsanjani as the Speaker of the *Majlis*, and Mousavi as the Prime Minister, Khamenei's Presidential position was more ceremonial than executive.³

Khamenei and Rafsanjani have had a long history together. For example, during the Pahlavi period, Rafsanjani helped Khamenei to hide from SAVAK. They shared the expenses of a house during the 1960s.⁴ Additionally, as admitted by Khamenei in his 1965 will, Rafsanjani supported Khamenei financially.⁵ After the revolution, with Rafsanjani's recommendation, Khamenei attained membership in the 'Revolutionary Council.' With Rafsanjani's support, Khamenei obtained the Presidency a year later and finally became the Supreme Leader after Khomeini's death.

Despite their occasional political disagreements, they maintained a good relationship until at least 2009. They have had at least one unrecorded meeting every two weeks. They also publicly emphasised their good relationship; even in 2009, when their political relations were deteriorating, Rafsanjani called it a 'lover's relationship' and underlined that "no one has been closer than me and Mr. Khamenei over the last 50 years."⁶

In contrast to Rafsanjani, who had first-hand experience of the West, due to his many trips to various countries including the US, Khamenei's views about the West,

³ K. Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei: The World View of Iran's Most Powerful Leader* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008).

⁴ Hedayatollah Behboudi, *Sharh-e Esm Zendeginameh-ye Seyyed Ali Hoseini Khamanei* [Khamanei's Biography] (Iran: Muassese-yi Motale'at va Pajuhish-i Siyasi, 2011).

⁵ Ibid., pp-25-75.

⁶ Asr Iran 3/9/1387 (23/November/2008) <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/57603/>.

especially the US, were primarily shaped by the enormous skepticism inherent in the post-1953 coup intellectual atmosphere in Iran, dominated by the discourses of Third Worldism and colonialism.⁷ During the 1960s and 1970s, the dominant intellectual view in Iran was: “anti-Western nostalgia symbolised through the concept of *Gharbzadegi* (Westoxication) [strong opposition to the idea of assimilation to the West without considering any cultural and identity premises which were advertised by some intellectuals in the early twentieth century].”⁸

While Rafsanjani was more involved in the financial affairs of the revolution and public relations with various political groups, Khamenei was in touch with different circles of secular intellectuals. He was interested in music, literature and poetry. When comparing these two men, Rafsanjani displayed a strong sense of self-esteem and, consequently, effective managerial skills. Khamenei arguably suffered from lower self-esteem.⁹

The romanticisation of Iranian-Islamic nostalgia shaping the intellectual discourse of the pre-revolutionary period had made the re-reading of different historical political figures an intellectual trend. While Khamenei found intellectual comfort in Seyyed Qutb’s views, Rafsanjani became fascinated with modernisers, specifically Amir Kabir, who in the mid nineteenth century initiated economic and cultural reforms aimed at modernising Iran.¹⁰

Amir Kabir’s tragic death made him a national hero. After finishing courses in Qom Seminary and following his first book about Palestine, Rafsanjani published

⁷ Khamenei only traveled to the US for attendance to the 1987 UN General Assembly.

⁸ A. Mirsepassi, *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization: Negotiating Modernity in Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2000): 65-95, 77.

⁹ Morteza Mirdar, *Khatarete Akbare Nateq Nouri* [Memoir of Nateq Nouri] (2005). For example, Nouri noted that during Khamenei’s trip to China and North Korea, he was easily offended by perceived breaks in protocol.

¹⁰ Amir Kabir (1807–1852) was an Iranian Prime Minister in the mid-19th century.

Amir Kabir: The Hero of the Struggle against Colonialism. Rafsanjani's views about the role of Islam and clergy in the modern world and his ideas about development are portrayed in this book:¹¹

I wrote "Amir Kabir" so people could understand that, along with promoting piety and afterlife, the clergy also cares about the prosperity and earthly needs of people. I wrote it so Muslims can realise that if there is nothing but promoting piety and afterlife's concerns in a society... this society would become more backward.¹²

At the same time, Khamenei admired Seyyed Qutb, who was an Egyptian intellectual and activist theorising the need for an Islamic state. Qutb was executed by the regime of Gamal Abdol Naser in 1966. Khamenei translated three of Qutb's books into Persian. Arguably, Qutb's ideas had a strong effect on Khamenei's already emerging anti-West world views.

In the translated preface of *Islam and the Problems of Civilisation*, Khamenei argues: "alienation in the face of the 'monstrous' Western civilisation" has been the main threat to the Islamic nations. This 'monster' is "an expanding reality against the school of monotheism and humanity and... its incompatibility with human nature, has made Western civilisation unsustainable." He argues, instead of helping mankind to achieve perfection and salvation, Western civilisation transformed people into slaves. Moreover, now that this civilisation is showing its "flaws and has to face its contradictions and its deep emptiness," its followers are realising that,

At the expense of technology and rapid modernisation, they had lost their humanity and human traditions... According to his (Seyyed Qutb's) and our opinion, Islam is the only way out... And all other paths have no future other than that of confusion for mankind, given that they are the products of mankind. Only Islam... can lead mankind to attain knowledge, power and

¹¹ Rafsanjani 12/2/1386 (2/May/2007), <http://rafsanjani.ir/view.php?id=12090> code: 13095.

¹² Quoted in Abbas Shadlu, *Ahzab Va Jenah-ha ye Siasi-e Iran-e Emruz* [Political Parties in Contemporary Iran] (Vuzara, 2000): 115.

wisdom.¹³

In sum, Rafsanjani supported more interaction with the West, in order to use its technological achievements to achieve modernisation. Meanwhile, Khamenei was worried about Western technologies and modernisation, as well as the effect they would have on the society. Thus he adhered to Third-Worldism and strong skepticism of interaction with the West. Eventually, these two seemingly contradictory approaches towards the world found their way into the power dynamic and factional struggles of the IRI and played a significant role in the views of factions and popularisation of factional politics. Nonetheless, until Khomeini's death, Rafsanjani and Khamenei enjoyed a strong political and personal relationship.

It is important to underline that once he became the Supreme Leader, Khamenei enjoyed great institutional power, but Rafsanjani had greater informal authority.¹⁴ Khamenei lacked Khomeini's charisma, religious authority and background as the father of the revolution. Additionally, a good number of the Leftists and Moderates, who had enjoyed the protection of Khomeini, worried that Khamenei may not support them as Khomeini had.

This worry emerged as a result of the disagreement between Khamenei and Khomeini over the re-appointment of Mousavi. Rafsanjani, however, enjoyed strong public support from Khomeini. He had a popular reputation as a pragmatic manager with a deep knowledge of executive and administrative affairs.¹⁵ Rafsanjani had also maintained a good relationship with other political factions. He obtained the Presidency, a powerful institution, under the 1989 revised Constitution.

¹³ Seyyed Qutb, *Eddeanam'ei 'alayh-e Tamaddon-e Gharb* [Indictment against the Western Civilisation], trans. Ali Khamenei (Mashahad: Tous, 1970): 6-7.

¹⁴ Mohsen M Milani, "The Evolution of the Iranian Presidency: From Bani Sadr to Rafsanjani," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 1 (1993): 95-6.

¹⁵ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 7, 435.

After Khomeini, the transition of power carried little factional tension. With the lobbying of Rafsanjani, along with the tacit, compromised agreement of different factions, Khamenei became the new Supreme Leader. The Right and the Left accepted this for different reasons. Given his economic views, Khamenei was assumed to be affiliated with the Conservatives. On the other hand, the Left considered Khamenei as a compromise candidate because, relative to other possible candidates, he was regarded as a Moderate.

Moreover, the fact that Khamenei was not a Grand Ayatollah made him more vulnerable in factional disputes.¹⁶ These varied perceptions of Khamenei's future role and the potential scale of his power, held by different factions, made his election unanimous. Two months later, along with the referendum for new amendments to the Constitution, Rafsanjani, Speaker of the *Majlis* for nine years, became president. Rafsanjani gained a majority vote of 96.1 per cent with a 53 percent participation rate.¹⁷

During this period, the Conservatives and Rafsanjani's cadres dominated the political arena. Khamenei and Rafsanjani were both members of the JRM. Armed with new Constitutional powers, almost all the IRI institutions were staffed by those who did not belong to the Left. With such a power dynamic, a new Era in the IRI began. Rafsanjani, with the initial support of Khamenei, undertook the economic developmental policies he deemed necessary in the face of the destruction brought by the long Iran-Iraq War. The details of these policies reflected his vision for the future of the IRI. However, their implementation required a considerable shift from the policies of the first decade of the IRI's existence and from the ideological understanding of the base and goals of the revolution. This political-ideological

¹⁶ Khamenei, the Hojjatol Islam, a middle-ranked cleric, was not a *Mojtahed* or *Marja*.'

¹⁷ *Jomhurieslami* 9/5/1368 (31/July/1989).

challenge had to be met before coherent implementation of the development plans could take place.

The vacuum that emerged after the demise of Khomeini created conditions for the intensification of factional struggles as ideological production became decentralised and factional groups claimed to represent the true interpretation of Khomeinism. The serious economic, social and geopolitical challenges that faced the IRI gave great momentum to the factionalisation of politics, as political and policy responses to these challenges were sought by different groups.

The search for these responses was complicated by the incomplete legacy of Khomeinism. Despite his establishment of a relatively organised political theory of an Islamic Republic, Khomeini could not and did not provide comprehensive outlines within Khomeinism in all other areas. Although the '*velayat-e faqih*' thesis was institutionalised after the Constitution's revision, by the time of his death, Khomeini left a contradictory set of opinions touching on different aspects of public and private life. This legacy made it possible for factions, to change their views completely. They were able to claim that they remained within the boundaries of Khomeinism, or to attack other faction's views with the accusation of betraying Khomeini's true path.

According to Lefort, any ideological system that promises a utopia has a figure with 'external' objective knowledge of the truth and absolute power over ideological discourses. This 'master' has the ability to smooth over contradictions within the 'ideological discourse' as it encounters the practicalities of governance. Consequently, within this 'master,' ideology and legitimacy merge. Criticising the 'grand master' can be seen as delegitimising the ideology. With the death of the 'grand master,' his role is divided amongst institutions and successor political elites.

At the same time, successors and subsequent elites must link themselves to the

heritage of the ‘grand master’ and claim that their respective ideas and policies, as well as practices, are in fact true elements of the ‘grand master’s’ ideology and intuitions. In this respect, Iranian politics was no exception, and power struggles over different economic, social and cultural issues had to be framed within, and justified by Khomeinism.¹⁸

Current literature agrees, broadly speaking, there are three main factions in the Rafsanjani era: the Conservatives (also known as the Right, the Traditional Right), the Traditional Left (also called the Left, Leftists and Radicals) and the Modern Right (the Technocrats, the Moderates and the Pragmatists). Moslem (2002) and *Asr-e Ma* introduced a fourth faction, named the ‘neo-Fundamentalists’ or the ‘New Left.’ However, in this study, this group is considered a pressure group of a particular faction, rather than an independent faction in itself. Given its characteristics, this issue will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Challenges and Responses

After the end of the war with Iraq and the death of Khomeini, the IRI faced potentially serious political and ideological problems resulting from geopolitical isolation, economic discontent, and growing social frustration. Economically, the challenges were complex and difficult.¹⁹ Due to the exigencies of the war and the ideological beliefs of the Leftists, a statist economic system had emerged that engendered serious economic problems, such as stagflation, poor productivity, low real economic growth and consistently high unemployment rates.²⁰

The low and lower-middle socioeconomic classes, who had supported

¹⁸ Shakibi, *Khatami*, 136.

¹⁹ Farhang Rajaee, *The Iran-Iraq War: The Politics of Aggression* (University Press of Florida, 1993).

²⁰ Jahangir. Amuzegar, *Iran's Economy under the Islamic Republic* (I. B. Tauris, 1997).

Khomeini's revolution and lost many lives in the war with Iraq felt that the revolutionary promises of social justice and welfare remained unfulfilled.²¹ After all, it was the slogan of social justice that had motivated these classes to back the revolution and then to become the backbone of the regime. In this context, the memory of the strong economic growth of the Pahlavi Era was still alive.

Economic discontent was not limited just to these classes. On the one hand, the professional and mercantile middle-class had endured a drop in their living standards, while remembering, as did other classes, the strong economic growth of the late Pahlavi era. These groups were already culturally and politically hostile to the regime, resenting the state's interference in their private lives. The Bazar, which had financed Khomeini's revolution, found the government's economic politics detrimental to their interests.²²

For example, the IRI introduced economic policies directly infringing on the Bazar's interests, such as new taxation, land reform, new customs' tariffs and nationalisation of foreign trade. Aggressive revolutionary foreign policies surrounding the thesis of the export of the revolution had made international trade more difficult. Lastly, by the end of the war, many urban areas were in ruins. The regime had to take care of an estimated one million veterans, more than half a million disabled veterans and more than 40,000 prisoners of war.²³

In sum, by the late 1980s, almost all economic indices signalled economic deterioration. In a Friday sermon, followed by an interview a week later, Rafsanjani summarised the economic obstacles of this time in 23 elements. The main points were:

²¹ Abrahamian, *History*, 177-189.

²² Arang Keshavarzian, *Bazaar and State in Iran: The Politics of the Tehran Marketplace* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²³ *Mehr News* (22-September-2012).

Statistics could be found at the Centre for Strategic Studies of Presidential Institution <http://nahad.gov.ir/portal/Home>ShowPage.aspx?Object=News&Category>.

the consequences of the war, domestic and international debt, the decrease in real income, extreme bureaucratic centralisation, unnecessary subsidies, a large income gap between rich and poor, the rising expectations of the people after the war, the flight of capital, inadequate tax income, and international isolation.²⁴ All socioeconomic classes were in discontent and had specific expectations that the regime needed to address to avoid a political crisis.

Khomeinism was an attempt to build a utopian modernity based on the premises of Islam, at the core of which was the creation of *homo Islamicus*. The efforts to meet this goal created serious problems that added to the regime's worries on the economic front. This created social discontent as the regime imposed restrictions on personal behaviour in public sphere and attempted to interfere in the people's private sphere. Also, during this period a large post-revolutionary generation was born, eventually called the '60s' generation (Because they were born in the 1360s of the solar Persian calendar (1980s)). They had no memories of the Pahlavi regime or the revolution. They resented both the social restrictions they faced and the declining economic opportunities.

As a whole, people who were under the influence of some liberal norms, obtained two faces: one public, reflecting the Islamic values propagated by the state, and a private one, reflecting their personal lifestyle choices. During the periods of less sociocultural pressure that allowed limited public discussion, some of the components of this culture, such as 'political secularism,' 'private sexual life' or 'forbidden loves,' sparked public debates.²⁵ Khomeinism implemented the 'Islamic Culture' from above, but the liberal sociocultural norms with the nationalistic themes of Pahlavi

²⁴ Rafsanjani 2/6/1370 (24/August/1991), <http://rafsanjani.ir/view.php?id=12987>; Rafsanjani 18/5/1370 (9/August/1991), <http://rafsanjani.ir/view.php?id=8508>.

²⁵ Pardis Mahdavi, *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

period continued to influence a large chunk of public opinion, despite the state's suppression.

Furthermore, the Islamicisation of social policy led to serious social problems. The most important of which for this work was the abolishment of the Pahlavi programme of birth control. This created a population boom, which was the regime's goal. From 1976-1986, the population rose by 46 percent.²⁶ The statist economy could not absorb the increase in those entering the job market. This dramatic increase in the population, especially in provincial and rural areas combined with the conditions of the war to create a massive migration to major cities as people sought work and security. These cities, such as Tehran, could not deal with these high rates of urbanization. The result was rising economic and social discontent. This further resulted in the spread of shantytowns at this period.

During the war the regime was able to blame foreign enemies, namely the West and Iraq, for the problems facing the country. Yet, with the end of the war, this approach was no longer effective. A shift in policies was necessary.

Responses

To institutionalise and strengthen the legitimacy of Khomeinism after the demise of Khomeini, socioeconomic development came to occupy the main place in the agenda of the IRI. The Rafsanjani administration adopted the slogan 'Development' (hereafter *Tose'eh*) to describe its overall goal. In order to justify placing *Tose'eh* at the centre of the IRI's political-ideological agenda, Rafsanjani brought forward Khomeini's decree of 'the Codification of General Policies of the IRI During the Reconstruction Period' to claim he was continuing Khomeini's work. This was his answer to critics

²⁶ Iran's population rose from 33 million in 1976 to 60 million in 1996.

who claimed that he was trying to divert the revolution away from its true path.

In light of this approach, Rafsanjani's supporters bestowed on him the title of 'Marshal of Construction.' Rafsanjani believed the rhetoric, surrounding *Tose'eh*, that aimed to bureaucratise the revolution needed to contain these elements: 1) economic development based on a market-driven economy and privatisation; 2) modernising the state through reform of the bureaucratic system; 3) normalising the IRI's relations with other countries to facilitate economic growth; 4) professionalisation of bureaucracy, based on professional competence rather than revolutionary commitment; and 5) creation and strengthening the 'mercantile bourgeoisie'.²⁷

Rafsanjani's plan for socioeconomic and cultural change, and the above-mentioned shift in the IRI's approach to socioeconomic development are reflected in the composition of his first cabinet. Rafsanjani's moderate sociocultural tendencies can be seen in his appointment of tolerated Leftists, such as Mohammad Khatami as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and Mostafa Moein as Education Minister. His appointment of technocrats reflected the shift in prioritising the role of competence in ideological commitment.

The appointment of US-educated Mohsen Nurbaksh as the Minister of Economic and Financial Affairs, who had a reputation of supporting pro market economic policies, was a clear shift in the economic direction. Ali Akbar Velayati, another US graduate, remained as Foreign Minister. Velayati has a close relationship with Khamenei that dates back to the mid-1980s, when Khamenei, elected to a second term as President, wanted to replace Mir Hossein Mousavi with him as Prime Minister. Khomeini stepped in, publicly humiliated Khamenei, and Mousavi remained as Prime

²⁷ Mercantile Bourgeoisie is a term used by Ali Ansari see: A.M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change* (Chatham House, 2006).

Minister. This made Velayati an interesting actor in the subsequent political drama, when disputes formed during the 2009 election and political players had to declare their position regarding Khamenei, Rafsanjani and Mousavi-Karroubi. In sum, Rafsanjani's goal was to form a technocratic government not involved in politicking and factional politics.

However, rationalisation, bureaucratisation and routinisation of the IRI as requirements of development required both a change in the official ideological discourse and an institutional reshuffle. These above-mentioned elements of *Tose'eh* stood in contrast to the revolutionary mottos of the export of the revolution, denunciation of capitalism and creation of *homo Islamicus*. In sum, popular transitory opinion believed Rafsanjani's plans symbolised the return to the socioeconomic policies of the disgraced Pahlavi regime.

To justify this ideological shift, Khamenei and Rafsanjani initially worked together. They promoted economic development as a mandate of the revolution and an Islamic value applicable to worldly affairs. Islam now dealt with this life and the afterlife. In their speeches, Rafsanjani and Khamenei assumed a new tone. In a series of Friday sermons, Rafsanjani emphasised these changes.²⁸ "It was the prophets' path to encourage people to be concerned about their financial affairs along with giving attention to their afterlife."²⁹

Meanwhile, Khamenei promoted Imam Ali as a "palm plantation" owner. This was a transformation of Imam Ali's position, from being a symbol of disinherited people to a plantation owner.³⁰ In the first meeting with Rafsanjani's cabinet, Khamenei blamed the enemies of the IRI for overlooking the importance of material

²⁸ Rafsanjani 26/8/1368 (17/November/1989), <http://rafsanjani.ir/view.php?id=7361>.

²⁹ Ibid.; Rafsanjani 10/6/1368 (1/September/1989), <http://rafsanjani.ir/view.php?id=7359>.

³⁰ Abrahamian, *A History*, 183.; *Bayan* 1/10/1369 (22/December/1990).

affairs in Islam:

It is the propaganda of our enemies (foreigners) that if the state wants to solve people's problems, to increase production, and to expand mines and industries... It would mean forgetting... revolution's goals and diluting spiritual values... This world and the afterlife, materialistic welfare and spirituals, are completing each other and they could only succeed alongside each other...³¹

To deflect criticism that development plans resembled those of the Pahlavis, Rafsanjani underlined the political and economic autonomy of the IRI and claimed the IRI's approach to *Tose 'eh* was independent of foreign interests.³² Vitally, Rafsanjani argued that no tension existed between commitment to the revolution and being a technocrat.³³

The Rafsanjani government emphasis on economic development and less attention to the creating *homo Islamicus* influenced the socioeconomic relationship between the state and different segments of society. Rafsanjani believed that in light of the socioeconomic challenges the regime faced, it was necessary to create an economic elite capable of advancing the causes of economic development. He understood that this elite might disagree with the regime on sociocultural issues, but would support it given its economic interests.³⁴

Ansari described this move towards "a 'mercantile bourgeois republic,' founded upon an alliance with the traditional merchants and administered through a large bureaucracy dominated, in true patrimonial style, by himself [Rafsanjani]."³⁵ Whether Rafsanjani intended to create this class or not is not the focus here, what is important is the consequences of this class' emergence.

³¹ Khamenei, 8/6/1368 (30/August/1989).

³² Rafsanjani 10/6/1368 (1/September/1989).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ansari, *Iran, Islam*, 41-62.

³⁵ Ibid., 52.

The IRI managed the transition after Khomeini's death by projecting the image of a united decision-making centre and of stability by having one faction, to a large extent, staffing all the state's institutions. The attempts by Rafsanjani and Khamenei to shift the socioeconomic direction of the IRI had two consequences vital to this study, namely, it opened the door for the return of other factions and it institutionalised differing interpretations of Khomeinism, or Khomeini's legacy, as an alternative method for justifying factional political views. Strictly speaking, Rafsanjani's policies became a catalyst to expand factional politics.

Tose'eh's economic objectives faced a social, factional and political backlash given a) the power structure of the IRI and its constitution; b) the populist aspects of Khomeinism; and c) international constraints. Faced with political and popular discontent, Rafsanjani in the middle of his second-term as President, changed his economic approach in favour of a more statist approach, introducing a new rhetoric of 'stabilisation policies'.

Rafsanjani's power position was linked to different and sometimes contradictory premises. For example, implementation of economic policies favouring the Bazar was regarded as a promotion of his interests — as he was a merchant and a building contractor — and resultantly, these policies cost him popularity. Incontrovertibly, as his popularity became a subject of factional and personal rivalry, his economic policies — chiefly in his second term — came into conflict with the traditional Bazar's interest.

Consequences

Privatisation of government-owned companies, one of the main objectives of *Tose'eh*, aimed to boost efficiency, productivity and to achieve economic growth. However, the privatisation was implemented poorly due to myriad factors, including the lack of

transparency, the history of a statist economy, a rent-seeking culture, corruption, and ideological and security conditions.³⁶

Companies with a poor economic portfolio could not attract buyers and remained under state control. Profitable companies, through no bid auctions, were transferred either to close relatives of the regime's elites or to different state institutions, namely '*Bonyads*' or IRGC affiliated firms. Poor privatisation changed the structure of the economy by damaging the private sector, creating semi-governmental corporations and expanding the network of patronage. Moreover, during this period, bribery and bureaucratic corruption increased and even Rafsanjani recognised this bureaucratic corruption.³⁷

As mentioned in Chapter One, *Bonyads* are responsible to the SLO. While they receive a large budget from the state, they have little accountability towards the state's electoral institutions. Thus, this economic empowerment transformed *Bonyads* into giant financial powers. Their involvement in the post-revolution economy expanded into all its sectors creating a vast network of patronage which made them important factional players.³⁸

Ultimately, *Tose'eh*'s privatisation programs, similar to the experience of privatisation in some other countries, led to: 1) the formation of a new economic elite with a patron-client relationship with the regime that consisted of predominantly close relatives of religiopolitical elites. Considering the factional and political arrangements at this time, most of the patronage systems formed within institutions under the control of Khamenei, the Conservatives, or Technocrats surrounding Rafsanjani; 2) an

³⁶ There were fears that foreigners could gain control of vital economic interests.

³⁷ Gheissari and Nasr. *Democracy in Iran*, 126.

³⁸ Activities of Mohsen Rafiq Dust, as the Head of the Mostazafan Bonyad, provide a good example of this interaction.

increase in economic inequality and its social consequences; and 3) the spread of corruption which became a main issue in political and factional debates, subordinating other issues in political discourses. Moreover, Rafsanjani and his family became symbols of corruption, which made him the target of much harsh political criticism in the following years.³⁹

To keep war veterans and military institutions out of politics, Rafsanjani encouraged the IRGC and *Basij* to participate in *Tose'eh*. Yet, Rafsanjani tried to bring them under the control of the state by integrating the IRGC into the regular army establishment, under the control of the 'Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces Logistics.' He failed to achieve this. Nonetheless, Rafsanjani's strategy turned militia institutions into economic giants. For example, the IRGC's Engineering Branch, 'Khatamol Anbia,' became one of the main contractors of big developmental infrastructure projects.⁴⁰

Paradoxically, Rafsanjani's attempts fostered the growing involvement of the IRGC in politics by strengthening them financially. The early sign of IRGC involvement in politics — after the war — was in the fifth *Majlis* election when Mohsen Rezaee, the IRGC Commander-in-Chief, emphasised the need for IRGC involvement in the sociopolitical sphere and implicitly supported the Conservative faction in election campaigns.⁴¹ Above all, these military organisations have an unclear organisational structure and almost no accountability, nor responsibility to civic courts, or to any public supervision. Thus, their involvement in politics and the economy imposes a serious challenge to popular politics.

³⁹ See the next chapter on Rafsanjani-Reformist relationship.

⁴⁰ F.M. Wehrey, United States. Dept. of Defense. Office of the Secretary of Defense, and National Defense Research Institute, *The Rise of the Pasdaran: Assessing the Domestic Roles of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps* (RAND National Defense Research Institute, 2009): 60-63.

⁴¹ *Iran* 25/1/1375 (13-April-1996).

Khamenei obtained political benefit from a strong IRGC and *Basij*. Rafsanjani strengthened them, while remaining suspicious, given his attempts to restrict their political autonomy. Khamenei strengthened his institutional power by protecting these groups. Eventually, Khamenei, his office, and these military organisations became more dependent on each other, given official and unofficial links between them.

Tose'eh also influenced the country's socioeconomic class structure during its implementation and as its consequence. Although the growth of the 'petty bourgeoisie' and bureaucrats experienced slow growth, during 1986-1996, the middle-class, the employees of private sectors and the number of capitalists, including modern capitalists and the traditional sector grew.⁴²

Three elements gave momentum to the expansion and characteristics of the middle-class in this period: 1) demand for more skilled workers and educated professionals and managers; 2) expanded opportunities for higher education; and 3) the emergence of a consumption-based economy which resulted in the empowerment of a mercantile middle-class.

Rafsanjani improved the educational system as a necessary requirement of development. During this period, the number of students increased due both to the population boom and the expansion of education facilities. In higher education, the total number of students tripled, reaching 1.2 million. The demographic, geographic and gender distribution of the education system also improved.⁴³ To meet the increasing demands for education facilities, semi-private and private educational institutions, with partial autonomy from the state, were introduced.

⁴² Sohrab Behdad and Farhad Nomani, "What a Revolution! Thirty Years of Social Class Reshuffling in Iran," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 29, no. 1 (2009).

Mahnaz Zahirinejad, "The State and the Rise of the Middle-class in Iran," *Hemispheres* 29, no. 1 (2014): 63-7.

⁴³ *Sima-ye Sazanegi*, [Review of Construction Era], (Iran, 1997).

The ‘Free Islamic University’ (hereafter Azad University), was one of these institutions that rapidly expanded its branches in different parts of the country, including small cities and rural areas. Thereupon, economic and sociocultural relations of these areas were influenced, given it was mostly middle-class and upper middle-class families who could afford Azad University. Moreover, Azad University significantly increased the number of students and empowered student bodies.

In an atmosphere of relative freedom, new intellectual discourses emerged in universities, criticising different conservative interpretations of Khomeinism. The formation of critical intellectual discourses imposed another challenge to the regime at an ideological and institutional level. The revival of student unions with a bigger student body formed a new mobilisation network competitive to the state-led mobilisation organisations, such as mosques and *Basij*. Thus they played an important role in the popularisation of politics.

Overall, socioeconomic challenges forced the IRI to abandon its revolutionary phase and adopt a new socioeconomic and ideological direction. Implementation of new policies, the socioeconomic consequences of *Tose'eh*, and, ultimately certain geopolitical changes (such as the collapse of the USSR and the Persian Gulf War)⁴⁴ not only affected the relationship between state and society but also provided new political opportunities to rival factions. During the Rafsanjani period, a new power dynamic emerged. While factionalisation of politics at the top increased, the popularisation of politics at the bottom gained momentum.

Politics

This section examines how struggles over policy initiatives and power influenced the

⁴⁴ The geopolitical context of this period will be reviewed in Chapter Six.

relationship between Rafsanjani and Khamenei and, the factionalisation and popularisation of politics. The goal is not to examine the root causes behind these struggles which have already been covered by existing literature.⁴⁵ Rather, the focus is on the political consequences of these struggles and how these consequences impacted the emergence and evolution of factions and the popularisation of factional politics.

During Khomeini's time, the political or ideological success of various factions depended mostly on the opinion of Khomeini. After his death, this dynamic changed. To strengthen their positions, factions needed to gain control of state institutions or increase the power of institutions already held and the support of different figures within the elite.⁴⁶ This new dynamic became a catalyst for the popularisation of factional politics since electoral victory enabled the capture of certain institutions.

Since political parties in the IRI were not institutionalised, personalities played a leading role in electoral victories. Electoral victory in the conditions of the IRI is very dependent on the popularity of leading elite figures (such as Rafsanjani, Mousavi, Khatami and Karroubi). Thus, to an extent, factions themselves ended up becoming little circles based around leading political figures. Since the dynamics of personal relations and institutional and factional power struggles are entangled with each other, a chronological narrative is used to examine the dynamics of politics in this period especially in the light of the emergence of new factional groupings examined below.

The Rafsanjani-Khamenei Alliance

The elite decided that one way to compensate for the absence of Khomeini's charismatic position was to restructure the state's institutions so that the jurisdictional

⁴⁵ Moslem, *Factional Politics*; Baktiar, *Parliamentary*; Gheissari and Nasr, *Democracy in Iran*.

⁴⁶ Moslem, *Factional Politics*. 11-47

lines between them became clearer. Khomeini's increasing emphasis on the 'secondary ordinance' during the last few years before his death and his decree for revising the Constitution two months before his death could be signs he had realised the importance of institutions.

This restructuring aimed to clarify institutional boundaries and minimise possible future factional tensions. Yet, the debates in the 'Assembly for the Revision of the Constitution' were factional in nature. In the revision process, each faction speculated on possible future political scenarios and tried to maximise the power of institutions they already held or expected to hold. In a political move, both factions — the Traditional Right and the Traditional Left — changed their political views.

The Conservatives (the Traditional Right), considering the probability of having Rafsanjani as the next President and a Conservative cleric as the future leader, aimed for a strong central executive body in addition to advocating an individual *faqih* as a leader with a great authority. It is worth noting that, up to this point, the Conservatives had been opposed to a strong central government. Fearing for their power position in the absence of Khomeini's support, Leftists pushed for a strong parliament (the *Majlis*) and prime ministership, since these were their power bases.

The Left opposed elimination of the prime minister's office by claiming concentration of power in the Executive Branch would open the way for dictatorship. By supporting a 'collective leadership' view, the Left altered their views about the strong individual *faqih*, arguing that such a strong position was only suited for Khomeini and no one else.⁴⁷ The hybrid characteristics of the regime made these shifts possible. Eventually, the Traditional Right gained the upper hand and the new Constitution established a strong Presidency and leadership office. Despite this new

⁴⁷ *Mashruh-e Mozakerat-e Showra-ye Baznegari-ye Qanun Asasi*, [Memo of the Sessions of the Constitution Revision] (1989).

power structure, the hybrid character of the Constitution and consequent institutional conflict remained.

Rafsanjani's factional position and his alliance with the Conservatives were based on shared common views about the economy and foreign policy, but his sociocultural views tended to be more in line with the Left. However, the relationship with the Left was tainted by the scandals towards the end of the Iran-Iraq War, namely Rafsanjani's role in the ending of the war and his hand in the McFarlane/Iran-contra affairs.

By the time of the election for the fourth *Majlis* (1992-1996), Rafsanjani and his technocrats and Khamenei and the traditional Right shared a common cause of elimination of the Left. The GC and the 'Supervisory Committee' — the supervisory body within the Ministry of Internal Affairs — banned many Leftists, including prominent seated candidates such as Karroubi (the Speaker of the third *Majlis*), Khoeiniha (leader of MRM, former general prosecutor) and Mohtashamipour (former Interior Minister), from running in the election.⁴⁸

During the election debates, in which criticism was thrown at 'vali-ye faqih,' Rafsanjani supported Khamenei. When the Left expressed concerns about deviation from 'Khomeini's true path,' Rafsanjani condemned the Left harshly, calling their argument the conspiracy of "world arrogance."⁴⁹ In sum, Khamenei was against the Left, given their economic and cultural policies, whilst Rafsanjani hoped that a united *Majlis*, dominated by the Right, would facilitate the implementation of the policies of *Tose'eh*. The Left suffered from a lack of popular support due to their radical foreign

⁴⁸ The fourth *Majlis* had 110 Conservative seats, only 40 Radical seats, and 100 Independent seats, which were mostly affiliated with the Right faction. The Election's Executive Committee, which was under the control of the Interior Ministry, disapproved 90 Radical seats before the GC vetting process began.

⁴⁹ Rafsanjani. 3/2/1372 (23/April/1993), <http://rafsanjani.ir/view.php?id=8687>

policy views and the unpleasant memories of the war-economy, which were linked to their administration.

Despite his role in the elimination of the Left from many of the political institutions, Rafsanjani maintained, to an extent, his relationship with leading figures of this faction. For example, in 1989 he assigned a well-known Leftist and critic of his policies, Khoeiniha, editor of the Left's newspaper *Salam*, as the head of the recently established 'Center for Strategic Research.' This centre soon became a think tank for the Left (later Reformists) and provided them with the opportunity for their reorganisation. This move helped create the conditions for the subsequent alliance of the Left and the Modern Right by 1997.⁵⁰

Soon after the elections to the fourth *Majlis*, the Traditional Right with a solid majority, and in light of the destruction of the Left, now moved to contain the power of the Technocrats. Despite the Right's slogan of "support for Hashemi [Rafsanjani]" in the parliamentary campaign, their alliance was short-lived. Ali Akbar Nateq Nuri, a well-known traditional Conservative, became the Speaker of the fourth *Majlis*, defeating Hassan Rouhani (later President), who enjoyed the support of Technocrats. In another case, the Conservatives impeached the Minister of Transport only six months before the end of Rafsanjani's first term. During Rafsanjani's second term, the composition of his cabinet and sociocultural issues gave great momentum to the escalation of these factional disputes.

The Gradual Split

By the end of Rafsanjani's first term, the power balance between Rafsanjani and Khamenei had changed. Rafsanjani's popularity was declining due to high inflation

⁵⁰ *Andisheh Pouya* *Tir*/1391 (July-August/2012); *Mehrnameh*, *Tir*/1390 (July-2011).

and unemployment rates. Khamenei, then emerged from the shadow of Rafsanjani and established his political position by reinforcing his religiopolitical power as the 'Supreme Leader.' The first signs of the gradual split came when Khamenei joined the Conservatives in criticising Rafsanjani's development plan in 1992.⁵¹

Khamenei's shift was linked, to a certain degree, to the IRI power structure that embodied hybrid characteristics. Rafsanjani's attempts at bureaucratisation of the state and his development plans meant more power to the electoral state institutions and less power for the revolutionary institutions, which were an important source of Khamenei's institutional power. Eventually, these institutional conflicts influenced the personal relationship of these two men.

Khamenei, seeking to enhance his position, sought a powerful political alliance and was after the expansion of the power of the SLO. The alliance of Khamenei and the Conservatives was almost inevitable given their shared views and in light of the old disputes between Khamenei and the Left. To strengthen Khamenei's authority, the Conservatives propagated the institution of '*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*' (absolute mandate of *faqih*) and called him, Imam Khamenei.

On the other hand, Khamenei, using the Constitutional power of the SLO, established new institutions, in order to implement the Conservative's sociocultural views and strengthen his and their institutional power. For example, 'the representatives of *faqih* headquarters' in universities and 'Friday prayers office' were established in 1990 and 1993 respectively. These institutions were parallel to the existing institutions and — as will be discussed in the next section — soon began to play a major role in factional politics.

While the ties between Khamenei and the Conservatives were strengthening,

⁵¹ Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 201

Rafsanjani's ties with the Conservatives were weakening. They considered Rafsanjani's attempts to expand the state bureaucracy, support for an industrial export-based economy, and adherence to relatively moderate sociocultural views, to be threats to their power and economic interests. This deterioration of relations, to an extent, influenced Rafsanjani's personal relationship with Khamenei. Given Khamenei's increasing ties with the Conservatives. This dynamic was an underlining theme in most of the factional disputes of this period.

Sociocultural Issues

The above-mentioned domestic and geopolitical situation, resulting from the end of the Cold War and the death of Khomeini, presented the IRI with an ideological challenge. In order to strengthen its Islamic/revolutionary institutions, Khomeinism needed, therefore, to be reformulated. Thus, Khamenei introduced the hegemonic discourse of 'cultural onslaught.' For Khamenei this initiative enabled him to reinforce his position as Supreme Leader and to prove his standing as a regime intellectual. Vitally, it gave him the opportunity to establish a new school of thought within Khomeinism.

Nonetheless, in this discourse, which was largely rooted in Khomeinism and a great reflection of Khamenei's political thought on the West, 'Islamic culture' was introduced as a 'moral' culture superior to the Western 'liberal' and 'immoral culture,' promising happiness in this world and the other world based on propagating 'real' virtues. The 'cultural onslaught' was contextualised in response to the continuation of the West's enmity with Islamic Iran, specifically the US and Israel. The IRI was positioned as the leader of resistance to the West's 'imperialist colonial hegemonic plots.' Similar to other ideologies, 'cultural onslaught' was an attempt to construct an emotional context for mobilising people and justifying the IRI's revolutionary power

structure. As Khamenei stated:

At the current time, and especially after the complete defeat of Marxism, the West's arrogance uses cultural means and methods in order to dominate and expand its political and atheist hegemony over revolutionary nations... Not reacting to such 'cultural onslaught,' which sometimes ensues itself through the writings of sacked elements (*anasor-e khod forukhteh*)... will have damaging and destructive [consequences].⁵²

The Conservatives backed the discourse of 'cultural onslaught' and used it to justify their sociocultural views in society at this period. The Conservatives believed that, in the public sphere, the people had to adhere to certain Islamic cultural norms. For example, wearing *Hejab* and/or the separation of genders in schools. They placed renewed emphasis on making *homo Islamicus* and considered it as a duty of the Islamic state. Accordingly, the state's intervention in the private sphere, and specifically the state's supervision of public behavior, were justified under a traditional interpretation of Islamic discourse of Propagation of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice [*hereafter PVPV*].⁵³

Backed by Khamenei, the Conservatives moved to implement their cultural views. The evolving battle over the sociocultural direction of the IRI increased in intensity when Khatami, Minister of Culture and Guidance, resigned in 1991 over growing Conservative criticisms of his sociocultural policies. Ali Larijani, a well-known Conservative and a member of the Conservative political organisation, *Mo'talefeh*, replaced Khatami. Upon his appointment, he announced that his main mission was "to confront the cultural onslaught of the West" with the culture based on

⁵² Khamenei 2/7/1370 (24/September/1991), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2493>.

⁵³ PVPV, an Islamic concept, asks Muslims not to be indifferent to other people and society. It also actively propagates the wise, virtuous and prohibit others from evil. Or also "enjoining what is proper or good and forbidding what is reprehensible or evil."

W. Madelung, "AMR BE MA'RUF," Encyclopaedia Iranica, (December 15,-1989) vol.-I, Fasc. 9: 992-95.

the teaching of Islam.⁵⁴

In 1993, Ahmad Jannati, a Reactionary Conservative, was selected by Khamenei to form the Organisation of Vivification of PVPV to enforce 'true Islamic culture.' Furthermore, in 1994, Ali Larijani replaced the head of National Radio and TV, Mohammad Rafsanjani, Rafsanjani's brother, who had the reputation of holding moderate sociocultural views. In his decree appointing Ali Larijani, Khamenei underlined: "The general theme of all programmes should be resistance to the 'cultural onslaught' and propaganda campaign of 'world arrogance.'"⁵⁵

a) Mostafa Mir Salim, another *Mo'talefeh* member, replaced Ali Larijani as the new Minister of Culture and Guidance. He gave greater momentum to the Conservative's position on culture and announced that his mission was: a) to propagate the culture of *Basiji*; b) to cleanse the media of 'liberal' thoughts; and c) to support and protect the media's duty to propagate proper religious and revolutionary virtues.⁵⁶

As part of the Conservative's campaign, many newspapers were closed on the pretext of propagating 'liberal norms' or challenging the Conservative's view on Islam. Intellectuals charged with the accusation of entertaining 'liberal' tendencies faced increased social and political restrictions. Some of these intellectuals were fired or forced to take early retirement, while a large number of books were banned. In addition to this reactive campaign, the IRI reinvigorated its propaganda offensive on the cultural front. For example, a series of editorials in *Kayhan* newspaper and a TV program under the name of '*Hoviyyat*' (Identity) were dedicated to propagating the

⁵⁴ Larijani's speech in the Majlis on 20/5/1371 (11/August/1992), http://ical.ir/index.php?option=com_mashrooh&view=session&id=1672&Itemid=38.

⁵⁵ Khamenei's decree to the Head of National TV and Radio, Khamenei (13-February-1994), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=9373>.

⁵⁶ *Iran* 24/12/1373 (15/March/1995); *Iran* 6/2/1374 (26/April/1995).

idea of a pure Islamic identity or making *homo Islamicus*. In these programs so-called ‘liberal’ intellectuals and political figures were accused of having links to foreign intelligence services and of attempts to undermine the regime.

A major element central to the creation of *homo Islamicus* was universities. One issue was the degree of autonomy for universities and the type of courses to be taught in higher education. At the same time, the political significance of gender separation increased. The gender separation exists at primary and secondary education levels. Thus, universities offer the first opportunity for the young to interact in a public place with members of the opposite sex.

The Conservatives generally considered the mixed gender environment to be against Islamic orders. Moreover, traditional clerics and lay Conservative figures considered universities modern institutions that propagated modern social sciences whose principles could eventually limit and undermine clerical authority, which, it is claimed, is given to them by God. As Khamenei argued: “Religion should be revived in the universities. Our universities are born irreligious; this is a clear [fact]... [This is] similar to the intellectualism in our country that has also been born irreligious.”⁵⁷

The issue of autonomy for universities was a source of concern for the Conservatives because liberal socioeconomic and cultural views were gaining popularity in universities. The Conservatives reacted by putting together university programs to deal with this issue. In 1992, ‘*faqih* headquarters’ were established in universities. One of its goals was to “promote Islamic and revolutionary values in all scientific and administrative levels.”⁵⁸

Khamenei declared the need for the Islamisation of universities and asked for

⁵⁷ Khamenei’s speech in a meeting with the Members of the Supreme Assembly of Cultural Revolution, Khamenei 20/12/1370 (11/December/1991), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2531>.

⁵⁸ Statute of Faqih Representatives in Universities, <http://nahad.ir/?siteid=546&pageid=60996>.

more active involvement of *Hezbollahis* and university *Basij* in university activities and student affairs.⁵⁹ University *Basij* had been formed with Khomeini's decree in 1988. By this time it was expanded in almost every big university.⁶⁰ To a large extent, the culture of *Basij* became the regime's ideal model of 'Islamic culture'.⁶¹

Occasionally, *Hezbollahis*, mostly affiliated to the university *Basij*, were called upon to march in the universities to threaten so-called 'liberal' students, and to harass professors, political activists and others deviating from true 'Islamic culture.' By the end of Rafsanjani's second term, the role of students became more noticeable in the political scene, given the expansion of the universities, the number of students and student political organisations.⁶²

Despite occasional criticism of conservative cultural policies, Rafsanjani refrained from pressuring the Conservatives on sociocultural issues. From the time of Khatami's resignation in 1992 until the seventh Presidential election in 1997, the Conservatives dominated sociocultural institutions and the cultural agenda. The reasons behind Rafsanjani's passive position remain unclear but could be linked to: a) as a pragmatic, he compromised on sociocultural affairs in order to have more freedom in executing his economic plans; b) the 'cultural onslaught' was an ideological initiative formed in reaction to ideological challenges, and Rafsanjani may, therefore, have considered it a necessary step in the continuation of the regime; and c) a low popular mandate in the sixth Presidential election's results (1993) and the unpopularity of his economic plans had weakened his position of power.

⁵⁹ *Iran* 30/2/1374 (20/May/1995); *Iran* 2/4/1375 (22/June/1996).

⁶⁰ *Tebyan* 6/10/1394 (27/December/2005), <http://www.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=14678>.

⁶¹ *Seyr-e Takvin-e Basij* (Evolution of Basij), Official Website of Basij, <http://www.basij.ir/main/index.php?Page=definition&UID=9145>.

⁶² The 1997 universities' unrest, followed by 1999 and 2003 student protests. The 2009 events all show this trend.

Sixth Presidential Election

During the sixth Presidential election in 1993, there were few factional disputes. It was a significant event in the initial stages of the popularisation of factional politics. In the absence of the Left's candidates, Rafsanjani was the main candidate enjoying the support of various groups, including the JRM.

However, part of the traditional Right supported Ahmad Tavakkoli. In his campaign, Tavakkoli criticized *Tose'eh* over its unclear long-term consequences for social justice and lack of attention to Islamic and revolutionary principles. Although Rafsanjani won the election with 62 percent of the vote, there was approximately a 24 percent decline in the participation rate, which made this election the second in a row, after the 1991 election to the AofE, which had a low turnout.

Faced with a decline in his popularity due to growing socioeconomic discontent and pressure from the Right, Rafsanjani began to take steps to generate popular support for himself and his policies. In December 1992, '*Hamshahri*', the first Iranian color newspaper, was established by Qolam Hossein Karbaschi, Tehran's Mayor and a close friend of Rafsanjani. '*Hamshahri*' implemented a new journalistic approach. Instead of getting directly involved in politics, it focused on the issues of urban life in Tehran and emphasised sociocultural issues—particularly of the middle-class.

'*Hamshahri*' also underlined the role of Rafsanjani and propagated a technocratic view on various socioeconomic issues. '*Hamshahri*' was an attempt to fill the gap between Rafsanjani and the support base he was hoping to expand in response to Conservative's criticism. '*Hamshahri*' rapidly grew and its circulation jumped from tens of thousands to a hundred thousand in less than six months. In 1994

its circulation reached three hundred thousand.⁶³ Two years after the successful experience of '*Hamshahri*,' '*Iran*,' the second color newspaper, was established as the Executive Branch's newspaper. '*Iran*' followed the strategy of '*Hamshahri*' but on a countrywide scale. These two, with the short-lived *Bahman* weekly, were the three main media outlets of Technocrats during Rafsanjani's Presidency.

The decline in Rafsanjani's vote influenced the factional power balance and, in turn, shaped the policy initiatives in the second mandate. The Left argued that this decline was a sign of the people's dissatisfaction with Rafsanjani.⁶⁴ The Conservatives took advantage of this decline and escalated their efforts to gain access to more institutions. While before the election (1993) the Conservatives targeted mostly cultural programs, after the election, economic programs were also criticised. To alleviate the decline in his popularity, Rafsanjani reshuffled his cabinet and shifted ministers in charge of economic policies.⁶⁵

Economic Issues

Although both Technocrats and the Conservatives believed in a non-state market economy, their visions for the structure of Iranian economy differed. Rafsanjani believed that Iran should have an industrialised, export-oriented economy. The Conservatives believed that an industrialised economy did not correspond with Iran's traditional economic interests and the IRI economy should continue to focus on trade.

The 'First Five Year Plan' contained policies designed to create the conditions for the emergence of an industrial export-oriented economy. Therefore, Rafsanjani's plans to industrialise the economy hurt the interests of the major socioeconomic source

⁶³ *Hamshahri*, <http://www.hamshahrilinks.org/roozshomar.htm>

⁶⁴ *Asr-e Ma* 11/1372 (January-September/1993).

⁶⁵ Masoud Safari, *Haqiqat ha va Maslahat ha dar Gofeigu ba Rafsanjani* [Truth and Compromises, an Interview with Rafsanjani] (Nashr-e Ney, 1999): 161-162.

of support for the clerical class — the trading Bazar. The climax of disputes over the direction of the economy was portrayed in the *Majlis*' debates over the 'Second Five-Year Plan,' when the bill was approved only after several amendments and changes to the original bill. With a one-year delay, the final product was a shift from a technocratic industrialised economy towards a bazar focused economy.

Rafsanjani faced an additional crisis when poor fiscal policies and payment of foreign debts hit the currency market. As a result, the inflation rate increased to more than 40 percent by 1995-1996. As the economic situation worsened and the fifth *Majlis* election was approaching, the Conservatives focused their criticism on economic management, corruption and the lack of commitment to revolutionary/Islamic values amongst Rafsanjani's cadres. Once again the issue of social justice emerged.⁶⁶

Khamenei also joined these debates and, in a speech to the officials of Planning and Budget Organisation, highlighted the need for social justice and commitment to the revolution's values.⁶⁷ In response to the Conservative's criticism with regards to the technocrats' lack of Revolutionary/Islamic commitment, Rafsanjani argued: "a detachment between the revolutionary [characteristics] and the competence of officials does not exist since these two are not separable."⁶⁸ He defended his *Tose'eh* as a necessary step towards a better socioeconomic support of the downtrodden⁶⁹ and underlined the long-term benefits of *Tose'eh* plans: "Instead of spending the budget on construction of dams and infrastructure we could have spent it on [importing] cooking oil, rice, sugar, cubic sugar and wheat and people would have felt a price drop immediately. But, we would have realised that we were acting irrationally only in the

⁶⁶ *Iran* 21/1/1375 (9/April/1996).

⁶⁷ Ibid., *Iran* 26/2/1375 (15/May/1996).

⁶⁸ *Iran* 27/11/1373 (16/February/1995).

⁶⁹ *Iran* 9/10/1374 (30/December/1995).

future, when we lost all our capital.”⁷⁰

Nonetheless, Rafsanjani, facing criticism, changed programs within *Tose'eh* and lowered the pace of the liberalisation of economy and initiated ‘adjustment’ policies. At the same time, Rafsanjani blamed the Bazar and the hard currency black market for the rising inflation. He took a series of actions against the Bazar, which endangered the Bazar’s interests and consequently affected Rafsanjani’s relationship with the Conservatives.⁷¹

In 1994, a new institution of ‘Committee for Adjustment of the Bazar’ was established to control prices and regulate Bazar activities. In 1995, to reform the distribution network, ‘*Refah*’ chain department stores were launched as competitors to the Bazar. These stores hoped to cut out the middlemen by creating a direct link between the suppliers and the consumers which meant a serious blow to the traditional distribution network. Additionally, Rafsanjani demanded heavy punishment for black market brokers.⁷²

As the Conservatives put Rafsanjani and his cadres under pressure, Rafsanjani, realising the important political capital to be gained from addressing discontent over sociocultural issues, abandoned his compromise with the Conservatives and criticised the closed intellectual space. In other words he made a step in direction of popularisation of factional politics.

At the Tehran Book Exhibition in 1995, he argued: “We should resist dogmatic views; writers, researchers, and, scholars should feel safe and secure so that they can write... It is impossible that all [scholars] can satisfy our taste. A book that is written just to satisfy our taste is better not to be written in the first place.”⁷³ On another

⁷⁰ *Iran* 31/3/1375 (20/June/1996).

⁷¹ *Iran* 9/2/1375 (28/April/1996).

⁷² Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 210-215.

⁷³ *Iran* 21/8/1374 (12/November/1995).

occasion soon after his re-election, Rafsanjani underlined the issue of freedom, democracy, and the individual and social rights of the people as his second list of priorities after guarding Islam.⁷⁴ In sum, Rafsanjani opened up another front against the Conservatives by propagating and supporting popular sociocultural expectations and demands.

Eventually, groups of officials surrounding Rafsanjani recognised the political capital to be gained by distancing themselves from the Conservatives. As mentioned above, the disputes between the *Majlis*, dominated by the Traditional Right, and the Technocrats in the executive bodies were escalating, due to their different sociocultural and economic views. At the same time, new sociopolitical demands from below were gaining momentum in society. These elements provided a political opportunity for the Technocrats to distance themselves further from the Conservatives and to establish themselves, with some pragmatic Leftists, as an independent political front. They initiated a process which led to the establishment of the *Kargozaran* Party and the emergence of the ‘Modern Right’ faction prior to the fifth *Majlis* election. This was an important step in popularisation of factional politics.

The dynamics of the election to the fifth *Majlis* following the sixth Presidential election shows an important aspect of the elites’ perceptions with regard to the IRI hybrid structure. In general, the political elites were well aware of the challenges that the whole system could face if the electoral/republican pillar became emasculated. The Conservatives prefer some sort of hierarchical, patriarchal system, but also acknowledge that functioning electoral/republican institutions play a significant role in sustaining the regime’s legitimacy. In a sense, the Conservatives see the electoral/republican pillar as an imposed necessity or burden. The dynamics of this

⁷⁴ Parliamentary Debates 13/2/1372 (3/May/1993).

election show how rival groups were aware of the potential threat of low participation rates to the very legitimacy of the IRI and correspondingly reacted.

Economic hardship, US sanctions and social discontent forced the regime to look at limited political openness as an acceptable tool to raise the participation rate. A year before the election, Rafsanjani signaled to the opposition groups that the next election would be more open to competition:

We have faith in the people's vote, and we believe that people's votes are the source of the revolution's prosperity and the best reference... I, as the President, do not consider anything more important than to hold a free and healthy election...⁷⁵

Even the Conservatives and JRM members supported the idea of giving more room to the opposition. Mahdavi Kani, the leader of JRM, claimed:

I sent a message to Mr Hashemi Rafsanjani and told him you should announce that people who are in this country, in the opposition groups and even different-minded groups, should attend the competition... I told the GC not to reject the candidates if they did not have a really bad reputation.⁷⁶

Mohammad Yazdi, Chief of Judiciary, a prominent Conservative and another JRM member, announced: "The political field is open... And all people and groups and parties have the right to announce candidates for the next election."⁷⁷

Political groups reacted differently to these promises. The Left, as the main opposition faction, doubtful of the sincerity of these moves, reluctantly joined the electoral debates.⁷⁸ MII, as one of the Leftist organisations, concluded in its announcement: "We will publish a list of candidates despite the fact that we are sure, with a very high probability, that there will be a great amount of obstacles in our

⁷⁵ *Iran* 28/10/1374 (18/January/1996).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Iran* 30/10/1374 (20/January/1996).

⁷⁸ MII, in an announcement published in *Iran* 4/11/1374 (24/January/1996); Mousavi Lari comments in *Iran* 17/11/1374 (6/February/1996).

way.”⁷⁹ MRM, as the major Leftist organisation, showed its hesitation, and despite encouraging people to participate in the election, decided not to publish a list of candidates.

In explaining this decision, Abdol Vahhab Mousavi Lari, a prominent MRM member, expressed his pessimism about the result of the vetting process of GC or the Supervisory Committee, arguing: “It is obvious that all the electoral tools and supervisory institutions, including the election’s Executive Committee, Supervisory Committee and even the Interior Ministry organisations, are dominated by the Right faction.”

He was correct. Once again, most Leftists were not allowed to run either by the Supervisory Committee or GC. 34 seated MPs were found to be unfit by the Supervisory Committee.⁸⁰ The elimination of the Leftists was so intense that they could not even publish a list of 30 candidates for the Tehran election.⁸¹ Technocrats took advantage of the regime’s call for participation in the election, established the *Kargozaran* and managed to become a significant player in this election.

The establishment of the *Kargozaran* was an important development in the evolution of the IRI’s popularisation of factional politics. It was, to some extent, an attempt to implement ‘party politics’ as a new form of politics. In this new form, organised political parties were not inclusive, one party or supra-factional, but represented the interests of a particular political and/or socioeconomic group. It was in contrast to the ideological utopian view practiced hitherto, which ignored, or at least did not recognise, the diversity of interests and views in society and propagated the higher non-factional values of the Islamic utopia. As we will see, the establishment of

⁷⁹ *Iran* 4/11/1374 (24/January/1996).

⁸⁰ *Iran* 15/11/1374 (4/February/1996).

⁸¹ *Iran* 2/12/1374 (21/February/1996).

Kargozaran had a strong influence on the formation of civil society and future election debates.

The establishment of *Kargozaran* with an organised political plan was a serious challenge to the Conservatives. Therefore, a number of Conservatives who were aware of their weak popular support, and had already recognised the importance of implementing the party politics, attempted to change the structure of Conservative organisations.

In the run-up to the fifth *Majlis* election, therefore, the political structure of JRM, as the main organisation of the Right faction, became the source of disputes between the JRM and its umbrella organisation: *Hamsu*.⁸² At this time, prominent *Mo'talefeh* members, such as Asgar Owladi, with the support of clerics such as Nateq Nuri (the Speaker of the *Majlis* at the time), proposed two issues. First, the JRM should change its political structure and develop a modern party structure in order to better deal with political challenges.

Second, non-clerical and *Hamsu* members should be more involved in the decision-making process. The proposal faced the opposition of conservative members of JRM, mainly Mahdavi Kani, JRM's speaker. Mahdavi Kani's opposition was based on three premises. By implementing a party system the clergy would inevitably be forced to align with some people over others, which is contradictory to its goal of being neutral.⁸³ By accepting the party system, the clergy would eventually fall under the control of a reactive public and popular elective government, which he believed

⁸² Following the dissolution of the IRP (Islamic Republic Party) in the late 1980s, some of its subdivisions responsible for different unions, such as teachers, engineers, students, physicians etc., came under the protection of the JRM with the name of *Hamsu* (affiliated).

Shadlu, *Ahzab*, 37-8.

⁸³ *Akhbar* 29/4/1374 (20/July/1995).

contradicted the clergy's duty of guarding the interests of Muslims.⁸⁴ Finally, since JRM and MRM are clerical institutions, they should only be held accountable to the Supreme Leader.⁸⁵ As the disputes escalated, Mahdavi Kani resigned as the Speaker of the JRM.⁸⁶ However, in the end, the attempts to change the structure of the JRM did not succeed. He returned but these tensions remained.

The debates within the JRM underlined the presence of two different divisions within the Traditional Right. On the one hand, there are those who believed in the use of party systems, the state's authority, less hierarchical structure of the JRM and more involvement in everyday politics using modern political means.⁸⁷ On the other hand, there are those who support the traditional position of clerics, the hierarchical structure of the JRM, the main authority of clergy, and the autonomy of clerical institutions. They denounced the party system as a Western idea. Eventually, hidden tensions within these two trends surfaced in future political events.⁸⁸

Emergence of the Modern Right and Kargozaran

Unlike the unsuccessful attempt of restructuring the JRM, the *Kargozaran* managed to emerge as a political organisation. Although Rafsanjani has never been a member of *Kargozaran*, it has been regarded as his party. The main goal of this party was to institutionalise Rafsanjani's position and the power of his cadres.⁸⁹ In a declaration signed by some of the deputies and ministers of the Rafsanjani administration, they initiated a process towards the establishment of *Kargozaran*.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ *Hamshahri* 29/4/1374 (20/July/1994).

⁸⁵ JRM News Bulletin no. 26: 22; *Salam* 13/12/1374 (3/March/1996).

⁸⁶ *Ettela'at* 17/4/1374 (8/July/1995).

⁸⁷ *Sobh* 29/1/1374 (18/April/1995); *Asr-e Ma* 9/7/1374 (1/November/1995).

⁸⁸ These events included the sixth *Majlis* election. During the Khatami Presidency, over Ahmadinejad's candidacy and finally in the 11th Presidential election.

⁸⁹ *Iran* 2/11/1374 (22/January/1996).

⁹⁰ *Iran* 20/10/1374 (10/January/1996).

Sensing the rise of a powerful rival, the Conservatives reacted negatively to the announcement of *Kargozaran*. Asadollah Badamchian, a prominent *Mo'talefeh* member and the editor of 'Resalat,' one of the main newspapers of the Conservatives, condemned the 'announcement' as interference of the Executive Branch in the Legislative Branch.⁹¹ In a letter, 150 Conservative MPs condemned *Kargozaran's* statement as being disrespectful to the *Majlis*.⁹²

Eventually, Khamenei's intervention paved the way for *Kargozaran's* establishment.⁹³ After its unsuccessful attempt to stop *Kargozaran's* establishment, the traditional Right and its pressure group, *Ansar-e Hezbollah*, were hopeful that the GC would block its members. *Ansar-e Hezbollah* officially entered the electoral campaign debates. It was yet another step in the popularisation of factional politics. For the first time they were taking a public stand. They announced: "[We] ask the GC to prevent all those penetrating hands of 'world arrogance,' liberals, technocrats and intellectuals... from entering the *Majlis* and to confront them with no tolerance,"⁹⁴ However, in a sermon, Khamenei signaled to the GC:

It is not acceptable that personal tastes and views intervene with the process of accepting or vetting... GC should do its heavy duty with complete perception and utmost justice and fairness... One cannot be charged with being against the *velayat-e faqih* based on false accusations... due to the irrelevant over-investigations and grudges.⁹⁵

It was a factional and political signal, because while almost all of the *Kargozaran* managed to pass the GC, most of the Leftists could not participate in the election.⁹⁶

⁹¹ *Iran* 4/11/1374 (24/January/1996).

⁹² *Iran* 8/11/1374 (28/January/1996).

⁹³ Khamenei 8/11/1374 (28/January/1996), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=19693>; *Iran* 14/11/1374 (3/February/1996).

⁹⁴ *Iran* 14/11/1374 (3/February/1996).

⁹⁵ *Iran* 15/11/1374 (4/February/1996).

⁹⁶ *Asr-e Ma* 9/12/1374 (28/February/1996).

However, the Left acknowledged and encouraged the emergence of *Kargozaran*. In an article in their bulletin, *Asr-e Ma*, MII (a Leftist organisation) listed six different reasons for their support of the establishment of *Kargozaran*:

1) it would promote the political institutions; 2) it would make the views of different factions clearer; 3) it would facilitate moves towards more institutionalised politics; 4) it would encourage political pluralism and block the monopolising measures of the Traditional Right in the fifth *Majlis*; 5) it would make society more political; and 6) it would help to increase the political accountability of different political groups.⁹⁷

In the election, the *Kargozaran*, the Modern Right, was faced with declining popular support given its links to increasingly unpopular economic policies of the Rafsanjani administration. In turn, the Traditional Right was seen as responsible for restricted sociocultural policies and civic liberties.⁹⁸ After the election, both factions claimed to have gained a majority. After the cancellation of some ballots in different cities,⁹⁹ and considering the second round's results, the Traditional Right faction gained around 105 to 140 seats.¹⁰⁰ The *Kargozaran* and the *Imam's Path* coalition gained around 110 seats and the remaining seats belonged to Independents.¹⁰¹

Another important event of this election was that Faezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani, daughter of Rafsanjani, obtained the second highest number of votes in Tehran. In her campaign she raised the issue of greater involvement of women in society, which stood

The vetting process was so strict, the Leftists that decided to participate in the election could not publish a list of 30 candidates for the Tehran election.

Iran (21/February/1996).

⁹⁷ *Asr-e Ma* 18/11/1374 (7/February/1996).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Isfahan was one of the cities where disputes led to public tension between Isfahan's Governor and the GC.

¹⁰⁰ The range of 105 to 140 is due to:

a) the unclear political position of some independent candidates; and
b) some candidates were on a list of both factions in different cities.

¹⁰¹ Official Webpage of the Majlis, <http://www.parliran.ir/index.aspx?siteid=1&pageid=3952>.

in contrast with the views of the Conservatives on the role of women in society. The Conservatives labelled her as a 'liberal,' promoting a Western role for women. Nonetheless, Faezeh managed to mobilise not only women but those who wanted to show their discontent with restrictive sociocultural policies. This was the beginning of the emergence of the influence of gender issues on factional politics.

In sum, Rafsanjani became more dependent on the support of the professional middle and upper-middle-classes and those who were looking for a decrease in sociocultural restrictions, in light of the gradual change in the factional power balance and the evolution of social class structure. In his acceptance speech of his second term Presidency, Rafsanjani promoted the "issues of freedom, democracy, and the individual and social rights of the people and social justice."¹⁰²

Therefore, an alliance between him and 'the Left undergoing reform' became more plausible. In return, Khamenei, in order to consolidate his support base and to maintain his authority over the revolutionary and Islamic institutions, had to come up with ideological answers to the changing conditions and to expand patronage in these institutions. Consequently, Khamenei became more dependent on *Basij*, Militia, IRGC, *Hezbollahis* and other religious fundamentalists. Khamenei's increasing dependence on Islamic/revolutionary institutions played a significant role in the evolution of factional politics and influenced the personal relationship between him and Rafsanjani. Moreover, the Conservative's traditional support base seemed to contract due to many factors, including distancing of part of the society from the revolutionary state, spread of satellite TVs, the presence of alternative political factional views and changes in the Bazar structure.

¹⁰² Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 203.

Factions in the Rafsanjani Era

As a result, by the end of Rafsanjani's Presidency, power struggles over reconciling ideology with the socioeconomic and ideological challenges faced by the IRI, in addition to the rivalry in the political elites, changed the factional landscape. The dynamic of factional politics in this period has already been discussed. This section, therefore, provides an overview of different factions by the end of Rafsanjani's Presidency.

The Conservatives (The Traditional Right)

For the Traditional Right, religiosity and the Islamic dimension of the IRI has precedence over its republican and populist dimension. The main politico-religious views of this faction are portrayed in the *velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih* and the 'Islamic government' thesis. Traditional *feqh* is at the heart of their ideology and despite having rationality — reasoning — (*aql*) and *ejtehad* as acceptable tools for *feqh*, application of these two is limited to certain domains.¹⁰³

For this faction, 'Islamic government' is a divine phenomenon that would expand its authority through a hierarchical system. People are considered secondary players and imitators (*muqalled*). Since clerics are the experts in *feqh* and sources of imitation (*marja' taqlid*), the government should be run by them. Vitally, they believe that most of the republican institutions only become legitimate after the verification of religious super bodies.¹⁰⁴

Since the traditional Right places Islam and the traditional *feqh* at the center of its discourse, its views regarding the economy, foreign policy and socioculture are

¹⁰³ *Asr-e Ma* 8/8/1373 (30/November/1994).

¹⁰⁴ *Iran* 6/12/1374 (25/February/1996).

influenced heavily by *feqh*. After Khomeini's death, the Conservatives continued to maintain their initial views about the 'Islamic economy.' Based on the traditional *feqh*, in an 'Islamic economy,' new concepts, such as cooperative economy, taxation, insurance, banking and customs need to be structurally modified. In general, less regulation, a market-driven economy and the removal of trade tariffs underline the main aspects of Conservative views.

Considering the alliance of the Bazar and the Conservatives before and after the revolution, this faction promotes trade and commerce and less investment in industries and agriculture.¹⁰⁵ Following its reading of Islam, in Islamic society, different social classes should exist and the issue of socioeconomic justice would be addressed through the charity of the wealthy via religious taxation, such as '*Khoms*' and '*Zakat*'.

The main characteristics of foreign policy of this faction during this period were: emphasis on sovereignty, and favouring normalisation of relations with other countries, with the exception of Israel and to a lesser degree the US.¹⁰⁶ In contrast to the Left, the export of the revolution was not a top priority for this faction. The historical alliance between this faction and the Bazar, to some extent, has influenced the formation of this pragmatic foreign policy that could facilitate conditions for international trade, which would benefit Bazar economy.

Traditional *feqh* also influenced this faction's sociocultural views. Based on traditional *feqh*, 'Islamic ethics' and 'Islamic culture' find their normative premises from orders and ordinances preserved in the Quran and the 'tradition' (*sonnat*). The

¹⁰⁵ It should be noted, after the revolution, the structure of the Bazar changed. As a result of the creation of a patronage system within the state, thus, the homogeneity of the Bazar was broken and its indigenous mobilisation power weakened.

Ibid. Keshavarzian.

¹⁰⁶ On two occasions, Ali Larijani gave the green light to the US on rebuilding diplomatic relations. Moslem *Factional Politics*, 111-113.

clergy is responsible for discovering and explaining these norms. In this discourse, the 'Islamic government' is responsible for preservation, practice and exercise of 'Islamic culture' and 'values.'

In other words, Islamic government should guard the spiritual dimension of the IRI and coercive force is a legitimate tool, while pluralism is not an acceptable concept.¹⁰⁷ After the introduction of 'cultural onslaught,' 'Islamic culture' gained more ideological weight, having an effect on this faction's pragmatic foreign policy. While the Traditional Right benefits from economic interaction with the West, they were quite fearful of the influence of Western culture on society.

The Modern Right

Due to its pragmatic tendencies, the Modern Right's relationship with *feqh* and *velayat-e faqih* has been based on changing political circumstances. *Velayat-e faqih* is acknowledged as a key element in the survival of the IRI but one whose power should have particular limits. For this group, an ideal position of the leader is spiritual leadership of the '*Ummat*' (Islamic nation). Moreover, this faction primarily believes in elements of modernism, collective rationality and Western modern political philosophy as useful methodological tools for creating an Islamic state. Therefore, they emphasise 'dynamic *feqh*' (*feqh-e puya*) discourse.¹⁰⁸

Tose'eh was the pillar of Modern Right ideology. They believe that the IRI's success depended on an industrialised economy and modern, well-developed political institutions. The Modern Right's view of *Tose'eh* is based on a market-driven economy, development through integration in the global economy and on industrial

¹⁰⁷ Mesab Yazdi argues four different approaches towards pluralism. Reza Sanati, *Gofteman-e Mesbah* [Mesbah's Discourse] (Markaz-e Asnad-e Inqelab-e Islami, 2008): 501-528.

¹⁰⁸ *Iran* 6/12/1374 (25/February/1996).

and export-oriented economy. The state should have an active role in the economy through regulating the market and investing in infrastructure to provide export competitiveness and a less oil-dependent economy. The state should also reform tax laws and develop transparency in financial records. This faction supports membership in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and implementing the IMF and World Bank's development guidelines. For this faction, banks and financial sectors should play an important role in channeling investment and capital into different sectors.

While the Modern Right, similar to the Left, considered the state responsible for social justice, it argued that redistribution should be emphasised only after 'development' succeeded. So the rhetorical support for social justice did not really translate into policy.¹⁰⁹

For the Modern Right, sustained economic development rests on political stability and normalised foreign relations. Despite recognising the political and ideological complexities of Iran-US relations, this faction believes that better relations even with the US are in the IRI's national interest.

Similar to the Left, the Modern Right believes in tolerance and moderation in the sociocultural sphere. Dismissing use of coercive force, the Modern Right argues that sociocultural issues should be left in the hands of specialists and within the *Tose'eh* discourse, scientific and technological progress would revive the Islamic/Iranian culture.¹¹⁰ The Modern Right is less concerned with the slogan 'cultural onslaught.' In fact, at times they did not see a threat in cooperation with the West.¹¹¹

Due to the importance of Rafsanjani to the Modern Right, the main political figures of this faction were Rafsanjani's ministers and deputies. Gholam Hossein

¹⁰⁹ *Asr-e Ma* 19/11/1373 (8/February/1995).

¹¹⁰ Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 133.

¹¹¹ *Asr-e Ma* 19/11/1373 (8/February/1995).

Karbaschi, Ataollah Mohajerani, Abdollahe Nuri, Hassan Rouhani, Mohsen Nourbakhsh, Mohammadreza Ne'matzadeh, Bizhan Namdar Zanganeh, Mohammad Ali Najafi, Eisa Kalantari and Eshaq Jahangiri are amongst the prominent members of this faction. *Iran*, *Hamshahri* and the short-lived biweekly *Bahman* were the main journals of this faction.

The Left

In this period, the Left's views on economy, foreign policy and intellectual discourse were modified as a way to return to the political scene. The possibility of various interpretations of Islam and an emphasis on 'dynamic *feqh*' became cornerstones of the Left's ideology and the catalyst for reconsidering their initial views. Moreover, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War was a blow for leftist ideologies worldwide. The Left's statist egalitarian economic model — at least in its revolutionary form — was less appealing to the public. Therefore, an effort went into forming intellectual discourses on the concepts of 'rule of law,' 'civil society,' 'republicanism,' the relation between Islam and modernity and 'pluralism.'

Despite the collapse of the USSR, the Left's economic views remained focused on self-sufficiency and 'independence.' Emphasis on egalitarian redistributive socioeconomic justice remained while there was a new emphasis on development and economic growth.¹¹² The Left believed that economic growth is only possible through the state's intervention and control over strategic economic sectors.

Consequently, more investment in industries and more control over the commerce and trade sectors were encouraged. They believed that expansion of socioeconomic justice should be considered as one of the main goals of the IRI.

¹¹² *Asr-e Ma* 8/8/1373 (30/November/1994).

Furthermore, skeptical of IMF's development plans, the Left was cautious about the *Tose'eh* and its effects on socioeconomic justice and 'independence.'

Despite the less aggressive tones in this period, the Left's foreign policy remained focused on anti-imperialist rhetoric against the US as the sole remaining superpower. However, considering the Left's moderate tone in foreign policy in the Reformist era (1997-2005), as we will see, one can conclude that the Left's criticisms were mainly the result of domestic factional politics.

The Left, compared to the Right, had moderate sociocultural views in the Khomeini era. On various occasions during the period from 1979-1989, the Left also exhibited a hard-line position towards Western culture and the presence of un-Islamic symbols in society. However, during Rafsanjani's Presidency, the Left changed its tone and showed more tolerant sociocultural views and became the main critic of sociocultural restrictions.

The main journals of this faction during this period were: '*Salam*,' '*Asr-e Ma*,' '*Bayan*,' '*Kiyan*,' and '*Gardun*.' This faction was focusing on shifting their ideological and intellectual discourse to form a public discourse. To revive or continue its political life, political thinkers and journalists were in the front-line of this faction during Rafsanjani's period. Main active figures were Mousavi Khoeiniha, Saeed Hajjarian, Abbas Abdi, Behzad Nabavi, Mohsen Mirdamadi, Mohsen Armin, Hamid Reza Jalaei Pour, and, most importantly, Abdolkarim Souroush.

As mentioned earlier, this period witnessed organised activities of another group, called the 'neo-Fundamentalists' or the 'New Left.' Although some scholars consider them a faction, I am going to argue here, briefly, why they should not be considered as such. The views of this group were a mixture of traditional jurisprudence and some modern readings of Islam and *Sharia*. Their views reflected a combination

of the ideas of Ali Shariati (ideologue of revolutionary Shi'ism), Morteza Motahhari (Chairman of the Revolutionary Council) and Navab Safavi (founder of Devotees of Islam '*fadaeyan-e Islam*'). They cherry-picked from these discourses and thought in line with changing political battles and conditions.¹¹³ In other words, they were dogmatic.

The group's ideological fundamentalism and its belief in the 'permanent revolution' led to its lack of respect for the authority of the state and the law. They believed that people should adhere to certain Islamic norms in the public sphere and it is this group's Islamic duty to make sure that society follows those norms. They performed, therefore, many vigilante actions, targeting, mostly, the public manifestation of secular views, such as improper veiling for women '*bad hejabi*,' Western style of dress. Accordingly, they strongly harassed secular intellectuals. The private sphere was not safe from their intrusions due to the debates that put the making of *homo Islamicus* as the main duty of the IRI. Populist egalitarian social justice and self-sufficiency have been used as excuses to legitimise their hostility against opposition groups.

Within this line, they attacked those who were showing off their wealth. The main figures of this group were Mehdi Nasiri, Masoud Dehnamaki and Hossein Allah Karam, with the journals *Yalasarat*, *Shalamche*, *Jebheh* and *Sobh* as their main tribunes. They have a dress code of a black shirt, buttoned up to the neck, khaki or grey straight trousers, and black shoes, with a bearded face, and they ride in pairs on a particular model of motorbike: the Honda 125. They are thus referred to as the 'plainclothes militia.'

¹¹³ Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 140-151.

There is a common perception that this group lacked any official institutional power or any concrete political ideology.¹¹⁴ Some have argued that this group is made of hardliners or semi-militia forces with a military hierarchical organisational structure and no accountability to any civic institutions. Moreover, they have access to classified information and public financial resources through their strong links to parallel revolutionary and religious institutions.

This group is a circle of supporters or an informal pressure group that is called upon on particular occasions to execute the dirty work of the state, or, more precisely, a particular faction or patron. Its activities in this period consisted of protests close to the fourth *Majlis* election and over 'cultural onslaught,' the protest in front of the IRNA news agency, and the harassment of people in the cinema *Qods*.¹¹⁵ Their actions became the subject of public political debates in the future. Therefore, consideration of this group as a vigilante group, affiliated to a certain faction as a means of informal pressure on other factions or social groups, is a better description.

Conclusion

This chapter examined the extent to which the socioeconomic and ideological challenges that faced the IRI after the death of Khomeini influenced the expansion of factional politics and pushed towards its popularisation in the context of the hybrid characteristics of the IRI and the rivalry in political elites. Although in response to the social and economic discontent after the war *Tose'eh* dominated the political agenda, its requirements were found to be in conflict with the ideological and revolutionary institutions. Due to the contradictions of Khomeinism at both an ideological and institutional level, Rafsanjani's efforts to provide a cohesive stratum to integrate the

¹¹⁴. *Asr-e Ma* (30/November/1994); Moslem *Factional Politics*, 134-156.

¹¹⁵ *Iran* 9/2/1375 (28/April/1996).

modern state elements with Khomeinism achieved limited results. Eight years of *Tose'eh*'s policies failed to fulfil the goal of containing the socioeconomic challenges¹¹⁶ — though it changed the society, state and state-society relations.¹¹⁷

Since in this period the political sphere was dominated by the presence of Rafsanjani and Khamenei, their personal relationship and their power position had a symbiotic relationship with the institutional and factional power dynamics. As the ideological/revolutionary context of the IRI started to dissolve, the power struggle between Rafsanjani and Khamenei strengthened and gave more rein to their ideological differences as both men sought political ideological means to win the power struggle. Factional struggle had two goals. Firstly, factions sought to strengthen institutions they held. Secondly, and naturally, they sought to increase the number of institutions they control.

Consequently, institutional struggles emerged between those institutions controlled by supporters of Rafsanjani and those institutions staffed by supporters of Khamenei. Furthermore, pluralisation of Khomeinism – following the removal of the ‘Grand Master’ — intensified struggles over policy initiatives. Resultantly, confrontation over different policy initiatives, specifically over the socioeconomic plans, antagonised the pragmatic cadres of Rafsanjani and led to the split in the ‘Traditional Right’ that resulted in the emergence of ‘the Modern Right’ as a new faction, with the *Kargozaran* as its front representing part of the popular demands.

As the society distanced itself from revolutionary ‘activism’ and began to give more attention to worldly affairs, the social support base of Khamenei weakened and Rafsanjani’s support base gradually shifted. Exercising his power through

¹¹⁶ Despite the improvement in some indexes, such as economic growth and the GDP, the perception of society and expectations were considerable elements that formed the state of dissatisfaction.

¹¹⁷ Gheissari and Nasr, *Democracy in Iran*, 127.

Islamic/revolutionary institutions, Khamenei, in order to maintain his support base, had no choice but to first come up with ideological answers to changing conditions and, second, to expand patronage within his support circle and related institutions. Due to the shrinking of the Conservative's traditional support base, Khamenei became more dependent on *Basij*, Militia, IRGC, *Hezbollahis* and similar religious fundamentalists.

For his part, Rafsanjani had to seek support from those social classes which his policies had helped to flourish in the first place. In other words, he and *Kargozaran* paved the way for the empowerment of the republican dimension of the IRI or popularisation of factional politics. Meanwhile, the Left was reconstructing its ideological discourse surrounding the republican dimension of the IRI as a potential legitimate means to return to power. Consequently, the republican pillar or popularisation of politics became a common ground for alliance between Rafsanjani, the Modern Right and the Reformists, in order to contain the institutional dominance of the Traditional Right.

In the next chapter, as the debates on the republican aspect of the IRI become the main political agenda, the extent to which these debates have influenced the future power dynamics and the rivalry in the political elites in the context of factional politics will be discussed.

Chapter Three

Popularisation of Factional Politics

The election of Mohammad Khatami as President in 1997 marked a new phase in the popularisation of politics in the IRI. Despite strong support from the Conservatives and Khamenei for his rival, Nateq Nouri, Khatami's majority of more than 20 million votes was a clear signal of demand for change in society. Khatami mobilised those who had never voted before and unified different social groups with slogans such as the 'Rule of Law,' 'Civil Society' and 'Democracy' Khatami's election paved the way for the return of the old Leftists with a new form of political mandate, and the designation of 'Reformist's.

These elements made up the Reformists platform of 'political development.' Their goal was to become the unifying representative of all pro-reform forces. Although Khatami and the Reformists had this overwhelming mandate, there was no clear concept of the extent and the breadth of what reform meant. The extent of changes expected by various electoral constituencies was unclear. So while Khatami's victory was an important step in the popularisation of politics, it also created additional tensions in IRI factional politics. The victory of Khatami's slogans, and the Reformist's, was again a repetition of basic divisions in society about the main goals of the revolution; Islamic/revolutionary aspirations or republicanism. This division goes back to 1979–1980. At the heart of this division was the very question of 'the role of people' in the IRI.

The question of the role of people in the IRI has always been an underlining theme of IRI politics, as Alireza Alavai Tabar, Khatami's advisor and prominent Reformist, underlines: "The faith in the IRI is determined by struggles between those

supporting republican interpretations of the Islamic Republic and those who support other interpretations of the Islamic Republic — [which he has previously categorised as totalitarian, traditional oligarchical and bureaucratic authoritarian].”¹

Nevertheless, during this period, the IRI elites proposed varied responses to this question within the framework of Khomeinism. These debates exercised a strong influence on factional politics, social expectations, social awareness and perspectives of political elites. To an extent, the concept of the ‘role of people’ had become an ‘empty signifier,’ borrowing Laclau’s argument that different factions and social actors implemented to craft their vision, to justify their actions and to empower their position within the IRI.²

The IRI’s hybrid characteristic also played an important role in how these different responses translated into politics. A popular President combined with a popular *Majlis* not only can strengthen the Executive Branch, together they can exercise a strong influence on the balance of power between the republican and Islamic institutions. Given the power balance of this period, strengthening the electoral institutions, along with Khatami’s attempts to integrate pro-republicanism aspirations into the fabric of the IRI, threatened the patriarchal model of government supported by the Conservatives and the Supreme Leader, and also the political and/or economic interests of these groups, which was deeply entangled in the power of parallel Islamic/revolutionary institutions at this time.

While Khatami was hoping to introduce and to strengthen republicanism in the state institutions by reinforcing ‘civil society,’ as well as the ‘rule of law,’ Khamenei, alongside the Conservatives, were expanding their authoritarian interpretation of

¹ Mohsen Armin Hashem Aghajari and Mohammadreza Tajik, *Eslahat va Porsesh-ha-ye Asasi* [Reform and fundamental questions] (Nashr-e Tahqiqat-e Zekr, 2000/2001): 190.

² S. Critchley and O. Marchart, *Laclau: A Critical Reader* (Routledge, 2004).

Khomeinism. As a result, these two divergent, and sometimes conflicting interpretations of Khomeinism influenced the dynamics of the power struggle on an institutional level and the trajectory of societal change.³

The Khatami Era and factional politics of this era were mentioned in numerous studies, but they have not been substantially studied in themselves.⁴ Given that the main goal of this chapter is to construct an analytical comparative case within the larger comparative framework of this thesis, this chapter does not offer a substantial study of factional politics of this period. Nevertheless, this chapter aims to place the emergence of the pro-Reform Movement, its evolution and the factional politics of this period in a better context by taking into account two aspects. For example, theoretical and intellectual debates of the opposing factions, both the Reformists and the Conservatives, and conversely, the ideological and intellectual battles, as well as political struggles of this period.

This chapter examines the main philosophical and political trends that struggle with each other over the meaning of the ‘role of the people’ within the IRI system. Vitally, it also examines the extent to which these different definitions have influenced the dynamics of power within IRI politics and of society. It aims to explore the structural and human agency factors affecting the trajectory of the popularisation of factional politics in this period by looking at the attempts to determine the ‘role of people’ in the IRI. It shows how concepts become a significant factor in factional fights, either as justification for action, the promotion of given institutions or use of violence. It aims to show that the Conservative’s position is not only cynical power politics or mindless reaction; rather rooted in an Islamic philosophical approach and intellectual doctrine.

³ Gheissari and Nasr, *Democracy in Iran*, 128.

⁴ See Introduction chapter for details of these studies.

This chapter starts by exploring the importance of Khatami's election and why it has been a turning point in IRI history. This is followed by an overview of Khatami's political thought and his personality, with a focus on exploring the theoretical premises of the 'role of people' in Khatami's discourse.⁵ The subsequent section reviews the main intellectual debates in this period, including those opposing Khatami's interpretation of the 'role of people' in the IRI. The following section shows how these different responses have influenced the institutional battles in the IRI. The final section investigates the reaction of society and popular movements in these debates.

Khatami's election marked the beginning of a new Era in the IRI. It is referred to as 'The Epic of 23 May.' In this election, new players with agendas greatly differing from the previous administration attained political power through the platform of election. This election revived, to an extent, certain elements of electoral procedure. In contrast to previous elections: a) the 'ballot box' became the battleground for different ideas and views; b) 'voting' developed into the means of choosing different policy directions, besides its symbolic meaning of affirming the revolution; c) 'electoral competition' was restored, at least to a limited degree; d) the demand of people for change was channelled through a non-violent political participation that divided them into a 'majority' and 'minority,' and e) the defeated faction accepted the results. While previous elections were mostly confirmations of pre-selected winning candidates, who usually enjoyed the tacit consensus of the political elites, this election was a competition with an unpredictable result. Overall, perhaps this election was the first step in the transformation of '*Ummat*' or 'always mobilised nation' to citizens.⁶

The different political factions reacted differently to Khatami's victory. The

⁵ Even though it is called 'Khatami's Discourse,' it is an accumulation of a myriad of intellectual efforts of various thinkers and public debates.

⁶ *Mehrnameh* v. 22 (June 2012).

Conservatives propagated it as confirmation of the revolution and the Supreme Leader, given the high electoral participation.⁷ The Left, however, promoted Khatami's victory as the opposition of the people to the policies of the Conservatives. Hajjarian, a prominent Reformist, argued that the 'The Epic of 23 May' was the natural consequence of the unsatisfied expectations of the people.⁸ Abdolkarim Soroush, a well-known religious, intellectual, declared: "The election result was a 'No' to all that has been going on in our society, specifically with regard to (sociopolitical) freedoms."⁹

Khatami's victory showed that there were several sources of tension in society. First, the restrictive sociocultural policies of the Conservatives had resulted in social discontent amongst various social groups. Second, people and the lower and middle-class in particular had serious concerns about the deteriorating socioeconomic situation along with the country's international isolation at this period. The divide in the Conservative's camp, portrayed in the emergence of *Kargozaran*, had created new 'political opportunities' for 'new political players,' and also a chance for social groups, mainly young people and women, to demand a certain degree of change.

It was within this context that Khatami became the symbol of this change, and his rival, Nateq Nuri, became the symbol of the regime's pre-elected candidate.¹⁰ A 'collective solidarity' emerged amongst different social groups around the support for Khatami. This was, to a certain extent, a form of contention with the established political setting. This collective solidarity, coupled with the agreement amongst the

⁷ *Resalat* 5/3/76 (26/May/1997); 4/3/76 (25/May/1997).

⁸ *Salam* 27/5/76 (18/August/1997).

⁹ *Resalat* 8/3/76 (29/May/1997).

¹⁰ Nateq Nouri, in his memoir states, he became the symbol of the establishment while Khatami became the candidate of change. He even blamed those groups who attached themselves to him and whose ideas he did not support, for his defeat. Mirdar, *Khaterat-e Akbar*, 100-121.

Leftists and Modern Right political elite over Khatami, created an opportunity for this change.

Khatami's victory was not solely due to systematic mobilisation of the supporters of these two factions — the Reformists and the Modern Right. The election results showed that Khatami gained the votes of the urban population, the rural areas, the support of the secular middle and upper-middle-classes, as well as the conservative segments of society, as demonstrated by his victory in Qom, a Conservative bastion. Different aspects of Khatami's personality also appealed to different constituencies.

For instance, Khatami's religious standing and being a 'Seyyed' (being a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad) helped him to gain the support of conservative families. In addition, his slogans, chic attire, charismatic personality and moderate cultural views attracted many who hoped for change. Therefore, while Khatami broadened the appeal of these two factions, at the same time part of his votes belonged to different constituencies. This incoherence amongst Khatami's supporters influenced, to an extent, the future of the Reform Movement.

Khatami's personality and political views played an important role not only in his electoral victories and his popularity, but also in the wider scope of the IRI's politics.¹¹ Seyyed Mohammad Khatami (b. 1943) was raised in a middle-class family. His father was the Friday prayer Imam of Yazd.

In contrast to both Khamenei and Rafsanjani, Khatami was never a direct student of Khomeini. He moved to Qom in 1961 at the age of 19. After Khomeini's exile in 1964, he left the Seminary and chose a different educational path. He studied Western philosophy at the University of Isfahan and then earned a Master's degree in

¹¹ For study of Khatami's personality and political views see: Ghoncheh Tazmini, *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform* (I.B.Tauris, 2009). Shakibi, *Khatami*, 143-186.

Education from Tehran University. He then returned to Qom to finish his seminary studies. During this time, Khomeini's thesis on political Islam and his authority as a *Marja* became well established. Khomeini's students were now seminary teachers propagating his reading of political Islam and engaging in new debates regarding its different aspects. Khatami was a student of Morteza Motahhari and Hossein Ali Montazeri, two of Khomeini's main pupils of this period. Thus, Khatami was heavily involved in these new debates.

Khatami's marriage to Zohreh Sadeqi, who was from a prominent religious family, deepened his ties with the clerical establishment, especially with Khomeini's family. She was the niece of Mousa Sadr (the Lebanese *Shi'a* leader) and the aunt of the wife of Ahmad Khomeini (Khomeini's son). Contrary to Khamenei and Rafsanjani, who married in their early twenties, Khatami was 31 at the time of his marriage.

Khatami was never imprisoned or exiled, in contrast to both Khamenei and Rafsanjani. He was not even in Iran during the revolution.¹² After his return to Iran from Germany in 1980, Khatami gained Khomeini's support, becoming an MP in the first *Majlis* and soon after becoming in charge of cultural affairs. After showing his ability as the editor of *Kayhan* newspaper, he became the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, a post he held for ten years (1982–1992). Eventually, over the growing criticism of his moderate sociocultural views, Khatami resigned, after only two years in the Rafsanjani cabinet. At the time, Khatami's resignation was seen as a sign of his weakness in politicking.¹³

Khatami's many years in higher education, during which he studied philosophy

¹² He was in Germany, where he had replaced Mohammad Beheshti as Head of the Hamburg Islamic Cultural Centre.

¹³ Shakibi, *Khatami*, 150.

and the humanities, strengthened his deliberative disposition of uncertainty and self-reflection. He was an intellectual, and concerned with the ‘truth’ more than ‘*Maslahat*’ (expediency) and practicalities, an attitude that Karbaschi, secretary general of *Kargozaran*, described as “[Khatami’s] lack of interest in administrative work and planning.”¹⁴ These personal characteristics may help us to understand better certain decisions that Khatami made — or did not make — in times of crisis. When Khatami became President, his ideas were confronted with the exigencies of political leadership. This adds to the importance of investigating Khatami’s political thoughts.

The relation between Islam and modernity, or the Western concept of modernity, has been at the core of Khatami’s philosophical concerns. Khatami’s attention to these issues are seen in the books he published after his resignation as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Importantly, Khatami has a fairly realistic image about the West, given his life experience and his studies in the philosophical grounds of Western modernisation. In his book, *Fear of the Wave*, published in 1992, Khatami underlines two factors in addressing the question of “Where is our place [as Iranian Muslims] in today’s world?” These factors are “understanding time” and “religious concerns.” Therefore, he finds “religious intellectualism” a necessary requirement for Iranian society. This “religious intellectual” should have certain characteristics, including familiarity with “modern issues” and respecting reason and freedom.¹⁵

Khatami seeks to introduce a new ‘discourse of modern subjectivity’ by integrating elements of modern Western thought into an interpretation of Islamic

¹⁴ *Mehrnameh* v 22 Tir/1391 (June/2012): 94.

¹⁵ Mohammad Khatami, “Bim-e Moj,” (Tarth-e No, 1996/1997): 202–205.

thought.¹⁶ In this framework, freedom possesses an essential place in Khatami's discourse. He argues that "the people's ideal has always been and will always be freedom."¹⁷ Khatami underlines that "the history of mankind is the history of [the quest for] freedom."¹⁸

However, he believes in the compatibility of freedom and religion: "Placing religion against freedom would be one of the major catastrophes of the history of mankind because in that case, both freedom and religion will suffer, in addition to mankind, who deserves to be both religious and free."¹⁹ He also criticises liberalism because, by starting from individualism, freedom transcends to hedonism. "Utilitarianism was derived from the bosom of individuality, and material interests became the foundation of social and inter-state relations."²⁰

Most of Khatami's efforts are dedicated to conclusively responding to the question of the role of the people in the IRI. He hopes to define this role in a way that recognises the modern rights of individuals while remaining in the purview of Islam and Khomeinism. He tries to integrate Islam and republicanism in state institutions. This effort is portrayed in his thesis of "religious democracy" (*mardomsalari-ye dini*). Khatami argues that integration of the main components of 'Western democracy' with Islamic values can offer a better form of democracy.

In his view, "there is no contradiction between the right to rule of the people and the divine right to rule, because these two are at two different levels (*dar tul-e ham*

¹⁶ "Post-Revolutionary Islamic Discourses on Modernity in Iran: Expansion and Contraction of Human Subjectivity," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35, no. 04 (2003); Farzin Vahdat, "Religious Modernity in Iran: Dilemmas of Islamic Democracy in the Discourse of Mohammad Khatami," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 3 (2005).

¹⁷ *Ettela'at* 3/3/1377 (24/May/1998).

¹⁸ Mohammad Hussein Haqdar, *Gofteman-e Farhangi Siasi-ye Khatami* [Cultural and Political Discourse of Khatami] (Shafi'i, 1999), 76.

¹⁹ *Ettela'at* 3/3/1377 (24/May/1998).

²⁰ Mohammad Khatami, *Mardomsalary* [Democracy] (Tarak-e No, 2002): 28.

*hastand).*²¹ For Khatami, God is the absolute source of legitimacy. However, God assigned this right to people because God also equipped mankind with tools such as will, choice, responsibility and reason that would enable him to figure out the best ways to manage societies. People, directly or indirectly, are, therefore, the real sovereign and people's will that legitimises all other state authorities.

Khatami believes that this 'religious democracy' needs an 'Islamic civil society' to succeed. He illustrates the characteristics of this civil society:

In a civil society, the dynamics of society are based on participation, cooperation, sympathy and elections. People with different preferences, interests and tendencies should have the opportunity to come together and define their demands and... discuss their rights and find procedures that need to be taken in order to secure them these rights [and demands]. These mechanisms would keep society dynamic, coherent and progressive.

Perhaps to prove that this civil society is in the purview of Khomeinism, Khatami distinguishes Islamic civil society from Western civil society.

While Western civil society, historically, as well as theoretically, is derived from the Greek city-state and the later Roman political system. The civil society that we have in mind has its origin in the historical and theoretical ground of *Madinat ol-Nabi* (city of the Prophet, literally, pointing to the first Islamic state established and governed by the Prophet Mohammad in *Madina*).²²

Khatami underlines the need for 'freedom' and 'rule of law' as important instruments to protect this society. He points out the interrelation of the two concepts: "freedom without law is chaos and law without freedom is dictatorship."²³ In his first press conference five days after his election, Khatami announced:

²¹ *Jomhourieslami* 8/8/1376 (30/October/1997).

²² Mohammad Khatami, "Islam Dialogue and Civil Society, Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies, the Middle East & Central Asia," (Canberra: The Australian National University, 2000):16.

Madinat ul-Nabi (or *Madinat al Nabi*) means the 'City of the Prophet.'

²³ *Ettela 'at* 3/3/1377 (24/May/1998); *Jomhourieslami* 22/3/1378 (12/June/1999); *Ettela 'at* 2/3/1378 (23/May/1999).

Our main goal is to institutionalise the ‘rule of law’ and to implement fully the Constitution.”²⁴ However, as it will be shown the Constitutional conflicts between the revolutionary/Islamic and republican institutions became obstacles to the success of Khatami’s political platform. Khatami defines political freedom as freedom of opponents and minorities and one of the main pillars of political development.²⁵ Khatami advocates ‘dialogue’ as the only way of negotiating the differences, because “dialogue is a value in itself, as it is based on freedom and autonomy/choice (*ekhtiyar*).²⁶

Khatami introduces the universality of the rights of people by implementing a new interpretation of Khomeinism. This view is portrayed in his slogan of “Iran for all Iranians.” By arguing that an important aspect of Khomeini’s discourse was the revival of the rights of humans to determine their fate and to participate in different aspects of life. Khatami concluded that all segments of society should have certain rights.²⁷

On another occasion, he underlined “We are proud that we have interpreted our Islamic regime in a way that every Iranian who is a citizen, either Muslim or non-Muslim should have citizenship rights.”²⁸ Khatami underlines the accountability of the government to its citizens and argues that a ruler is accountable to God and the people. His definition of this accountability is summarised in his slogan: ‘Freedom in the realm of thought; rationality in the realm of dialogue; and law in the realm of action.’²⁹

The ‘security paradigm’ of Khatami is closely linked to sociopolitical pluralism, tolerance, citizens’ rights, social participation, respect for minorities,

²⁴ *Salam* 7/3/1376 (28/May/1997).

He also argued, “A good government is the one that does not exclude even one of its opponents and can persuade its opponents to play by its rules.” Khatami continues, “One of the main aspects of political development is freedom for minorities.”

²⁵ *Ettela’at* 17/7/1382 (8/October/2003).

²⁶ Khatami Speech in Florence University Quoted in: Reza Soleimani, *Siasat Khareji-ye Dolat-e Khatami, Siasat-e Tanesh Zoda’i va Goftegu-ye Tamaddon-ha* [Foreign Policy of Khatami, Normalisation and Dialogue of Civilisation] (Kavir, 2002): 23.

²⁷ *Ettela’at* 26/1/1378 (15/April/1999).

²⁸ *Jomhourieslami* 22/9/78.

²⁹ Mentioned in Golnar Mehran, “Khatami, Political Reform and Education in Iran,” *Comparative Education* 39, no. 3 (2003).

freedom of speech and security for opponents, and the coexistence of different views and ideas. "The real security is that the people could participate in different areas and feel this participation [is real]."³⁰

For Khatami, the combination and coexistence of religion and freedom are the recipe for salvation:

Unification of religion and freedom is our message to today's world. Our religion, as well as our freedom both, have enemies. Enemies of religion hide behind the idea of 'Western freedom,' whilst enemies of freedom hide behind religion, I believe our journey of Islamic salvation and development of society, is in its transient period that is the experience of [finding a way] to merge religion and freedom.³¹

In this line, in a response to the debates of 'clash of civilisations,' he put forward the idea of 'dialogue of civilisations.'

In sum, 'rule of law,' 'freedom' (political freedom), an 'accountable government,' 'the rights of citizens' and 'civil society' are the main aspects of Khatami's political ideology. During his Presidency, Khatami introduced new terms or new definitions for old terms and new concepts to the political culture of the IRI. Although these concepts were unprecedented topics since the establishment of Khomeinism,³² it was the ambiguity in Khomeinism that allowed the possibilities of representation and redefinition of these new topics.

By doing this, Khatami greatly influenced the popularisation of factional politics. He redefined the role of the government, its obligations and its accountability to its citizens, and, while recognising that people have certain rights, aimed to institutionalise them through the rule of law. To fulfil his promises, Khatami aimed to strengthen the IRI republican institutions. His efforts translated into a new power

³⁰ *Jomhourieslami* 1/5/1377 (23/July/1998).

³¹ Khatami, *Mardomsalari*, 29.

³² Armin and Aghajari and Tajik, *Eslahat*, 252–5.

balance for the republican dimension and shaped new political dynamics at a factional and institutional level.

The debates about the rule of law and people's right to rule over their fate were, to a great degree, the reflection of unresolved issues of the source of legitimacy of the IRI or the discourse of *velayat-e faqih*. The *velayat-e faqih* thesis was Khomeini's response to the philosophical question of the relationship between Islam and modernity. Therefore, intellectual debates, once again, centred on the source of the legitimacy of the IRI. However, these debates differed from the debates both before the revolution and soon after it, during the process of ratification of IRI's Constitution. This time, a generation of intellectuals who were part of the IRI elite tried to respond to these debates. Not only did they have the experience of the revolution and the Iran–Iraq War but also they had gained 20 years worth of experience in the political arena.

Intellectual Debates

To a degree, the intellectual battles over different definitions of 'people' and their 'role' in politics were a facet of the power struggle in this period amongst the main IRI political players. On the one side are those who believe people can achieve prosperity and salvation in life by using the tools with which God provided them; namely, reason, modern knowledge and human achievement.

For this group, Islam is a rich collection of guidelines that help humans to find better solutions for governing. The Islamic faith is an important yet personal endeavour for this group. They consider the people as bearers of rights. On the other side are those who consider people to be creatures that need continuous supervision and guidance. For this group, people cannot be trusted as they are doomed to follow their negative desires. They believe God has provided people with a complete set of rules and regulations that will guide them to salvation and prosperity and these orders are clear

and normative. They argue that the Islamic government should be established to implement Islamic ordinances in society and should be actively involved in the life of the people to ensure their commitment to Islam.³³

These two different conceptions of the people lead to two different political orders. They each define a different role for the state and its institutions and different borders for public and private spheres. Furthermore, the IRI Constitution, with its hybrid characteristics, embodied institutional opportunities for each of these two approaches. On the other hand, the ambiguities in Khomeinism provide enough ideological manoeuvrability for each of these two sides to claim to be the true promoter of Khomeini's ideas. As a result, these intellectual battles over the role of the people provided grounds for the political cohesion of different political groups, while also largely influencing the factional power struggle within the grounds of 'Constitutional politics'.³⁴

'Absolute mandate of jurist' (*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*), the hegemonic discourse of the IRI, argues that during the time of occultation since there is no access to infallible imams, the *foqaha* have guardianship over people, inclusive of all responsibilities of the Prophet Mohammad. Once a man qualifies as a jurist, he then becomes the source of authority over the people. In this interpretation, jurisprudence and the Islamic pillar of the IRI take precedence over the IRI's republican dimension. Although Khomeini's thesis was a response to the challenges of modernity to Islam, Khatami's victory proved to some that Khomeini's thesis was not responding to other challenges being posed by modernity.

Therefore, new intellectual efforts emerged to address these questions.

³³ These two are different to liberal/ideological or liberal/theocracy dichotomies.

³⁴ Arjomand, *After Khomeini*, 99-140.

Khatami, while emphasising the rule of law and the Constitution, rarely addresses the institution of *velayat-e faqih*. However, as mentioned earlier, he was encouraging intellectual debates in this area. Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, Mohsen Kadivar, Mohammad Mojtabah Shabestari, Abdolkarim Soroush and Mostafa Malekian were the main religious figures and ‘religious intellectuals’ dealing with this issue of finding new responses to the challenges imposed by modernisation. Besides these religious intellectuals, the political theories and scholarly works of Homayoun Katouzian and Hossein Bashiriyyeh have influenced the platform and paradigms of the Reformists and Khatami.³⁵

Ayattollah Montazeri’s views are important because he was one of the main advocates of the integration of the principle of *velayat-e faqih* in the IRI Constitution during the establishment of the IRI. After almost 20 years of his first-hand experience of IRI politics, he became a critic of *velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*. He publicly criticised Khamenei’s authority and questioned his credentials. Eventually, his opposition led to house arrest in 2002. Based on Montazeri’s political model, people should choose their leader amongst a group of jurists (*foqaha*), given that jurists are experts in understanding what is ‘good’ and ‘bad.’

However, this leader should be accountable to and responsible for the people and it is the people who should decide the terms of his leadership, including his tenure and his jurisdiction. Theoretically, Montazeri’s ideas are in the purview of Khomeini’s political Islam and from the classic school of the Islamic methodology. However, Montazeri’s students, particularly Mohsen Kadivar, took the initiative and broadened

³⁵ A. Mirsepassi, *Democracy in Modern Iran: Islam, Culture, and Political Change* (NYU Press, 2010): 132, 143.

this subject.³⁶³⁷

Mohsen Kadivar is a *mojtahed* with a Doctorate in Philosophy and a degree in electrical engineering. He introduced new readings of political Islam and eventually his provocative ideas led to his imprisonment and defrocking in 1999. Kadivar tried to integrate modernity with his conception of Islamic-Iranian identity.

By criticising the traditional narrative of *ejtehad*, he questioned the originality and authenticity of *velayat-e faqih* and claimed it has been just a minority in the *Shia* tradition that followed this narrative. In his book 'Political Thoughts in Iran,' he underlines the contradictions between *velayat-e faqih* and the principles of republicanism. In this book, after explaining different possible forms of government in *Shia* tradition, he discusses the difference between two main forms of 'absolute and appointed guardianship of jurist' (*velayat-e entesabi-ye motlaqeh-ye faqih*) and 'selected and consultative guardianship of jurist (*velayat-e entekhabi-ye moqayyedeh-ye faqih*). In the former, the source of legitimacy is top down, while in the latter, the state mostly gains its legitimacy from the people.

However, to integrate Islam with modernity, Kadivar introduced a new approach: "If a majority of a society is Muslim then this society can have a democratic government and at the same time [this society] can practice [Islamic] faith, [Islamic] ethics and Islamic values, because Islam as a religion, can integrate with democracy as a modern political tool."³⁸ For Kadivar, the IRI should be a religious democracy, by which he means the form of government is a democracy whilst the majority of the people are Muslims. Kadivar soon became a public intellectual and an active

³⁶ Hossein Ali Montazeri, *Nezam ol Hekam fel Islam: Kholaseh Ketab Derasat fi Velayat Faqih*, [Collection of Teachings about Velayat-e Faqih] (Nashr-e Saraei, 2001).

³⁷ Hamid Dabashi's Interview with Kadivar, 12/10/1388 (2/January/2010), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9YC51vB3CI0>.

³⁸ Mohsen Kadivar, *Shariat va Siasat: Din Dar Howzeh-ye Omumi* (1387/2007): 237, http://kadivar.com/?p=8448#_Toc298183485.

'Reformist.' He published many articles and made many speeches on 'civil society,' 'freedom,' 'pluralism' and 'rule of law,' mainly to discuss how these concepts could be linked to Islam.

Kadivar's philosophy looks at different traditions of *feqh* using mainly the classical methods of theology. Shabestari implements modern philosophical paradigms, namely hermeneutic and existential theologies, to respond to the contradictions between revolutionary Islam and modern forces. Shabestari argues that it is not possible to have a single true interpretation and/or reading of any text and/or religion, therefore no one should claim to possess the true reading of a religion. Shabestari rejects that Islam suggests a certain form of polity and argues that the Quran and Islam are concerned with certain end goals and not particular forms of government.³⁹

Contradictory to the official ideology, in his discourse, state and political institutions have a 'civil' nature where religious measures could apply to them. Freedom plays a crucial role in Shabestari's discourse. He argues that institutionalisation of religion would lead to the negation of subjectivity, which is against freedom.⁴⁰ Shabestari argues that the main concerns of the people of faith regarding political theories should be in which form of government faith can flourish the most. Faith cannot be achieved without freedom of thought and autonomy.⁴¹ A desirable government should, therefore, have guardian institutions for freedom and

³⁹ Mohammad Mojtabah Shabestari, *Iman Va Azadi* [Faith and Freedom] (Tehran-e No, 2000): 60.

⁴⁰ Shabestari's discourse lies within the paradigm of 'mediated subjectivity,' as Farzin Vahdat suggests.

Farzin Vahdat, "Post-Revolutionary Discourses of Mohammad Mojtabah Shabestari and Mohsen Kadivar: Reconciling the Terms of Mediated Subjectivity: Part I: Mojtabah Shabestari," *Critique: Journal for Critical Studies of the Middle East* 9, no. 16 (2000).

⁴¹ Mohammad Mojtabah Shabestari, *Hermenutic, Ketab, Sonnat* [Hermenutic, Script, Tradition] (Tehran-e No, 1996).

‘citizen rights of participation’ as its main requirements.

Since the best form of government that can deliver these two promises is the parliamentary system with an independent judiciary system, then this form of government is desirable.⁴² For Shabestari, “The necessity of a democratic government cannot be derived from the meaning of faith or the religious texts. However, since social realities demand such a form of government, people of faith must forge a relationship with this reality, reconcile themselves with its requirements and follow a faithful life along its riverbed.”⁴³

Abdolkarim Soroush was another influential religious intellectual of this period who was once a radical member of the ‘Cultural Revolution Council’ in 1980. Soroush gradually distanced himself from his revolutionary stance and increasingly criticised the role of the clergy in the IRI. Soroush made several contributions to the debates on the relationship between modernity and Islam, most of which faced serious reactions from the traditional clergy.

In his book *The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Sharia*, Soroush distinguishes between religion and religious knowledge and argues that, in contrast to ‘religion,’ ‘religious knowledge’ is subjective, changing, time-bounded and influenced by other realms of knowledge, including science and the humanities, therefore claiming to have true and absolute understanding of a religion is impossible.⁴⁴ He implicitly questions the privilege of *Ulama* over religion. In another series of his works, he discusses the relationship between religion and ideology.

Contrary to the views of many Muslim modernist thinkers, including

⁴² *Naqdi Bar Qara'at-e Rasmi Az Din* [Criticism of Official Interpretation of Religion] (Tarak-e No, 2002): Ch.1.

⁴³ Mahmoud Sadri, "Sacral Defense of Secularism: The Political Theologies of Soroush, Shabestari, and Kadivar," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15, no. 2 (2001).

⁴⁴ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Qabz va Bast-e Teorik-e Shariat* [The Theoretical Contraction and Expansion of the Sharia] (Sirat, 1991).

Khomeini, Soroush rejects claims religions are ideologies and underlines the need to reverse those efforts that aim to ideologise religions. Soroush argues that ideologies are developed to fulfil certain sociopolitical purposes in a particular set of sociohistorical frames. Thus, ideologisation of a religion will harm religion in two ways: Firstly, by fitting religion into certain boundaries, it will not allow different meanings and interpretations that a religion can offer to surface. Second, it will transform a religion into a collection of certainly fixed answers to certain questions raised mostly in competition with rival ideologies.

For instance, considering Islam as an ideology leads to the empowerment of the *Sharia* dimension at the cost of ignoring mystic interpretations of Islam.⁴⁵ Soroush opposes the “ideologisation” of society because it will leave little room for reasoning, critical thinking and efforts to question the official ideology. In a society where religion is practiced as an ideology, questioning the official religion will be restricted, which is contradictory to an ideal religious society, which acknowledges subjective understandings of religion.

Importantly, reasoning and critical thinking are significant elements in Soroush’s philosophy, given the large influence of Western philosophers, particularly Carl Popper.⁴⁶ In sum, for Soroush, the political form of government is outside the purview of jurisprudence and within the other realm of knowledge. For Soroush, like Shabestary, faith is the essence of religion and gives precedence to religious practices. He concludes that secularism as government is compatible with Islam, and, by the same token, a plural and democratic form of government is an essential element in the flourishing of religious faith.

⁴⁵ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Modara va Modiriyyat* [Tolerance and Management] (Sirat, 1997): 4-6; Abdolkarim Soroush, *Serat-ha-ye Mostaqim* [True Paths] (Sirat, 2008): 12-26.

⁴⁶ Soroush translated many of Carl Popper’s books to Persian and also propagated his philosophy.

A major aspect of these intellectual attempts was the justification of a new role for people in politics. With the victory of Khatami and the Reformists, these intellectual concepts became the subjects of politics and public debates that challenged the old establishment on theoretical and institutional levels. Soon after Khatami's victory in 1997, the Reformists published several newspapers and journals propagating the discourse of political development.

The Conservatives soon reacted. They used state-backed newspapers, such as *Kayhan* and *Resalat*, the tribunes of Friday prayer and national TV as their main media outlets. Mesbah Yazdi (hereafter Mesbah), Ahmad Jannati and Mohammad Yazdi stood at the forefront of the Conservative camp's attempts to respond to these challenges. However, many people, to an extent, regarded Mesbah as the key theorist of the conservative camp, because he engaged in these debates on a theoretical and philosophical level.

Mesbah was born in Yazd in 1932. After studying for a few years at Yazd seminary, he went to the Qom seminary in 1953, where he attended Khomeini's courses. Despite his active involvement in Khomeini's Movement in the early 1960s, many Reformists and revolutionaries, including Rafsanjani, have questioned his support and loyalty to Khomeini's Movement during his exile.⁴⁷

There are also allegations about his support of *Hojjatieh*, a discourse that believes the Islamic government should only be established by the Hidden Imam. After Khomeini's exile, Mesbah became a member of the board of the *Haqani* School. Beheshti established this school as an alternative to the traditional *Madreseh* education system in 1964. After a few years, Mesbah resigned over the escalating disapproval surrounding his serious opposition to the ideas of Ali Shariati (who propagated

⁴⁷ *Aftab News* 17/10/1384 (7/January/2006); *Shargh* 3/11/1384 (23/January/2006); *Shargh* 5/11/1384 (25/January/2006); *Shargh* 27/6/1393 (18/September/2014).

revolutionary Islam as a modern interpretation of Islam). Mesbah rejected these views because “the religion that implements non-*feqahati* methodology can be dangerous.”⁴⁸

After his resignation, tensions continued in the Haqani School amongst the students and eventually 18 students who supported Mesbah were expelled. Soon after his resignation, Mesbah established a section in another school called the ‘*Madreseh-ye Rah-e Haq*’ and enrolled the expelled students from Haqani School. These students became the core ring of Mesbah’s supporters and leading figures in the Ahmadinejad period.

After the revolution and during the first decade of the IRI, Mesbah mostly held different positions dealing with cultural and educational affairs. He founded the Baqer al Olum Foundation as a continuation of Rah-e Haq School, and later on, in 1995, he established ‘the Research and Education Institution of the Imam Khomeini,’ which allowed him to exchange students from other universities and to offer postgraduate courses.

These educational institutions helped him to expand his influence institutionally and to educate new *cadres* — followers — with specific views that would eventually deepen his informal power over different state institutions. Mesbah has been a member of the AofE and a member of JMHEQ. In 1996, he organised an educational course for *Basij* forces to strengthen the ideological education of these forces, called the ‘Guardianship Scheme’ (*Tarh-e Velayat*). This programme strengthened the scale of influence of Mesbah and his circle on these mobilisation networks, given that students and teachers of the Imam Khomeini institutions taught this course.

Mesbah’s relationship with Rafsanjani and Khamenei dates back to their time

⁴⁸ Sanati, *Gofteman*, 145.

in the Qom Seminary in the 1950s. The difference in the worldviews of Rafsanjani and Mesbah could be traced back to this time in Qom. While Rafsanjani was mostly concerned with the practical aspects of resistance to the Pahlavi state, Mesbah was mostly engaged in its theoretical and ideological aspects.

These different views were portrayed in the bulletins that each published.⁴⁹ During Khomeini's exile, Rafsanjani proved to be a pragmatic, while Mesbah remained a fundamentalist. These different approaches led to their disagreement regarding cooperation with Leftist Islamist groups, such as the MEK. When Rafsanjani was helping MEK, Mesbah opposed him, arguing that alliance with those who are against the Islamic nature of the movement will compromise the principles of the Islamic Movement. Despite their different ideological standings, after the revolution, they have cooperated frequently. However, eventually, these two different worldviews fueled their disputes. These disputes reached their peak during the ninth Presidential election in 2005.⁵⁰

For Mesbah, the goal of the revolution was the establishment of an Islamic government where the main source of legitimacy is a divine right. He argues,

Shia jurisprudence — with the exception of few contemporary *faqihs* — believes that in the time of 'occultation,' *faqih* has the right to rule and this right is assigned to *foqaha* from God through infallible Imams. In the time of 'occultation,' a government should only be legitimised through God, and people have no role in legitimising a government and [the people's] role is only to objectify this government.⁵¹

For Mesbah, any other role for the people is unacceptable. He denounces the

⁴⁹ Akbar Rafsanjani, *Hashemi Rafsanjani: Dowran-e Mobarezeh* [Time of Struggle] (Nashr-e Ma'aref-e Imam, 1996): 195–6.

Rafsanjani managed the 'Be'sat' Bulletin, which is mostly a political journal, while Mesbah managed 'Enteqam,' a theoretical/ideological journal.

⁵⁰ *Shargh* Year Book vol.1 1383 (2004); 20; *ISNA* 11/11/83 (30/January/2005).

⁵¹ Sanati, *Gofteman*, 558–9.

arguments of dual legitimacy and/or conditional legitimacy. Dual legitimacy argues that *velayat-e faqih* enjoys both divine legitimacy and popular legitimacy. However, conditional legitimacy argues that the main source of legitimacy of *vali-ye faqih* is divine, but conditioned to the people's acceptance and votes.⁵² For Mesbah, the republican aspect of the IRI has no intrinsic value, and it refers to the IRI's frame of government. He argues,

The goal is establishing an Islamic system through a government and the name of this government would be a republic only because monarchy (*Saltanat*) is not an acceptable form of government. This does not mean we have another goal called republicanism next to Islam. This is infidelity (*sherk*)... Republicanism is just a shell for reaching Islamic government otherwise it (republicanism) has no essential value.⁵³

He reaffirms this point: "There is no doubt that the main theme of the IRI's Constitution is the sovereignty of God and Islam."⁵⁴

For Mesbah, a majority cannot be trusted because, in general, people are weak and mostly under the influence of their earthly desires. Therefore, "It is the duty of the 'vali' to rule as long as there are only enough people who support *vali-ye faqih* to maintain the Islamic government, and it is not the question of the number of his supporters."⁵⁵ For Mesbah, Islamic orders surpass all other human achievements, particularly in the humanities, given that Islamic orders are rooted in the ultimate truth.

According to Mesbah's discourse, there is only one reading of Islam and it is obtained through traditional *feqh*, and only *Ulama* have the authority and expertise to conclude this reading. *Ulama* are in agreement on the main issues of Islamic rules, and in those few areas of disputes, *feqh* and *ejtehad* offer sufficient tools to find the

⁵² Ibid., 560–90.

⁵³ *Parto Sokhan* 17/12/1379 (7/March/2001): 3–4.

⁵⁴ Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, *Dar Partou Vilayat* [In the Shadow of Jurisprudence] (Imam Khomeini Institute, 2007): 201–3.

⁵⁵ *Iran* 10/9/1379 (30/November/2000).

answers.

Mesbah harshly condemns debates about pluralism and the possibility of different readings of Islam: “Extension and generalisation of pluralism and political ‘pluralism in religion is not acceptable.’”⁵⁶ He even criminalises such interpretation: “Whoever said I have a new reading of Islam should be punished and punched in the mouth.”⁵⁷ He responds to his critics by saying that “Islam has one reading and that is the reading of the Prophet and Imams. Those people who argue that no one has the right to impose his preference [on others], (implying the Reformists and Khatami) [should know that] our religion is not a matter of preference (*saliqeh*) for us, [which based on that] we can not impose it!”⁵⁸

For Mesbah, freedom is legitimate only if both *Sharia* and the law embrace it.⁵⁹ In another word, there are legitimate or illegitimate freedoms rather than just legal or illegal freedoms. The duty of the Islamic government is to prohibit any ‘illegitimate’ acts, in addition to protecting ‘legitimate and legal’ freedoms. He reduces the demand for ‘freedom,’ propagated by the Reformists, to a Western ‘morally corrupted’ lifestyle.

Mesbah rejects Khatami’s view on freedom: “Those remarks that consider freedom as the source of human dignity and consequently reject [social or political] restrictions and or boundaries, propagate a deceitful slogan of freedom of the West.”⁶⁰ He argues that there is no freedom without boundaries; so, the question is who should define these boundaries? “The response of a Muslim is: no one is more competent than

⁵⁶ *Fath* 25/10/1378 (15/January/2000).

⁵⁷ *Khordad* 27/6/1378 (18/September/1999).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, *Nazaryieh-ye Siasi-e Islam* [Islam's Political Theory] (Imam Khomeini Institute, 2007).vol. 1: 209–10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, vol 1, 75.

God for defining the restrictions of freedom in the world because it is God who creates all the beings and knows the best of its creatures and knows their desires and wants nothing but their perfection... but the response of a liberal is: these restrictions should be defined by people.”⁶¹

For Mesbah, freedom and democracy are not inherently Islamic values; even interpretations of them are in contrast to Islam. Therefore, he blames those intellectuals who claim Islam propagates these values.⁶² In a sermon in a Friday prayer in 1998, Mesbah summarised his views:

Those who propagate freedom and at the same time are mourning that there is no freedom in Iran, what are they implying?! The fact is, they have seen, heard or watched a certain behaviour in Western countries or in their movies and now they crave for that lifestyle, but this [Western lifestyle (referring to social and individual liberties)] is not permitted in Iran. Who does not permit it? Islamic government. Where does the Islamic government get this right from? From Islam; where does Islam get this right from? From *vali-ye faqih*, from God, and from the Prophet. These people, in fact, do not want to accept God’s orders...⁶³

For Mesbah, all types of freedom are constrained to the boundaries set in *Sharia*. Therefore, he rejects the freedom of belief because Islam only accepts the ‘true’ and ‘right’ beliefs. By the same token, freedom of expression is valuable as long as it is not used against Islam or sacred religious values.

In Mesbah’s paradigm, Muslim identity prioritises citizenship.⁶⁴ Mesbah questions the universality of the right of citizens and argues: “Equality of humans in humanity does not necessarily mean that they are equal in citizenship rights.”⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Porsesh-ha va Pasokh-ha* [Questions and Answers] (Imam Khomeini Institute, 2006). vol.4: 23-4.

⁶² *Resalat* 11/2/1373 (1/May/1994).

⁶³ Sanati, *Gofteman*, 320-3.

⁶⁴ *Mosharekat* 18/12/1378 (7/February/2000); *Noroz* 25/4/1380 (16/July/2001).

⁶⁵ Sanati, 336-8.

Mesbah criticises Khatami's slogan of 'Iran for all Iranians,' "Propagating nationalism is a sign of the deterioration of religious culture [in Iran], because these ideas and values [nationalist values] would [only] spread when religious culture deteriorates in a society and in order to substitute this culture."⁶⁶

Khatami underlines 'tolerance,' in society as a major element in the political development platform. Conversely, Mesbah is suspicious of these attempts, considering them a weakening of Islamic values and a Western conspiracy: "They took our religious pride by propagating 'tolerance.' Be careful not to lose our spirit of martyrdom easily, and not to be fooled by the people propagating 'tolerance.'"⁶⁷ To show the contradiction between 'tolerance' and Islam, Mesbah underscores areas in which Islam explicitly legitimises violence. "Representing violence as a negative value is part of cultural onslaught."⁶⁸

"The West says that we should have tolerance when someone offends our religious beliefs... but Islam says such beliefs are sacred and are [even] more important than our life and one should defend these values even by sacrificing one's life."⁶⁹ For Mesbah, the use of violence is part of Islamic ordinances. "If one accepts the Quran, consequently one should accept [the use of] violence."⁷⁰ He argues that the enemies of Islam should feel the terror of Islam and "for protecting Islamic regime, violence is a must and the most necessary obligation of Muslims."⁷¹ He believes there are clear circumstances in which Islam allows people to use violence even without the approval of the state.

⁶⁶ *Resalat* 25/2/1379 (14/May/2000).

⁶⁷ *Ham-Mihan* 14/1/1379 (2/April/2000).

⁶⁸ *Aftab Yazd* 6/9/1379 (26/November/2000).

⁶⁹ *Yalasarat* 11/6/1378 (2/September/1999).

⁷⁰ *Sohb Emrooz* 30/5/1378 (21/August/1999).

⁷¹ *Khordad* 2/5/1378 (24/July/1999).

For instance, if “the people feel that the principles of Islam are in danger”⁷² and/or if religious beliefs of Muslims are insulted.⁷³ In one of his most controversial comments, Mesbah argued that “if someone insults the ‘sacred values’ [of Muslims] he/she should be killed and there is no need for a court order.”⁷⁴ Given his comments, he was called the ‘Theoriser of Violence’ by the Reformists and Khatami. Khatami responded to his remarks on many occasions:

Violence is condemned in all forms, even under sacred or popular slogans, or in the name of revolutionary figures [...] however, those who are trying to theorise [and to legitimise] this use of violence should be blamed the most.⁷⁵

On another occasion Khatami underlined the possible dangers of these remarks:

We made the revolution in order to build a proud revolutionary society. And people also declared that they accepted [that interpretation of] Islam, which its orders were reflected [in the Constitution]. Now, how is it that some people dare to disturb this order in the name of Islam? To claim what they believe in is the true interpretation of Islam, even if it is against the Constitution, even if it is against the accepted norms. How do they dare to encourage people and their religious followers to use violence and terror with the excuses such as your religion is in danger ... those who are against science and knowledge and every modern achievement, disguise [hide] their illusions and delusions in philosophical themes and ‘ayeh’ (Quranic verses) and ‘hadis’ in order to propagate their reactionary beliefs. [They] present these [delusions and illusions] as holy concepts and take advantage of religious emotions [of the people]... The only thing that they are concerned about is their dark narrow mindset. These people do not believe in Khomeini, Islamic revolution and the Constitution.⁷⁶

These intellectual battles became largely politicised. These two different conceptions of the role of people in politics remained an underlining theme in factional

⁷² *Yalasarat* 11/6/1378 (2/September/1999).

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Khordad* 13/6/1378 (4/September/1999).

⁷⁵ *Sohb Emrooz* 6/5/1378 (28/July/1999).

⁷⁶ *Khordad* 17/5/1378 (8/August/1999).

politics, the effects of which shaped, to a certain extent, different aspects of factional politics at an institutional level.

Factional Politics at the Institutional Level

Before elaborating the dynamics of factional politics, a few points need to be recalled. The triumph of Khatami took both him and the Reformists by surprise.⁷⁷ They had no long-term comprehensive strategy. They realised that the extensive social support of Khatami was their main political asset. Given the large diversity of this support base, satisfying all sections of this support base was difficult. Khatami and the Reformists made political development their main agenda and their initial strategy was a negotiation at the top, backed up with pressure from below.

To execute this strategy successfully, one can argue that Khatami needed effective negotiation amongst political elites at the top and unification of both his social support base and the Reformists. Satisfying the expectations of his supporters meant executing policies that would endanger the interests of the Conservatives. At the same time, prolonged negotiations at the top could lower the social momentum behind the change and weaken his negotiating position. The task was, therefore, complicated, demanding the skills of a politician instead of a philosopher.

In return, the Conservatives focused on dividing the Reformist camp and weakening its ties to its social support base. They blocked and delayed the implementation of Reformist policies and discredited the Reformist elites. They used coercive force both against the Reformists and civil society— They were successful. On the one hand, the question of how to respond to the Conservative's actions led to a

⁷⁷ Mohammad Ghouchani, *Baradar-e Bozorgtar Mordeh Ast* [Big Brother is Dead] (Negar, 2002): 5-8.

divide in the Reformist camp. On the other hand, some people and political elites questioned even the possibility of the initial claims of the Reformist Movement about achieving Islamic democracy by following the Constitution.⁷⁸

In this context, power struggles formed around policy initiatives concerning social, economic, cultural and foreign policy. These struggles took place on an institutional level between the judiciary and other guardian institutions versus civil society and electoral institutions versus guardian institutions.⁷⁹ To stay in the purview of this thesis, only those events with direct relevance to factional politics and institutional battles are covered. This section does not claim to provide a political history of this period.

Before the dynamics of this power struggle are elaborated, it should be noted that the relationship between Khatami and different segments of the Reformists changed. For instance, at political junctures, some of the Reformists who used to consider Khatami the 'Father of Reforms' changed their views on his role in the Reformist Movement. The radical part of the Reformists even proposed in 2000, the thesis of 'bypassing Khatami,' by which they meant that if Khatami is not ready to adapt to the pace of the Reformist Movement, the Reformists should look for alternatives to Khatami and stick with the movement.⁸⁰ Thus, referring to Khatami and the Reformists as a single political unit in this thesis does not mean they were always

⁷⁸ Divisions formed, aligning to different political strategies in reaction to the Conservative's actions. Some Reformists argued the need to leave the political scene completely, to show our dissatisfaction with the political situation. While some argued the need to cooperate with the Conservatives on the few policies in which common ideas are shared. These strategies gained different names, including: 'Khoruj az hakemiyat' (Leaving the Government), 'Aramesh-e Fa'al' (Active Tolerance), 'Bazdarandegi-ye Fa'al' (Active Deterrence), 'Eqdam-e Hamahang' (Cooperative Action), and 'Nafarmani-ye Madani' (Civil Disobedience). During the election to the seventh *Majlis*, 'Khoruj az Hakemiyat' (Leaving the Government) and 'Nafarmani-ye Madani' (Civil Disobedience), gained momentum within a large part of the Reformists.

⁷⁹ These categorisations are for the sake of analytical purposes, and the interconnections and interrelations between power struggles in these different categories are acknowledged.

⁸⁰ *Entekhab* 27-7-1379 (18 October 2000); Mohsen Armin and Hashem Aghajari, eds. *Ubud Az Khatami* [Bypassing Khatami] (Zekr, 1999).

united.

Soon after the seventh Presidential election, Khatami and the Reformists strengthened their attempts to open the political and sociocultural space under the rubric of ‘political development’ and empowerment of civil society institutions. In response, the Conservatives, having realised the serious challenge that Khatami’s paradigm would impose on their power base, unified their forces. They exerted their control over judiciary institutions and also mobilised their pressure groups, the IRGC and *Basij*. As a result, a power struggle emerged between these two groups.

The appointment of Ataollah Mohajerani and Abdollah Nouri, as Ministers of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Interior respectively, was a clear signal of change in sociocultural and political agendas, due to their moderate views. In this new direction, new journals and newspapers were published, mostly propagating Reformist agendas. In October 1997, the first union of journalists was established by personal order of Khatami. In the music industry, bans were lifted on new genres of music, which were previously considered anti-Islamic.

Many books, which were banned by prior administrations, were published and/or republished. New films and plays were produced, challenging the official image of society by showing different aspects of ‘secular culture’ within Iranian families. Controversial issues, such as the role of war veterans in post-war politics, social freedom, social poverty, extramarital romantic affairs and the social position of clerics, increasingly became the subject of books, music and films. In fact, these new cultural activities were in clear opposition to the claims of the state in its success in creating *homo Islamicus*. The popularity of these new debates was confirmation of the growing number of different social groups with a desire for change.

Whilst the policies of Mohajerani marginally opened the cultural space,

Khatami and his Interior Minister tried to open the political space. Taking a step towards modern politics and the encouragement of party politics, new parties were established. During the period of 1997–1998, eight new parties were established, including the ‘Iranian Participation Front’ (*Hezb-e Moasharekat-e Iran* hereafter *Mosharekat*), which was headed by Khatami’s brother, Mohammad Reza Khatami. *Mosharekat* was the Reformist’s attempt to institutionalise their popular support base. Even though *Mosharekat* portrayed itself as Khatami’s main political party, Khatami was not a member, and at times their political strategies and tactics were in conflict.⁸¹

To strengthen civil society, over the eight years of Khatami’s Presidency, an estimated ten thousand NGOs were established, in contrast with Ahmadinejad’s two terms as President, where the number of NGOs dropped to around two thousand.⁸² Women’s rights activists and unions activists (mainly teachers and labourers) also mobilised their forces during this time. However, their efforts faced harsh and sometimes violent reactions from the regime.

Universities also benefitted from this relaxed political space. Student activities revived and eventually gave birth to the first round of serious Student Movements in 1999. Various meetings, ceremonies and anniversaries with a political nature received permits from the Minister of the Interior to form. For instance, in 1997 a permit for a memorial for Bazargan became the subject of factional politics and eventually became the main excuse for the impeachment of Nouri in 1998 by the Conservative *Majlis*. Bazargan was one of the founders of the LMI and the first IRI Prime Minister.

However, due to his criticism of revolutionary policies, particularly during and after the hostage crisis (1979–1981), he became the symbol of so-called ‘liberals,’ a pejorative term in IRI political lexicon which refers to those who compromise the

⁸¹ Shadlu, *Ahzab*, 781–9.

⁸² *Shargh* 29/12/1392 (20/March/2014).

revolutionary ideals. In response to the Reformist's attempts to open the cultural and political spheres, the Conservatives soon joined forces with the judiciary institutions.

In this period, the judiciary institutions — including the Special Clerical Court (SCC) — imprisoned influential intellectuals, activists and political Reformists and restricted the Reformist media and NGO activities. The first victim was Gholam Hossein Karbaschi, who was arrested on charges of corruption in 1998.⁸³ Arguably, his arrest was the Conservative's factional revenge for *Kargozaran* and the Modern Right and their role in Khatami's victory.⁸⁴ The attack on the Modern Right continued with the banning of Faezeh Hashemi's newspaper 'Zan' (woman) in April 1999. Less than a year into the Khatami's Presidency, in April 1998, comments by Rahim Safavi, the Commander-in-Chief of IRGC, were circulated.

I told Khamenei that a new form of hypocrisy is forming in the name of clergy. There are people wearing clerical attire but they are hypocrites. They are pretending to obey the rules but [in fact] they are breaking the rules. We need to cut someone's head and/or cut out someone's tongue (implying hard punishment); [because] these days, tongues have become swords [of our enemies], the newspapers that are publishing [these days] are threatening our national security. We are destroying and will destroy the roots of these anti-revolutionaries wherever they are.⁸⁵

Following these remarks, two months later, in February of 1999, Mohsen Kadiver was arrested and convicted in the SCC. His conviction ignited a series of debates about the legitimacy of such courts. In 1999, Abdollah Nouri, who, after his impeachment as the Minister of Interior, engaged in publishing newspapers. Nouri was arrested and sentenced to six years in prison, despite alleged attempts by Rafsanjani to

⁸³ *Hamshahri* 17/1/1377 (6/April/1998).

⁸⁴ Mohammad Ghouchani, *Do Gam Be Pish Yek Gam Be Pas* [Two Steps Forward, One Back] (Meraj, 2000).

⁸⁵ *Salam* 10/2/1377 (30/April/1998).

get a lesser sentence. Khamenei defended the clerical courts and criticised Reformist clerics.⁸⁶

In 2000, several Reformist intellectuals and politicians were arrested and tried following their attendance at a conference in Berlin. The Heinrich Boll Foundation (an organisation affiliated to the German Green party) held this conference to discuss IRI politics after the sixth *Majlis* election.

However, the attendance of opposition groups outside of Iran, including MEK, in addition to the weak performance of the Reformist attendees in responding to the harsh criticisms pointed at the IRI regime, gave enough excuse to the judiciary for action. On another occasion, following a signal given by Khamenei in a speech at Amir Kabir University, in March 2001 the 'Islamic Revolutionary Court' issued an arrest warrant for numerous members of two political groups, the National Front, *Melli Mazhabi* and the LMI, over charges of involvement in a project called 'over throwers of the regime.' The IRGC imprisoned a large number of these members during a trip by Khatami to Moscow.⁸⁷

NGOs were not safe from the political actions of the judiciary. For instance, in September 2002, the 'Ayandeh' Foundation, with its link to Gallup and Zigby, was convicted because it undertook a survey which showed that 74.4 percent of Iranians supported direct negotiations with the US.⁸⁸ After IRNA published this report, many Reformists involved in the institute, including Abbas Abdi and Alireza Alavi Tabar, were accused of espionage.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ During a Friday prayer, Khamenei said, "The enemy manipulates people to get its goal and sometimes it is the clergy which is manipulated and ignorant."

Khamenei Friday prayer (17/December/1999), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2984>.

⁸⁷ *Jomhourieslami* 22/12/1379 (12/March/2001); *Jomhourieslami* 22/1/1380 (11/April/2001); *Noroz* 20/1/1380 (9/April/2001).

⁸⁸ *Hayat-e No* 1/7/1380 (23/September/2001); *Etemad* 1/71380 (23/September/2001).

⁸⁹ http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/030203_a-iran-poll.shtml (2 March 2016).

Another controversial action of the judiciary against Reformist intellectuals was the sentencing to death of Hashem Agha Jari in November 2002, because of his harsh criticism of the concept of *taqlid* (emulation) during a speech.⁹⁰ His death sentence ignited another series of university protests in this period. His sentence was eventually reduced to 15 years in prison.

The Conservatives used the judicial institutions for political purposes against the Reformist media. In July 1998, Mohammad Yazdi, the head of the judiciary, argued in a Friday prayer that political development is not the main priority of the IRI.⁹¹ His sermon was followed by an editorial in *Resalat* by Morteza Nabavi elaborating that continuation of political development would lead to chaos and a political explosion in Iran.⁹² Soon after his sermon, the judiciary shut down '*Jame'eh*' newspaper, which was the first independent newspaper established a few months after Khatami's Presidential victory. It had become popular, perhaps because it had unconventional stories and headlines, ran political cartoons and satire, and was not afraid of questioning certain social and political taboos.

In reaction to its closure, Ahmad Borghani, the Press Deputy of the Culture and Islamic Guidance Minister, resigned and *Jame'eh* was replaced with '*Tous*' newspaper two days later. Soon, this procedure of issuing a new newspaper under a new name with the same cadres became the main tactic of the Reformists in the face of restricting Judiciary actions against the media. These newspapers gained the title of chain newspapers.

Gradually, the Reformist media radicalised in reaction to increasing pressure

⁹⁰ Following this speech, JMHEQ announced MII – the organisation to which Agha Jari was affiliated with, against the *Sharia* and asked Muslims not to cooperate with MII.

Siasat-e Ruz 19/4/1381 (10/July/2002).

⁹¹ *Asr-e Ma* 7/5/1381 (29/July/1998).

⁹² *Ibid.*

by the Conservatives and entered sensitive political areas, such as the legitimacy of the 'Supreme Leader.' Eventually, Khamenei entered the debates and harshly criticised the Reformist newspapers, calling them the "base for the enemies."⁹³ After this signal from Khamenei, and despite attempts by Mohajerani to contain the situation, eventually, in April 2000, several newspapers were shut down overnight by the order of Judge Saeed Mortazavi through the institution of the press court.

Saeed Mortazavi soon became the forefront of the Judiciary actions against the pro-Reform camp. The escalated restrictions on the Reformist media continued to where national TV almost completely boycotted Khatami during the final years of his Presidency. The Conservatives also used their formal and informal links to hard-line pressure groups in the factional battles and in times of signs of social unrest.

The pressure groups, including *Ansar-e Hezbollah*, played an important part in the judiciary's systematic actions against the Reformists. By and large Judicial actions against the Reformists usually began with the mobilisation of these pressure groups following a signal from the conservative camp. This signal could be a comment by a prominent Conservative or Khamenei in a Friday sermon or other tribunes in which certain sociocultural activities of pro-change forces and/or policies of the Reformists were criticised.

In their protests, these groups accused Khatami's government and the Reformists of intentionally weakening 'true' Islamic/revolutionary values and demanded a harsh reaction of the judiciary and/or other guardian institutions. As mentioned earlier, since these groups were not accountable to any civic or military courts, they were also the main instrument of illegal suppression of the opposition by the regime.

⁹³ Khamenei 1/2/1379 (20/April/2000), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=896>.

However, as the Conservatives limited the Reformist's actions and in damping the pace of their sociocultural and political programs, these hard-line pressure groups became less present in the public sphere. Over the period of 1997 to 2000, *Ansar-e Hezbollah* and plain clothes militia were involved in vigilante actions on more than 30 occasions. They harassed intellectuals, disturbed political meetings and even beat up high-ranking officials of the Khatami cabinet (including the beating of Abdollah Nouri and Ataollah Mohajerani, in a Friday prayer in September 1998). They protested against Mohsen Kadivar and Abdollah Nouri before and during their trials and asked for the serious punishment of the attendees at the Berlin conference in 2000. They also played an important role in vigilante actions against students during university unrests on different occasions. Some members of these groups were also involved in the assassination of Saeed Hajjarian in 2000.

The assassination attempt on Hajjarian by Saeed Asgar, a young, active *Basij* member, was a turning point in Khatami's politics of change. The assassination took place soon after the landslide victory of the Reformists in the sixth *Majlis*. The bullet went through his head but he survived. He has, however, been paralysed ever since. Hajjarian was one of the key theorists and strategists of the Reformists.

His assassination shocked society, Khatami and the Reformists. Serious suspicions emerged about the involvement of the security forces in the assassination and whether the assassins had a direct religious decree, *fatva*, for their action. It was seen as a clear threat to the Reformists and showed the scale of violent measures that the anti-Reform Movement was ready to take to hinder the Reformist Movement. The assassination considerably raised the cost of reform for Khatami and the Reformists and it raised the risk of activism.

The message was clear: if the anti-Reform Movement cannot tolerate activities

of Hajjarian, a war veteran, an active revolutionary and one of the founders of the intelligence services after the revolution, what reaction should other segments of the society who have been outsiders to the revolution expect. The Hajjarian assassination was a case in a series of violent actions against the pro-change forces. What made it so exceptional, was the fact that he was part of the establishment.

The incident known as the ‘Chain Murders’ case was the climax of systematic use of violence by the guardian institutions for hindering Reformist ‘liberal’ intellectual debates and civil society institutions. In November 1998, several public intellectuals, Dariush Forouhar and his wife, Parvaneh Eskandari Mohammad Mokhtari, Mohammad Jafar Pouyandeh and Majid Sharif, were brutally murdered. Reformist journals covered their deaths and also connected them to the killings of intellectuals in the previous years.

In December 1998, a group called “Pure Mohammadian Islam Devotees of Mostafa Navvab” took credit for at least some of these killings. On 5 January 1999, the public relations office of the Ministry of Intelligence unexpectedly issued a short press release admitting that “staff within” its Ministry “committed these criminal activities [...] under the influence of undercover rogue agents.”⁹⁴ Eventually, the case was closed by the resignation of Khatami’s Intelligence Minister and the suicide of Saeed Emami in prison, as the key officials responsible for the murders.

The domination of the ‘Chain Murders’ in the public sphere significantly influenced both factional politics and the public debates of the time. As mentioned in the previous section, part of the intellectual and public debates in this period surrounded ‘coercion’ and ‘violence.’ These debates were formed within this context. The resolution of the case with the resignation of the Minister of Intelligence was

⁹⁴ *Jomhourieslami* 16/10/1377 (6/January/1999).

perceived by most people as a success for Khatami and Reformists and a blow to the Conservative's camp and Khamenei himself, given that the Minister of Intelligence is only appointed after the approval of the 'Supreme Leader,' and it was seen as giving the upper hand to Khatami and the Reformists.

Crucially, the 'Chain Murders' became a turning point in the relationship between Rafsanjani and the Reformists. The Reformists, who had reinforced their political power following a landslide electoral victory in the first City Council election, considered the 'chain murders' a unique opportunity to settle their old disputes with Rafsanjani.

In a political manoeuvre, they targeted Rafsanjani and accused him of knowing about these political assassinations during his Presidential terms. Some went even further and implicitly portrayed him as the man behind the killings.⁹⁵ Abbas Abdi, who was imprisoned during the Rafsanjani administration, and Akbar Ganji were at the forefront of these attacks. They succeeded. Rafsanjani's popularity declined considerably, to the point that in the election to the sixth *Majlis*, he received the lowest number of the votes amongst Tehran's elected MPs and was eventually forced to resign before the sixth *Majlis* began.

As a result, the monopolising ambitions of the Reformists cost them Rafsanjani, a major political ally who exercised considerable influence on the political elite. After their successive electoral victories in 1997, 1999 and 2000, the Reformists seemingly thought that the Conservatives popular and institutional power had been significantly weakened. Therefore, they thought it was now a good time to contain the power of Rafsanjani as a possible rival.

⁹⁵ Akbare Ganji published a book and accused Rafsanjani of being the puppet master. Akbar Ganji, *Alijenab-e Sorkhpush Aliljenab-i Khakestaripush, Asib Shenasi-ye Gozar Be Jame'eh-ye Democratic* [The Boss in Red and the Boss in Grey] (Tarah-e No, 2000).

Nonetheless, the attack on Rafsanjani seemed a political gamble, because, at this period, they needed Rafsanjani's politicking skills more than ever, given that their main strategy was a negotiation at the top. Thus, this was a strategic mistake which the Reformists realised only too late when they lost the ninth Presidential election to Ahmadinejad. The Reformists, or at least some part of them, overestimated their popular and institutional power while underestimating the power of the Conservatives. The Rafsanjani–Reformist relationship will be discussed in more detail in the next section where factional politics between the electoral institutions and guardian institutions are examined.

Electoral versus Guardian Institutions

Struggles over the control of electoral/republican institutions have always been a major area of factional politics in the IRI. However, since the republican institutions were the only main state institutions that the Reformists could find a chance to control, elections were especially important during this period. During the eight years of Khatami's Presidency, six elections were held, including two Presidential elections, two elections to the *Majlis* and two elections to the City Councils. To raise popular participation in politics, and also to show his popular support, Khatami established the institution of City Councils soon after his victory.⁹⁶

In February of 1999, in the first City Council election, Reformists successfully mobilised pro-change social groups and enjoyed a strong victory. Although the institutional jurisdictions of City Councils were limited, this election was an important battleground for different factions to show their popular support, given it was the first

⁹⁶ As in this election, the Interior Minister was in charge of the vetting process, instead of the GC. Many Reformists entered the election.

election since Khatami's election.

However, this institution became a victim of factional politics. For example, the first City Council of Tehran became a near dysfunctional institution by mid-term.⁹⁷ The major electoral victory of Reformists happened a year later when they won 170 out of the 290 seats in the sixth *Majlis* elections in February of 2000. With this victory, the Reformists gained control of almost all electoral institutions, marking this period as the height of the struggle between the GC and the sixth *Majlis*.

This period (2000–2004) was dominated by factional disputes between the Reformists and the Conservatives and escalated debates about the role of the people in politics. In June 2001, the eighth Presidential election was held, in which Khatami succeeded over his opponent with more than 50 percent of the vote; he won more than 21 million votes.⁹⁸ This was, however, the last electoral victory of the Reformists during this period.

The first signs of a decline in their popularity can be seen in the second City Council election in February 2003 where part of the Conservatives took advantage of the electoral apathy of the supporters of the Reformism and won the election. In February 2004, in the election to the seventh *Majlis*, the GC banned a large number of the Reformists, thus the Reformists suffered another electoral defeat. The domination of the Conservatives in the seventh *Majlis* during the last two years of Khatami's second term made him a lame duck President. The struggle between the electoral and guardian bodies was a significant aspect of factional politics in this period. To emphasise different aspects of these struggles, a historical narrative is used here.

Khatami and the Reformists were engaged in a factional struggle with the fifth

⁹⁷ More than half of the Tehran City Council members resigned and it was closed for some time.

⁹⁸ Seventy-seven percent of the total vote, with 67.7 percent participation.
Entekhab 21/3/1380 (11/June/2001).

Majlis dominated by the Conservatives in the first two years of Khatami's Presidency. During this time, the fifth *Majlis* used most of its instruments to hinder Khatami's plans to shift the direction of sociocultural and political developments.

For example, almost a year into the Khatami Presidency, the fifth *Majlis* successfully impeached Khatami's Interior Minister, Abdollah Nouri, over his moderate political policies in a tense impeachment session.⁹⁹ Less than a year later, in 1999 the *Majlis* impeached Mohajerani, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, who was the key member of Khatami's cabinet supporting moderate cultural policies. Mohajerani, with his 'dazzling' oratory skills, convinced the hardliner *Majlis*. Eventually, he resigned in 2000 due to the harsh criticisms of the Conservatives, importantly, the direct and public criticism of Khamenei, in addition to his disappointment in controlling the radical approach in part of the Reformist newspapers.¹⁰⁰

The Conservatives in the fifth *Majlis* used their legislative power to contain pro-Reform policies. To limit the freedom of the press, they proposed legislation leading to a tougher press law. It was during this time that the *Salam* newspaper published an allegedly secret letter from Saeed Emami to the Intelligence Minister Fallahian. Emami was the key suspect in the chain murders and in his letter, expressed his worries regarding the cultural state of society and the need for action. The article that included this letter led to *Salam*'s closure, which was followed by student unrest in reaction. Eventually, in the final few days of the fifth *Majlis*, the new legislation passed. However, the press law continued to be a major issue in the factional politics in the sixth *Majlis*.

⁹⁹ In this session, a Conservative MP attacked Nouri and slapped another cleric who was stopping him.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ataollah Mohajerani, conducted in 2014.

The Sixth Majlis

The Reformist dominated sixth *Majlis* gave birth to a new dynamic of factional politics. During the last two years of the fifth *Majlis*, a large part of factional politics was between two electoral institutions of Conservative dominated *Majlis* and Presidency. Different from this dynamic, in the sixth *Majlis*, the factional politics emerged mostly within the institutional context of Reformist sixth *Majlis* and the GC.

The first conflict between the sixth *Majlis* and the GC happened before the start of the sixth *Majlis*. The GC refused to approve the election results of Tehran, where almost all the winning candidates were Reformists. After bombarding the GC with numerous nominees, many Reformists who had eventually passed the GC vetting procedure entered the election competition.

After the sweeping victory of the Reformists, the GC questioned the legitimacy of the election and tried to cancel the election of Tehran and that of some other cities. Eventually, the GC only confirmed the election results after the direct intervention of Khamenei through Leadership Decree.¹⁰¹ The *Mosharekat* party gained a majority in the sixth *Majlis*. *Mosharekat*'s success was due to its popular support because of its portrayal as being pro-change and anti-establishment. However, its attempts to show itself as anti-establishment cost the party its alliance with Rafsanjani and *Kargozaran*.

The election to the sixth *Majlis* significantly influenced the relationship between the Reformists and other factions and internal disputes amongst their members. The Reformists were overwhelmed by the extent of their victory and thus suffered from a degree of hubris and overconfidence. They underestimated the extent of the political power the Conservatives could impose. They overestimated their ability

¹⁰¹ Khamenei 29/2/1379 (18/May/2000) <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=11508>

to implement quickly a Reformist political agenda.

A growing split emerged between Khatami and some leading Reformists. As mentioned earlier, soon after Khatami's victory, the '23 May' Movement Coalition was formed. Since it included a wide political spectrum of political players, it was an incoherent political organisation. The emergence of *Mosharekat* was an attempt to shape this spectrum under a new political organisation.

However, *Mosharekat* lacked both a solid political identity and a coherent political strategy even amongst its members, let alone with the other pro-change groups. The leading members of the *Mosharekat*, in accordance with majority members of the MII, supported radical approaches in implementing political development. They believed it was time to reform the power structure, which could also guarantee their chance of remaining in power. They propagated radical sociopolitical reforms affecting almost all the revolutionary and Islamic institutions. Their approach soon came into conflict with moderate pro-Reform groups, namely MRM and *Kargozaran*, in this period. These moderate Reformists argued that these radical measures would only radicalise the Conservatives and consequently would harm the Reform Movement.

This approach of the radical part of the Reformists was depicted in their relationship with Rafsanjani. A radical part of the Reformists raised a war against Rafsanjani. This campaign, which had followed the 'Chain Murders' case, escalated during the election to the sixth *Majlis*.

At least three points could explain these Reformist's hostilities against Rafsanjani. First, they feared that, if Rafsanjani became the Speaker of the sixth *Majlis*, his pragmatic views could be an obstacle to the Reformist's main objectives of substantial political and cultural reforms. Second, they argued that the time of

Rafsanjani's behind-door politicking was over and his method would harm 'political development.' Third, most of the Reformists had not forgotten nor forgiven Rafsanjani's role in their political elimination in the elections to the fourth and the fifth *Majlis*.

Therefore, when Rafsanjani announced his candidacy for election to the sixth *Majlis*, he became the target of severe criticisms and accusations from the *Mosharekat* and their newspapers. *Mosharekat* even refused to include Rafsanjani in its list of candidates. When Rafsanjani was announced as the last elected candidate in Tehran, *Mosharekat* continued its intimidation and accused the GC and Rafsanjani of electoral fraud. Finally, Rafsanjani resigned his seat in parliament, even though after the recount of disputed ballot boxes his position improved by ten steps. The *Mosharekat* and the radical Reformists portrayed Rafsanjani's resignation as a victory, but they lost an important ally who could have played a significant role in the coming factional disputes.

The Reformists used the legislative power of the *Majlis* as the main institutional instrument to empower their position and to pursue political reform. These efforts fueled factional politics and largely influenced the Reformist's relationships with the main political figures, namely Khamenei. The Reformists put forward a bill designed to reform press law in their first attempt. Two weeks after the election, Mohammad Reza Khatami, the first candidate of Tehran in the sixth *Majlis*, underlined: "Now, the lifting of severe limitations on the press, which is one of our [the Reformists] most important political promises, can be resolved easily. We aim to resolve the semi-legal, legal and illegal obstacles on press in our first step."¹⁰²

Just a few weeks into the sixth *Majlis*, the Reformists pushed for a new press

¹⁰² *Bahar* 23/3/1379 (12/June/2000).

law bill, despite Khamenei's back-door messages to postpone such action because the previous *Majlis* had just passed the new law. Eventually, Khamenei intervened officially and issued a Leadership Decree. Karroubi, who was initially against the ratification of the bill, giving Khamenei's several messages, dropped the bill from the agenda as the *Majlis*' speaker. *Mosharekat* reacted and, after unsuccessful attempts to nullify Khamenei's decree by obstruction, questioned the grounds of the Leadership Decree (*hokm-e hokumati*). *Mosharekat*'s reaction was a clear questioning of the authority of Khamenei. It was seen as a sign of confrontation between the Supreme Leader and the Reformists. Importantly, these threats to Khamenei resulted in a renewed relationship between Khamenei and Rafsanjani, given that both men faced challenges from the Reformists.

Disputes between the *Majlis* and the GC escalated when the Reformist *Majlis* focused on strengthening republican institutions of the IRI by introducing reforms limiting the power of parallel revolutionary/Islamic institutions of the IRI. Mostafa Moein, Khatami's Minister of Higher Education, proposed the 'Structural Reform of Higher Education Bill,' which aimed to limit the jurisdiction of the SCCR, a parallel institution, by bringing it under the control of the Ministry of Higher Education.

The Conservatives reacted strongly, and the bill was rejected by the GC as being against the *Sharia* and the Constitutions on 34 counts. The *Mosharekat* MPs ratified the bill with a few corrections and insisted on their initial position after underlining that the initial purpose of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution was not legislative.¹⁰³ Once again, Khamenei entered the debates, given his sensitivity towards cultural programmes. In a meeting with university professors, he strongly supported the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution and responded to the Reformist

¹⁰³ *Mardomsalari* 20/9/1381 (11/December/2002).

arguments: “No, in fact, it is not a legislative centre, it is a policymaking centre and policy making is superior to legislation.”¹⁰⁴ As the disputes escalated, Mostafa Moein resigned. His resignation letter shows the scale of institutional deadlock in the IRI and of pressure on intellectuals and youths:

In fact, on the one hand, the myriads of decision making centres and especially the jurisdictional conflicts with Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, in addition to the suspicions, interferences and intrusions of institutions and councils that are unaccountable and irresponsible [to any state institutions], have taken considerable time and effort of me and has made any successful, efficient and effective efforts almost impossible. And on the other hand, the sacred privacy of the universities, the dignity, privacy and the intellectual and social security of students, professors and staffs and in general the youth, intellectuals and ‘*farhikhtegan*’ (thinkers) have been violated, harassed, and not tolerated.¹⁰⁵

The Twin Bills

The climax of the disputes between the electoral and guardian institutions was over the ‘Twin Bills’ (*lavayeh-e dowganeh*). In an interview almost a year into the second term of his Presidency, Khatami, announced the introduction of legislation designed to equip the President with the minimum instruments that would enable him to perform his Constitutional duty of implementing the Constitution. Subsequently, the Khatami government submitted two pieces of legislation: the ‘reform of the election law’ and the ‘explanation of rights, duties and jurisdiction of the President’s bills. *Lavayeh* were if passed intended to a) restrict the jurisdiction of the GC, and b) empower the institutional position of the Presidency in relation to other parallel institutions, by providing it with additional legal instruments.

Lavayeh were designed to strengthen the electoral institutions, at the expense

¹⁰⁴ Khamenei 22/8/1381 (13/November/2002), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3153>.

¹⁰⁵ BBC Persian (23/August/2008), http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/030823_mf-moinletter.shtml.

of the guardian institutions. Ratification of *lavayeh* became the main priority of Khatami and the Reformists, given that institutional deadlocks had paralysed their policies. Their future political life was at stake. The Reformists expected that, with the GC in charge of the vetting process, they would have little chance of entering the electoral campaign in the coming 2003 parliamentary election. The Conservatives reacted harshly. As shown in the following paragraphs, the debates surrounding the *lavayeh* showed the institutional obstacles facing reform because of the contradictions embedded in the IRI Constitution, and the importance of the factor of human agency in IRI politics.

The main objective of the first bill, the 'reform of the election law,' was to constrain GC authority by clarifying its jurisdiction over electoral institutions. Based on Article 3 of, the '*Majlis* election law,' passed by the fifth *Majlis*, "Supervision of *Majlis* elections is within the purview of the GC and the nature of this supervision is 'mandatory' (*estesvabi*), comprehensive, and inclusive of all the steps and procedures related to the election."

In the proposed bill, the adjective 'mandatory,' was dropped and the new article was rephrased as: "According to Article 99 of the Constitution, supervision of the *Majlis* elections is the duty of the GC."¹⁰⁶ By linking the GC jurisdiction to a specific article in the Constitution, the Reformists hoped to hinder GC attempts to block it on the grounds of being against the Constitution. To limit the GC excuses to vet the candidates, the general condition of being Muslim and expressing the commitment to the Constitution replaced the existing condition of 'commitment' (*eltezam*) to Islam and *velayat-e faqih* as requirements for candidacy.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Bahman Esmaeili, *Entekhabat-e Majlis-e Haftom* [Seventh Majlis Election] (Asnad-e Inqelab-e Islami, 2005). vol. 1: 142–3.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, vol.1, 120–80.

The Conservatives reacted to these amendments. In an AofE's opening ceremony, Ayatollah Meshkini, a well-known conservative, criticised these Reformist's efforts: "The AofE expresses its serious regret over the bitter actions of the lawmaking officials, namely the elimination of the '*estesvabi*' supervision, [and] the elimination of the requirement of the practical commitment to the *velayat-e faqih* and Islam in the election laws."¹⁰⁸

The second bill reinforced the jurisdictional leverage of the President in the conflicts with parallel institutions by giving him more legal power. Based on the first article, the President would establish a new institution, a 'committee of supervision and prosecution of the execution of the Constitution.' 'All of the state institutions' must grant access to "all of the information and documents" requested by this committee and certain penalties are foreseen for those who defy to submit.¹⁰⁹

The generality of the term, 'all of the state institutions,' would give this committee the legal authority to supervise and to intervene in the institutions that were already out of reach of the supervision of the Executive Branch, namely, and most importantly, the SLO, the EC, the GC and the *Majlis*. The second article of this bill was designed to strengthen the president's position by expanding his jurisdiction over guardian institutions: "The President should act upon his duty of executing the Constitution... and stop the decisions and/or actions made against the Constitution."¹¹⁰

By placing the President in charge of determining when Constitutional laws are broken and by whom, the President would have more authority in disputes with the judiciary, and, most importantly, with the GC, whose main Constitutional duty is to

¹⁰⁸ *Hambastegi* 12/12/1381 (3/March/2003).

¹⁰⁹ Markaz Pajousheshhaye Majlis, "Mashrouh-e Mozakerat-e Majlis [7th Majlis]," 11/6/1383 (1/September/2004).

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

assure that legislation complies with the Constitution. The GC and the Conservatives, sensing the threat that these bills could impose on their institutional power, escalated their efforts to stop their passage.¹¹¹ In addition to the ongoing legislative battles between the *Majlis* and the GC, *lavayeh* became the main subject of factional politics in the public domain and one of the turning points in the Reform Movement.

The main strategy of the Reformists and Khatami was to convince the GC that the rejection of *lavayeh* would leave the regime facing a serious legitimacy challenge.¹¹² The Reformists threatened that if the *lavayeh* did not pass, they would exit IRI politics and/or they would go directly to the people and use a referendum to defy the GC.¹¹³

In November, Saeed Hajjarian, underlined that Khatami, had red lines and “if his red lines are violated he will not continue and if *lavayeh* do not pass, Khatami will resign.”¹¹⁴ Hamid Reza Jalaeipour, *Mosharekat*’s central committee member, summarised the debates: “If the *lavayeh* does not pass, the Reformist Movement will have two strategies: the referendum and/or eventual collective resignation.”¹¹⁵ The GC rejected both bills with more than 50 amendments.¹¹⁶

The GC verdict fueled factional battles. Tajzadeh, Khatami’s advisor and political deputy of the Interior Minister in the first two years of his Presidency, announced: “If these two bills do not pass, ultimately, part of the Reformists will decide to resign in order to show their objection to current conditions in which the

¹¹¹ *Jam-e Jam Online* 5/7/1381 (27 September 2002), <http://www1.jamejamonline.ir/news.aspx?newsnum=100004208236>.

¹¹² *Aftab Yazd* 25/6/1381 (16/September/2002).

¹¹³ *Siasat-e Ruz* 13/7/1381 (5/October/2002); *Etemad* 26/7/1381 (18/October/2002).

¹¹⁴ *Hambsategi* 11/8/1381 (2/November/2002).

Mohamdreza Khatami, Khatami’s brother and the head of *Mosharekat*, also argued, “If the GC vets [the *lavayeh*], I recommend to go to the referendum.” *Hayat-e No* 29/8/1381 (20/November/2002).

¹¹⁵ *Abrar* 2/9/1381 (23/November/2002).

¹¹⁶ *Yas No* 18/1/1382 (7/April/2003).

right to free election and the 'citizenship right,' are not secured... I assume by going in this direction it is possible that part of the Reformists will decide to prepare clear proposals for amending changes in the Constitution," (implying reconsideration of the position of the Supreme Leader of the Constitution).¹¹⁷ As the factional disputes escalated, in June 2002, the Reformists directly targeted Khamenei and sent a harsh letter to him demanding him to comply with the Reformist's demands:

With the current turn of events, there are just two possible outcomes: either dictatorship or despotism, which in the most optimistic scenario would lead to more political and economic dependency and ultimate collapse of the regime; or, return to the principles of the Constitution and honest acceptance of democratic rules... Such a humble and rational reaction would face, with no reservation, with the same award that *Imam Rahel* [Khomeini] received from the people [after ending the war].¹¹⁸

This letter targeted Khamenei directly and considered him the main Constitutional obstacle. It also underlined the overconfidence of the radical section of the Reformists. As the election to the seventh *Majlis* approached, the debates about *lavayeh* were overshadowed by the GC's actions in eliminating the Reformists. The GC initially rejected a large number of the Reformists, including 80 seated MPs. Mohsen Mirdamadi called the GC's action "a coup d'état without an army and a regime change without a military involvement."¹¹⁹ In January 2003, *Mosharekat* MPs, in reaction to the GC actions, started a protest and sit-ins in the *Majlis*, which were followed by a hunger strike almost a week later, and a call for collective resignation.

On the first of February 2003, and in reaction to the final confirmation of the vetting of the GC, more than 90 MPs resigned collectively. This was followed by the collective resignation of governors, the threat of resignation from cabinet ministers,

¹¹⁷ *Abrar* 22/2/82 (12/May/2003).

¹¹⁸ *Gooya* News (22/May/2003).

¹¹⁹ *Shargh* 22/10/1382(12/January/2004).

and, allegedly after getting the green light from Khatami, the collective resignation of deputy ministries.

In the deputies' resignation letter, the GC actions were considered: "Violation of the most obvious and most essential principle of a democratic regime, in other words, it is the violation of 'freedom of choice of the people' and 'right of candidacy' for candidates."¹²⁰ After reminding the challenges that this action of GC may impose on the very legitimacy of the regime, they asked the President to implement all the means at his disposal not to let it happen.¹²¹ However, Khatami pulled the rug from under the Reformists and rejected their resignations, declaring that the election would be held.¹²² Khatami, who had initially threatened the GC that if many candidates were banned, he might not carry out the election, harshly criticised those in the Ministry of the Interior who were supporting this idea.

Eventually, the sit-ins ended with no major popular resonance. The seventh *Majlis* election was held despite the disqualification of a thousand of the Reformist candidates. The electoral participation rate dropped from 67 percent in the sixth *Majlis* to 51 percent, allowing the Conservatives and the neo-Conservatives to gain a majority in the seventh *Majlis*.

Soon after the defeat of the Reformists in the seventh *Majlis*, Khatami retracted his *lavayeh*. In his press conference, he revealed some structural obstacles to change: namely the conflict between the parallel institutions, the lack of authority of the Presidential office and the domination of security doctrine in the state institutions.

Khatami criticised the GC for acting politically: "I take the *lavayeh* back because our *lavayeh* faced strong reaction from the GC. The GC ignored the initial

¹²⁰ *Shargh* 2/11/1382 (22/January/2004).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Jam-e Jam* 7/11/1382 (27/January/2004).

verdict which had underlined that it was the President's duty to ensure complete implementation of the Constitution.”

In response to another question, he confessed to the lack of institutional authority of the Presidential office and its limited power: “In the current situation the President is in a position of *tadarokchi* (tea boy) for other organisations.” He also noted escalating activities of parallel security institutions as obstacles of pro-democracy forces: “We will face a myriad of problems if supervision is replaced with guardianship, ‘*qeimumiyyat*,’ (mandate) or if those who are in charge of supervision establish parallel intelligence organisations to spy on people; this is problematic.” He finally rejected the possibility of his resignation.¹²³

To sum up, three points need to be stressed in the wider framework of the subject of this thesis: First, political disagreements had polarised factions regarding the ‘role of people’ in politics and electoral institutions. The Reformists increasingly propagated the importance of the people’s vote, electoral institutions and demanded restrictions on the guardian institutions.

In return, the Conservatives increasingly emphasised their conception of the role of the people in politics, which demanded the stronger presence of guardian institutions in the sociopolitical domain. The Conservatives, therefore, strengthened their links to guardian institutions with security and military nature. For the Conservatives, security considerations became vital and resulted in the growing involvement of the IRGC and other semi-militia organisations, such as *Basij*, in politics, the economy and the public sphere, to the point of public confrontation of the IRGC with the government on some occasions. For instance, at the opening ceremony of the Imam Khomeini International Airport, the IRGC intervened in the middle of the

¹²³ ISNA 23/12/1383 (13/March/2005), <http://isna.ir/fa/news/8212-10778/>.

ceremony and closed the airport, because of their disputes with the government about the contracts for the airport security.¹²⁴

Importantly, the Conservatives also realised that power was now increasingly dependent on popular politics. They restructured their organisations and electoral strategies, which was a turning point in the evolution of the popularisation of factional politics. During this period, the Conservatives also sharpened their organisational and rhetorical methods for increasing the political activism of their supporters. This included learning how to run more attractive and flashy campaigns (including posters, banners, meetings, party organisational cells and other forms of propaganda).

The Reformists faced disagreements on how to respond to the attacks of the Conservatives. Some of the Conservatives aligned with the IRGC and other semi-militia organisations took advantage of this political opportunity. They entered electoral politics and occupied electoral institutions one-by-one. (The emergence of the neo-Conservatives will be examined in the next chapter.)

Second, personal decisions and/or mistakes played a significant role in the factional disputes in this period, which underlines the importance of human agency, particularly in the absence of established institutions. For example, Khatami's reluctance to proceed with his resignation and/or to ask people to boycott the election of the seventh *Majlis* produced an image of an indecisive leader which arguably became a significant factor in the disappointment of a large part of the pro-change segment of the society with his ability to provide sustainable change or to be a leader of pro-change forces.

It also emboldened his opponents, who realised that he would not stick to his threats and would back down in the end. His opponents could, therefore, act with an

¹²⁴ *Ebrat News* 21/8/1391 (12/November/2002), <http://ebrat.ir/?part=news&inc=news&id=49066>.

increasingly free hand. The actions of the Reformists, and particularly *Mosharekat*, in breaking their political ties with certain influential political figures, namely Khamenei and Rafsanjani, suggest that they underestimated the importance of political figures in IRI politics. In fact, their public confrontations with these political figures limited their political manoeuvrability. For instance, Rafsanjani's position in the Expediency Council as the ultimate arbitrator between the GC and the *Majlis* could have been an option for passing at least a compromised version of *lavayeh*. Alternatively, they could have used Khamenei's supra-institutional authority position to pass the bills partially.

Third, the Reformists had mistaken the number of their votes with active, mobilised popular support. They had a misperception of how far their social support would take them. They were therefore surprised when, during the last days of the sixth *Majlis*, their actions did not resonate in society.

However, this social indifference was rooted because on several occasions the Reformists had left these groups alone in their confrontation with the conservative part of the regime (namely, the Student Movement, the imprisonment of intellectuals and the continuous harassments of social groups such as unions by semi-militia organisations). The Reformist's call for popular support was seen as insincere, as it only came when they were facing electoral defeat and loss of power.

In sum, despite experiencing several electoral defeats one after the other, including the seventh *Majlis* election, *lavayeh* and election to the second City Council, they remained delusional about their social support, and eventually their underestimation of the chance of the rival groups in the ninth Presidential election cost them the last institution they held.

Conservative Responses

In the shadows of escalating factional politics and Reformist internal disputes, part of

the Conservatives restructured their political thought. The first sign of this factional reshuffle was the election to the second City Council in 2003 in which the new faces in the Conservative faction secured a landslide victory countrywide. However, this change in the Conservatives reflected older divisions in this faction, the first signs of which had surfaced during the election to the fifth *Majlis* (1994).

As previously mentioned, there were two different trends in the Conservatives in the early 1990s. One trend believed in more involvement in everyday politics using modern political means, party systems, the state's authority and the less hierarchical structure of the JRM, which consisted of the younger generation, non-clerical members of the JRM and *Hamsu*, and political players such as Ali Larijani.¹²⁵ The second trend believed in the traditional position of clerics, the hierarchical structure of the JRM, the autonomy of clerical institutions and denouncing the party system as a Western idea.¹²⁶

Clerics close to Mahdavi Kani in the JRM and many JMHEQ members belonged to this trend. The first trend was not a coherent political body. On the one side of its spectrum were those who had familial links to the prominent revolutionaries, had close relations to the *Mo'talefeh* and were part of the establishment since the revolution. On the opposite side were those with a more radical approach to the Islamic state, young active enthusiasts in the IRGC and *Basij*, whose involvement in state affairs was mostly grown after Khomeini's death.

Electoral politics played a significant role in changes in the balance of power between these various segments of the Conservative spectrum. Consecutive Conservative electoral defeats in Khatami's first Presidency, and the election to the first City Council, gradually weakened the traditional segment of the Conservatives to a point that their defeat in the sixth *Majlis* election almost completely marginalised

¹²⁵ *Sobh* 19/1/1374 (18/April/1995); *Asr-e Ma* 10/8/1374 (1/November/1995).

¹²⁶ Moslem, *Factional Politics*, 100-102.

this segment of the Conservatives in electoral politics.

This final defeat gave momentum to the restructuring process of the Conservatives. The coalition of 'Supporters of Imam and the Supreme Leader Front,' under which the Conservatives had entered the sixth *Majlis* electoral campaign, changed its name to the Council for Coordinating the Revolutionary Forces. This council was, in fact, a coalition of 28 political groups and organisations joining forces to put an end to the Conservative's electoral defeats.

Eventually, Mahmood Ahmadinejad and Hossein Fadaei were selected and became in charge of the Conservative's campaign for the election to the second City Council, in which they entered under the new title of '*Abadgaran-e Iran-e Islami*' (Developers of an Islamic Iran, hereafter '*Abadgaran*').¹²⁷ Their name resembled the Rafsanjani's *Kargozaran*. They won this election. In Tehran, 14 out of 15 City Council members belonged to *Abadgaran*. Ahmadinejad's reward was the mayorship of Tehran. This victory strengthened the young generation of the Conservatives at the expense of the Traditional Conservatives.

The Conservatives successful electoral campaign for the second City Council also became a platform for their campaign to the seventh *Majlis* election, in which they secured another victory, due to the absence of any prominent Reformists in the election and a low voter participation. As part of their campaign strategy, they introduced completely new faces, all of whom carried the titles of engineer and doctor because they realised that the prominent Conservatives had lost their appeal to a large portion of the society.

For instance, in Tehran, with the exception of Gholam Ali Haddad Adel and Ahmad Tavakkoli, all other 28 *Abadgaran* nominees were almost unknown. Even their

¹²⁷ *Shargh* 5/5/1392 (27/July/2013).

attire had no resemblance with the Traditional Conservatives. In their campaign, they aimed to construct an image of technocrats who could save the country, depicted in their title, *Abadgaran* and its resemblance with *Kargozaran*. *Abadgaran* also kept their distance from the Traditional Conservatives. The JRM declared that *Abadgaran* had no connection to this group.

However, most of these candidates were active members of the IRGC and *Basij*. Thus, they considerably increased their chance of winning by taking advantage of their patronage network through the guardian institutions. On the one hand, the GC eliminated almost all the prominent Reformist candidates. On the other, these candidates used the facilities of the IRGC and *Basij* in addition to these institution's organisational votes in their favour. As the election to the ninth Presidency approached, the tensions between different divisions within the Conservatives escalated and eventually, a new faction emerged within the Conservatives.

The main slogans of *Abadgaran* focused on the delivery of social justice, economic growth and fighting corruption. They portrayed themselves as the party who could deliver the true promises of the revolution; namely achievement of social justice and successful struggle against corruption. Being a new player in IRI politics gave *Abadgaran* the easy opportunity to blame the previous IRI governments and the establishment for the current economic situation without being considered even partly responsible for the situation. They amplified Khatami's image of lack of attention to the economy whilst propagating their own image of being the party who could build the economy.

The neo-Conservatives despite Khatami's relative success in economic policy, attacked him for not achieving any form of social justice. Khatami could not properly establish the link between different components of his political development platform,

namely republicanism, rule of law, and the civil society and wider economic goals. Most importantly, he could not present a comprehensive link between social justice and political development.

Even though Khatami considered the economic achievements of his administration comparatively successful to his political reforms,¹²⁸ society perceived him and the Reformists as concerned with political development more than the economic development. Khatami and the Reformists could not convince different segments of society that their plan was to provide both political change and social justice by increasing the role of people in politics.

Different elements played a role in the construction of this image of Khatami and the Reformists. First, it was the context in which the political development paradigm emerged. This paradigm formed in the final years of Rafsanjani when economic development had become the main agenda of the IRI. The Reformists main argument was that political development is the requirement of successful economic development.

However, their emphasis on political development was perceived by society as neglecting social justice. Second, a sharp decline in oil revenue was a serious challenge to the Khatami administration, given Iran's budget depends largely on oil revenues. Although economic indicators showed that Khatami's economic achievements, particularly in his second term, were defendable compared to other administrations. His image was of one who could not deliver on the revolution's economic promises.¹²⁹

Importantly, the issue of social conservatism was another aspect of the factional politics of this period. The Reform Movement was seen as a Progressive Movement,

¹²⁸ *Iran* 12/5/1384; *Iran* 11/5/1384 (2, 3/August/2005).

¹²⁹ Jahangir Amuzegar, *The Islamic Republic of Iran: Reflections on an Emerging Economy* (Routledge, 2014): 112-131.

questioning not only existing political order but also social and cultural norms. This worried conservative segments regarding the extent of future sociocultural changes. The rhetoric of social conservatism gained appeal.

The Conservatives cultivated this social conservatism, accusing the pro-change movement of not believing in IRI traditional values, of a lack of respect for the memory of martyrs, and for the sacrifices of war veterans and the revolutionaries. The Conservatives propagated that the pro-Reform Movement sought to substitute Islamic/revolutionary values with liberal Western norms, which in their rhetoric meant a morally corrupted society with no respect for sacred family values or Islamic traditional values.

Nonetheless, some aspects of social conservatism resonated in traditional families, particularly amongst the older generation. Strong anti-West sentiment in a large part of this generation, to an extent, was due to the legacy of anti-Pahlavi Movements, such as both leftists and Islamists. To an extent, social conservatism was a flip side of demands for social and cultural pluralism demanded by other segments of society, particularly the younger generation. The neo-Conservatives did not capitalise on social conservatism in their political campaigns, given the increasing popularity of secular culture. However, to an extent, this conservative sentiment engendered conservative parts of society's mistrust of the Reformists.

Social Activism

Khatami's discourse of political development, particularly his slogan of empowerment of civil society, entailed an increasing 'role of the people' in politics. Social groups considered this call a signal for more active participation. Thus, collective organised actions from different groups seeking recognition of their rights by the regime increased.

This call resonated mostly with young people and women, given the particular characteristics of Iranian society: a large youth population, tensions between official and underground culture, the generational gap and a patriarchal society. However, in the absence of coherence, autonomy and flexibility in society's political institutions, this active participation soon became a new challenge to the regime. While Khatami and Reformists asked for more popular participation, they could not strengthen the society's political institutions. Nor could they provide sustainable protection to existing institutions, given the parallel institutional structure of the IRI, besides other Constitutional, historical and cultural obstacles to the formation of these institutions.

In a sense 'reform' had become a holy concept, partly because it projected dreams of different groups in this period and provided a discourse with which different social groups could all identify. Thus, being a Reformist became a component of identity for this generation. This romanticised conception of the 'reform' had certain social and political consequences. By intensifying the emotional component of the Reform Movement it consequently facilitated, to a certain extent, the formation of collective solidarity at times of social contention. It also intensified the impact of the defeat of the Reform Movement, for this defeat was perceived as crushing the dreams of a generation who had emotionally invested in it, instead of transferring political power from one faction to another.

Since different groups projected their own ideals on 'reform,' satisfying different groups with a particular political programme was almost impossible. At the same time, the ambiguities in the concept of 'reform' made it possible for different political players with contradictory views to claim to be the representatives of the Reform Movement in the next decade. Romanticised perceptions of the 'reform' placed Khatami as the hero of this movement. This heroism had its roots in historical

memory and the sociology of the Iranians.¹³⁰ Even though Khatami criticised this view,¹³¹ this heroic conception of Khatami played an important role in future political events and influenced the social influence of Khatami.

The dynamics of social activism at this period resemble the dynamics of the larger political landscape of the IRI. The very activism of various social groups soon became the subject of factional politics, mostly because their sociopolitical demands were in tension with the IRI's ideological claims. In general, the Conservatives accused these activist groups of conspiracies to replace the IRI's values with 'liberal,' 'Western' norms and/or to corrupt the *homo Islamicus* to emasculate the IRI society from within.

The Conservatives argued that these activist groups would impose a serious challenge to the IRI and therefore should be suppressed and/or repressed before it became too late. On the other hand, the Reformists supported most of these group's demands as part of promoting their political development paradigm, and perhaps also to improve their position in factional politics by underlining the dissatisfaction of these groups as a clear sign of the failure of the conservative sociocultural policies.

However, the Reformist's support seemed only half-hearted, because when these groups confronted the guardian institutions, the Reformists left them alone on various occasions. For instance, artists, intellectuals and activists were harrased and imprisoned by the guardian institutions, during this period. This included the imprisonment of a large number of student activists following the 1999 and 2003 student protests. The response of the Reformists to said actions reinforced the perception that the Reformists were unable to protect these groups, either due to lack

¹³⁰ Homayoun Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (Yale University Press, 2010).

¹³¹ Khatami's Meeting with Student Unions, *Iran* 27/7/1379 (17/October/2000).

of political will or authority.

The Reformist's and Khatami's reluctance to support these groups at these critical moments, in addition to the escalated repressive actions of the guardian institutions, resulted in various degrees of disappointment in these groups at the possibility of sustainable reform within the current IRI Constitution. This disappointment resulted in electoral apathy, which became a significant factor in the success of the neo-Conservatives and Ahmadinejad in the next Presidential election. After their experience in this period, social groups rethought and reevaluated their relations with the IRI and looked for new strategies to attain their rights.

Different activist groups of this period (student's, women's rights and workers' rights) have distinctive links to the regime. The nature of these links, in addition to the state of development of existing institutions representing these forms of activism, played significant roles in the trajectories of these involvements.

For instance, given the history of student activities and historical/organic links of student organisations with political groups in the IRI, and the presence of a mobilising structure within student organisations, Student Movements became the main visible area of activism during this period.¹³² Student Movements successfully mobilised different forces, mostly pro-democratic, on different occasions in this period.¹³³ Importantly, in addition to pursuing student demands, Student Movements, in fact, became a channel for both women's rights campaigns and union rights activists to raise their issues.¹³⁴

¹³² Mehrdad Mashayekhi, "The Revival of the Student Movement in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15, no. 2 (2001).

¹³³ Ali Akbar Mahdi, "The Student Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 15, no. 2 (1999); Mahdi, Ali-Akbar, "The Student Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 15 (1999): 5–32; Ali Afshari and H. Graham Underwood, "The Student Movement's Struggle," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 4 (2007); Saeid Golkar, "Student Activism, Social Media, and Authoritarian Rule in Iran," in *The Whole World Is Texting* (Springer, 2015).

¹³⁴ Mashayekhi, *Revival*, 285–301.

Placing different forms of activism in this period in a wider framework, one can argue that Khatami's election created an opportunity that enabled suppressed and/or denied sociocultural and political inspirations to surface and to ask for their recognition by the state. In other words, the underlining theme of these activist causes was the confrontation of the two divergent trends mentioned in the previous chapter, between those who were supporting official ideological norms and those who sought to lessen social restrictions. This confrontation was reflected in the arrangement of student groups active in universities.

A turning point of the post-revolutionary student activism was an incident known as '*18 Tir*' (9th of July), which refers to a series of demonstrations that took place between 8 and 13 July 1999.¹³⁵ '*18 Tir*' took place at the height of the Reformist's early efforts to institutionalise different aspects of their political development paradigm. As will be elaborated, this incident, to a large extent, changed Khatami's relationship with the Student Movement.

On 8 July 1999, a demonstration was held in the Tehran University dormitory in reaction to the closure of the newspaper, *Salam*, and to support freedom of the press. Continuation of this demonstration was heavily crushed later that day by, semi-militia groups with the alleged cooperation and involvement of 'police.' At least one person was killed, many students were injured, and many rooms were destroyed.

Over the next week, a series of protests emerged on different university campuses and cities in support of the students, condemning the invasion and demanding justice. These protests soon radicalised and created an 'opportunity' for students and society to express their general demands. The OCU that was trying to

¹³⁵ *Sobh-e Emruz* in (August/1999).

claim being the representative of the Student Movement lost its control over the situation.¹³⁶ A ‘shift in the scale’ was evident both in the size and the demands of the protests. This shift is portrayed well in the slogans of the protestors.

On 8 July, the first day, the slogans mainly touched on the importance of a free press, freedom of speech and condemnation of the closing of *Salam*. On the next day, slogans targeted mostly the *lebas shahsis* and their links to the Conservatives and police. For example, one slogan was: “*Niru-ye Entezami* (police) shame on you.” On 10 July, slogans further radicalised and targeted Khamenei himself and his position: “*Ansar* [referring to *Ansar-e Hezbollah*, the pressure group] commits crimes and the Supreme Leader supports them,” or “Freedom of thought could not be possible as long as the Supreme Leader is on top.”

When dissension escalated, it was quickly perceived as a serious security threat to the state. With the signal of Khamenei and the green light of Khatami, *Basij*, other militias and police forces intervened and controlled the situation on 13 July. On 14 July, a rally was organised by the ‘Islamic Propaganda Organisation’ (*Sazman-e Tablighat-e Islami*) to show solidarity with the Khamenei supporters.

No posters of Khatami were allowed. During the protests and in the following weeks, many students — around 1,500 — were imprisoned, amongst whom 17 remained in prison for more than two years.

The ‘18 Tir’ unfolded in the context of factional politics. The incident started as a confrontation of Reformists and guardian institutions and became a battleground for a factional power struggle. It ended with the defeat of the Reformists and caused the disappointment of many social forces behind the Reform Movement.

The day after the incidents (9 and 10 July) many prominent Reformists attended

¹³⁶ *Neshat* 20/4/1378 (11/July/1999).

the student demonstrations, demanding containment of the power of parallel security institutions. Almost all the Reformist newspapers targeted the *lebas shakhsis* and demanded serious action to make them accountable to the government. To show their solidarity, Mostafa Moein, the Minister of Higher Education, with the head of a few other universities, resigned. Khatami did not accept their resignations, but condemned the incident and asked for patience. Khatami also assigned a committee within the SNSC in charge of investigating the “18 Tir.” Hassan Rouhani (later President) was the head of the SNSC at the time. This committee published four statements over the course of the week.

An important part of these statements was their official recognition, for the first time, of the existence of pressure groups. Farhad Nazari, the commander of the Tehran police, was suspended. Khamenei also condemned the invasion on 12 July and stated “This incident broke my heart.” In another part of his speech, he asked of his supporters: “Even if my picture was set on fire or torn, you should not lose your patience.”¹³⁷

On 13 July, Khatami promised to find whoever was responsible.¹³⁸ When the demonstrations radicalised, Reformists sensed the possible political danger and backed down, denouncing any activities and slogans opposing the Supreme Leader and the IRI. Their half-hearted position showed their inability to control these forces and also contradicted their claim of being their representative. The climax of this confrontation with guardian institutions is reflected in the confidential letter that 24 commanders of the IRGC wrote directly to Khatami, threatening and condemning his actions in controlling the situation:

Mr. President, if you do not make the revolutionary decision and

¹³⁷ Khamenei 21/4/1378 (12/July/1999), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=2959>.

¹³⁸ *Hamshahri* 21/4/1378 (12/July/1999).

do not fulfil your national and Islamic duty, tomorrow will be unimaginably too late and irrecoverable. At the end, with all due respect, we declare that our patience is running out and we cannot bear any more inattention.¹³⁹

Despite Khatami's promise to prosecute responsible officials, the trial showed the weakness of the Reformist's influence on the judiciary. No high-ranking officials were found guilty of causing the incident, and not a single member of the pressure groups was prosecuted. In the final verdict, only two officers were found guilty for charges such as breaking a student's hair clipper, while many students were still in prison.

As Hashem Aqajari describes, "Anti-democratic forces wanted to suppress the movement, to put the Student Movement into a coma and to cause depression and disappointment in the Reformist government in order to paralyse this government... they temporarily succeeded."¹⁴⁰ The Student Movement revived once more in 2003 in reaction to the verdict of execution for Hashem Aqajari because of his comments about emulation (*taqlid*) in Islam. However, this time the unrest was soon contained by the regime.

The '18 Tir' incident, and the way it was suppressed influenced IRI politics on different levels. First, it set a precedence according to which the regime reacted to different popular mobilisations in the future. Most forms of mobilisation were perceived as potential security threats by the regime and a rapid containment of them by coercion gave precedence to any negotiations.

Importantly, this security doctrine was reinforced by geopolitical developments. After 2001, the doctrine of war against terror dominated US foreign policy, which led to the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. It was followed in 2002

¹³⁹ *Aftab News* 21/3/1384 (11/June/2005); <http://aftabnews.ir/vdci.zawct1ay5bc2t.html>.

¹⁴⁰ Qazal Iaq, *Etelaat-ha-ye Siasi Dar Jomhuri-ye Islami Iran* [Political Coalition in the IRI] (Markaze Asnade Iran Eslami, 2011): 187.

by the inclusion of Iran in the Axis of Evil, despite Iran's extensive help to the US in the war in Afghanistan. Finally, the beginning of the Iraq invasion in 2003 gave more excuses for this security doctrine of the IRI.

Khamenei and the Conservatives strengthened their ties with vigilante groups and semi-militia organisations because of their declining popularity, a possibility of external threat and domination of this security paradigm. This alliance translated into lesser restrictions on these vigilante groups and their empowerment in different spheres of economy and politics.

Khamenei had to face the reality of the scale of his popularity amongst certain parts of the society in comparison with Khatami's. This point played a role in their personal relationship. In a sense, Khamenei realised that he may never be accepted as an intellectual by part of society and their intellectual communities. Last, it showed that the Reformists lacked a strong structural network and/or ideological grasp on the pro-Reform social forces, which made their claim of representing these groups questionable. The Conservatives became less afraid of the Reformist's threat of the mobilisation of these groups in factional politics.

Another example of the popularisation of factional politics is women's activism. The dynamic of women's activism in this period shows the extent to which the IRI's hybrid characteristics and its factional nature interrelated with this aspect of the popularisation of politics.¹⁴¹ Despite the large participation of women in the 1979 revolution, in the new regime, women were marginalised and a male-oriented polity emerged.

However, at the same time, IRI's social policies, for instance, the expansion of

¹⁴¹ Arzoo Osanloo, *The Politics of Women's Rights in Iran* (Princeton University Press, 2009); Sanam Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011); Elaheh Rostami-Povey and Tara Povey, eds. *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013).

education, led to the empowerment of women, which strengthened the basis of female activism. Scholars agreed on the unique character of Iranian female activism. It is neither a centralised, organised movement with specific leaders nor is it fitted to grand theories of Women's Movements. Iranian women's activism seems to pass through different boundaries — ideological, ethnicity, socioeconomic class — and has been formed around major concerns of everyday issues of women.¹⁴² It is not "collective protests but collective presence" that makes its repression almost impossible and its evolution unique.¹⁴³ This fluidity has seemingly helped it to merge easily into forms of social activism, whether it is Student Movements, union rights or electoral campaigns.

The factional contexts of the IRI politics and its hybrid characteristics have both influenced female activism. Ambiguities in the rules, regulations and in Khomeinism itself, allowed the new reinterpretation of these regulations possible. As explored in this chapter, the electoral pillar of the IRI gave the Reformists a chance to return to power by giving attention to the various constituencies and electoral politics, which consequently meant that the elected government had to address certain demands of these constituents, even if these demands might not be in accordance with the views of the IRI's guardian pillar.

Since women's votes were a significant factor in Khatami's Presidential victory, addressing issues of women became a part of Khatami's administration. As electoral politics continued to influence increasingly the factional politics after Khatami, women's issues continued to play a major part in electoral debates, despite

¹⁴² H. Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Homa Hoodfar and Fatemeh Sadeghi, "Against All Odds: The Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Development* 52, no. 2 (2009), 215-223.

¹⁴³ Asef Bayat, "A Women's Non-Movement: What It Means to Be a Woman Activist in an Islamic State," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 27, no. 1 (2007): 161-167.

differences in the ideological standings of various candidates. Many of the attempts to reform the unequal rights in this period became the victim of factionalism. For instance, the GC rejected changing certain articles of civil law with the goal of more gender equality and also rejected the ratification of Convention of Elimination of all kinds of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).¹⁴⁴

Nonetheless, female participation in government and female activism expanded in the Khatami period. However, this active presence could not achieve tangible results in improving the legal status of women.¹⁴⁵ Khatami's administration witnessed more women in higher administrative positions compared to all previous post-revolution administrations.

He assigned Masoumeh Ebtekar, a prominent Leftist/Reformist, who was the speaker for the students in the US embassy hostage crisis, as his Vice President and the Head of Environmental Protection Organisation. He established the 'Center for Women's Participation' (*Markaz-e Mosharekat-e Zanan*) with the main goal of "increasing women's participation in different areas by preparing and proposing new policies and new legislation to corresponding bodies."¹⁴⁶

He appointed Zahara Shojaei, who was also his Women's Affairs Advisor, with a seat in cabinet meetings, as its director. Zahra Rahnavard, the wife of Mir Hossein Mousavi, the former Prime Minister, was appointed as his senior advisor on cultural affairs. Participation of women in electoral institutions also increased. In the first and the second City Council elections, 1375 and 2336 female councillors, respectively, were elected countrywide.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Rostami-Povey and Povey, *Women, Power*, 137–69.

¹⁴⁵ Vakil, *Women and Politics*, 75–90

¹⁴⁶ Official website of 'Center for Women's Participation' <http://women.gov.ir/portal/home/>.

¹⁴⁷ For detailed information about the role of women in Khatami's administration see:

Women also challenged male domination in different state institutions, both religious and civil. For example, women tried to run for the Expediency Council elections and Presidential elections even though they could not pass GC vetting.¹⁴⁸ To increase women's integration into the police force, Khatami established the first women's police academy, which ironically soon became a major force of the guardian institutions in constraining women's activities. In this period, the number of journals dealing with women's affairs increased, including the publication of *Hoquq-e Zanan* (Women's Rights) as the first journal dealing with women's rights professionally.

Finally, the blossoming of NGOs helped female activism. Importantly, this presence of women in the social and political scene was allowed only within certain rigid boundaries of explicit Islamic/ideological laws. Khatami's tenure witnessed the improvement of women's consciousness and their awareness of their rights. Gender analysis and women's rights language and discourse gained momentum and found themselves in most of the political debates.

Eventually, the gradual defeat of the Reformists divided female activists, similar to the student activists, over the possibility of the reform within purview of the IRI Constitution. In this period, the main approach of female activism was a collaboration with pro-Reform forces, hoping to attain certain rights from within and through the Reform Movement. The consensus amongst different groups of women activists, both Islamic and secular, about certain aspects of gender inequalities, including social, family and employment discrimination, unified these different groups.

However, a division emerged in this alliance when the repressive actions of the

Jamileh Kadivar, "Women and Executive Power," *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran* (2012).

¹⁴⁸ Seven women applied for the Expediency Council election, which was rejected by the GC on grounds of lack of sufficient religious qualification.

guardian institutions escalated and Khatami and the Reformists seemed unable to protect them or to conclude the main claims of the Reform Movement. (For instance, the guardian institutions blocked various attempts for legislative reform, NGOs closed or undertook heavy pressure from the state security apparatus, women's rights activists were imprisoned, and even the seated MP candidates — the Islamic spectrum of women activists — were not tolerated by the Conservatives and were stopped from running in the seventh *Majlis*.) Similar to the Student Movement, disappointment in Khatami and the Reformists, and division within their movement, led to passiveness of these groups in the next election, which helped pave the way for the neo-Conservative's rise to power.

Conclusion

The reinforcement of the different conceptions of the role of people in the IRI remained a major driving force in factional disputes and shaped the strategies and tactics of both the Reformists and the Conservatives, which also developed in an institutional context. During this period, factions polarised between the republican and/or revolutionary/Islamic pillars of the IRI.

Therefore, the Reformists and Khatami focused on: a) occupying more existing electoral institutions—the *Majlis*, and President office; b) empowering and/or reactivating electoral institutions — City Councils; c) containing the power of parallel institutions by questioning their legitimacy and their protection against the supervisory bodies — *lavayeh*; and d) empowering civil society as a tool to maintain their popular mandate.

In return, the Conservatives reacted by: a) limiting the jurisdiction and activities of the electoral institutions by using the parallel guardian institutions – GC actions against the sixth *Majlis*; b) closing sociopolitical and sociocultural spheres to

disappoint pro-Reform support base — actions of Judiciary and pressure groups against intellectuals and activists; and c) expanding activities of their loyal supporters and parallel guardian institutions, such as *Basij* and the IRGC.

Even though the attempts of Khatami and the Reformists to integrate the republican interpretation of Khomeinism into the fabric of the IRI failed, their efforts had a significant effect on society and politics. How the Reformists attempted to increase the political activism of their supporters also influenced the Conservatives. They too implemented new organisational and rhetorical tools to strengthen their electoral appeal.

The Conservatives understood the changes in political activism unleashed by Khatami and worked to adapt themselves to this new environment. Electoral institutions then became very important for factional politics. The two different factions with different concepts of the role of the people realised that they needed electoral institutions. The result was an increase in the popularisation of politics by both main blocs of the political divide in the IRI.

The new faces in the Conservative camp with strong ties with security institutions entered electoral politics and occupied different electoral institutions, one by one by taking advantage of the political opportunity that was created following: a) the disappointment and consequent apathy of pro-Reform forces in the Reformists; b) the internal split within the Reformists; and c) the sharp decline in popularity of prominent Conservatives.

Furthermore, Khatami's inability to link political development with economic development and social justice created an opportunity for neo-Conservatives to construct an image of themselves, which according to them, only they could, deliver on the main promises of the revolution, namely: social justice and anti-corruption.

Subsequently, once again the issue of social justice returned to the centre of IRI politics. The emergence of this faction and their occupation of the remaining electoral institutions initiated a new phase in the popularisation of factional politics in the IRI.

Chapter Four

Populism and the Neo-Conservatives (2005–2009)

This chapter focuses on the emergence of the neo-Conservatives as a new faction in the process of the popularisation of factional politics. The chapter has five sections; the first section explores the emergence of the neo-Conservatives as a faction in the IRI and the evolution of other factions. The election of the ninth President was an important event in this regard, his Presidential terms are discussed in the second and third sections.

During this election, various divisions within the Conservatives surfaced, and, to a lesser degree, within the Reformists. The electoral debates, slogans and campaign strategies of different candidates during the first and second rounds of the 2005 election offer a historical and analytical framework to better understand the relationship between different factions and their views regarding the role of people in politics. The fourth section includes discussions on the election and the emergence of Ahmadinejad populism. Ahmadinejad and his circle of close friends played a significant role in the politics of this period, which warrants a discussion of his personality and ideology, thus tracing the formation and evolution of this circle. The final section explores the dynamics of factional politics in IRI politics.

The neo-Conservatives and the Ninth Presidential Election

Khatami's attempts to institutionalise his vision of the dynamic between the republican and revolutionary institutions were ultimately not successful. His tenure in power transformed the dynamics of electoral politics, the popularisation of factional politics

and discussions concerning the role of the people in the IRI political sphere.

One major result of these dynamics that had for a period placed the Conservatives on the political back foot, was the emergence of the neo-Conservatives followed by their successive electoral victories in the elections to City Councils (2003) and the seventh *Majlis* (2004) under the label of *Abadgaran*. These victories changed the power balance amongst the conservative groups. The Presidential election of 2005 is a good example of this development during which the Conservatives fielded several candidates with different views. The ultimate result of this was the election of Ahmadinejad as President.

Ahmadinejad's Presidential victory surprised almost everyone: voters, analysts and political figures. Ahmadinejad was a middle-ranking civil servant whose highest administrative position was a short but controversial tenure as Mayor of Tehran. Although his previous electoral attempt as a candidate of the Conservatives in the election to the sixth *Majlis* (2000) was unsuccessful, he passed the first round of the 2005 Presidential election, defeating not only the Reformist candidates, including Mehdi Karroubi, the Speaker of the *Majlis* and Mostafa Moein, the main candidate of *Mosharekat*, but also prominent Conservatives, such as Ali Larijani, the head of National TV, and Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the Commander of the National Police (1999–2005).

Ahmadinejad's victory in the first round was marginal. Karroubi contested the results, accusing Khamenei's son of systematically changing the election result with the help of the *Basij* and the IRGC.¹ However, in the second round Ahmadinejad beat Rafsanjani, with 63 percent of the votes. Thus, for the first time since the revolution, a non-cleric, second-rank political figure and second generation revolutionary

¹ BBC Persian (19/June/2005), http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2005/06/050619_karoubi-objection.shtml.

occupied the Presidency. Ahmadinejad's factional affiliation to the neo-Conservatives expanded this faction's influence and marked a new Era in IRI history.

In IRI politics, elections determine the position of different factions while also creating opportunities for internal disputes to surface. In the ninth Presidential election, three additional issues touched on the subject of this study.

First, demands for social justice and anti-corruption efforts overshadowed those for political development. Second, this shift was justified under the paradigm of Khomeinism. Third, factional politics and their popularisation influenced the popularity and power of particular political elites, as shown by the investigation of Rafsanjani's vote following his defeat.

In this election, both the Reformists and the Conservatives suffered from internal divisions and could not agree on a single candidate. This was a reflection of deeper disagreements about the tactics, strategies and, to a lesser degree, the goals of each factional bloc given the evolution towards popularisation of factional politics. Initially, most of the Reformists were united behind bringing Mir Hossein Mousavi, who had previously served as Khomeini's Prime Minister. However, once Mousavi decided not to run, the unity over the choice of a single candidate fell apart. Thus the Reformists fielded several candidates.

At least four different approaches could be recognised amongst the pro-Reform forces. First, there were pro-Reform forces who supported the strategy of not participating in the election. They mainly argued that since popular participation is an important element in legitimising the IRI, lack of participation in the election would be an instrument by which they could show their dissatisfaction with the general direction of the country and push the regime to accept a series of sociopolitical changes. They were mostly disappointed in the possibility of sustainable change within

the Constitutional framework of the IRI and/or incremental reform proposed by Khatami.

The other three approaches amongst the pro-Reform forces supported different Reformist candidates in this election. The second approach belonged to those who supported Mostafa Moein who had served as Khatami's Minister of Higher Education (2000–2003). His supporters were mainly affiliated with the *Mosharekat* front. They had previously experienced the consequences of sanctioning elections in the election prior to the seventh *Majlis* and found it damaging to their plans of reform, given it resulted in a *Majlis* dominated by neo-Conservatives.

Moein entered the competition under the coalition of a 'pro-democratic front' consisting of Reformists close to *Mosharekat* and members of 'LMI,' with slogans, such as, "Homeland ('vatan'), We will build you [again]" and "Iran for all Iranians."² To a certain extent, Moein was the candidate of the so-called 'radical approach' to reform emphasising the supreme role of republican institutions. He stressed his main reasons as "defending the right of the silent and critical population" and "representing their voice... ending the extra-legal activities... ending the Era of law-breaking, [and] establishing a pro-democratic and human right front."³

The third approach amongst the pro-Reform forces belonged to those moderate Reformists who supported Mehdi Karroubi, the *Majlis* Speaker, known as the 'Sheikh of Reform.' These supporters found Moein and his supporters' approach to reform too radical. Although they shared to a certain degree with them mutual ideals, they disagreed with their tactics.

While Karroubi entered the election with a clear plan and an electoral campaign strategy, Moein seemed to enter the race with an indecisive one. Karroubi focused on

² *Eghbal* 16/3/1384 (6/June/2005).

³ *Eghbal* 8/3/1384 (29/May/2005).

social justice and the rights of ethnic groups while Moein focused on mostly advocating political development. Karroubi also had economic views different to those of Moein. His views were reflected in his slogan of “social welfare and the continuation of reform.”⁴ The socioeconomic and political views of this segment of the Reformists were succinctly depicted in the Karroubi political manifesto announced a few weeks before the election:

I believe the roots of our problems lie in the following of dogmatic interpretations of Islam, ignoring the republicanism of the IRI and forgetting ‘justice’ in economic and social development... I also believe that the concept of reform is embedded in the fabric of the IRI and the continuation of reform not only is possible, but also is the only way of solving the existing obstacles and problems facing the IRI, and thus ensuring the IRI’s survival...

He then made 12 promises which showed Karroubi’s and this group’s attention to the issue and demands of social justice including: a subsidy of 500,000 IRR (equal to USD 60) per month to all Iranian adults as part of his economic policy; implementation of a national health care system and reform of the education system.⁵

The fourth approach in the pro-Reform forces belonged to some new faces in the IRI political arena who supported Mohsen Mehralizadeh. Mehralizadeh was Khatami’s deputy and the Head of the Department of Sports. His main campaign slogan was “Welfare State.” He justified his slogan by criticising previous administrations for lacking a clear sociopolitical programme. He claimed his government would construct a welfare state similar to that of Scandinavian countries.⁶ He counted on the votes of ethnic groups, given his Azeri background,⁷ and the votes of the less political younger generation, along with various sports fans. However,

⁴ *Etemad* 8-19/3/1384 (6–16/June/2005).

⁵ *Aftabe Yazd* 11/3/1384 (1/June/2005).

⁶ *Shargh* 18/2/1384 (8/May/2005); *Shargh* 27/1/1384 (16/April /2005).

⁷ *Shargh* 17/2/1384 (7/May/2005).

Mehralizadeh could not get the endorsement of any prominent Reformists or main Reformist organisations and political groups. None of the aforementioned different Reformist segments could capitalise on Khatami's popularity and were unable to capture the bulk of his social base.

The Conservative forces also faced internal divisions. The divisions within the Conservative camp were reflected in the various candidates of this group, their electoral strategies and support base. In this election, the traditional segment of the Conservatives decided against appointing a well-known candidate, who belonged to the first generation revolutionary and/or old establishment. They supported Ali Larijani, one of the younger figures of the establishment.

The “Central Committee for the Harmonisation of Conservatives” announced Ali Larijani as its candidate. The Committee was initially established to unify different streams of the Conservatives to stop the Reformist's electoral victories by the time of the second City Council election in 2003. In this election, its efforts to unify different Conservative groups behind a single candidate failed. None of the candidates who had initially agreed to accept the decision of the Committee – namely, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mohsen Rezaee and Ali Akbar Velayati – accepted its final verdict and they entered the election independently, although Mohsen Rezaee withdrew only a few days before the election, and Ali Akbar Velayati left the competition when Rafsanjani entered the electoral campaign.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf enjoyed the support of *Jameyyat-e Isargaran* (hereafter *Isargarn*) and older veterans in the neo-Conservatives. *Isargaran* was a political organisation established in 1999 and had close links to the security institutions. Despite having Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as a founding member, *Isargaran* supported Qalibaf in the first round, influencing, to a degree, the future relationship of

Ahmadinejad and this segment of the Conservatives. *Isargaran* was one of the organisational pillars of the neo-Conservatives whose members were mostly second generation political figures.

The pillar of their claim to political power was loyalty to the Supreme Leader and the concept of ‘*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*’ and their sacrifice during the Iran-Iraq War. They did not have established organic links to prominent Leftists or the Traditional Right. However, their ideological views were, to an extent, a combination of different views of both the pre-Reformist Left and the Traditional Right. They believed in the revolutionary nature of the IRI, in domestic and foreign policies. They supported a welfare state with a production-oriented economy. At the center of their socioeconomic views was the widening gap between the poor and rich, in other words, social justice.⁸

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad enjoyed the support of the younger generation of *Isargaran*, the Conservatives, *Ansar-e Hezbollah* and the support of Mesbah and his circle of trustees. This internal division was reflected in the way that each candidate defined his relationship to the title of *Abadgaran*. Following the successful electoral victories of the *Abadgaran* coalition in the second City Council and the seventh *Majlis* elections, these candidates capitalised on the brand of ‘*Abadgaran*’ and took credit for its success.

Initially, Qalibaf, Larijani and Ahmadinejad all campaigned as the *Abadgaran*’s nominee. However, as the election got closer, Qalibaf changed his tactic and campaigned under the new title of ‘Progressive Principlists’ (*Osulgarayan-e Tahavvol Khah*). Both Ahmadinejad and Larijani spoke under the name of *Abadgaran*

⁸ Shadlu, *Ahzab*, 313; Ali Darabi, *Jaryan Shenasi-ye Siasi Dar Iran* [Study of Different Political Schools in Iran], 4 ed. (Pazhuheshgah-e farhang va andisheh-ye Islami, 2009); 235–236.

until the election. Eventually, almost six months after Ahmadinejad's victory in the election, Mehdi Chamran and Hassan Bayadi, close allies of Ahmadinejad established 'Abadgaran-e Javan-e Iran-e Islami' to differentiate themselves from *Abadgaran*.

These internal divisions also shaped different campaign strategies of conservative candidates. Ali Larijani had the support of traditional Conservatives, the bazaris or merchants and some clergy, particularly before Rafsnajani's entrance into the electoral race. To appeal to the secular middle-class, Larijani's campaign slogans included, "Government of Hope" and "Fresh Air."⁹ Qalibaf's campaign strategy can be compared to Tony Blair's, which resulted in the return of the UK's Labour party to power for three consecutive terms after several years of Conservative rule.¹⁰

Similar to Blair's 'third way' campaign, Qalibaf tried to demonstrate that he and his team could be trusted in all areas of governance just as much as the Reformists.¹¹ Feeling assured about having the conservative vote, Qalibaf focused on connecting with undecided voters more aligned with the Reformist sociocultural policies and demanding better economic prosperity. Qalibaf's campaign constructed an image of him as a pragmatic leader capable of solving all of Iran's problems with no dogmatic sociocultural views.

Thus, Qalibaf's slogans, such as "each Iranian deserves a decent life," or "I will not be, if there is no Iran,"¹² rarely touched on his sociocultural policies and carried nationalistic themes. He launched the most expensive campaign, which in turn pushed

⁹ *Shargh* 20/2/1384 (10 May 2005).

Intentionally or not, *Havaye Tazeh* was the name of a poetry book by Ahmad Shamloo (1925–2000).

¹⁰ Benjamin Williams, *Warm Words or Real Change? Examining the Evolution of Conservative Party Social Policy since 1997* (University of Liverpool, 2013).

¹¹ *Aftab News* 5/3/1384 (26/May/2005), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcj.heifugevtsfzu.html>.

¹² This slogan was a verse in a book of poetry entitled, "The Story of Kings" (*Shahnameh*) by Ferdowsi, whose poetry has been celebrated amongst Iranians for centuries. His epic depiction of Iranian nationalism and heroism of the kings faced boycott by the revolutionary Khomeini regime at the start of the IRI.

away his initial support base of *Basijis* who disapproved of his flashy campaign strategies. Qalibaf found a new support base within the Reformist social groups and Rafsanjani supporters.¹³

While both Larijani and Qalibaf targeted social groups that originally had more appeal to the Reformists, Ahmadinejad followed a different strategy. He portrayed himself as a true Khomeinist who grew up 'impoverished,' and thus understood the problems of ordinary people firsthand. He projected an image of a capable leader who could solve the people's problems. His main strategy was to run an anti-establishment platform. The main pillars of his slogans called for the return to the true *Khomeinism* values of social justice and anti-corruption, which he proclaimed to be the true value of Khomeinism.

Rafsanjani announced his candidacy only a few weeks before the election. Rafsanjani's candidacy was arguably due to the dynamics of the popularisation of factional politics. As mentioned above, the popularisation of factional politics led to the fragmentation of factional politics in both conservative and Reformist camps while none of them seemed to activate their grassroots support.

Thus, sensing this fragmentation and a challenge it could impose on the regime Rafsanjani entered the election. He underlined the process of, and the reasons behind his candidacy in a speech few weeks before the election. In it, he described his meetings with Khamenei, and their initial attempts to persuade the Conservative groups to unify behind one candidate. "When it was clear that they (Conservatives) could not unify behind one candidate... Khamenei asked me to intervene. I told him that these people would not listen to me, and, most of them even considered me as their rival. [Nonetheless] I did my best unite them." In his meeting with Khamenei,

¹³ *Shargh* 19/3/1384 (9/June/2005).

Rafsanjani underlined three concerns that would oblige him to enter the election:

First, a candidate should enter the election that would be capable of continuing the [Right–Left] dichotomy so the country could rest on two pillars. Second, ‘political nobodies’ must not win the election and cause embarrassment by suddenly decreasing the regime’s prestige. Third, if a candidate amongst the acceptable candidates became President with a very low number of votes some would interpret it as a serious gap between the regime and the people.¹⁴

Rafsanjani argued that this factional fragmentation itself might represent itself as a challenge to the regime. Thus, he needed to enter the election. However, Rafsanjani also saw a political opportunity in this fragmentation that he interpreted as a path to his victory in the election.

Rafsanjani announced his candidacy a few hours before the deadline. He also explained his rationale for announcing his candidacy without telling Khamenei first:

I thought [that if I met Khamenei and talked to him about the election and my candidacy] there would be three possible scenarios, either he would tell me not to participate in the election and then I would not. Or he would tell me that I should attend, which would be against the principle of non-interference in the election, or he would say nothing which would not be good for our relationship.¹⁵

Importantly, Rafsanjani’s tone and his description of his meetings with Khamenei showed, to an extent, that Rafsanjani perceived his position with regarding Khamenei as equals. He was trying to construct an image of their relationship as those deciding and planning the important political events together. However, as time showed, the power relationship was already shifting against him. Rafsanjani’s speech also underlined that the main IRI political elites believed that large voter participation was an important legitimising element of the IRI. It also implicitly confirmed

¹⁴ Rafsanjani 18/3/1384 (8/June/2005), <http://rafsanjani.ir/view.php?id=11610>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Khamenei's affiliation to the Conservative camp.

Rafsanjani entered the electoral campaign with an attitude that, since he had been President, he could easily win. Capitalising on his image as a pragmatic leader, his main slogan was: "For the glory of Iran, we all work together." Placing Iran on the path from underdevelopment to development, he presented himself as the best leader for this journey.

This was reflected in a political manifesto he published a few weeks after his candidacy describing his views and plans: "From a historical point of view the reform Era is linked to the construction era." He continued, "I hereby introduce a roadmap to guide the Iranian nation into a transitory Era leading to democratic and sustainable development." He included 14 points in this political manifesto as his major policy goals, including improvement and expansion of health care and education, expansion and improvement of social welfare services, efficient policy making, and addressing issues important to women and the younger generation.

Under the political development section, he declared popular participation and the institutionalisation of political participation as main goals of his administration.¹⁶ Most of the prominent political figures, particularly those affiliated to the traditional bazar and clerics, endorsed his candidacy. Velayati and Ahmad Tavakkoli withdrew from the campaign following his candidacy, followed by endorsements by several seated and previous MPs and ministers.¹⁷ JRM endorsed Rafsanjani a few days before the election, and although JMHEQ could not reach a conclusive decision, a large number of its members declared their support in an announcement.¹⁸

Rafsanjani's entrance into the electoral arena exercised a strong influence on

¹⁶ *Hambastegi* 11/3/1384 (1/June/2005).

¹⁷ *Shargh* 17/3/1384 (7/June/2005).

¹⁸ *Shargh* 19/3/1384 (9/June/2005).

the dynamics of this election. Rafsanjani enjoyed organic links to the IRI's political elites and both blocs of the Conservatives and the Reformists. He also enjoyed a diverse support base, especially the very mercantile bourgeoisie class he had helped create during his Presidential terms.

Rafsanjani was a strong rival. However, his candidacy ignited a series of debates about his political authority, his reputation and his patronage, which all underlined the change within IRI politics. Open debates and criticism of Rafsanjani further highlighted the extent to which members of elite, in this case Rafsanjani and his family, could become victims of factional politics. This is important, because in most dictatorial regimes, the political elites usually enjoy a certain extent of immunity against public scrutiny. This also touches on the wider purview of this thesis and the extent to which the factor of human agency could play a role in IRI history.

The content and scale of attacks on Rafsanjani underlined a deeper change within IRI politics. Rafsanjani, who was perceived as one of the closest living comrades of Khomeini next to Khamenei, and gained his legitimacy and authority from comradeship to Khomeini, his efforts in the revolution, role in consolidation of the IRI and efforts in the Iran-Iraq War, now became the subject of some of the harshest attacks. He was accused of betraying Khomeini and the revolution's ideals. During the sixth *Majlis* elections it had been mostly the radical spectrum of the Reformists who had criticised Rafsanjani.

Now Rafsanjani's biggest critics come from the conservative camp and the neo-Conservatives. Ironically, Rafsanjani, about whom Khomeini once said, “[Rafsanjani] is alive because the movement is alive,”¹⁹ was now faced with the accusation of betraying the revolution by those too young to have played a role in the revolution or

¹⁹ Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Imam*.vol. 7, 495.

have seen Khomeini alive.

In the Conservative camp, both Qalibaf and Ahmadinejad considered Rafsanjani their main rival. Therefore, they both attacked the record of his former ministers charging them with being supporters of liberal capitalism. However, attacks on Rafsanjani by those affiliated to these segments of the Conservatives started months before his election announcement.

As rumours emerged almost a year before the election that Rafsanjani would run for the Presidency, the University *Basij*, an institution close to the neo-Conservatives, in an open letter, called for new faces in politics, which was seen as their attempt to dissuade Rafsanjani from entering the election.²⁰ In the Reformist camp, the main criticisms came from Karroubi, who, to a certain extent, shared a large support base with Rafsanjani, given their revolutionary history, reputation and religious standings. He criticised Rafsanjani for claiming none of the existing candidates could solve the IRI's problems. He took this as personal insult.²¹

Ahmadinejad and Qalibaf's supporters accused Rafsanjani of economic mismanagement, being a "palace dweller" and liberal who had turned his back on the revolution's ideals. The Reformists, however, criticised his sociocultural policies and accused him of involvement in the killing of intellectuals and disregarding political freedoms. Arguably, Rafsanjani did not foresee this volume of attacks and thus his campaign was not prepared for them.

Ali Larijani lost much of his supporters to Rafsanjani and was left only with the support of the *Mo'talefeh* and a few other Conservative organisations. Therefore, both Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad approached Larijani to persuade him to withdraw in their favour. Larijani's nightly meetings with Chamran and Ahmadinejad did not

²⁰ *SharifNews*, 30/7/1383 (21/October/2004).

²¹ *ISNA* 28/2/1384 (18/May/2005).

agree. When Nateq Nouri persuaded him to withdraw in favour of Rafsanjani, his brothers persuaded him to stay in the election.²² This reflected a deeper disagreement between Larijani's brothers and Rafsanjani and also their sensing of a shift of the power balance away from Rafsanjani and towards Khamenei. Having sensed this shift, Larijani played a political game that preserved for him an important role in the future of factional politics, particularly after the events of 2009.

Rafsanjani's candidacy significantly influenced society's perception of the political power of various candidates. It also underlined another characteristic of IRI politics namely that in the absence of organised parties, candidates could change their position frequently and freely. Because of Qalibaf's fancy campaign suspicions were raised amongst his followers about the real reasons for his desire to become President. Therefore, to many his main goal for running to get to office was to serve his personal economic interests. This provided a unique opportunity for Ahmadinejad, who remained the anti-establishment candidate.

Rafsanjani appeared as a villain with regard to Ahmadinejad's rhetoric of fighting for the 'downtrodden people.' As election day approached, criticisms of Rafsanjani, his family and different aspects of his political life gave Ahmadinejad the opportunity to strengthen his position as the anti-establishment candidate. This was reflected in the contents of promotional videos that each candidate produced to be aired on national television.

Ahmadinejad's video underscored his simple lifestyle with his small house in a lower middle-class neighbourhood of east Tehran. Rafsanjani's video showed him arriving in his Mercedes Benz to have a meeting with the young in his big house in upscale northern Tehran. Moreover, Ahmadinejad had not been a political player

²² *Shahrvand-e Emruz, Azar/1386* (December/2006)

during the previous Presidential administrations, provided him protection from overall criticism of current socioeconomic condition.

The support of the SLO and Khamenei have always played a significant role in the dynamics of factional politics. For Conservative candidates, support from the SLO translates into a large and systematic vote for that candidate, a vote rooted in the patronage network linked to the SLO. It was speculated that during this election, the initial candidate of Khamenei and SLO was Qalibaf, but a few days before the election, the SLO switched his support in favour of Ahmadinejad.

Qalibaf had aligned himself closer to the Reformists and thus appeared to be distancing himself from Khamenei's values, despite his relatively strong ties to the IRGC. Khamenei has never explicitly supported a candidate before an election, though his sermons during electoral campaigns always provided hints about the candidate he prefers. During the seventh Presidential election, Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri was perceived as Khamenei's choice, and this time it was Ahmadinejad. A day before the election, Khamenei argued in a speech, "The next government should be the one who would solve the people's problems and it should find its colleagues amongst faithful Muslims... Corruption should be eliminated, and special attention should be given to the 'downtrodden people.'"²³

This was perceived as support for Ahmadinejad, given the strong position of 'downtrodden' in Ahmadinejad's rhetoric. Or, when a few weeks before the election, Khamenei said the new President should have "youthful vivacity"²⁴ it was perceived as a hint that Rafsanjani was not his favourite candidate. Qalibaf explicitly elaborated

²³ Khamenei 25/3/1384 (15/June/2005); the Headline of *Siasate Rouz* 26/3/1384 (16/June/2005). Khamenei, on 10/3/1384 (1/June/2005), explicitly announced, "No one knows my vote." <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3294>.

²⁴ Khamenei 5/3/1384 (26/May/2005), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3292>.

on this, stating that “Aqa [Khamenei] was against Rafsanjani.”²⁵

Nevertheless, Khamenei’s support of Ahmadinejad could also be explained within the context of the political power balance. One could argue that Khamenei preferred the loyal candidate who was not a strong factional leader or linked to strong factions in contrast to Rafsanjani and Khatami. Khamenei believed the continuous factional disputes of the Khatami Era had threatened his authority and even institutional power.

The escalation of the security paradigm due to international and geopolitical concerns, especially given the US war on terror, provided a strong justification for his preference of having more control over the Executive Branch. Therefore, every Reformist candidate, particularly Moein, was considered a possible disruptive force. Rafsanjani and Larijani were both affiliated to the traditional Conservatives, and as such, their Presidency would mean another President with strong factional links. Though Traditional Conservatives were Khamenei’s close allies, they had gained their authority and legitimacy prior to Khamenei’s supreme leadership. Khamenei was seen as part of this faction and not its father figure.

Therefore, both Qalibaf and Ahmadinejad appeared as the best option for Khamenei. However, Qalibaf’s flashy electoral strategies made Ahmadinejad a more desirable candidate. These three different streams of conservatism depicted in the candidacies of Ali Larijani, Ahmadinejad and Qalibaf, soon became political rivals. Their disputes escalated and led to the formation of new groups, namely: *Paydari* and *Jaryan-e enherafi* (to be discussed in the next chapter).

In the first round of elections, Rafsanjani obtained 21 percent of the votes and thus entered the second round, along with Ahmadinejad who obtained 19.5 percent of

²⁵ *Aftab News* (17/3/1384) (7/June/2005), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcj.xeifuqemtsfzu.html>.

the votes. Mehdi Karroubi was ranked third with only a few hundred thousands vote less than Ahmadinejad, followed by Qalibaf, Moein, Larijani and Mehralizadeh. The analysis of the votes demonstrated, to some extent, the social support base of each candidate. These election results showed that, contrary to common belief, Ahmadinejad's main supporters were concentrated in urban areas, rather than rural areas. Karroubi and Rafsanjani were relatively successful in rural areas, which could be interpreted as the popularity of Karroubi's promise to direct distribution of subsidies or Rafsanjani's religious and revolutionary status in rural areas.²⁶ Importantly if the Reformists had been united behind one candidate, Ahmadinejad would not have gone to the second round.

In sum, an analysis of the first round of the election showed: First, a shift from attention to political development to issues of social justice, economic prosperity and anti-corruption. Primarily all candidates focused on these issues except for Moein. Second, almost all candidates acknowledged the importance of electoral institutions, at least in rhetorical forms.

They all used fancy slogans and refurbished them to reflect popular opinion. Ahmadinejad's rhetoric of the return to the true values of the revolution and Khomeinism was no exception. This is investigated in more detail in the next section. Third, Rafsanjani's presence changed the dynamics of the election considerably, which also highlighted the factor of human agency in the IRI's factional politics in a

²⁶ In small cities, Karroubi ranked first, followed by Rafsanjani, Moein, Ahmadinejad and Qalibaf. However, Karroubi and Moein gained significantly more votes in rural areas with moderate size populations, while Ahmadinejad's major votes came from populated urban areas. In medium-sized cities, Karroubi ranked first, followed by Rafsanjani, Ahmadinejad, Moein and Qalibaf. Though Rafsanjani, Moein and Qalibaf's votes were comparatively greater in the rural populated areas compared to urban areas, Ahmadinejad had more votes in urban areas. In big cities, Ahmadinejad ranked first, followed by Rafsanjani, Qalibaf, Karroubi and Moein. Similar to small cities, Karroubi's main vote came from rural areas, while Ahmadinejad, similar to small and medium cities, enjoyed the highest vote in urban populated areas.

Farda News 29/2/1388 (19/May/2009), <http://www.fardanews.com/fa/news/83120/>.

wider frame. How Rafsanjani's attitude raised harsh criticism of Karroubi is a good example of this effect of human agency. Fourth, a split emerged between the neo-Conservatives and the old Conservative establishment. Some of the neo-Conservatives criticised these groups for their incompetence and forgetting the true values of the revolution. Fifth, the role of the security institutions in politics increased. All conservative candidates were IRGC members, and various security and military institutions explicitly engaged in political campaigning. For instance, security forces, close to law enforcement, bugged one of Rafsanjani's campaign committees, an incident that received the title of the "Iranian Watergate."²⁷

In addition, *Basij* forces were mobilised to support Ahmadinejad and intervene in the supervision of the election.²⁸ Mousavi Lari, the Interior Minister, warned about the IRGC and the *Basij*'s involvement before the election, following comments by the GC speaker urging supervision of ballot boxes by the *Basij*.²⁹ Finally, while the first round witnessed the dispersion of factions and the emergence of different segments, the second round witnessed the unification of factions.

In the second round, once again, the definition and candidate's perceived conceptions of the role of the people became the centre of factional/electoral political competition. The political sphere became polarised. Rafsanjani's supporters portrayed the election as a choice between two different approaches to 'the role of people' in IRI politics, namely: Islamic republic or Islamic government. All the different segments of the Reformists unified behind Rafsanjani in this round, including MII, *Mosharekat* and 'LMI.'

Their main argument was that, if Ahmadinejad became President, the IRI

²⁷ *Hambastegi* 18/3/1384 (8/June/2005).

²⁸ *Sharq* 22/3/1384 (12/June/2005).

²⁹ *Aftab Yazd* 10/3/1384 (31/May/2005).

republicanism would be eliminated. They claimed Ahmadinejad aimed to establish an Islamic government promoted by Mesbah. In its announcement supporting Rafsanjani, MII underlined that “the iron fist of authoritarianism that is hidden in the silk glove of popular democracy is about to crash... The only hope is the political understanding of the great Iranian people... To change the result of the second term in favour of themselves and against despotism and authoritarianism.”³⁰

In an announcement endorsing Rafsanjani, the Association of Researchers and Teachers of Qom, a Reformist religious organisation, argued, “The Iranian nation stands at a juncture: one way carries the danger of collapse and elimination of the regime’s republicanism and hinders the Reform Movement, itself leading to the emergence of a branch of Talibanism under the name of Islam and Shia. The other way [voting for Rafsanjani] will save the regime and the revolution.”³¹

This theme was also reflected in Moein’s endorsement letter, “[By voting for Rafsanjani] I will say “no” to the threats of dogmatism, death of the Reform [Movement] and Fascism.”³² Mehdi Karroubi, explicitly, and Mohammad Khatami³³ and Mir Hossein Mousavi, implicitly, supported Rafsanjani. In their announcements, they underlined the “threat of dogmatism and authoritarianism” and the “elimination of republicanism.”³⁴ Ironically, during the election to the Sixth *Majlis* (2001), some of these Reformists who were now supporting Rafsanjani, were harsh critics of Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani’s support included many non-Reformists, such as some of Qalibaf’s supporters. Some prominent Conservative groups under the banner of the “harmonising committee [of the Conservatives]” called both candidates Reformist

³⁰ *Aftab News* 29/4/1384 (20/July/2005).

³¹ *Shargh* 1/4/1384 (22/June/2005).

³² *Shargh* 31/4/1384 (22/July/2005).

³³ *Shargh* 31/1/84 (20/April/2005).

³⁴ *Ebtekar* 1/4/84 (22/June/2005); *Shargh* 1/4/1384 (22/June/2005).

principlists (*Osulgaraye Eslahtalab*) and did not pick sides. Also, *Mo'talefeh* did not endorse Ahmadinejad or Rafsanjani.

However, as attempts escalated to portray Ahmadinejad as a politician who wanted to emasculate the republican institutions, Ahmadinejad reinforced his rhetoric as a simple *Basiji* whose only aim was to serve the people, deliver social justice and cut the hands of those who had become rich at the cost to people. Therefore, the more the Rafsanjani front unified, the stronger Ahmadinejad's claim of "entering the forbidden zone of the government"³⁵ became.

This 'victimisation' was an important theme both in Ahmadinejad's campaign and his political career as President. Ahmadinejad's political doctrine rested on rhetoric of "us against them," in which "us" were the people and "them" were part of the establishment, who had manipulated the IRI, and betrayed Khomeini's values for their own material benefit. Furthermore, since Ahmadinejad had never held a major leadership position, he was immune to popular criticisms and discontent emerging from existing socioeconomic conditions.

These themes were reflected in Ahmadinejad's long interview with Fars News a few days before the second round of the election. By stressing his anti-establishment credentials, Ahmadinejad accused IRI politicians for being responsible for the current economic and social problems. "I think the institution of government has detached itself from the people, thus cannot properly recognise the problems facing the people and has fallen into political and power games." He criticised Khatami's and Rafsanjani's programmes, stating:

I am saying that for the last 15 or 16 years you [Khatami and Rafsanjani] have done economic and political development. Now I am asking you, do our farmers, workers, clerks, businessmen and bazaris have security, peace of mind or stability? No!

³⁵ *Fars News* 2/4/1384 (23/June/2005).

Economic growth benefitted the pocket of a few special people and not the dinner tables of the people.

Portraying himself as a victim he argued that the attacks on him were the result of the understanding of the elites that his election would threaten their political and economic interests: “Some in the establishment think that if I become President, their rents will cease... Those factions that control our economy and politics, as well as the administrative decision-making centres, fear that if the door opens to popular forces, they [popular forces] would prove that they can manage everything better.” To give more credibility to his claims and popular platform he once again and explicitly played the anti-establishment candidate, saying:

I am not part of any faction or party. I am independent and no one supported me. I introduced myself to the people, and they welcomed me... My problem is that I do not accept factional and party politics. I am saying it proudly that I only want to serve the people, [because] there is no reason that I would sacrifice people’s interests for the sake of groups, factions, and parties.³⁶

He connected his lack of clear economic policy to the issue of corruption, stating:

I do not accept the current financial system of the country, because this system has only benefited a few, and not the majority of people... This means the socioeconomic gap is widening in favour of a few special people... They say that I am against investment. I believe in investment, but I am saying your financial system is shifting the IRI economy to a broker economy.

To appear attractive to urban youth and middle-class voters he rejected the accusation that he supported restrictive sociocultural policies. He also turned the table and called those who initially called him a radical, the real radicals:

Those who say Ahmadinejad is a radical, I know them; they had the control of the Interior Ministry in the years from 1985 to 1993. We [Ahmadinejad and his team] confronted them at the

³⁶ *Fars News* 2/4/1384 (23/June/2005).

time as we were against them sending their cyclists to the streets to cut the hair, shoes and dresses of those they deemed as inappropriately dressed. They were the ones who put buses and soldiers on the streets to control and check women's make-up. We were against these actions then and considered it against *sharia*. [We believed] you (they) had no right to confront our people in this way, because they were our people.

He declared, "I strongly support freedom of the press. We (Ahmadinejad and his team) even thanked the press who criticised us [during my mayorship] and gave them awards." He endorsed freedom: "Freedom is the soul of the revolution and it is the greatest gift and a blessing from God." Subsequently, by connecting freedom to economic policies, he criticised the establishment: "The government whose industry is 80 percent state-owned has restricted popular freedoms. This means that all the economy is in the hands of a few while the rest of the people have nothing."³⁷

During two televised Presidential debates, representatives of Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad discussed their candidate's respective economic and sociocultural policies. They only popularised Ahmadinejad's support. In these debates, it was the attitude of Rafsanjani's representatives rather than the content of their debates that hurt Rafsanjani. Their self-righteous attitude reinforced the audience's negative views on Rafsanjani and his team and served Ahmadinejad's narrative that some within the establishment behave as if they owned the country.³⁸

Rafsanjani's defeat in the second round, with about seven million votes less than Ahmadinejad, showed, to an extent, that the Reformists and Khatami's appeal to people to vote for Rafsanjani did not resonate amongst their supporters. In the second round, despite large support from Reformists, especially Khatami, Rafsanjani only secured 5 million votes of the total 10 million Reformist votes of the first round (the total number of votes of Karroubi, Moein and Mehralizadeh). This was largely due to

³⁷ *Fars News* 2/4/1384 (23/June/2005).

³⁸ *Iran* 3/4/1385 (24/June/2005).

the Reformist's inability to justify properly their sudden decision to support Rafsanjani and to persuade their support base to vote for him.

The Reformists had earlier, and during the first round, accused Rafsanjani of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. They had called him “The Master in the Red Suit,” for his alleged involvement in the “case of chain murders,” but now they stood behind Rafsanjani. They referred to him as a fighter and a survivor for freedom, republicanism and the Reform Movement. The shift was too much for many.

Large numbers of pro-democratic forces and intellectuals found their ideals and their perception of Iranian society crushed by Ahmadinejad’s victory. They mostly blamed the deprived social class for Ahmadinejad’s rise to power and considered this class the new majority. This point was depicted in the lower participation rate in the second round. The total number of more than 2 million votes were cast less than the previous round (participation rate dropped from 63 percent in the first round to 59 percent in the second round).

However, the votes in the second round showed that a large part of Ahmadinejad’s vote came from the middle-class. Ahmadinejad obtained the majority of votes in big cities, such as Tehran, Shiraz, Mashhad and Tabriz. Mohammad Ghouchani, the Chief Editor of *Shargh*, a Reformist newspaper, said the votes came not from “the deprived (*mahrum*) socioeconomic class, [but] the fat, irresponsible and demanding middle-class we ourselves developed.”³⁹ In a historical context, some of Ahmadinejad’s votes were cast by those who were looking for quick fixes to their problems and found Ahmadinejad’s promises appealing. This theme of rapid reform was also a significant component of Khatami and Rafsanjani’s promises. They both promised rapid economic and/or political change but rarely discussed the time frame

³⁹ *Siasat Nameh, Shargh* 6/3/1385 (27/May/2006).

or details and consequences of these changes.

As explored in previous chapters, Rafsanjani's economic development and Khatami's political development strengthened IRI middle-class to routinise the revolution and motivate the middle-class to act as the main social force behind development. However, their efforts and promises only raised society's expectations, which they were unable to meet given the IRI's hybrid characteristics, its factional politics and deep structural economic and social problems. This resulted in unsatisfied economic and political expectations in large parts of the society over the last 16 years.

Ahmadinejad's victory was also a reflection of resentment concerning the establishment. Once again, a candidate who was perceived as an outsider and against part of the establishment gained the vote of the majority. Mohammad Ali Abtahi, Khatami's Vice-President, analysed Rafsanjani's defeat in his weblog a few days after the results were announced. He said,

Hashemi Rafsanjani, in the public opinion, was largely the representative of power, wealth and the regime, whether true or not! Mr. Ahmadinejad took advantage of the divide between the government and the people, as well as the gap between poor and rich. In the eyes of lay members of society, [Ahmadinejad] became a symbol of confrontation with the regime, the symbol of the fight against poverty and the symbol of change for different layers of society.⁴⁰

As mentioned earlier, the IRGC, and the *Basij* played an extensive role in this election. They used their mobilising network and vast resources in favour of Ahmadinejad, as later claimed by both Karroubi and Rafsanjani. Regardless of the nature of this involvement, it underlined the increased role of the IRGC and parallel security institutions in the state affairs. Ironically, it was Rafsanjani who had allowed these groups to expand their economic activities as means to keep them out of politics.

⁴⁰ Abtahi Official Website, 4/4/1384 (25/June/2005),
<http://www.webneveshteha.com/weblog/?m=04&y=1384&page=3>.

Now Rafsanjani himself became a victim of these groups' political ambitions.

In his statement about the results of the election, Rafsanjani denounced their interference, stating,

With regard to those who in unprecedented action took advantage of billions of tomans (Iranian unofficial monetary unit) of 'public money' and brutally offended me and my family. And those who used the facilities of the regime in systematic ways and interfered illegitimately in the election, I believe their misfortune in this world and the afterlife would be the price of this brutality to me, the people, and the country.⁴¹

To a large extent, Ahmadinejad's rise can be explained using the theoretical populism framework, specifically the new works on 'neo-populism,' or 'electoral populism.' Neo-populism is different compared to the classic populism on certain characteristics. It is "less mobilisational, transformatory, and redemptive as compared to classical populism. Its inclusionary character is more symbolic than effective." However, "it adopts a more anti-organisational stance, reaches followers in the private sphere, and depends on the confidential responses of individual citizens, [and] not on collective manifestations by the people in the public sphere."

Therefore, it is "more representative than classical populism,"⁴² and more compatible with democratic systems.⁴³ Some argue that "Populist Movements or parties are a by-product of the democratic malaise which they exacerbate when the political elites and their democratic institutions are unable to address the challenge with vigour or efficiency."⁴⁴ Even though the IRI is far from a Western-style

⁴¹ *Jomhurieslami* 6/4/1384 (27/June/2005).

⁴² Kurt Weyland, "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics," *Comparative Politics* (2001), 15-17.

⁴³ Kenneth M Roberts, "Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* (2006) 127-48.

For a study of populism in Iran, see:

Manochehr Dorraj, *From Zarathustra to Khomeini: Populism and Dissent in Iran* (Lynne Rienner Publishers London, 1990); "Iranian Populism: Its Vicissitudes and Political Impact," *The Many Faces of Populism: Current Perspectives*; Alamdar, "The Power Structure."

⁴⁴ Yves Meny and Yves Surel, *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 11-12.

democracy, Khatami's political development, following Rafsanjani's economic development strengthened, to a certain extent, the electoral institutions, while raising sociopolitical and economic expectations in society. These expectations were not met due to a variety of reasons; the unsatisfied expectations within the hybrid structure of the IRI created an opportunity for the emergence of populism.

An examination of Ahmadinejad's populism enables us to understand his approach to it in different debates on this issue. Ahmadinejad's conception of the 'role of the people' was to a large extent a mixture of different paradigms, including both Khatami's and Mesbah's. Khatami's conception of the people and their role in politics was rooted in the individual and the modern concept of 'a citizen.' His efforts, to an extent, were transforming the concept of an 'always mobilised nation' ('*mellat-e hamisheh dar sahneh*') to citizens with rights whose will legitimised the IRI.

Ahmadinejad followed majoritarianism and under a vague concept of the people, which justified his political aspirations. Though he seemed to "thrive on people's acclamations," he did not in fact believe in the "people's vote",⁴⁵ or he probably saw their votes as a means to his goal of reaching power. Ahmadinejad reduced popular demands to social justice and improved the economy, perhaps due to his own personal experiences with poverty, while neglecting the Reformist approach to republicanism. He considered all other demands secondary and unjustified. He also shared Mesbah's concept of the role of people, stating: "In the heart of Europe Marxism is defeated, and so is liberalism. It is only pure Islam that can respond to modern-day challenges."⁴⁶

Ahmadinejad was concerned about building the IRI as a representative of a true Islamic society. However, unlike the Khatami era, most public debates during

⁴⁵ Ali M Ansari, *Iran Under Ahmadinejad: The Politics of Confrontation* (Routledge, 2007): 45.

⁴⁶ Official website of the President of the IRI, 30 /9/1386 (21/December/2007).

Ahamdinejad's Presidency were about economic or foreign policy issues. Fewer debates took place about the theoretical power balance between republican versus Islamic-revolutionary institutions.

Ahmadinejad rarely discussed issues such as tolerance, freedom of speech and pluralism except in blaming Western countries for their so-called hypocrisy. He mainly used the Islamic government as rhetoric in the wider international stage, saying “Liberalism, Marxism, and Nationalism could not save the mankind. Now all the nations realise that there is only one way for salvation and that's the way that the Iranian nation took with the help of the clergy and *ulama*.⁴⁷

Ahmadinejad tried to construct a doctrine to justify his claims about the significant role of the IRI in building a new global civilisation order. He emphasised the role of the Iranian revolution as an example and alternative to the devastation brought on the world's nations by liberalism and Marxism. His claims became more relevant in negotiations with the West on the Iran's nuclear programme.⁴⁸ Ahmadinejad's two terms and his role as a leader marked a new Era in IRI history.

The following section focuses on Ahmadinejad's personality and traces the formation of his circle of friends, exploring different social, economic and managerial aspects of his policies and views.

Ahmadinejad and the *Uremia* Circle

During the time when the aristocracy (*ashrafiyat*) was considered noble and living in cities was considered civilised, “I was born in a poor family in a rural village near Garmsar [a city located in the southeast of Tehran].”⁴⁹ Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

⁴⁷ Official website of the President of the IRI, 25 /3/ 1386 (15/June/2007).

⁴⁸ Official website of the President of the IRI, 28 /1/ 1386 (17/April/2007).

⁴⁹ <http://www.ahmadinejad.ir> 21 /5/1385 (12/August/2006).

(b.1956) opened his official biography with this sentence, showing the importance of social class conflicts and his resentment towards symbols of aristocracy in his psyche, a characteristic rooted in his personal life experience. His family moved to Tehran in 1959 when Ahmadinejad was just one-year-old.⁵⁰ Growing up, Ahmadinejad supported his family by working in a small shop. Later, he successfully entered the Iran University of Science and Technology (IUST), where he studied Civil Engineering. He obtained his PhD after the revolution in 1997, whilst at the same time serving as the Governor of the Ardabil province in northwest Iran.

Ahmadinejad, given his background and his belief that Pahlavi modernisation disrupted rustic life and his own family life he was more than a willing adherent of Khomeini's slogans touching on socioeconomic indifferences and achieving social justice and ultimately suspicion of urban elite.⁵¹ Ahmadinejad later, and in his electoral campaign for Presidency in 2005, capitalised on a similar class antagonism discourse which was an important component of Khomeinism as discussed in Chapter One.

Before the revolution, Ahmadinejad was not a prominent revolutionary and after the revolution he gradually built his political career through student networks and his services in the war. He was never imprisoned or exiled and had no close links to the IRI's prominent revolutionaries. Ahmadinejad did not have any familial ties to the IRI establishment. After the revolution he was one of the founding members of the 'Islamic Student Union' and consequently a member of the Central Committee of the

⁵⁰ In his autobiography, he blamed Pahlavi's modernisation efforts and land reform plans for the family's financial struggles that forced them into migration, saying: "The villagers were lured into the glamour and seductive appearance of the urban life. They migrated to the cities in hopes of finding a morsel of bread, but instead found themselves marginalised in the slums."

Ibid.

⁵¹ Abrahamian, *A History*, 27-8.

OSU, where he worked with prominent Leftist students.⁵²

However, in the 1990s, when some of the students of the first circle of OSU emerged as Reformists, he stayed close to the Conservative camp. Soon after the revolution he was appointed as the Deputy Governor of Khoy and Mako, small cities in Iran's Azerbaijan province in north-west Iran. He worked his way up and by the time of Khatami he became the mayor of Tehran (2003-2005). During the war, he joined the IRGC.⁵³ Before becoming Tehran's Mayor, Ahmadinejad unsuccessfully participated in the election to the sixth *Majlis*. He ran as a candidate from the Conservative camp and *Mo'talefeh*. Ironically, Rafsanjani was a prominent figure in their list.

Ahmadinejad's Presidential victory also led to the entrance of his circle of friends to power. This circle's members gained each other's trust over the years. Ahmadinejad considered them off limits regarding political factional attacks. This group was known as 'the Urmia circle' in IRI political lexicon, given they worked together closely dealing with political and intelligence issues in these areas (Urmia is a city in north-west Iran).

Their friendship was forged in their common experiences and goals soon after the revolution and in their service to the War. The main members of this circle were Sadeq Mahsouli, the Interior Minister, his Advisor, Mojtaba Samareh Hashemi, his Senior Advisor and Deputy Interior Minister for Political Affairs, and Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei (*hereafter* Mashaei), the Chief of Staff and Vice-President.⁵⁴ Mashaei

⁵² He was opposed to the invasion of the US Embassy and argued that if an embassy were to be occupied, it should be the Soviet one.

Fararu 12/11/1388, <http://fararu.com/fa/news/34410/>.

Bultan News 19/10/1392 (9/January/2014), <http://www.bultannews.com/fa/news/185424/>.

⁵³ *Fars News* 12/5/1384 (3/August/2005).

⁵⁴ The formation of this circle could be traced back to the early days of the revolution. Mahsouli was appointed Governor of Urmia and the IRGC Commander of Division Five, in charge of the northwestern part of Iran. At this time, Samareh Hashemi was appointed the Deputy Governor of the

became an important pillar of the Ahmadinejad administration during his Presidency.

Mashaei, who is believed to be Ahmadinejad's mentor, has built his career in intelligence and cultural affairs. Similar to Ahmadinejad, he was young at the time of the revolution.⁵⁵ In the early 1980s, he served as the IRGC Intelligence Office Deputy in charge of controlling Kurdistan's Komaleh (a Leftist Kurdish group). In 1984, when the Ministry of Intelligence was established, he took charge as the codification of the IRI's strategy toward Iranian Kurds.

During Khatami's Presidency, Mashaei became the Head of the newly established radio station, Payam Radio. Payam attracted new audiences by playing Iranian pop and jazz songs for the first time on the radio. This led to harsh criticism from some religious figures, who blamed the Reformist government and Khatami for allowing these types of music to be played. At the time of Ahmadinejad's mayorship, Mashaei moved to the municipality office where he was in charge of cultural and art affairs.⁵⁶ His controversial comments and his attitude were in contrast to his behaviour while working in Payam Radio.

For instance, he harshly criticised cultural houses and the genre of pop music, saying "cultural houses have turned into 'houses of corruption.' I will Islamicise them. Khatami should be held accountable [for them]. I won't allow vulgar pop songs to be

Azharbaijan Province, while Ahmadinejad served as the Governor of Khoy. As Mahsouli became the Commander of the IRGC Fifth Division, Ahmadinejad also joined him as Commander of the 'Armoured Division' (*Tim-e Zerehi*). Others, such as Parviz Fattah, the Minister of Energy in Ahmadinejad's first Cabinet, and Alireza Sheikh Attar, Iranian diplomat and an ambassador, formed an alliance during this period. When Ahmadinejad was Governor of Khoy, he met Mashaei in the meetings of the "Committee of Maintaining the Security of Province." (*Showra-ye Tamin-e Ostan*). *Shargh* 3/4/1394 (24/June/2015), <http://www.sharghdaily.ir/News/66561,http://aftabnews.ir/vdceno8zyjh8wwi.b9bj.html>.

⁵⁵ An excellent public speaker, he gave speeches in praise of Khomeini, in small cities, at the age of 15.

Nameh News 21/9/1391 (11/December/2012), <http://namehnews.ir/fa/news/12369>.

Khabar Online 3/2/1392 (23/April/2013), <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/288697/Politics/parties>.

⁵⁶ *Nameh News* 21/9/1391 (11/December/2012), <http://namehnews.ir/fa/news/12369>.

distributed in cultural houses. Un-Islamic theatres should be banned.”⁵⁷ He portrayed himself as a strong supporter of Imam Mahdi, which gave momentum to the rumours about his involvement with the *Hojjatieh*. Mashaei faced accusations of misuse of public money for electoral purposes.⁵⁸

While Mashaei increasingly engaged in security and cultural affairs, Mahsouli increased his financial activities and became one of the financial sources of this circle.⁵⁹ When Ahmadinejad proposed him as his initial candidate as Oil Minister in 2005, his wealth and the controversies surrounding how he became rich became a topic of debate in the *Majlis* and a factor in his rejection by it.⁶⁰

The Ahmadinejad Doctrine

Ahmadinejad and his circle belonged to a generation of Khomeinism that gained its political identity and legitimacy from its efforts in the war. They did not participate in the revolution but called themselves true revolutionaries claiming they understood the revolution’s true ideals. They believed the IRI did not deliver on these ideals. This point is well depicted in Nateq Nouri’s account of his meeting with Ahmadinejad in the “Central Committee for the Harmonization of Conservatives,” prior to the ninth Presidential election, when Ahmadinejad presented his plans as a possible candidate.

Nateq Nouri said:

After Ahmadinejad proposed his plans, Asgar Owladi said, ‘This brother of ours thinks that he is the only one who understands Islam. This brother of ours thinks he is the only one who understands the revolution. This brother of ours thinks he is the only one who knows the Imam.’ I said then, ‘Mr. Ahmadinejad, I listened to your presentation carefully, but I should admit that I did not understand any of it, either your knowledge is beyond my understanding or your comments are by someone who lives in

⁵⁷ *Etemad* 16/6/1388 (7/September/2009).

⁵⁸ *Etamaad* 16/6/1388 (7/September/2009).

⁵⁹ *Nameh News* 12/12/1391 (2/March/2013), <http://namehnews.ir/fa/news/26917/>.

⁶⁰ *Shargh* 21/8/1384 (12/November/2005) *Fararu*, <http://fararu.com/fa/news/17146/>.

the clouds. After this meeting, Ahmadinejad got angry, and later in a letter said that he did not wish to work with us.⁶¹

Ahmadinejad considered Mousavi's war economy, Rafsanjani's economic development and Khatami's political development misleading and deviations from true Khomeinism. In a speech almost a year before his election, he underlined these points:

During the war, the country's macro-management was centralised due to the war situation. This gave birth to patronage. The second phase was the construction Era in which the administration followed different agendas, but could not deliver social justice. In the third phase the sociopolitical direction changed and many revolutionary principles were transformed, though once again social justice could not be accomplished... In the second phase, justice became a part of the [economic] development paradigm and the goal of overcoming social deprivation became the secondary target. In the third phase, the principles of religious governance and independence of the country were questioned.⁶²

Ahmadinejad promoted the increasing role of the people in the IRI. However, his understanding of the people differed from Khatami and the Reformists. While the political conception of the people in Khatami's doctrine referred to modern civil identity and the people as the collection of citizens/individuals, Ahmadinejad considered the people as a collective identity of a single entity. This entity then shared the same aspirations for social justice while fulfilling their Islamic revolutionary duties expressed in Khomeinism.

The Islamic regime could not be achieved without the direct participation and involvement of the people. Thus it is the only popular regime in the world... Those who think that the *Majlis* and government are the only ways to realise the ideals are wrong. People should demand social justice... If people are in charge of the government, then the Islamic regime can be achieved. The reason that the income gap is widening is due to the fact that the people feel that their responsibilities are only establishing these pillars of the government (*arkan-e hokumat*) and defending its

⁶¹ ISNA 31/4/1393 (22/July/2014), <http://isna.ir/fa/news/93043118195/>.

⁶² Fars News 4/5/1383 (25/July/2004).

independence.

He also emphasised,

If we want to realise justice, we should change the administration model of the government and open the way for the people to manage the country. The popular government is in the context of Islamic government, and the role of the people in the administration of the country is essential... Without the involvement of the people, reform of the economy and the emergence of social justice is impossible.⁶³

To a certain extent, under the influence of Mesbah's theory of the role of the people in the IRI, Ahmadinejad constructed his theoretical vision, which gave meaning to his mission. He called for a 'third revolution' to establish divine government. He highlighted different aspects of this mission in his Presidential election speech in Rasht, a city in northern Iran.

He placed his mission in a religious-historical context: "The Islamic revolution was the continuation of the Prophet's Movement and its goals were the prophet's goals." He placed the role of the people within a religious context of an apocalyptic mission, stating, "The Iranian nation has a duty of preparing the grounds for the Islamic government which would be the precursor for the establishment of the government of the occumulant [hidden] Imam."

Therefore, he argued, "We need to establish a progressive powerful and unique Islamic society in Iran as fast as possible, [a society] that can set an example for [other countries] and consequently, be the first step in the global movement toward the Islamic government." He then placed this thesis in the historical context of the IRI, arguing that the establishment of the Islamic government would be the third revolution, following the first one, meaning the 1979 Revolution, and the second one, meaning the establishment of IRI political stability. He also defined the Islamic government as

⁶³ Ibid.

“... a government where practices, regulations and agendas are extracted from Islam.”

He also distinguished this government from the previous governments of the IRI arguing, “The programmes of these administrations were based on their own thinking or the implementation and copy of other programmes,” and not based on Islam. For instance, during “the construction era, the goal of economic development had become economic growth and wealth accumulation.” While “...during the Islamic government economic development is based on justice,” which he defined as “fair countrywide distribution of the country’s resources.”⁶⁴

The relationship between Ahmadinejad and Mesbah dates from the time he attended Mesbah’s classes held for University *Basij* professors.⁶⁵ After his Presidency, Ahmadinejad also praised Mesbah and Imam Khomeini’s institutions on different occasions.⁶⁶ Ahmadinejad’s idea of building the ‘ideal Islamic society’ was influenced by Mesbah’s teachings.⁶⁷ However, after he became President, Ahmadinejad tried to avoid direct involvement in philosophical debates about the role of the people as taught by Mesbah. For instance, in response to the question of a journalist on Mesbah’s comment which said, “The people’s vote is the base of popularity, and not legitimacy,” Ahmadinejad said, “These are scientific debates. Let’s not hinder the expression of ideas and scientific debate by politicising them.”⁶⁸

In sum, social justice, return to Khomeinism and anti-elitism (‘*ashrafigari*’) were the three elements of Ahmadinejad’s doctrine. Ahmadinejad believed these three

⁶⁴ Hamidreza. Esmaeili, *Shuresh-e Ashrafiyyat Bar Jomhuriyyat* [Confrontation of Aristocracy and Democracy] (Markaz-e Asnad-e Enqelab-e Islami, 2011): 75-78.

⁶⁵ Interview with Mohsen Qaravian, *Nasim Bidari Journal*; Partially republished at ISNA23/3/1392 (13/June/2013), <http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/92032313728/>.

⁶⁶ Official website of the President of the IRI 25/3/1386 (15/June/2007).

⁶⁷ Official website of the President of the IRI 24/10/1384 (14/Jan/2006).

⁶⁸ Official website of the President of the IRI 24/10/1384 (14/Jan/2006).

elements, also known as 'compassionate government,' were true values of the Islamic revolution and that any distancing from them, including adoption of foreign, specifically Western models, would only weaken them and thus the revolution.⁶⁹ He therefore summarised: "The next government will be just, and faithful to the ideals and goals of the Islamic revolution. The government will go back to the hands of the people again."⁷⁰

These themes were highlighted in his 'comprehensive strategic plan of Presidency,' which was published a few weeks after his first Presidential victory. The global aspect of Ahmadinejad's mission was highlighted by emphasising the significant historical role of Iran in creating a new civilisation. "Khomeini was another leader who placed Iran on the track of civilisation building... The Islamic revolution was a new beginning for the Iranian Islamic civilisation... The Islamic Iran is now gradually emerging to spread the lights of justice and spirituality by refuting the hegemonic world order." His ideal was to "prepare the grounds for the 'world's just government' through the vivification of the Islamic civilisation."⁷¹

To understand some of the policy decisions Ahmadinejad made, it is necessary to summarise some of his announced policy goals. His main strategic approach was "to spread justice and multi-faceted and endogenous development based on pure Mohammedan Islam." His main cultural strategy was "to improve public culture, human dignity, legitimate freedoms..." His social and economic strategy was to create a welfare state based on "self-reliance in production, activating economic capacities and export-oriented production, just wealth distribution, job creation, overcoming

⁶⁹ Shuresh, 55-85; *Fars News* 20/11/1383 (8/February/2005), (<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8311200358>); *Fars News* 12/11/1383(31/January/2005), <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8311120348>.

⁷⁰ *Fars News* 12/11/1383(31/January/2005), <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8311120348>.
⁷¹ *Fars News* 25/5/1384 (16/August/2005).

deprivation, elimination of discrimination, and improvement of people's purchase power and their welfare."

In this document republican institutions were considered a part of his security strategy: "The security strategy includes popular mobilisation at decisive moments, the empowerment of the regime's republican aspects by spreading justice and serving the people, job creation, the strengthening of scientific and economic bases, and improving defense capabilities."⁷²

Ahmadinejad's personality and ideological views strongly influenced his different policies and programmes, and thus IRI politics, society and economy. For instance, due to his personal financial background and his image as the defender of the poor, Ahmadinejad considered money the answer to all problems and "perceived economics as a handbook for distributing assets and income rather than primarily a source of income and wealth creation."⁷³

He initiated expansive monetary policies. Contrary to common economic knowledge, he considered inflation as a result of production cost rather than monetary policies. His economic plans were a mixture of several inconsistent policies, which he justified under different Islamic economic doctrines, such as anti-corruption or social justice. He propagated reducing the role of the government in the economy and took liberalising measures. For instance, he lifted subsidies on petrol and other products and continued the privatisation of state-owned companies. His record on stabilising prices and demolishing financial auditing institutions was, to a large extent, unprecedented in the IRI history.

His economic plans were chaotic. To fulfill his slogan of "bringing the oil

⁷² *Fars News* 25/5/1384 (16/August/2005).

⁷³ Jahangir Amuzegar, "Islamic Social Justice, Iranian Style," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 3 (2007): 67.

money to the dinner tables of families," he redistributed oil income directly to the hands of people without following *Majlis* regulations and protocols. Given his commitment to *Jahadi* management, he initiated many extensive projects without proper prior study and research and in the absence of proper budgeting and financial evaluation.

He initiated the 'Mehr Housing' project offering first-time owners affordable housing without proper prior research and evaluation.⁷⁴ He also distributed public 'justice shares' (*Saham-e 'Edalat*) by allocating stocks of large state-owned companies to low-income people without clarifying its regulatory body. An unprecedented increase in the oil income allowed him to sustain these expansive economic policies for a few years. However, when oil prices plunged and sanctions tightened, most of these policies became huge burdens on the state and the next administration.⁷⁵

Ahmadinejad's Presidential management style was a continuation of his municipal management style which had two main pillars. On the one hand, his informal populist managerial approaches aimed to construct and strengthen a down-to-earth, hardworking and humble image of Ahmadinejad. As mentioned by Mohammad Jahromi, his Labour and Social Affairs Minister in the first cabinet, his 'ego,' lack of managerial knowledge or experience and his increasing 'narcissism,' led to his micro-management.⁷⁶

His decisions and performance seemed contradictory to his status as President. To reinforce this image of humble servant, he held cabinet meetings in different

⁷⁴ Ali Karshenasan and Mahsa Beiranvand, "A Review on Weaknesses and Strengths of Delivering Mehr Housing Project in Terms of Achieving Economical Goals," *Management Science Letters* 3, no. 9 (2013).

⁷⁵ In his 100 Days in Office Speech, Hassan Rouhani explains the hurdle that the Mehr Housing Project is imposing on his government.

⁷⁶ *Etemad* 20/6/1394 (11/September/2015) Interview with Jahromi; *Etemad* 20/12/1386 (10/March/2008).

provinces, arguing that his cabinet needed to be in touch with reality on the ground. He got involved with people's minor problems and gave orders on the spot during these cabinet meetings. He also distributed handout payments in his trips. His trips across the country were filled with images of mostly poor people approaching him or his car just to give him letters describing their problems and asking for handouts. Over the seven years of his Presidency, he received more than 23 million letters during these trips.⁷⁷ He even defined new small projects on the spot by bypassing regular protocols.

His ego and self-confidence made it almost impossible for his cabinet ministers to work with him. He interfered in ministerial affairs and policy details without proper research and knowledge. He also frequently interfered in the department process within individual ministries, including intra ministerial appointments. For instance, he once interfered in the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Sport and Youth and directly asked for the dismissal of the national football team's coach. In another occasion, he made the final decision about the selection of a football club director.⁷⁸ He changed ministers and appointed new ones in an unprecedented and unpredicted ways.

As Qolam Hossein Mohseni Ezhei, Ahmadinejad's Intelligence Minister, emphasised, "We did not know why we were fired."⁷⁹ Some of his ministers were expelled on the spot just for having small disagreements with him.⁸⁰ Despite his continuous emphasis on the importance of competency in the selection of his cadre, the main criteria for his cadre selection were loyalty, obedience and adulation, further highlighting his dictatorial style.⁸¹

Consequently, his modus operandi created chaos in policy making and severely

⁷⁷ *Hamshahri* 23/3/1391 (12/June/2012).

⁷⁸ *Khabar Online* 27/8/1394 (18/November/2015),

<http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/479598/sport/sport-management>.

⁷⁹ *Taamolnews*, <http://www.taamolnews.ir/fa/news/38327>.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Jahangir Amuzegar, "Ahmadinejad's Legacy," *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 4 (2013): 124-126.

weakened the cohesion of the cabinet and of the ministries. This modus operandi also brought chaos to other institutions. He dissolved many such as the ‘Money and Credit Council’ a body responsible for research and decision making regarding the general policies of the Central Bank⁸² to increase his power over policy making, he decreased the role of supervisory bodies such as the ‘Planning and Budget Organisation’ (*Sazman-e Barnameh va Budjeh*).⁸³

In his valedictory speech after his resignation, Davoud Danesh Jafari, Ahmadinejad’s Economics Minister (2005–2008), succinctly summed up the characteristics of Ahmadinejad’s economic, and managerial approach:

“First,[during Ahmadinejad’s administration], there was skepticism about the country’s expertise. [Moreover] many generally accepted concepts in economics, such as the impact of liquidity on inflation, or the preferable division of labour between the government and the people were doubted. Second, unimportant secondary issues became the government’s priority... We also witnessed an active presence of pressure groups in administrative processes. In order to change the direction of affairs, these groups circulated false information... Third, the government continuously entered into disputes with other institutions due to a myriad of reasons, which heavily affected the activities of the Ministry of Economics and Treasury. Many of [these issues] have remained unresolved until now. Those disputes with the *Majlis*, disputes with particular people, disputes with the National Television, disputes with Ahmadinejad’s previous rivals in the Presidential election and disputes with potential candidates of the tenth Presidential election.”

Fourth, although the main programme of the government was to face the financial sanctions [imposed by the UN], the interference of “people who had no expertise or professional experience” hindered these efforts.⁸⁴

⁸² *Nazar News* (9/4/1394) (30/June/2015), <http://www.nazarnews.com/39258>.

Ahmadinejad forced Shaybani, the Head of the Central Bank, to resign in 2007 and instead appointed Tahmasb Mazaheri. However, when Mazaheri also disagreed with his orders, Ahmadinejad forced him to resign as well. When Mazaheri refused, in an unprecedented action, Ahmadinejad directly appointed another Head to the Central Bank in 2008.

⁸³ *Fararu* (20/8/1393) (11/November/2014), <http://fararu.com/fa/news/213322/>; *Etemade Melli* 20/4/1386 (11/July/2007).

⁸⁴ *Etemad* 4/2/1387 (23/April/2008).

Factional Dynamics

Because of this modus operandi and political, ideological approach, the dynamics of factional politics during the Ahmadinejad period differed greatly from those of previous administrations. There were three main trends in factional politics.

First, given that the Reformists had lost control of almost all the state's institutions, they debated the reasons behind their defeat and planned their comeback, while their media remained critical of Ahmadinejad's policies. Second, in the absence of the Reformists from the main state institutions, internal disputes amongst the Conservatives greatly escalated. Third, one of the major factional disputes, which became personal, was the dispute between Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad that in return exercised an increasing influence on the overall dynamics of factional politics and their popularisation. Thus the investigation of these inter-elite competitions are necessary for better understanding of the popularisation of factional politics of coming years.

Importantly, it should be underlined that this period was overshadowed by the geopolitical concerns about the Iranian nuclear programme and Ahmadinejad's aggressive tone in foreign affairs. Geopolitics were, therefore, important contextual elements of factional politics during this period. In this section, some of these geopolitical contextual elements are mentioned briefly and a substantial analysis of them is presented in Chapter Six.

During this period Rafsanjani and his family became the target of harsh personal and political attacks by Ahmadinejad and the neo-Conservatives. The first signs of opposition to Rafsanjani appeared when Rafsanjani's speech in Qom, on 5 June 2006, on the anniversary of the beginning of Khomeini's Movement, was

disrupted by clerics affiliated to the Imam Khomeini Institute.⁸⁵ Mesbah's office denied any systematic role in this incident.⁸⁶ The struggles between Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani reached its height during the disputes over the control of the Azad University (Free University) and the arrest of Mousavian.

The importance of Azad University is due to several points. First, Azad University is the largest non-governmental educational institution in the IRI. Therefore, it has an important position in the debates about the IRI's control over the educational policy and the making *homo Islamicus*. Second, given its large student body it can be a powerful mobilising force for any group in whose hands it resides. Azad University serves 75 percent of the country's university students.

Azad University's students are a large network parallel to other networks, such as the *Basij*, which enjoys the control of the state. Third, with an annual budget of around two billion US dollars, it is the source of wealth and patronage.⁸⁷ As mentioned in Chapter Two, Rafsanjani established Azad University as one of the requirements for the success of his *Tose'eh* paradigm. Thus, Rafsanjani's name was attached to the Azad University. Therefore, Ahmadinejad's success in gaining control over Azad University symbolised the weakening of Rafsanjani's power.

Ahmadinejad versus Rafsanjani

Ahmadinejad regarded Rafsanjani as his main political rival. This rivalry was partly personal given the dynamics of the 2005 election and partly political. In addition, going after Azad University fitted into Ahmadinejad's ideological rhetoric of targeting corrupt establishment. Therefore, important aspects of the disputes over Azad were the rivalry between Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad's attempts to prove

⁸⁵ *Etemade Melli* 16/3/1385 (6/June/2006).

⁸⁶ *Etemade Melli* 17/3/1385 (7/June/2006); *Fars News* 17/3/1385 (7/June/2006).

⁸⁷ *Serat News* 17/12/1393 (8/March/2015), <http://www.seratnews.ir/fa/news/231624/>.

his anti-establishment claims.

Azad University

Soon after his election Ahmadinejad targeted Azad University and asked for a reduction of its tuition fees. In October 2006, he threatened Azad University, saying “If Azad University does not reduce its tuition fees we will take a revolutionary decision against the university.”⁸⁸ It was perceived largely as a political move as Azad University was non-governmental and received no fund from the government. If Ahmadinejad’s motivation was to reduce the tuition fees, he could have approved some governmental loans for which Azad University had applied and/or tried to put a cap on public university tuition fees, which sometimes were more than that of Azad University.⁸⁹

Two weeks later, Ahmadinejad took action against the statute of Azad University. As the President and the Head of the SCCR, he appointed five people to conduct an inquiry into the statute’s reform and the possibility of a change in the composition of its founding board.⁹⁰ SCCR is an IRI upper body mainly charged with delineating the general strategic educational and cultural policies of the IRI. The SCCR’s organisational links to Azad University are relatively limited.

Azad University, similar to all other IRI educational institutions, must comply with the legislation of the SCCR. Any changes in the composition of the founding board and the appointment of the University Dean need SCCR confirmation. Thus, Ahmadinejad’s action was a clear example of how different factions use their control over beheld institution for factional political purposes.

⁸⁸ *Iran* 8/1385 (November/2006).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ *Asr Iran* 17/8/1385 (8/November/2006), <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/6219/>.

In response Rafsanjani as the head of founding board of Azad University, proposed changes in the composition of the founding board. He hoped that diversifying the board would hinder Ahmadinejad's attempt to control the institution.⁹¹ Following Khamenei's behind the door interference, SCCR accepted these changes and for a while the issue was dropped.⁹² However, the 2009 Presidential election gave Ahmadinejad the chance to settle his issues with Rafsanjani and Azad University. Ahmadinejad's use of Azad University in the election campaign was part of his attempts to strengthen his anti-establishment image.

In a live televised electoral debate during the 2009 election, Ahmadinejad harshly criticised Rafsanjani and his family. He also accused Azad University of systematically using the organisation's money and resources for political and electoral purposes.⁹³ After the election, Ahmadinejad's surrogates accused Azad University and Mehdi Hashemi, Rafsanjani's son was at the time the office manager of the University's founding board, of interfering in politics.⁹⁴

Fearing monopolising actions by the Ahmadinejad administration, Rafsanjani and Azad's founding board endowed Azad University. In doing so, they ensured that the government could not access the institution's assets even if the board lost control of the University.⁹⁵ Rafsanjani hinted about the personal aspect of these disputes, "While worried about the future and aware of the extent of greed and jealousy toward the institution, the Founding Board reached the conclusion that the only assured way to respond to these attacks was to endow the institution."⁹⁶

⁹¹ Alef 6/9/1385 (27/November/2006), <http://alef.ir/vdch.-nit23nxmftd2.html?txt>.

⁹² *Raja News* 21/8/1386 (12/November/2007).

⁹³ See *Aftab News* 14/3/1388 (4/June/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcjxveh.uqeymzsffu.html>.

⁹⁴ *Frasnews* 27,28/11/1388 (15,16/Februrary/2005).

⁹⁵ *Tabnak* (1/September/2009), <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/mobile/news/62069/>.

⁹⁶ *ILNA* 8/9/1388 (29/Novemebr/2009); *Tabnak* 8/9/1388 (29/Novemebr/2009), <http://www.tabnak.ir/8/9/1388>.

In his second term as President, Ahmadinejad reinitiated the process to reform Azad University statute. On 25 April 2010, Ahmadinejad declared Azad University's new statute. In the new statute, Azad University fell largely under the control of the government. Eventually, on 27 February 2012 after two years of intense political disputes, Farhad Daneshjoo became its new Dean, following a decision made by the trustee board and the acceptance of the majority of the founding board members. To legalise this decision, Rafsanjani's signature was needed as the head of the founding board. Rafsanjani refused to sign the decree.

In return, Ahmadinejad assigned Kamran Daneshjoo, Farhad's brother and the Minister of Science and Education, to sign his verdict instead of Rafsanjani.⁹⁷ This move symbolised the weakened power position of Rafsanjani during this period following the 2009 events. However, during Rouhani's Presidency, a shift in factional power balance, tipping in favour of Rafsanjani, led to a new power balance in Azad University. Daneshjoo was replaced in 2014, after about two years of controversial management of the institution.

Khamenei's role in these disputes reflects the evolution of the personal relationship between Khamenei and Rafsanjani and the extent to which this relationship changed following the 2009 election. The next chapter explores different aspects of this shift in more detail. Khamenei's first intervention in these disputes was in 2006 when he asked both Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani to drop the issue after the changes in the composition of the founding board occurred. After the 2009 election, the deterioration of the relationship between Rafsanjani and Khamenei was reflected in Khamenei's position in disputes over Azad University. Rafsanjani asked Khamenei about Azad University and received the green light for his endowment plans.

⁹⁷ *Qanun* 24/6/1392 (15/September/2013).

However, the SLO later publicly denied this confirmation. When Rafsanjani went to see Khamenei, the Supreme Leader responded that it had just been his jurisprudential decree in which he agreed to the principle of endowment and Rafsanjani still needed to gain the acceptance of jurisdictional institutions, such as the SCCR. Meanwhile, the process to reform Azad University statute, which was reinitiated by Ahmadinejad after 2009 continued. When Rafsanjani sent a letter to Khamenei pointing out that the intervention was illegal, the SLO, instead of Khamenei himself, rejected Rafsanjani's claims and confirmed its legality in a letter.⁹⁸ The shift in the balance of power and the deterioration of the relationship between Khamenei and Rafsanjani was now publicly clear.

The escalation of these disputes led to the entrance of new institutions into these debates. Two events in late May and early June 2010 changed the dynamics of these disputes. First, on 27 May 2010, security forces invaded the office of Azad's founding board. Media close to the government and the IRGC claimed, in the raid many confidential documents regarding oil contracts and other important confidential issues were discovered.⁹⁹

However, *Mosharekat* claimed the purpose of this raid was to confiscate the documents that Azad University had on some of the children of the establishment and civil servants, which showed their fraud in their obtaining degrees. *Mosharekat* also claimed amongst the documents confiscated was a confidential report on the Student Movement in Mashahd from the January 2010 *ashoura* event.¹⁰⁰ Second, the *Majlis* entered the Azad University's dispute in June 2010. Ali Larjani, the Speaker of the

⁹⁸ BBC Persian (14/June/2010),

http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/07/100714_i39_azaduniversity_khamenei.shtml.

⁹⁹ IRNA 8/3/1389 (29/May/2010).

¹⁰⁰ BBC Persian (14/June/2010),

http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/07/100714_i39_azaduniversity_khamenei.shtml.

Majlis, emphasised that there had always been an unofficial agreement between the SCCR and the *Majlis*, set by Khamenei, according to which the *Majlis* was not allowed to interfere in the SCCR's decision making.¹⁰¹

The *Majlis* ignored Larijani's comment and voted in favour of Azad University and the continuation of the older statute. The *Majlis* referred to a court verdict in 2006 in which the changes in the statute was considered illegal. This action by the *Majlis* faced harsh criticism from the plain clothes militia, pressure groups and the *Basij*. They condemned the *Majlis* for acting against Khamenei's wishes and threatened to close the *Majlis*. The *Majlis* harshly criticised these actions of these pressure groups, though it later cancelled the bill.

Eventually, as the disputes escalated, Khamenei intervened and in two different letters asked both Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad to stop their attempts to reform the statute and the endowment process.¹⁰² As mentioned above, in less than two years after these events in the *Majlis*, Ahmadinejad implemented the new statute and changed the Dean of Azad University.

The entrance of the eighth *Majlis* into Azad University debates and consequent events was an important event portraying shifts in the dynamics of factional politics and the confrontation of republican institutions with the revolutionary pillars. The eighth *Majlis* had a Conservative and neo-Conservative majority.¹⁰³

Therefore, the actions of the *Majlis* against Ahmadinejad in Azad University debates were, to a large extent, a reflection of the division within the Conservative camp. This was one of the first few occasions where pressure groups were mobilised

¹⁰¹ BBC Persian (29/June/2010),

http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/06/100601_139_azaduniversity_background.shtml.

¹⁰² ANA 14/4/1389 (5/July/2010); Fararu 14/4/1389 (5/July/2010), <http://fararu.com/fa/news/51331/>.

¹⁰³ Given that after large rejection of the Reformist's candidates and electoral apathy of the Reformist supporters and secular Iranians, the Reformists only gained around 15 percent of the total number of MPs.

to condemn the actions of a Conservative-dominated institution. These groups justified their actions with new rhetoric. They claimed they would act upon their understanding of the Supreme Leader's wishes (*Niyyat*), because sometimes the Leader could not announce his wishes publicly due to state's interests (*Maslahat*). This new rhetoric played an important role in future political events, particularly during the Rouhani administration and in negotiations with the US in the nuclear programmes.

After the 2009 election, Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani's lack of attention to Khamenei's continuous public and private interventions to a degree revealed the formation of new power dynamics and the weakening of Khamenei's institutional authority as the ultimate arbitrator of disputes. This point will be elaborated further in the next chapter.

In sum, these disputes on Azad University illustrate certain elements regarding the subject of this thesis as well as the impact of inter-elite competition on the popularisation of factional politics. First, the way these disputes emerged and evolved offers an example of the ideological and political dynamics of factional politics. Second, these disputes continued in both of Ahmadinejad's Presidential terms, therefore they offer a case study with analytical importance given that these events symbolise the extent to which the 2009 Presidential election and subsequent events have influenced the dynamics of factional politics and Rafsanjani's power position and popular authority. Third, these disputes symbolised wider power politics of this period and how a personal issue for both Rafsanjani and Ahmadinejad, evolved and spread into the wider political arena leading to the confrontation of different institutions. Fourth, they highlight the importance of human agency in the IRI politics. Fifth, these disputes represent the evolution of the relationship between Rafsanjani, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. Finally, they showed that Khamenei was unable to control the factional

fights.

Mousavian Arrest

In this dispute between Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani, yet another main dispute, happened in May 2007 when Hossein Mousavian was arrested on charges of espionage. Mousavian was Hassan Rouhani's Deputy and a high-ranking official in the Iran's negotiating team with regard to its nuclear programme. To date, he maintains a close relationship with Rafsanjani. When Rouhani was in charge of Iran's nuclear programme negotiations, Mousavian served as the Speaker of the negotiating team (2002–2005). Mousavian was acquitted of espionage charges and keeping governmental and confidential documents. However, on charges of propaganda against the regime, he was found guilty and sentenced to three years of suspended sentence. Ahmadinejad and Mohseni Ezhei, his Intelligence Minister, criticised the sentence for being too light.

Ahmadinejad used Mousavian's arrest as another example in his wider rhetoric about the hidden powerful hands in IRI politics and the extent of Rafsanjani's power. He said, “They [Rafsanjani and his allies] went as far as planting a spy [in the negotiating team] in order to systematically collect secret information. Of course, if this spy goes to the court, the judge would acquit him. However, they should know that the people's court will not allow it and we will be in continuous fight with the ‘mafia’ in full force.”¹⁰⁴

Once Mousavian was acquitted of part of the charges. Ahmadinejad seized the opportunity and escalated his anti-establishment rhetoric. The IUST Basij-of which Ahmadinejad was a member of-arranged a protest against the judiciary.¹⁰⁵ He pointed

¹⁰⁴ *Fararu* 10/9/1386 (1/December/2007).

¹⁰⁵ *Donya-e Eqtesad* 7/9/1386 (28/November/2007).

out that if Mousavian was innocent, why his trial was not open to the public, and why not publish his private conversations with foreigners, so the people could judge for themselves.¹⁰⁶ Mousavian's indictment was published in early 2010 by *Iran* newspaper, close to Ahmadinejad's administration at the height of factional politics following the 2009 election and just before the ninth *Majlis* elections. Ahmadinejad used this opportunity to portray himself once again as an anti-establishment figure.¹⁰⁷

Mousavian was accused of transmitting information about IRI's domestic issues and conflicts to foreign officials and his indictment was a valuable document that showed the dynamics of factional politics and an insider's perception of Ahmadinejad. In the indictment, at least three points regarding the subject of this thesis were detailed. First, it confirmed the role of the IRGC and the *Basij* in the Presidential election and their electoral strategy. Mousavian "confirmed the existing disagreements amongst the elites (the IRGC's support for Qalibaf, as well as the *Basij*'s support for Ahmadinejad)."

Second, it explained the power structure for decision-making in foreign policy and the relationship within the negotiating team. "[Mousavian claimed that] there is a disagreement between the SNSC and the Foreign Ministry on the negotiators... A disagreement between the new head of negotiating team (Ali Larijani) and a previous one (Hassan Rouhani.)" He underlined that Ahmadinejad only trusted his inner circle and in foreign policy Ahmadinejad's main confidant was Hashemi Samarah.

Third, in the indictment the dynamics of factional politics and the conflicting relationship between Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani was confirmed. "Emphasis on the

¹⁰⁶ *Fararu* 10/9/1386 (1/December/2007), <http://fararu.com/fa/news/4800/>.

¹⁰⁷ *Iran* 12/1388 (Februrary–March 2009) (Special edition journal *Ramze Obour*); *Fararu* 24/12/1388 (15/March/2009), <http://fararu.com/fa/news/43540/>.

During this time, Rafsanjani proposed a national unity scheme.

point that the result of the AofE and the City Council elections in December 2005 (in which Rafsanjani acquired more than 1.5 million votes and was elected as the first rank candidate) weakened the government and particularly Ahmadinejad.”¹⁰⁸

As the tenth Presidential election (2009) approached, Rafsanjani escalated his criticisms of Ahmadinejad, targeting his socioeconomic policies, such as Ahmadinejad’s subsidy reform, known as the ‘targeted subsidy scheme.’ This scheme aimed to cut the subsidies on fuel and energy and instead distribute the freed resources to the people and the production sector. Subsidy reform was the plan of the previous governments. However, Ahmadinejad’s attempts to pass the scheme just a year before the election was perceived largely as a political move.

Rafsanjani accused Ahmadinejad of “motivating the lazy” (*Gedaparvari*), stating “social justice cannot be reached through fancy slogans. Social justice is not the distribution of impoverishment, but rather it is the proper distribution of facilities amongst different social groups.”¹⁰⁹ Ahmadinejad responded by connecting Rafsanjani’s criticisms of his efforts for reform in subsidies, sarcastically saying,

If all of the subsidies devoted to you, whose stomach and pockets are full, and to you, whose wealth hits the sky, it would not be *gedaparvari*. But if it was distributed amongst all the nation, it would be *gedaparvari*! You do not know the people (*mellat*). You have distanced yourself from the people. You only consider yourself, your families, and your party as the people.¹¹⁰

Ahmadinejad versus the Conservatives

A major development in the evolution of the popularisation of factional politics was the turning of the Conservatives against each other, or in other words the emergence of civil war amongst them. As mentioned above, the ninth Presidential election became

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ ISNA 26/8/1387 (16/November/2008).

¹¹⁰ Official website of the President of the IRI 29/7/1387 (20/October/2008).

an event in which internal disputes between the Conservatives surfaced. Even the Conservatives were surprised when Ahmadinejad won the election. As only a few Conservative groups supported Ahmadinejad, he was mostly dependent on his circle of friends. At the beginning, he was considered a weak President whose main element of power was his social support base.

Gradually, his confidence rose, and he increasingly confronted different streams of the Conservatives. As time passed, he was less willing to compromise on different political issues. This trend was reflected in Haddad Adel's (the Speaker of the seventh *Majlis*) interview, where he stated,

We had high hopes when Ahmadinejad won the election, but since the beginning [of his Presidency], our relationship changed... We were two different breeds. In other words, Mr. Ahmadinejad did not believe in compromise (*ahl-e tamkin nabud*). Therefore, an atmosphere was created where we had a difficult time, largely due to the fact that we [the Conservatives] insisted on keeping disputes between the *Majlis* and the government out of the public sphere. This was our intentional political strategy.

He claimed this strategy succeeded, and the Conservatives remained united in the eighth *Majlis* election in 2008. When a list of candidates showing both Ahmadinejad and other Conservative supporters was published, "People did not ask if this was the list of Ahmadinejad or Haddad Adel." However, "by the ninth *Majlis* election, we could not continue to keep this unity which was no longer a secret."¹¹¹

The first sign of internal disputes after Ahmadinejad's successful election was the *Majlis*' vote of confidence for his nominated Ministers. Most of Ahmadinejad's close allies did not obtain a vote of confidence and those ministers who gained the vote were mostly affiliated with other streams of Conservatives. The *Majlis* rejected Ahmadinejad's initial choices for the Ministries of Education, Oil and Gas,

¹¹¹ *Asr Iran* 27/3/1392 (17/June/2014), <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/341178>.

Cooperatives, and Labour and Social Welfare.

Ahmadinejad gradually waged war against most of his former rivals in the Presidential election. The first sign of this disagreement was when, in the second City Council election, Qalibaf became Tehran's mayor, despite Ahmadinejad's disagreement and his support for Aliabadi, Ahmadinejad's Deputy for Development at the time of his own mayorship. Qalibaf's selection was, in fact, a reflection of the divide within the City Council and between two streams of Ahmadinejad's supporters and his critics. However, the main issue touched on the budget for transportation projects.¹¹²

The disputes between the municipality and the government reached the point that Qalibaf eventually asked the Supreme Leader to intervene and explicitly stated that his request was "due to personal disputes between the government and the Mayor after a few years of unsuccessful attempts to solve the differences."¹¹³ Ahmadinejad's efforts to hinder Qalibaf's work were to a certain extent political. He knew of the power of the Tehran municipality in Presidential elections and also sensed the possible threat that Qalibaf could impose on his re-election. Ali Larijani was also not safe from Ahmadinejad's attacks during his tenure as the Head of the SNSC (2005–2007). At this time he was also the Chief Negotiator in charge of negotiations with regard to Iran's nuclear programme.

Eventually, their disagreements about negotiation tactics led to Larijani's resignation.¹¹⁴ During the eighth *Majlis*, in which Larijani was the Speaker of the *Majlis*, their disagreements continued, particularly over issues such as 'the targeted subsidy scheme' and the annual budget. During Ahmadinejad's last year of his first

¹¹² *Donya-e Eqtesad* 1/4/1387 (21/June/2008).

¹¹³ *Etemad* 16/12/1386 (6/March/2008).

¹¹⁴ *Shargh* 9/9/1392 (30/November/2013).

term, their row over the ‘targeted subsidy scheme’ bill reached its height and, in public, Larijani called Ahmadinejad’s objections “ridiculous.”¹¹⁵

The eighth *Majlis* (2008–2012) reflected the wider factional political landscape. In this election, the GC rejected large numbers of Reformist candidates while there was also a general electoral apathy amongst the Reformists and their supporters. There was a low voter turnout of 51 percent across the country and 30 percent in Tehran.

This led to a Conservative and the neo-Conservative majority in the *Majlis*. The Reformists only gained around 15 percent of the votes, while with a 220 MP majority, the Conservatives and neo-Conservatives established the faction of Principlists (*Osulgarayan*) in the *Majlis*. This was a coalition of different conservative forces and thus was not a coherent faction. It reflected the wider political landscape of the Conservative forces.

The first stream in this faction included 60 out of these 220 MPs, were amongst the government’s supporters who entered the election under the label of ‘nice smell of service’ (*rayeheh-ye khosh-e khedmat*). These MPs had close relationships with Ahmadinejad, while also maintaining good relations with Mesbah’s circle. The main figures in this segment included Morteza Agha Tehrani, Hamid Rasaei and Ismaeil Kowsari.

The second segment of the Conservative forces, with more than 100 MPs, was composed of old establishment Conservatives, who mostly belonged to the Followers of the Imam and the Leader Front. They included Ali Larijani, Mohammadreza Bahonar and Ala Broujerdi, amongst other members. The third stream was the ‘Progressive Principlists’ (*usūlgarayan-i tahavvol khah*), who mostly supported

¹¹⁵ *Etemad* 27/12/1387 (17/March/2009).

Qalibaf in the election. They included Haddad Adel, Elias Naderan, Ahmad Tavakkoli and Alireza Zakani as their main members.

The eighth *Majlis* (2008–2012) witnessed a change in the dynamics of the relationship between the *Majlis* and the government which was also a reflection of the division within the Conservative forces. The first signal of this change came when the Speaker of the *Majlis* was selected. The *Majlis* chose Ali Larijani, Ahmadinejad's rival in the ninth Presidential election, instead of Hadad Adel, who was seen as pro-Ahmadinejad and had a reputation of following an approach of non-confrontation with the government.

This change of dynamics also showed itself in the impeachment of Ahmadinejad's Interior Minister, Ali Kordan, only a few months after the beginning of the eighth *Majlis* and despite Ahmadinejad's zealous support for him until the end in November 2008. The 2009 election and subsequent events significantly influenced the relationship between the *Majlis* and Ahmadinejad during his second term.

The main disagreements were on economic views, budgeting, and financial management. As the tenth Presidential election approached, rumours emerged that the Conservatives would enter with a candidate other than Ahmadinejad.¹¹⁶ These disputes happened in an institutional context, to a large extent, given the conflict of institutional jurisdictions and ambiguities within the Constitution and Khomeinism. During this period, debates around the jurisdictional authority of the President and the *Majlis* once again became the source of dispute.

For instance, the disputes between Ali Larijani and Ahmadinejad over the 'annual budget of 2009–2010' evolved within this institutional context. Ahmadinejad had included the 'targeted subsidy scheme' as part of the budget bill to bypass the

¹¹⁶ *Fararu* 28/7/1387 (19/October/2008), <http://fararu.com/fa/news/16121/>.

Majlis in discussing this scheme as an individual bill. This scheme aimed to cut the subsidies on fuel and energy and instead distribute the resources to the people and the production sector.

Subsidy reform had been the plan of the previous governments. It had been the victim of factional politics given that each factional group did not want another factional group to implement it because they would become popular. Thus, Ahmadinejad's attempts to pass the scheme just a few months before the tenth Presidential election (2009) were perceived largely as a political move. The *Majlis* therefore rejected the scheme as part of the budget bill.

Ahmadinejad claimed the *Majlis* action was against the Constitution and he as the President had a Constitutional right to intervene. Larijani rejected his claims and argued that according to the Constitution, the President did not have this right. This right (determining if a bill is against the Constitution or not) was only reserved for the GC, and the President could not intervene in such matters.¹¹⁷ Eventually, the scheme passed and was implemented in December 2010. However, the way that it was implemented and its consequences continued to play a significant role in future factional politics and their popularisation and split of the Conservatives.

As mentioned earlier, Ahmadinejad enjoyed the support of Khamenei. Ahmadinejad never seriously confronted Khamenei and his authority during his first-term of Presidency. Thus, Khamenei did not perceive Ahmadinejad as a threat to his position. However, various criticisms to Ahmadinejad's sociopolitical and economic policies and his disputes with different institutions were also reflected in Khamenei's comments about Ahmadinejad. Khamenei's criticisms were mild and mostly targeted

¹¹⁷ *Etemad* 26/12/1387 (16/March/2009); Ahmadinejad's letter, and *Etemad* 27/12/1387 (17/March/2009) Larijani's response.
Also for further details see, *Etemad* 3/2/1387 (22/April/2008).

administrative issues and ways in which Ahmadinejad's disagreements with other institutions should be better managed.

With the tone of an advisor, Khamenei usually proposed his concerns in his annual meetings with the President and his cabinet. For instance, during the above mentioned institutional disputes between the *Majlis* and the President, Khamenei emphasised more cooperation between the legislative, executive and judiciary bodies: “The next point is the importance of cooperation between state institutions (*ta'amol-e qova*). After all, you (the President), the *Majlis* and the judiciary are different parts of one body (*kol*) and your cooperation is necessary. It will not be helpful when one body blames the other.”¹¹⁸ When there were criticisms about Ahmadinejad’s trips and his action as empty promises, Khamenei asked for more attention to following up with passed legislation.¹¹⁹

Khamenei also gave moral advice touching on some criticism of Ahmadinejad’s personal attitude: “Be aware not to fall into the pitfall of arrogance.”¹²⁰ On another occasion, Khamenei asked for extra attention to ‘expertise and research,’ which could be seen as a criticism of Ahmadinejad’s actions, such as the dissolution of the aforementioned counseling bodies: “Particularly with regard to fundamental issues, such as the budget organisations and councils, you should give attention to expertise.”¹²¹ He also asked not to rush to execute large national projects and to take extra time for research about their consequences. The case of the targeted subsidy scheme was an example of such projects.¹²²

Khamenei also commented on Ahmadinejad’s concept of justice and

¹¹⁸ Khamenei 6/6/1385 (28/August/2006), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3349>.

¹¹⁹ Khamenei 2/6/1387 (23/August/2008), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3661>.

¹²⁰ Khamenei 4/6/1386 (26/August/2007), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3398>.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Khamenei 2/6/1387 (23/August/2008), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3661>.

underlined that the concept of justice was intertwined with “two other concepts of rationality and spirituality,” stating: “Without rationality (*aqlaniyyat*), justice is not justice, because if we do not use rationality to find an area of implementation, then justice may be lost. Rationality is not conservatism... while justice without spirituality would lead to fake, deviating and hypocritical lies and manipulations.”¹²³

Khamenei asked the President to respect the jurisdiction of ministers, which reflected his concerns about Ahmadinejad’s increasing interference with ministerial affairs: “The supervising role of the President should not be mistaken with his interference in the minister’s jurisdiction.”¹²⁴ The 2009 election and its aftermath gradually changed Khamenei’s relationship with Ahmadinejad significantly.

Conclusion

The neo-Conservatives emerged to reinvent Khomeinism along the lines of social justice and socioeconomic concerns, following a general social disappointment with the ‘political development’ paradigm of the Reformists and/or the Reformist’s ability to implement sustainable sociopolitical change, in particular. The eight-year experience of the Reformists taught the Conservatives the importance of popular support and its role in republican institutions. Some Conservatives restructured their organisations, and by capitalising on populist aspects of Khomeinism and taking advantage of mobilising facilities of security institutions of the IRI, they successfully increased their popular support.

However, the first round of the ninth Presidential election showed that both the Reformist and the Conservative camp suffered from internal divisions. Different segments of each faction were claiming to be the main representative of that faction

¹²³ Khamenei 8/6/1384 (30/August/2005), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3304>.

¹²⁴ Khamenei 2/6/1387 (23/August/2008).

and of its popular support. In the second round, electoral dynamics changed and different conceptions of the role of the people in IRI politics became the centre of electoral debates. The Reformist' efforts to mobilise their popular support base behind Rafsanjani, by portraying Ahmadinejad's election as the end of republicanism and the emergence of the Islamic government, were unsuccessful.

Ahmadinejad directly connected with different segments of the society and gained their political loyalty by promising them their share of the economy, stopping the corruption of political elites and returning the revolution to its true path. Ahmadinejad's promises to return the revolution back to the hands of people and to deliver social justice were the main elements of his populism that resonated with popular demands and sentiments of different individuals, mainly belonging to the urban lower and lower-middle-classes. His triumph became a significant turning point in the IRI's contemporary history.

Ahmadinejad's Presidency raised him and a group of his close friends to power in an alliance with the neo-Conservatives. However, the relationship between Ahmadinejad and the neo-Conservatives is different to the relationship between both Khatami and *Mosharekat* or the Reformists, or Rafsanjani and *Kargozaran* or the Modern Right. Despite having certain enthusiastic supporters and a circle of close allies, Ahmadinejad has never been a pillar for wider political groups and/or the neo-Conservatives. Unlike the political position of Khatami and Rafsanjani after their Presidencies, after Ahmadinejad's two terms of Presidency, most Conservatives and neo-Conservatives who had initially supported Ahmadinejad during his Presidency, tried to distance themselves from him. Some even went as far as denying their role in his economic and social mismanagement.

Nonetheless, in the context of factional politics of this period, Ahmadinejad

had a unique position. Although when he became the President he was seen as one who “served the function of a charismatic vanguard, clearing the way of Reformist debris,”¹²⁵ he soon showed that he was a serious political player. Gradually, Ahmadinejad and his circle, increased their power by taking advantage of every opportunity. Their lack of organic ties with main factions provided them, to a large extent, with some political resilience and political manoeuvrability in factional disputes. He also enjoyed the inherent institutional power of the Presidency. Ahmadinejad also expanded the power of his circle by appointing them to important administrative positions.

The combination of this institutional power and political position, with certain personality traits, such as his narcissism, his opportunism and his mixed socioeconomic and religious ideological views, confronted the IRI with serious socioeconomic and geopolitical challenges. During his tenure, his aggressive rhetoric in foreign policy led to two UN resolutions on the Iranian nuclear programme that imposed economic and financial sanctions.

Meanwhile, his socioeconomic policies with his micro-management, and his continuous confrontations with various state institutions, as well as political figures, damaged the efficiency and cohesion of different IRI state institutions. It also exacerbated structural socioeconomic problems. Importantly, Ahmadinejad and his government used international sanctions as legitimate excuses to further ignore different laws, regulations and procedures. These elements led to the emergence of state-sponsored corruption and deep structural issues. Ahmadinejad was, and probably continues to be, a unique phenomenon within IRI politics.

The main factional disputes in this period were, on the one hand, between

¹²⁵ Ali Ansari, "Iran under Ahmadinejad: Populism and Its Malcontents," *International Affairs* 84, no. 4 (2008): 696.

Ahmadinejad, the Reformists and Rafsanjani, and between different spectrums of the Conservatives. The main themes of the evolution of factional disputes and the dynamics of the relationship between Ahmadinejad, Khamenei and Rafsanjani, were symbolised in the Azad University dispute.

In sum, the Azad University debates showed the gradual split between Rafsanjani and Khamenei and the role that Ahmadinejad played in it. It also showed the power balance of these political players. Ahmadinejad's Presidency, to a large extent, strengthened the political power of Khamenei and his office, given Ahmadinejad's weak factional position, his shared ideological views with Khamenei's and his large popular support, which was gained through his harsh criticisms of Rafsanjani. Khamenei's close relationship with Ahmadinejad also gave Khamenei an opportunity to implicitly implement part of his sociopolitical and foreign policy ideas.

Thus, Khamenei's authority was raised by the expansion of the network of his loyal supporters and their integration into different state institutions and semi-governmental organisations. The IRGC was involved further in state affairs and the economy. The continuous confrontations of Ahmadinejad with Rafsanjani weakened Rafsanjani, while Khamenei claimed to be impartial.

However, the 2009 Presidential election and its aftermath became a turning point in this context. It led to public confirmation of the schism between Khamenei and Rafsanjani and affirmation of Khamenei's political affiliation with Ahmadinejad. Khamenei became increasingly involved in these disputes as well as in everyday political affairs. In other words, the restricting of Rafsanjani's authority came at the price of strengthening Ahmadinejad and his circle, which eventually became yet another challenge to Khamenei and IRI politics. This will be discussed in the next chapter. In this chapter, I aimed to explore the emergence of the 'Ahmadinejad

phenomena,' its ideological standings, its roots in the politics of the IRI and its impact on the popularisation of factional politics.

Chapter Five

Popular Politics from Below (2009–2013)

This chapter investigates how the rapid evolution of factional politics, the dynamics of which changed during the first Ahmadinejad administration, helped to create the conditions for the confluence of factional and popular politics in the Presidential electoral campaign. This confluence was expressed by a series of demonstrations from June 2009 to February 2011, which were crushed by the state. Those engaged in the demonstrations called these events the Green Movement, while the state refers to them as ‘sedition’ (hereafter *Fetneh*), an illegal movement that sought to overthrow the IRI. The issues of proper role of the people not only remained at the center of political life of the country but also came to overshadow other issues.

To place the emergence of these events in the context of factional politics, this chapter begins by investigating the discursive dynamics and the main political figures of the 2009 Presidential election. It then explores the consequent institutional and legitimacy challenges that these events imposed on the regime, and, subsequently, the reactions of the regime and the extent to which they influenced the popularisation of politics and led to the emergence of new international and domestic sociopolitical consequences. Finally, the embedded institutional contradiction between the electoral institutions and the guardian ones during this period are evaluated.

2009 Presidential Election and its Aftermath

Iran entered the tenth Presidential election (2009) facing domestic and geopolitical challenges that were more intense than in the past. Thus the electoral situation was fluid. Beginning in 2006, Iran faced severe international sanctions regarding its nuclear

programme. They banned any financial, research and trade activities that might have links to the country's nuclear programme or long-range missile programs. The sanctions froze assets of certain entities and individuals related to the IRI's nuclear programme.¹ Iran became increasingly isolated internationally.

Furthermore, in November 2008, Barack Obama was elected as US President. He sought to transform US foreign policy in the Middle East, promising withdrawal of US troops from Iraq, a change of policy in Afghanistan and a new approach towards Iran's nuclear programme.² Obama's changes promised possibility of a new dynamic in Iran-US relations, as well as the possible emergence of a new power dynamic on the western and eastern borders of Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. The Conservatives believed the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 was an additional sign of deterioration in the relationship between the West and Russia, which had already begun in 2003 and thus presenting the IRI with a new opportunity for strategic partnership with Russia.

At the same time, Lebanon was coping with the 2005–2008 internal conflict, which eventually ended with the empowerment of Hezbollah, Iran's main ally. This caused the escalation of the proxy rivalry between Iran and Arab countries. On the global stage, the 2008 financial crisis meant that the world faced one of the worst economic crises of the century, leading to worldwide recession, followed by sociopolitical consequences.

Iran was facing various economic, social and political challenges. As a consequence of the financial crisis, the price of oil declined rapidly. Ahmadinejad, who had once confidently predicted that the price of oil would not fall under \$100 per

¹ See UN Resolutions S/RES/1696 (2006); S/RES/1737(2006); S/RES/1747 (2007); S/RES/1803 (2008); S/RES/1835 (2008) and S/RES/1887 (2009), <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/>.

² NY Times (23/May/2012), <http://elections.nytimes.com/2008/president/issues/iran.htmlz>,

barrel,³ faced a 70 percent decline in oil prices in just a few months after his comments. Iran's budget was hit, given its dependence on oil income. Annual GDP growth dropped from 6.4 percent in 2007 to 0.6 percent in 2008.⁴ Inflation also rose from 11.9 percent in 2006 to 25.5 percent in 2008.⁵ As a result, concerns escalated about further deterioration of living standards.

During Ahmadinejad's tenure, restrictive sociocultural policies replaced, to an extent, the moderate sociocultural policies of Khatami's era. These were attempts to propagate the Islamic Revolutionary culture and escalate the creation of *homo Islamicus*. Many NGOs were banned.⁶ While, the budget of religious and semi-militia institutions increased significantly.⁷ They were asked to play an increasingly active role in the public cultural sphere. These actions led to increased discontent of secular Iranians.

To accelerate attempts to make the *homo Islamicus*, SCCR passed the legislation named "strategies for expansion of culture of chastity," known as the 'Veiling and Chastity Scheme.⁸ Its aim was to make the *homo Islamicus*. The Morality Police and the Social Security Police were established in 2006 to ensure adherence to state conceptions of morality in society; to cleanse society from representations of 'un-Islamic' symbols in public.

Thus, women and their attire became their main target. The Morality Police

³ *Hamshahri Online* 19/3/1388, <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/83165>.

⁴ Annual GDP growth (%), World Bank.

⁵ Inflation, Consumer Prices (annual %) (FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG) International Monetary Fund, International Financial Statistics and data files.

⁶ *Shargh* 29/12/1392 (20/March/2014).

⁷ In 2007, the budget of Basij increased by 200 percent.

Radio Farda 29/4/1387 (19/July/2008), http://www.radiofarda.com/a/f3_basij_budget/457002.html. The budget of seminaries increased from 20B (IRR) in 2001 to 1500B (IRR) in 2008.

Aftab News 1/10/1388 (22/December/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdciiwa3.t1ayp2bcct.html>.

⁸ "Strategies for Expansion of Culture of Chastity," ed. SCCR (4/5/1384 26/July/2005).

even expanded its jurisdiction to private companies, firms and small shops to ensure that IRI norms, particularly about *hejab*, were practiced.⁹ The Morality Police depicted the securitisation of identity with the aim of creating *homo Islamicus*. These issues and challenges raised social and economic discontent within society, particularly amongst secular Iranians, the urban educated middle and upper-middle-classes, and those with secular social and cultural tendencies. As analysed in the previous chapter, the animosity between the Conservatives and the neo-Conservatives at the time of this election was at its peak.

The Reformists leadership recognised this rising social and political discontent and the domestic and geopolitical consequences of the country's international isolation. Thus they believed they had a unique political opportunity to return to the IRI's political arena. As a result, Ahmadinejad's campaign for re-election encountered both growing popular discontent and serious political rivals, in contrast, both to Khatami's and Rafsanjani's second-term elections. Given that incumbency provided better access to various state institutions and media, the Reformist leadership knew that to win this election, they would need to unify behind one candidate.

To many Reformists, Khatami or Mir Hossein Mousavi should be the single candidate. Mehdi Karroubi, who was planning for this election since his 2005 defeat, could not convince different spectrums of the Reformists to support his candidacy. Khatami entered the election first, on 8 February 2009, but when Mousavi announced his candidacy a few weeks later on 10 March 2009, he withdrew and endorsed Mousavi. Some argued Mousavi's reputation as being Khomeini's Prime Minister, and his so-called leftist socioeconomic views, could appeal to some of Ahmadinejad's

⁹ *Hamshahri* (30/April/2008).

constituents whereas Khatami could not. Thus he might have a better chance at victory in the election.¹⁰

The prospect of a Khatami return, worried the Conservatives who began to unify. However, the emergence of Mousavi in the election increased Conservatives' worries and prompted them to unify behind a single candidate, Ahmadinejad, despite serious disappointment with his policies. The pro-Mousavi attempts to persuade Karroubi to withdraw were unsuccessful. Karroubi argued that he and Mousavi had different constituencies, thus his attendance would help the Reform Movement to split the Ahmadinejad vote.¹¹ Four candidates participated in the election: Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karroubi, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mohsen Rezaee. Mohsen Rezaee hoped to gain the vote of the moderate Conservatives and the support of some part of the IRGC, given his links to the IRGC.

Electoral Discourses

Large segments of the IRI establishment feared that the re-election of Ahmadinejad would impose serious threats to the revolution, and to the interests and standing of factions. We can see these worries in the slogans and manifestos of three main candidates for the Presidency: Mousavi, Karroubi and Rezaee. They hoped to mobilise those parts of society discontented with Ahmadinejad's socioeconomic policies. They criticised Ahmadinejad's style of governing, as well as different aspects of his social, cultural, economic and foreign policies.

In his live televised debate with Ahmadinejad, Karroubi stated: "We have criticisms both of Ahmadinejad's style of governing and his personality."¹² Mohsen

¹⁰ *Fararu* 30/1/1388 (19/April/2009), <http://fararu.com/fa/news/22556/>.

¹¹ *Etemad* 20/03/1388 (9/April/2009).

¹² *Hamshahri Online* 17/3/1388, <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/83025>.

Rezaee critically argued: “I believe it is necessary to transform the economy fundamentally, to transform the culture and also to initiate certain reforms in foreign and domestic policy.”¹³

In his first press conference, Mousavi listed four areas of Ahmadinejad’s actions in which he found serious threats to the IRI’s principles: 1) the tendency to violate the law (*Qanun Gorizi*); 2) “The disbanding of decision-making institutions, the main duty of which was assuring the effectiveness and coordination of decisions made by the state.” He was referring to Ahmadinejad’s actions in dismantling the supervisory and consultancy organisations; 3) the lack of transparency and Ahmadinejad’s blatant and self-defeating manipulation of economic statistics. For instance, Ahmadinejad changed the legal definition of employment from two days per week to two hours per week; and 4) the great inconsistency and zigzagging in foreign policy and/or economic policies.

He saved special criticism for Ahmadinejad’s populist rhetoric and actions, which were part of his claimed policy of solving the issue of social justice: “Social and human dignity is the greatest most valuable asset of the revolution and the state, therefore distribution of handouts (*Sadaqeh*) and bags of potatoes only humiliate our people (*mellat*). Such an approach could not maintain our people’s national confidence.”¹⁴

On another occasion, Mousavi accused Ahmadinejad of destabilising behavior, making contradictory decisions and causing unnecessary serious international and domestic problems. Mousavi attacked Ahmadinejad’s foreign policy, claiming it damaged Iran’s international prestige, created unnecessary embarrassment and

¹³ *Jam-e Jam Online* 15/3/1388 (5/June/2009),

<http://www1.jamejamonline.ir/news/text2.aspx?newsnum=100908632959>.

¹⁴ *Jomhourieslami* 18/1/1388 (7/April/2009).

consequently, seriously damaged domestic economic development. For example, in a live televised debate, he criticised Ahmadinejad's controversial comments about the Holocaust. He underlined why, when the official position of the regime had been to support the election in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, which was compatible with the international legal norms, one should break this procedure.

Mousavi continued: "The problem emerges when we act based on our personal judgement and our maverick and our extremism... [That's why in foreign policy] instead of isolating Israel, we (Ahmadinejad's actions) facilitated its victimisation in the international scene."¹⁵ Karroubi also criticised Ahmadinejad's foreign policy approach in regard to Arab neighbours, the US, Venezuela and Israel.¹⁶

These candidates criticised Ahmadinejad's continuous instances of breaking the law and regulations, including his repeated ignoring of *Majlis* legislation. In this vein, Mousavi linked the disregard for law with authoritarianism, accusing Ahmadinejad of authoritarian aspiration.¹⁷ By recalling that the dictatorship of the Reza Shah Pahlavi started by ignoring the laws passed by the *Majlis*, Mousavi argued: "I am not saying that you (Ahmadinejad) are a dictator, but the way in which you prioritise your ideas and opinions over the collective decisions of the Expediency Council or the *Majlis* will only end in a dictatorship."

In strong terms, in a televised debate, Mousavi condemned the overall characteristics of Ahmadinejad's governing style. He characterised it as dangerously "adventurous" and "destabilising," full of "theatrics and phoniness," "superficial," "based on old superstitions"(which have no place in governing style) and on secrecy and extremism. "shallow" and based on secrecy and extremism. His "shallow" modus

¹⁵ *Aftab News* 14/3/1388 (4/June/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcjxveh.uqeymzsffu.html>.

¹⁶ *Hamshahri Online* 17/3/1388

¹⁷ *Aftab News* 14/3/1388 (4/June/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcjxveh.uqeymzsffu.html>.

operatori was rested on two pillars: a disregard for the law and on the cult of personality.¹⁸

Importantly, Mousavi and Karroubi made these criticisms of Ahmadinejad's policies and behaviours as a critique within Khomeinism. Ahmadinejad's responses were also largely in the context of Khomeinism and the Khomeini's doctrine. Thus, in this election, the various competing interpretations of Khomeinism were, once again, an underlying theme of the election debates. In addition to the general criticisms of Ahmadinejad's foreign and economic policies and his managerial style, 'the return to the true values of Khomeini and the revolution' dominated the candidate's electoral rhetoric and was a context in which they criticised each other. This discursive theme was not new. However, new interpretations radically engendered discursive dynamics in this election, given the personalities of the candidates and the myriad domestic and international issues that the regime faced at the time. Issues that were more extreme than they had been in the past and, unlike in the past, they were being played out in the context of greatly heightened factional politics.

At the centre of Mousavi's interpretation of Khomeinism, in this election, was Khomeini's argument of the "Islamic Republic without the pretext and suffix."¹⁹ Mousavi argued: "I will not deviate, even a step, from what Imam [Khomeini] defined as the Islamic Republic. Islamic Republic means Islam and republicanism. Weakening any of these two will be harmful to us."²⁰ He considered that "the return to the revolution's values and the resistance against the enemies [of the IRI] are part of our identity, which will enable us to revive our [ancient Iranian] civilisational position."²¹ He argued that Ahmadinejad's policies and personal attitude had threatened the IRI's

¹⁸ *Aftab News* 14/3/1388 (4/June/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcjxveh.uqeymzsffu.html>.

¹⁹ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol.6, 274.

²⁰ *Jomhourieslami* 15/2/1388 (5/May/2009).

²¹ *Jomhourieslami* 5/3/1388 (26/May/2009).

foundation and framework. In his first press conference to announce his nomination in March 2009, Mousavi explicitly pointed out this issue:

Over the last five presidencies (two terms for Rafsanjani, two terms for Khatami, and one term for Ahmadinejad), I never felt that the foundations and the very structure of the regime and the revolution had been ignored or harassed. Despite witnessing some deviations... the directions of Rafsanjani and Khatami were in the general direction of the principles of the revolution... As time passed (during the Ahmadinejad Presidency), I found that the pillars [of the Revolution] were shaking that we were witnessing increasing accounts of breaking the framework, rules and principles of [the IRI]. Sensing the existence of such a serious threat to the future of the regime, I was convinced that I needed to enter the election.²²

Karroubi's interpretation of Khomeinism in this election shared Mousavi's emphasis on Islam and the Republicanism of the IRI, adding one extra element of nationalism or *Iraniyat*. It was Karroubi's attempt to emphasise a civil Iranian identity. In his first televised programme, Karroubi underlined the "three issues which Imam underlined [as the essence of the IRI], namely republicanism, Islamism and 'Iranianness' (*Iraniyat*, the Iranian national identity), are now threatened,"²³

He explored these three main premises of Khomeini's doctrine on different occasions during this election's debates. Similar to Mousavi, Karroubi underlined republicanism as being the main aspect of Khomeinism: "Khomeini was against any actions that would harm the republicanism of the IRI."²⁴ Accusing Ahmadinejad of ignoring the republicanism of the IRI. He criticised Ahmadinejad for not taking action when the GC rejected more than two thousand candidates for the eighth *Majlis* election: "when the IRI's republicanism faced restrictions [by the actions of GC], why didn't you (Ahmadinejad) defend these many people who were disqualified?"²⁵

²² *Jomhourieslami* 18/1/1388 (7/April/2009); *Jomhourieslami* 5/3/1388 (26/May/2009).

²³ *Jomhourieslami* 5/3/1388 (26/May/2009).

²⁴ *Jomhourieslami* 17/3/1388 (7/June/2009).

²⁵ *Hamshahri Online* 17/3/1388, <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/83025>.

Karroubi elaborated his interpretation of Khomeini's Islam, which shared the main elements of Mousavi's interpretation of Islam. They emphasised the importance of 'dynamic jurisprudence' (*feqh-e puya*), in Khomeinism.

This interpretation would allow them to integrate certain modern sociolegal elements, such as gender equality, which were part of their electoral slogans, into the IRI. Karroubi argued: "We are following the Islam of Imam [Khomeini] according to which he issued decrees which took into account circumstances at the time. And if you pay good attention to Khomeini's decrees and speeches, you will find that his later decrees were different [from his earlier ones]."²⁶ Karroubi was referring to those later decrees in which Khomeini prioritised the state's interests over Islamic ordinance.

However, he criticised Ahmadinejad's new Islamic discourse propagated by part of Ahmadinejad's circle under the name of '*Mahdaviat*', calling it against Khomeinism. '*Mahdaviat*' was a millenarian ideology proclaiming the possibility of a direct link to the hidden *Imam*, the twelfth Imam of Shi'a, who was considered to be alive and will be resurrected as Jesus was. It was a competing religious ideology to the *velayat-e faqih*, according to which, due to the lack of access to the hidden Imam during his occultation, the *vali-ye faqih* would be his representative. In other words, the *Mahdaviat* discourse weakened clerical authority by considering clergy's role an anachronism.²⁷

Karroubi argued that "the Khomeini's Islam was against superstitions and those who claim to pray behind Hidden Imam are dogmatists."²⁸ This was a direct attack on Ahmadinejad. In his televised debate with Ahmadinejad, Karroubi pointed out the theoretical and historical differences in the conceptions of political Islam held by

²⁶ *Jomhourieslami* 5/3/1388 (26/May/2009).

²⁷ Forozan, Hesam, *The Military in Post-revolutionary Iran: The Evolution and Roles of the Revolutionary Guards* (Routledge, 2015): 130-46

²⁸ *Jomhourieslami* 5/3/1388 (26/May/2009).

Ahmadinejad and Khomeini: “I frankly say that the faction is giving you (Ahmadinejad) directions now, that had problems with Khomeini’s [political views] and disagreed with him [before the revolution].”²⁹

Karroubi’s introduction of *Iraniyat* as part of his interpretation of Khomeinism was the reflection of a wider confluence of national identity and the popularisation of factional politics. Khomeini himself was against nationalism; his main political doctrine of *velayat-e faqih* was a transnational ideology based on an *’ummah* inclusive of all Muslims and downtrodden people. Khomeini explicitly proclaimed this position.³⁰

To counter possible criticism that his use of *Iraniyat* was in opposition to Khomeinism Karroubi argued: “Our *Iraniyat* is beyond nationalism and is rooted in ancient Iran and Islam.”³¹ Given the attempts at the institutionalisation of the modern conception of the civil nation and the nation-building process, which started in 1906, the Iranian civil national identity has been a strong source of identity overriding, and to an extent, other components of identity amongst Iranians.

However, over the last century, nationalism and Islamism took opposing paths, despite the fact that both remained the main components of “Iranian national identity in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran.”³² The inherent dichotomy between the civil *Iraniyat*, and the Islamic element of identity rooted in their opposite grounds of ideological legitimacy, integrated additional potential sources of tensions in the popularisation of factional politics.³³

²⁹ *Hamshahri Online* 17/3/1388 (7/June/2009), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/83025>.

³⁰ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol. 14, 307–8.

³¹ *Jomhourieslami* 5/3/1388 (26/May/2009).

³² Alam Saleh, “Iran’s National Identity Problematic,” *Sfera Politicii* 20, no. 4 (2012): 50.

³³ Alam Saleh, “Iran’s National Identity Problem,” *Ethnic Identity and the State in Iran* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 45–58; Ali Mozaffari, *Forming National Identity in Iran: The Idea of Homeland Derived from Ancient Persian and Islamic* (IB Tauris, 2014).

Since Khomeini's death, various conceptions of Iranianness (*Iraniyat*) and nationalism increasingly grew in the state discourses as well as electoral debates. Along with the popularisation of politics, different elements of nationalism integrated into the factional discourse. With the popularisation of politics, factions developed discourse and words by which they could mobilise people. Thus, different factions, or their electoral candidates, used different conceptions of *Iraniyat* in their discourses.

For instance, Ahmadinejad used *Iraniyat* to increase his popularity and to justify his aggressive foreign policy in the face of escalating sanctions. In this vein, *Mahdaviat*, as a millenarian religious worldview merged with nationalistic themes from Iran's pre-Islamic era, was introduced by Mashaei. He promoted it under the name of the 'Iranian school' (*Maktab-e Irani*). Khatami made Iranian nationality one premise of his political reform to justify the civil identity and his conception of the role of people in politics.³⁴ Karroubi's emphasis on *Iraniyat* was a continuation of Khatami's perception and an effort to mobilise supporters for electoral purposes. They were trying to create an emphasis on civil identity, which reflected the popularisation of politics.

Ahmadinejad's Defensive Offensive

In response to these criticisms, Ahmadinejad lumped together all former administrations and portrayed them as a regime that had taken the country off the path of the revolution. He defended his foreign, economic and sociocultural policies by comparing these policies' results with various sociocultural and economic situations of different periods of the IRI to show their success. In responding to charges,

³⁴ Khatami also argued, "Nation is a new phenomena... replacing older components of collective identity such as tribes or even race... The goal of reform is reconstruction and expression of this collective national identity." *Donya-e Eqtesad* 19/8/1387 (8/November/2008), <http://donya-e-eqtesad.com/news/481032>.

Ahmadinejad, like any true populist, picked only half-truths and quarter-truths to respond to accusations.

For example, responding to criticisms about the restriction of press or intellectual freedom during his administration, he compared the number of press closures in his administration with Khatami's. He emphasized that during his tenure, not even one journal was banned and during Khatami's tenure, many journals were closed. While this was true, it was only a half-truth. First of all, Khatami was not responsible for closing the periodicals. Second, Ahmadinejad's administration took subsidies away from potentially critical newspapers while banning state companies to advertise in them. In response to his restricted cultural policies, he attacked Mousavi's cultural policies in the first period of the IRI, claiming the scale of openness of his cultural policies was not comparable to Mousavi's in that era.³⁵

Ahmadinejad placed Rafsanjani at the centre of a faction acting as a mafia within the IRI, which had taken the revolution away from the people and the goals of Khomeini. He and his mafia now were intent on revenge. From that point, he placed Mousavi, Karroubi and others as members of the same mafia. Everything before him represented the old establishment against which he was fighting as the protector of the people.

In a debate, Ahmadinejad argued: "I am not facing one candidate today, I am facing three consecutive administrations... And the younger people should know that I am facing a system which has Rafsanjani as its pillar which, in cooperation with Khatami and Mousavi, has been attacking me [over the last four years]."³⁶

He claimed that his attempt to bring the revolution back to the people was the

³⁵ *Aftab News* 14/3/1388 (4/June/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcjxveh.uqeymzsffu.html>.

³⁶ Ibid.; Mohammad Hossein Rouzi Talab, *Takyigah (Barrisi-Yi Amalkard-I Rafsanjani Dar Intikhahat-I Riyasat Jumhouri)* [Support, Rafsanjani's Actions in the 9th and 10th Presidential Election] (Markaz-i Asnad-i inqilab-i Islami, 2011).

reason behind these attacks:

Over these three periods (the Mousavi, Rafsanjani and Khatami eras), a bureaucratic structure and a circle of managers were formed that deviated from the revolution path and the revolutionary values... Gradually, this group, '*Jaryan*,' emerged who considered itself the owner of *mellat*, the people and the revolution and had free access to the treasury (*beitolmal*) and controlled state affairs.³⁷

To respond to his rival's criticisms, Ahmadinejad referred to the revolutionary phase of Khomeini, which meant Khomeini's views during the revolution and a few years afterwards. For instance, he emphasised the revolutionary elements of Khomeini's foreign policy during this phase. He included Khomeini's thesis of the export of the revolution and/or the claims that Khomeinism could be an alternative to capitalism and/or Marxism.

Thus, Ahmadinejad claimed his aggressive foreign policy and the model for 'global management' were based on true Khomeinism. In this vein, when Mousavi criticised Ahmadinejad's foreign policy, having resulted in more international isolation, and damaged the Iranian dignity, Ahmadinejad defended his foreign policy. He forcefully rejected Mousavi's criticisms of the international isolation during his administration: "If you (Mousavi) think that we need to make a few great powers happy, this is against the Imam's wish, our reason and our independence."

He justified his socioeconomic policies by emphasising Khomeini's rhetoric of supporting the lower-class and 'downtrodden' people. He then charged Mousavi as well as the rest of the old establishment as being active members of 'the mafia dedicated to power and wealth' (*mafiya-ye zar va zur*), which, having forgotten the important social aspect of Khomeinism, tended only to their own economic and political interests. In this vein, Ahmadinejad's main supporters attacked Mousavi.

³⁷ *Aftab News* 14/3/1388 (4 June 2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcjxveh.uqeymzsffu.html>.

After the televised debate between Ahmadinejad and Mousavi, Ahmadinejad's surrogates continued the attack on Mousavi and the old establishment.³⁸

In sum, looking at some criticisms made by Mousavi and Karroubi, one can say that they supported the idea of strong state institutions that can create Islamic development, and conditions for a better socioeconomic situation. They were worried that with Ahmadinejad's destruction of these institutions, through the chaos and corruption that he was injecting into these institutions, the goals of the revolution, which should be achieved by these strong institutions, would fail.

They accused Ahmadinejad of damaging the essence of Khomeinism, which they saw in the institutionalisation of both republican and Islamic institutions. In response, Ahmadinejad referred to revolutionary Khomeinism. He once again presented himself as the anti-establishment candidate. This view found support in different segments within society who felt that a reason behind the unfulfilled socioeconomic promises of the revolution had been the corruption of the elites.

The height of the confrontation between these two different approaches and the polarisation of factional politics, came in a series of live televised one-on-one debates between the candidates for the first time since the revolution. The debates themselves were a significant step towards the popularisation of politics since candidates now debated with each other to attract popular support. The people's judgment was considered final.

The three one-on-one debates between Ahmadinejad and the other three Presidential candidates were at the center of the electoral campaign. In addition to the candidate's general criticisms of Ahmadinejad's programmes, personalities, and the disputes over who had the true interpretation of Khomeinism – as mentioned above —

³⁸ *Iran* 17/3/1388 (7/June/2009).

these debates had several moments impacted popular opinion and the mobilisation of people.

In the Mousavi-Ahmadinejad debates, in an unprecedented action, Ahmadinejad accused some political figures and their families of corruption and named them in this live debate, with more than half of the population watching. He accused Nateq Nouri, and his children, Rafsanjani's children and Karbaschi, of financial corruption in order to justify his argument: "I denounce rent and clientelism. I am against some people getting rich at the expense of the rest of the people. I am against these. I am not against the law."³⁹

He accused Rafsanjani of "a secret and illegal relation with an Arab neighbour country." He portrayed all former administrations as part of this mafia and members of a new aristocracy, '*Ashraf*,' which had taken the country away from the path of the revolution. Mousavi reacted and called these accusations one example of Ahmadinejad's disregard for law: "It is below the dignity of the head of the government to mention names of people without giving them the chance to defend themselves."⁴⁰ While many Reformists and some Conservatives criticised Ahmadinejad's accusations,⁴¹ his supporters considered his actions part of his bold, daring behaviour to reveal the elite's corruption.

Ahmadinejad attacked his opponents on a personal level. Towards the end of his debate with Mousavi, and after his attacks against the IRI political elites, Ahmadinejad, addressed Mousavi whilst showing him a file. With a threatening tone,

³⁹ *Aftab News* 14/3/1388 (4/June/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcjxveh.uqeymzsffu.html>.

⁴⁰ Translation is taken from *The Guardian*, 4/June/2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/03/iran-president-election-tv-debate>.

⁴¹ *Jomhourieslami* 16/3/1388 (6/June/2009). Hadi Khamenei, Khamenei's brother, was close to the Reformists. After accusing the Ahmadinejad administration of a lack of honesty and disobedience of the law. Khamenei argued, "Mousavi is not someone who would be indifferent to the Imam, the revolution and the regime." *Jomhourieslami* 17/3/1388 (7/June/2009).

he said: “Should I say it Mr Mousavi? Should I say it? (*begam? begam?*)” The file that Ahmadinejad was pointing at was a file on Mousavi’s wife with her picture on it. Despite such strong theatrics, the issue was only Ahmadinejad’s allegations about the educational career of Mousavi’s wife, Zahra Rahnavard. He accused her of obtaining her PhD illegally, since she did not attend the PhD entrance exam, and argued that her two Masters degrees were obtained in violation of regulations.

Mousavi defended his wife, and called this blackmailing behaviour of Ahmadinejad a sign of his incompetence for the Presidency. He argued that this behaviour was against the Khomeini’s path. He summed up: “I entered the election to change this behaviour.”⁴² Anti-Ahmadinejad supporters saw these personal attacks on Mousavi’s wife as vulgar, unfair and a sign of his populist deviousness. He had shown his true characteristics. It was also seen as hypocritical given that, only a few months earlier, when the Conservative-dominated eighth *Majlis* impeached Ahmadinejad’s Interior Minister, Ali Kordan, over his fake degrees, he called the degrees “just unnecessary pieces of paper that are not needed for serving the people.”⁴³ Even some of Ahmadinejad’s supporters found these attacks on Mousavi’s wife to be breaking certain ethical red lines for the sake of power, which stood in contrast to Ahmadinejad’s slogans.

Karroubi in his debate with Ahmadinejad, ended up falling into the populist framework that Ahmadinejad had set for him. Their debates ended up not being so much about policies, but about Ahmadinejad’s attempt to link Karroubi to the establishment mafia. Ahmadinejad tried to humiliate Karroubi over his economic knowledge and his information about state affairs, while evading Karroubi’s questions about his personal behaviour, his controversial comments, the financial allegations

⁴² *Aftab News* 14/3/1388 (4/June/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcjxveh.uqeymzsffu.html>.

⁴³ *Tabnak* 20/5/1387 (10/August/2008), <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=15167>.

concerning his time as Tehran's Mayor and his domestic and foreign policies. In response to Karroubi's criticisms, Ahmadinejad repeatedly accused Karroubi of financial corruption.

Karroubi eventually lost his temper and played defensively to Ahmadinejad's anti-establishment rhetoric.⁴⁴ However, part of this debate reflected the modus operandi of Ahmadinejad and his campaign of misinformation, which played a role in popular mobilisation that happened after the election. For instance, in response to Ahmadinejad's attempts to defend his economic policy by accusing Karroubi of not having economic knowledge of inflation, Karroubi said, "Your central bank has announced the inflation rate as 25 percent, but overnight, you decrease it to 14 percent using bizarre calculations. Even my mum and grandma understand inflation. Inflation, next to its scientific characteristic, is part of the everyday life of the people. It is not imaginary and a delusion."

On another occasion, Karroubi criticised Ahmadinejad's claim of producing a model for global management which had become famous:

"You (Ahmadinejad) told us more than 100 countries requested to have our model of management so far. First of all, what is this model of management? Tell us what is this model of management that you produced and 100 countries fell in love with? Just give us the name of 20 of these countries... No just [give us the name of] five... No just give us the name of two countries?"

However, it was Rezaee who challenged Ahmadinejad's economic aggrandisement, given his education in economics.⁴⁵

A few moments in these debates were important in retrospect and in the light of the Green Movement emergence. One example was a dialogue between Mousavi and Karroubi in their televised debate. There were worries that if Mousavi became

⁴⁴ *Hamshahri Online* 18/3/1388 (8/June/2009), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/83061>.

⁴⁵ *Hamshahri Online* 19/3/1388 (9/June/2009), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/83165>.

President, he would bend under the factional political pressure, given his 20 years of absence from the main political scene and thus abandon his political manifesto.

Karroubi raised this concern in their televised debate. When Karroubi asked: “Tell us frankly, how you will overcome the [factional and political] obstacles?” He replied: “I entered the election knowing all the obstacles and I will stay till the end *inshallah*.⁴⁶” Later on, the Green Movement referred to this part of the debate and admired Mousavi’s actions as fulfilling his promise to fight for the people’s rights to the end. During the electoral campaign, the supporters of Mousavi and Karroubi perceived that the National TV programmes supported Ahmadinejad’s candidacy. This perception reinforced feelings that there was a plot to rig the election, which emerged after the results.

These televised debates gave momentum to the popular mobilisation of candidates’ supporters. On the nights of these debates people poured into the streets of Tehran and big cities. In reaction to what they perceived as outrageous comments by Ahmadinejad, Mousavi’s and Karroubi’s supporters rallied in the streets. Yet, not all of the mobilised crowds had this kind of political motivation.

Many people were taking advantage of the less restrictive social space during this period to enjoy the rare chance of experiencing the feeling of participating in a carnival-like collective environment. This was largely different from the official ceremonies and rallies sponsored by the regime. However, this atmosphere increased the popularisation of politics. Even if some people were there for fun, it mobilised them and they then became part of that entire mobilised image and thus popular politics.

In reaction to the mobilisation of Mousavi’s and Karroubi’s supporters in the

⁴⁶ *Hamshahri Online* 18/3/1388 (8/June/2009), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/83061>.

street, Ahmadinejad and his political allies realised that they needed to mobilise their supporters in the streets, which added to the popularisation of politics. These unofficial, unorganised mobilisations were also coupled with some organised electoral mobilisations a few days before the election. On 8 June 2009, tens of thousands of Ahmadinejad's supporters gathered in Tehran's biggest mosque complex, *Mosalla*. On the same day, Mousavi's supporters launched a human chain of his supporters in Tehran and other big cities. On 9 June 2009, Mousavi's supporters held an electoral meeting in one of Tehran's big stadiums, mobilising tens of thousands of their supporters.

This election witnessed two additional, yet important developments regarding the popularisation of factional politics. First, new grassroots networks emerged and played an important role in the election, such as the 'Third Wave Campaign' (*Puyesh-e Mowj-e Sevvom*). Before Khatami's nomination, this campaign emerged with the main goal of persuading Khatami to enter the election.

After Khatami's withdrawal, however, this campaign supported Mousavi and played a significant role in mobilising his supporters, who numbered almost half a million members. This campaign consisted of and targeted young university students and the 60s generation with secular cultural tendencies, who had ties with the Student Movement of the Khatami era. This campaign utilised new campaigning tactics: it organised rallies and electoral meetings in major cities with the participation of public celebrities, and used new technologies, such as social media and the internet.

The 'Third Wave' established an internet TV called the 'Fourth Wave.' They institutionalised the colour green as Mousavi's campaign colour.⁴⁷ Other candidate campaigns followed some of these tactics. For instance, other candidates also assigned

⁴⁷ Kevan Harris, "The Brokered Exuberance of the Middle-class: An Ethnographic Analysis of Iran's 2009 Green Movement," *Mobilization: An International Quarterly* 17, no. 4 (2012): 435-455.

a colour to their campaign: Karroubi chose white, while Ahmadinejad, in the final days of the election, assigned the three colours of the Iranian flag. The youth branch of Karroubi's *Etemade Melli* was also active and shared almost the same strata of the young generation with the Third Wave campaign. It also moved beyond electoral tactics.

In the previous election, the Conservatives and the neo-Conservatives used their organic links to the *Basij* and the employers of the institutions that were under their control on election day. In this election, they mobilised these forces into the street to show their support for Ahmadinejad. It was an important aspect of the popularisation of politics by almost all different groups.

Second, the discourse of 'rights' increased in the candidate's slogans. For the first time since the revolution, the discourse of human rights was supported and promoted by some Presidential candidates in their campaigns, namely Mousavi and Karroubi.⁴⁸ The majority of Karroubi's principles — four out of six — were about rights, including the rights of minorities, the rights of women and the rights of citizens. His sixth statute was a 'manifesto of human rights,' which was, to a certain extent, the sum of the previous statutes.⁴⁹ He issued this manifesto after Mousavi published his manifesto of human rights a few weeks earlier, expressing his views regarding human rights and his promise of implementing them if he became a President.

Both candidates promised to establish new state institutions to implement and institutionalise these concepts. In part of Mousavi's manifesto, he promised,

To recognise that it is the people's support and their trust which gave me legitimacy. And to include all people in the process of decision-making, especially the young, women, NGOs, unions, syndicates, associations, councils and civil society institutions, to

⁴⁸ Negin Nabavi, "From 'Reform' to 'Rights': Mapping a Changing Discourse in Iran, 1997–2009," in *Iran* (Springer, 2012).

⁴⁹ *Asr Iran* 15/3/1388 (5/June/2009), <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/74322/>.

respect the rights of minorities and opposition groups. And to prepare the requirements for public rational-critical dialogue about national interests.⁵⁰

The personalities of these candidates influenced the degree and intensity of their political social support. Seyyed Mir Hossein Mousavi Khamene, (b, 1942) raised in a wealthy family. His father was a tea merchant. He graduated with a Masters degree in Architecture from Iran Melli University, during which he met his wife Zohreh Kazemi, known as Zahra Rahnavard, in 1969. She was “an Islamic feminist with leftist tendencies.”⁵¹

She published ten books before the revolution, mostly about Islam and its views on women, some of which were published outside of Iran and in the US. In 2000 she was appointed as Khatami’s senior adviser on women’s affairs. She also became the first female University President of *Alzahra*, an all-female university. They were both under the influence of Ali Shariati.⁵² Mousavi also had a close relationship with LMI and Beheshti, one of the main architects of the IRI. Mousavi became Prime Minister, given the strong support of Khomeini. Khamenei and Mousavi have a familial link: their fathers were second cousins. However, they did not enjoy a good relationship, politically or personally.

As mentioned in the first two chapters, Khamenei and Mousavi belonged to two different factions of the IRI. Their disagreements escalated over time and surfaced during Khamenei’s second term as President, to become a matter of public debate. After Khomeini’s death (1989), with the gradual elimination of the Left from the political scene, Mousavi also left politics and focused on his artistic and academic activities. His disputes with Khamenei added to his popularity during this period

⁵⁰ *Aftab News* 27/2/1388 (17/May/2009), <http://aftabnews.ir/vdciu3av.t1av52bcct.html>.

⁵¹ Jahanbegloo, *Iran Between*, 178.

⁵² *Mehr News* 13/2/1392 (3/May/2013), <http://www.mehrnews.com/news/2046224/>.

amongst anti-Ahmadinejad forces.

While most of the IRI political elites were clerics, engineers or doctors, Mousavi and Rahnavard were artists. Even their attire was different. Mousavi wore a tie in the first few years after the revolution, while most of the Islamic revolutionaries considered ties to be symbols of pro-West tendencies. Rahnavard wore colourful scarfs when the official attire of the IRI women's cadres was a black veil, called a *Chador*. In this election, they campaigned together shoulder to shoulder. It was the first time that a candidate's wife had a public political face. In sum, Mousavi and Rahnavard belonged to different segments of the first-generation revolutionaries, compared to Karroubi.

Mehdi Karroubi (b.1937) was raised in a religious family. His father was a cleric. He attended seminaries in both Qom and Najaf. He was a direct student of Khomeini and Hossein Ali Montazeri. He also held a university degree in theology from Tehran University. He was an active revolutionary who was in charge of distributing financial support to the families of revolutionaries who were in prison or in exile. He was imprisoned several times from 1963–1979.

These arrests led to his connections with different revolutionaries with a wider range of political affiliations, including MEK and *Tudeh*. After the revolution, Karroubi was elected MP in the first, second, third and sixth *Majlis*, and he was the Speaker of the *Majlis* in the third and sixth *Majlis*. He was a founding member and served as the head of the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation. He was also the founder of the Martyr Foundation.

After Khomeini's death, he was part of the Leftists who were eliminated from the main scene of IRI politics. With the return of the Leftists under the name of Reformists, he played a significant role in Khatami's election: he helped to persuade

Khatami to enter the Presidential election. He lobbied for his candidacy with Khamenei. He also confronted his critics in the Conservative camp, including pressure groups.⁵³ His speakership of the sixth *Majlis* was during Khatami's era. In sum, he considered himself to be a true revolutionary who sacrificed a lot for the IRI and who had been part of the IRI political elite since its establishment, and on the other hand, one that the Reformists are owed to their return to power.

Besides the debates about the political, social and/or even ideological differences amongst different candidates, the issue of ethics, morality and fairness — the importance of moral elements in politics and power struggles — became an important element in this election. The main components of Ahmadinejad's rhetoric revolved around the immorality of part of the IRI elites — the so-called mafia — in taking the Revolution away from its true path and for their personal political and economic interests. This moralisation of politics was an element that Mousavi, in particular, promoted more frequently than others.

This was seen in his statement published a day after his televised debate with Ahmadinejad:

I did not break my 20 year silence to be President by any means. I felt that the country is facing the danger of [the expansion of] immorality, moral and material impoverishment and irrational management. I entered the election to save human dignity and to ensure that moral values would be implemented in governing. And [I also entered the election] to stop the increase of superstitions.⁵⁴

This moralisation of politics had a very strong connection with the historical and cultural context of Iranian identity. It was reflected in religious and national ceremonies, rituals and symbols. One of these religious ceremonies is the

⁵³ *Shahrvand-e Emruz*, Azar/1386 (December/2006).

⁵⁴ *Jomhourieslami* 16/3/1388 (6/June/2009).

commemoration of the tragic martyrdom of Imam Hossein in the battle of Karbala (680), a ten-day national mourning ceremony.

In this ceremony, Imam Hossein is portrayed as the symbol of rebellion. He sacrificed his life along with the life of his other 72 followers and family members for freedom and in a fight against injustice, tyranny and oppression. Therefore, on the one hand, the strong presence of rhetorical debates about the values, revolution, morality in politics, fairness and rights, whatever way they were defined, raised the emotional component of the society in this election. The perception of electoral fraud that emerged following the election results stimulated this sense of injustice in parts of society and resonated with this component of the popular psyche.

Much symbolism during this mobilisation emerged comparing the Green Movement with the Imam Hossein Movement. Given that Mousavi shared the same name, he was also a descendant of the Prophet Mohammad, a 'seyyed,' and had the perceived conception of being a victim of injustice. This was also a factor in understanding the wide range of Mousavi supporters in the Green Movement.

Before the election, there were concerns about possible electoral fraud in this election.⁵⁵ Within the Mousavi and Karroubi camp, and in popular opinion was the belief that if the voter participation rate reached levels above 65 percent the chances of reactionary forces forging the results would collapse.

Moreover, The Mousavi and Karroubi camps were convinced that such a large voter participation rate would ensure a victory for anti-Ahmadinejad forces. They held little doubts that the majority of voters, if they came out and cast their vote, were

⁵⁵ In order to make sure the election was conducted fairly, Mousavi and Karroubi recommended the establishment of 'the Committee for Protecting the Ballot' ('Komiteh-ye Sianat az Āra'). This committee published a report a day after the election, explaining their claims as to why they think the election was rigged. *Gouya News* (9/July/2009), <http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2009/07/090245.php>.

against the current President. This point was reflected in banners in Tehran, which had a picture of Rafsanjani and the quotation: “If the majority does not vote, the minority will rule.”

On 12 June 2009, the election was held with an 85 percent participation rate, a large turnout, in comparison to those of the previous second-term Presidential elections, which were 67 percent for Khatami (2001) and 51 percent for Rafsanjani (1993). On election day, the candidates’ communication’s links with their representatives at the ballot boxes were cut following the shutdown of all mobile networks.⁵⁶ In the evening, the main building of Mousavi’s campaign was attacked by plain-clothes militia.⁵⁷ Mousavi declared his victory in the election before the official announcement of the results.⁵⁸

Khatami, and allegedly Nateq Nouri and Ali Larijani, congratulated him on his victory. However, the next day, the Interior Minister, Sadeq Mahsouli, declared Ahmadinejad as the new President, with 75 percent of the total number of more than 24 million votes. Mousavi came in second with 13 million votes (33 percent), and Karroubi was ranked last with less than 400,000 votes, even less than the number of voided ballots. Mousavi and Karroubi rejected the results, calling them fraudulent and for a new election.⁵⁹ Their claims were accompanied by the popular protest of their supporters in the streets,⁶⁰ with the main slogan of ‘Where is our vote?’⁶¹

The continuation of popular mobilisation and political disputes over the election results, and the violent reaction of the security forces and the police, all gained

⁵⁶ *Etemade Melli* 23/3/1388 (13/June/2009).

⁵⁷ *Farda* 22/3/1388 (12/June/2009).

⁵⁸ *Kalameh Sabz* 23/3/1388 (13/June/2009).

⁵⁹ *Kalameh Sabz* 24/3/1388 (14/June/2009).

⁶⁰ *Jomhourieslami* 24/3/1388 (14/June/2009).

⁶¹ It is not clear when this slogan first emerged, but since Monday 25/3/1388 (15/June/2009), it was used on a large scale.

the title of the Green Movement by the participants in the protests and/or *Fetneh* by the regime.

Investigating the causes behind the emergence of this uprising or its dynamics or social formation of this uprising is beyond the scope of this chapter. Although only a short time has passed since these events unfolded, a large body of literature has emerged that explores the different sociopolitical and cultural aspects of this movement, its emergence, the question of its demise and its future both inside and outside of Iran.⁶²

One could argue that certain characteristics made this movement different to a large number of recent contentious moments, including the Arab uprisings or, to a lesser degree, the coloured revolutions in Eastern-European countries. It was not a movement initiated by demands for institutional change or in reaction to certain socioeconomic policies, directions or difficulties nor was it a movement of party/faction supporters and their claims to political power.

It was a reaction to the efforts to emasculate the republican institutions, which, over the short history of the IRI and the evolution of the popularisation of politics, had become a rising hope for a large number of people to have a say in the direction of their country. It was the very popularisation of politics that initiated this reaction.

However, contentious movements have their own life and dynamics after they emerge. The demands and scale of the Green Movement also changed and evolved over time. It is necessary to investigate the extent to which this movement has influenced the popularisation of factional politics and factional politics. In other words, this section aims to provide a better understanding of this event within the context of the subject of this thesis.

⁶² See Introduction chapter for details of this literature.

These protests and events were portrayed differently by the protesters, their alleged leaders, Mousavi and Karroubi, and the state and its official narrative. Mousavi and Karroubi promoted these events as a movement within the framework of Khomeinism to protect the main premises of the IRI. They emphasised the civil nature of the protests and their non-violent characteristics. This theme is depicted in Mousavi's and Karroubi's statement published after the election. For instance, in Mousavi's ninth statement, issued on 1 July 2009, when the GC confirmed the election results, Mousavi maintained:

It is our historic responsibility to continue our protest and not to stop our efforts to obtain the people's rights. It is our religious responsibility not to allow the regime and the revolution to be transformed into something that Islam does not accept. It is our revolutionary responsibility not to allow the blood of hundreds of thousands of martyrs to be dissipated and reduced into the [emergence of] a security state.

He continued: "If the Islamic Republic [as a framework] is implemented based on its initial promise and initial contract [with the society], it is a regime (framework) that could satisfy all our (the Green Movement) demands." He then raised his concerns about those attempts to break ties with the regime and to become an opposition outside of the regime: "How bitter our disputes are; they are [still] a family's disputes. We will regret it if we involve foreigners in these disputes." He then underlined that it is not a personal matter: "I already have sacrificed my right, but I cannot negotiate with regard to the people's rights. At the centre of this [movement] are the issues of Islamism and the republicanism of our regime. If we do not stand up for them, there will be no guarantee that we won't experience the same problems again."⁶³

These points were also repeated in the last statute published by both Karroubi and Mousavi, the second draft of the manifesto of the Green Movement. In the first

⁶³ *Kalamih* 10/4/1388 (1/July/2009), <http://www.kaleme.com/1388/04/10/klm-8789/>.

paragraph, explaining the goal of the movement, they expressed: “the Green Movement is a critical movement within the framework of the Constitution and the popular vote and opinions.”⁶⁴ In their statement for the memorandum of the 1979 revolution victory, 11 February, they argued: “[The discourse of the Green Movement] is a discourse that sees the salvation of people in Islamism and the Republicanism of the regime and democratic sovereignty in all aspects of the country’s affairs.”⁶⁵

At the centre of the Mousavi-Karroubi narrative was the role of the people as the main legitimising element of the IRI. In his ninth statute after confirmation of the election by the GC, Mousavi stated:

From now on we will have a government that would be in a catastrophic position concerning its relation with society, [because] a majority of the society, including me, do not accept its political legitimacy. An unpopular and immoral government where nothing could be expected from it... A state that has been dependent on popular trust for 30 years cannot be replaced with security forces overnight.⁶⁶

In ‘the second draft of manifesto,’ he stressed the Green Movement “is a popular movement which gave birth to a national movement with the goals of freedom, social justice and national sovereignty.” Thus it is a movement along the historical movements of the “Constitutional Revolution” (1905–1911) the “Oil Nationalisation Movement (1949–1953) and the Islamic Republic Revolution (1979).” It underlined that,

Popular sovereignty and the right to self-determination are inviolable principles of the Green Movement. The institution of election is important as it is a means to fulfil this principle... The people’s vote and demands are the source of legitimacy of political power and therefore the Green Movement denounces... ‘mandatory supervision (*estesvabi*).

⁶⁴ *Kalamih* 3/12/1389 (22/February/2011), <http://www.kaleme.com/1389/12/03/klm-48610/>.

⁶⁵ *Kalamih* 19/11/1389 (8/February/2011), <http://www.kaleme.com/1389/11/19/klm-46738/>.

⁶⁶ *Kalamih* 10/4/1388 (1/July/2009), <http://www.kaleme.com/1388/04/10/klm-8789/>.

It also underlined that “the Green Movement is a civil, non-violent movement.”⁶⁷

The official narrative portrayed these events as conspiracies of the enemies of the revolution who had been planning them for years. One reason that this could have been effective is due to the fact that foreign countries had interfered in the country’s internal affairs such as 1906 Constitution Revolution the coming to power of Reza Shah in 1921, the coup d’état attempt against Mosaddeq, Western support of Mohammad Reza Shah and after the 1979 revolution, several foreign supported coup attempts against the IRI.

Based on this narrative, the protestors and their leaders either unknowingly or intentionally fell into this trap of the enemies, whose main aim was the collapse of the IRI through processes similar to the coloured revolutions in Eastern-European countries. Rafsanjani, Khatami and the radical Reformists were the internal agents of these plans. Almost a week after the election, many prominent Reformists, Mousavi’s and Karroubi’s high-ranking campaign officials and Rafsanjani’s daughter, Faezeh, were arrested. Only a few weeks after their arrests, they were publicly tried on charges of attempting to execute a coup d’état. The state media covered this trial.

This narrative was reflected in the televised confessions of various prominent political figures in this trial. Mohammad Alil Abtahi, Khatami’s Vice President and Karroubi’s advisor, who was arrested a few days after the election, said in his trial that “Mousavi, Rafsanjani and Khatami swore to remain united no matter what happened.” He continued: “The accusation of electoral fraud was their code name for creating chaos.” He also confessed that “Rafsanjani was trying to take revenge against Ahmadinejad and Khamenei.”

⁶⁷ *Kalameh* 3/12/1389 (22/February/2011), <http://www.kaleme.com/1389/12/03/klm-48610/>.

He argued that Mousavi was delusional, while Khatami clearly understood the situation and the power of the Supreme Leader. Khatami knowingly helped Mousavi and fueled Mousavi's delusion. Thus Khatami's actions constituted treachery.⁶⁸ Khatami and Rafsanjani rejected these accusations and criticised the trial. The role of foreign intelligent services from the West, the US and the UK was also expressed in the confession of Kian Tajbakhsh, an Iranian-American scholar.⁶⁹

Khamenei promoted this official narrative on many occasions: "I showed the evidence of at least ten, 15 years planning [by the IRI's enemies] for executing this *Fetneh* to some of the friends."⁷⁰ On another occasion he emphasised: "This *Fetneh* was huge... Their goal was bizarre. In fact, they wanted to occupy Iran. Those who were the agents of *Fetneh* – in the streets, or their speakers (implying Mousavi and Karroubi) — most had unknowingly fallen into this trap. They were ignorant. Nonetheless, they were played by someone else."⁷¹ Khamenei proclaimed the goals of this conspiracy as: "putting the people against the regime,"⁷² or that "the plan [of those conspirators] was to dismantle the Islamic Republic, not only to eliminate religion [in the state's institution] but also religious values."⁷³

In response to Mousavi's claims the Green Movement was within Khomeinism, Khamenei argued:

The principle of the revolution is not a matter of taste. Thus, anyone cannot come out of nowhere claiming to be standing up for the revolution... The principles of the revolution are Islam, the Constitution, Khomeini's legacy, his will, and the overall policies of the regime... In this framework, disagreements are not negative but also positive. They are not [politically] harmful, but in fact they are beneficial... As long as people act within the

⁶⁸ *Fars News* 10/5/1388 (1/August/2009).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Khamenei 4/8/1389 (26/October/2010), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=10456>.

⁷¹ Khamenei 12/8/1389 (3/November/2010), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=10552>.

⁷² Khamenei 16/2/1392 (6/May/2013), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=22494>.

⁷³ Khamenei 19/10/1389 (9/January/2011), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=10832>.

framework of the regime, do not use violence, do not disturb the security and peace of the society... the regime's approach is 'maximum attraction [of electoral support] and minimum rejection [of the people]...'. But, if someone opposes the fundamentals of the regime and the security of the people, the regime must act and resist them.⁷⁴

As elaborated earlier, in this election, two different interpretations of the meaning of returning to the true path of Khomeini, and the role of people became the underlining ideological and theoretical line of factional disputes, and, in a wider frame, the schism between the main blocs of IRI politics. In this schism, Mousavi, Khatami, Karroubi, Rafsanjani and the main body of the Reformists, and a large number of the Modern Right and some part of the Conservatives, stood on one side facing Ahmadinejad, with the neo-Conservatives, Khamenei and a large section of the security forces on the other side. This schism reached its climax in this election and in post-election events.

By this time, two groups were once again revolving around what seemed to be a traditional rivalry between Khamenei and Rafsanjani with their proxies; Ahmadinejad and Mousavi-Karroubi. The turning point of this divide occurred in a Friday Prayer a week after the election, when Khamenei declared the regime's position in these debates and contested election results. He chose Ahmadinejad over his old comrade Rafsanjani. It was a significant event since for a long time the Rafsanjani-Khamenei pact had been the symbol of the IRI. Now this symbol was broken over the line of popularisation of politics.

In his sermon, Khamenei proclaimed: "There have been disagreements between the President and [Rafsanjani] since the 2005 election and they (these disagreements) still continue. Disagreements about foreign policy, the implementation of social

⁷⁴ Khamenei 20/6/1388 (11/September/2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8033>.

justice, and cultural issues; nonetheless, my ideas are closer to the President's.”⁷⁵ At the end of this prayer, Khamenei gave the ultimatum that if the protests continued, they would face the harsh reaction of the regime. This Friday prayer represented several turning points, in addition to its influence on the evolution of the demonstration.

First, by taking Ahmadinejad's side publicly, Khamenei jeopardised his supposed position of arbitrator between factional groups. While supervising and verifying the general direction of IRI policies was one of the Constitutional responsibilities of the Supreme Leader, the public perception was that he should not be openly involved in factional politics, nor engage in everyday politics, particularly disputed ones.

Khamenei's position as the Supreme Leader has been justified and propagated as a father figure sitting above everyday politics and factional disputes, who would remind political players upon spotting a deviation from the main IRI goals, whatever his definition of these goals was. Therefore, his comments in the Friday prayer of 19 June 2009 damaged his image amongst Mousavi's supporters because they expected him to play his supra-political role, but with this speech, this perception changed. His image was strengthened amongst those who believed he was acting correctly in tackling serious threats to the IRI. Khamenei's declaration that Ahmadinejad was his preferred candidate, followed by the violent suppression of the protestors, weakened his popular legitimacy, to an extent.

After this Friday prayer, the rumors about Khamenei's involvement in the alleged electoral fraud gained momentum, especially in a country where conspiracy

⁷⁵ Khamenei 29/3/1388 (19/June/2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=7190>.

theory has been part of its historical and cultural identity.⁷⁶ These rumors gained some ground, since the election result was perceived by many as rewarding a candidate who had Khamenei's support.

Second, Khamenei's comment showed a significant change in his relationship with Rafsanjani. It was a powerful blow to the authority and power of Rafsanjani, given that Rafsanjani always portrayed himself as an equal and in agreement with Khamenei and his policies. One could argue it was Khamenei's final step in establishing himself as the sole power of the IRI and in ending any perceptions he was under the shadow of Rafsanjani's political authority. To a large extent, the split that was created between Khamenei and Rafsanjani following Ahmadinejad's first-term election reached its height in this public manifestation.

Nonetheless, if he did not make these comments, Khamenei would have faced serious consequences as well. Khamenei was facing an impossible situation regarding his power, because even if he wanted to back down, two dangers would emerge. One would be that he backed down due to popular demands. The other would be that he backed down because of the power of the coalition of Rafsanjani and his allies Mousavi, Karroubi and Khatami. In both scenarios, they would unify after he backed down. He would have had very little room to manoeuvre and he would have faced difficulty in regaining his authority for some time. This also came at a price as Khamenei attached himself to Ahmadinejad.

Whatever his feelings were for Ahmadinejad, given the power situation he was facing, he had to move toward Ahmadinejad. However this move weakened him, to an extent. He chose a man, who as shown in the previous chapter, was a political opportunist. One could argue that Khamenei thought Ahmadinejad could be managed

⁷⁶ Homa Katouzian, *Iranian History and Politics: The Dialectic of State and Society* (Routledge, 2012).

and would remain under his control, given that, in the previous four years, Ahmadinejad had proven his loyalty despite its ups and downs.

Ahmadinejad's popularity was damaged following the events of the Green Movement; hence, he would be an even weaker President during this term. However, Ahmadinejad soon recognised his newly found leverage. Ahmadinejad conceiving to have popular support, Khamenei had no option but to support him no matter what Ahmadinejad may do. This element drastically changed the Ahmadinejad-Khamenei relationship.

Third, Khamenei's comments in the Friday prayer sermon changed the dynamics of the protests. Ahmadinejad was initially the main opponent of the Green Movement's claims. Ahmadinejad's comments the day after the election, in particular, described the protesters as a bunch of dirt and dust (*khas va Khashak*),⁷⁷ fueled the emotional resentment and the anger of protestors. Thus a large portion of the slogans targeted him.

However, Khamenei's Friday prayer and the subsequent suppression of the protests, gave momentum to the radicalisation of the protests. Khamenei increasingly replaced Ahmadinejad in the popular claims of the Green Movement.⁷⁸ At the same time, Ahmadinejad chose not to comment on the unfolding contentious events, and also tried not to irritate the protestors and become their main target again. Therefore, the radicalisation of the movement translated into the strengthening of Ahmadinejad's position. He used this opportunity to attempt to expand his institutional power. He appointed his close allies to different positions and went as far as to confront Khamenei.

⁷⁷ Ahmadinejad 24/3/1388 (14/June/2009).

⁷⁸ Harris, "The Brokered Exuberance," 435-445.

Khamenei-Ahmadinejad

To a certain extent, the power balance between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad shifted after the election, and after Khamenei's comments in the 19 June Friday prayer. As will be explored in this section, Ahmadinejad increasingly contested Khamenei's decisions and publicly denounced his verdicts, to the point where he questioned Khamenei's institutional authority.

At the same time, in order to increase his popular support and to unify social forces behind his aggressive foreign policy and rising domestic socioeconomic discontent, Ahmadinejad attempted to build new discourses based on *Iraniyat*, surrounding pre-Islamic ancient symbols, mixed with claims of Iran as being one of the great contributors to global civilisations, along with elements of religious mysticism and apocalyptic hidden Imam paradigms. Ahmadinejad was creating a new discourse geared towards the greater popularisation of politics to secure his position in society against his opponents in the regime. Thus, it was yet another important reflection of the popularisation of politics.

Some components of this new discourse, such as its nationalism and mysticism, were in conflict with the main ideological elements of the Supreme Leader and other conservative groups, including Mesbah and his circle. These ideological and theoretical differences, in addition to continuous confrontations with Khamenei within the factional context of this period, led to a schism between the neo-Conservatives and the close circle of Ahmadinejad's surrounding Mashaei.

One of the first signs of this new dynamic between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei and their supporters came when Ahmadinejad appointed his close friend and ally Mashaei as Vice President. This appointment faced strong opposition from different parts of the Conservatives, the neo-Conservatives, and *Marja*'s. Mashaei's

controversial comments and unclear ideological standings made him unpopular amongst these groups. He was perceived as someone with a lack of commitment to traditional Islam. In a speech, Mashaei proclaimed that the Era of Islamisation had ended.

Another controversy was sparked by a speech in which he recognised the people of Israel. The skepticism about Mashaei was such that, in an editorial, Hossein Shariatmadari, chief editor of *Kayhan*, compared Mashaei with the radical Reformists and their role in the so-called *Fetneh*: “Mashaei is yet another agent of the Velvet Coup D'état. It is only the difference in the place of his mission that made him different from the other recent ‘seditionists’ (*Fetnehgaran*); but not his identity!”⁷⁹ Ahmadinejad ignored these reactions and defended him.

Eventually, Khamenei had to intervene. He sent a letter on 18 July 2009, stating: “The appointment of Mr. Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei as your Vice President is against the interest (*maslahat*) of you and your government. It is causing despair and schism amongst your supporters (*alaqehmandan*). It is necessary to cancel his appointment and to announce it ‘as it has not ever happened’ (*Ke ’An Lam Yakon*).”⁸⁰

At first, Ahmadinejad ignored this decree. However, Khamenei had to publish the letter a few days later in the media, forcing Ahmadinejad to accept it. It was an unprecedented action by Khamenei, which showed the seriousness of the conflict between them. Even then, Ahmadinejad accepted the resignation of Mashaei instead of dismissing him.

He replied to Khamenei: “Attached is a copy of the resignation of Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei from the Vice Presidency on 24 July 2009. Please be informed that

⁷⁹ *Kayhan* 3/5/1388 (25/July/2009).

⁸⁰ Khamenei 27/4/1388 (18/July/2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=7495>.

your handwriting of 18 July 2009 has been implemented based on the Article 57 of the Constitution.”⁸¹ Ahmadinejad’s action was perceived as being in some way disobedient because, first, Ahmadinejad did not respond to Khamenei’s letter, nor take appropriate action upon his receipt of it. He reacted after Khamenei’s letter was made public.

Second, in his response, Ahmadinejad underlined the resignation and his acceptance of it based on the Constitution and not upon Khamenei’s decree. Third, Ahmadinejad referred to Khamenei’s letter in his response as “your hand writing” instead of your decree. *Kayhan* argued that the reason behind such action was: “to greatly increase the political cost of issuing [secondary ordinance] decrees for the Leader. In their disoriented mind, they thought that [by doing so] they might be able to stop *Aqa* (Khamenei) from issuing similar decrees.”⁸²

A significant turning point in Ahmadinejad’s relationship with Khamenei happened in April 2011, when Ahmadinejad stayed at home and refused to go to his office for almost two weeks. His dispute with Khamenei over Heydar Moslehi, the head of the Intelligence Ministry, was at the centre of this incident.⁸³ Following his disagreements with the appointment of one of the Ministry’s deputies, Ahmadinejad pushed for Moslehi’s resignation, despite the opposition of Khamenei to this decision. This happened less than two months after Khamenei had visited the Intelligence Ministry for six hours and publicly endorsed Moslehi.

This time, media close to Ahmadinejad published Moslehi’s resignation letter next to Ahmadinejad’s acceptance of it, perhaps to nullify possible attempts to undo this decision. However, this move faced the public reaction of Khamenei. He published

⁸¹ Alef 3/5/1388 (25/July/2009).

⁸² *Kayhan* 3/5/1388 (25/July/2009).

⁸³ *Fars News* 28/1/1390 (17/April/2011).

a letter to Moslehi in which he asked for the continuation of his service.⁸⁴ In reaction to this letter, Ahmadinejad stopped going to work for 11 days, from 23 April to 3 May 2011.

During this period, the schism and internal disputes between the neo-Conservatives, *Mo'talefeh* and the IRGC with Ahmadinejad's circle of friends, in particular Mashaei, surfaced. Mohammad Nabi Habibi, the *Mo'talefeh* Secretary General, condemned Ahmadinejad's actions and gave him the "brotherly advice" not to allow "his close cadres [to] interfere with different ministries' appointments and dismissals."⁸⁵ Ahmadinejad's sit-in, following his previous confrontation over Mashaei, engendered the emergence of a new term in IRI political lexicon: 'deviant group' (hereafter *Jaryan-e enherafi*).

To a large extent, *Jaryan-e enherafi* was another attempt to monopolise the political arena. It also emerged in the context of the popularisation of factional politics. As mentioned above, Ahmadinejad increasingly emphasised a new discourse geared towards the popularisation of politics. In response, part of the regime, including the Conservatives, neo-Conservatives and Khamenei, promoted new discourses and slogans in the popularisation of politics to get the people on their side as well as eliminating their rivals.

On 22 April 2011, in part of a long interview with Fars News, a media outlet close to the IRGC, the IRGC commander, Mohammad Ali Jafari, explained the characteristics of *Jaryan-e enherafi* and its danger. He argued that "*Jaryan-e enherafi* means those who deviated from the path of 'principlists/Conservative's (*Osulgaraei*).'"

He placed it as a continuation of *Fetneh*: "The previous events (*Fetneh*) ended and their intentions were revealed, however, this new *Jaryan-e enherafi* aims to face

⁸⁴ Khamenei 31/1/1390 (20/April/2011), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=12124>.

⁸⁵ Fars News 30/1/1390 (19/April/2011), <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9001304137>.

the revolution using new slogans and implementing new methods and tactics. This new movement will indeed rise against the revolution.” He then claimed that this new *Fetneh* was hiding itself behind popular and accepted figures.⁸⁶ Jafari continued: “Whatever the IRGC possesses is coming from the Islamic Revolution, not Iran, nor the Iranian school of thought.”⁸⁷ It was clear opposition to Mashaei and Ahmadinejad.

The ‘Iranian school of thought’ (*Maktab-e Irani*) was a theoretical initiative by Mashaei to mobilise some of Ahmadinejad supporters. Two days later, on 24 April 2011, Jafari compared the revolution with a train and argued:

Many have departed the revolutionary train, but [they] still think that they are on board. Also, many are on board and have no idea where this train is heading. The destination is the advert of the Hidden Imam [Mahdi] (*zohur-e Imam*), but those who claim that this *zohur* will happen in the near future. [Their claims] are the threats of ‘deviation’ (*enheraf*). It is true that the Reformists and nationalists are eliminated, but there are still threats from ‘deviating forces’ (*Jaryanat-e Monharef*) domestically.⁸⁸

On 20 April 2011, the commander of *Basij*, Mohammad Reza Naqdi, warned about the emergence of a new *Fetneh* and described its characteristics: “In the next *Fetneh*, it will be very difficult to distinguish right from wrong. And we might find those who stand against the *velayat* under the name of Quran, prayer, appealing to justice, *Mahdism* and righteousness. ‘Deviants’ (*Monharefin*) most probably would stand against the revolution under the name of righteousness.”⁸⁹ Ahmadinejad returned after almost two weeks and publicly confirmed his allegiance to the *velayat-e faqih*.

This event represented another important step in the popularisation of factional politics. It was one of the first incidents that the IRGC publicly and to such degree

⁸⁶ *Fars news* 3/2/1390 (23/April/2011), <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9002010393>.

⁸⁷ *Fars News* 4/2/1390 (25/April/2011), <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=9002041320>.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Fararu* 31/1/1390 (20/April/2011), <http://fararu.com/fa/news/74614/>.

interfered in the factional politics and the republican executive affairs. The IRGC was in fact drawing the boundaries between who is inside and who is outside of the IRI political field. Placing the Reformists, Nationalists, *Fetneh* and *Jaryan-e enherafi* along the same camp by the IRGC highlighted its antagonism against republicanism given that the broad shared idea of the role of people and the republicanism was the only thing that these groups had in common. Ahmadinejad once again strengthened his anti-establishment figure, however, this incident became a turning point in already deteriorating relationship between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei.

The perception of the rising disputes between Khamenei and Ahmadinejad reached the point where Khamenei had to deny them. On 19 April 2011, the same day that Khamenei sent his letter to Moslehi, Raja News, the media outlet close to Mesbah, published Khamenei's comments in his meeting with JMHEQ, which had taken place almost five months earlier in which Khamenei rejected any kind of 'dual power' (*hakemiyyat-e dowganeh*) in the regime. He confirmed "The government, the Supreme Leader and other state institutions are all in cohesion with each other and are along one path."⁹⁰

However, soon after the Moslehi case, once again Khamenei publicly had to deny that there were any disagreements amongst them:

Look, just during these previous five or six days, what a fuss they make in the world over the issues that have no importance – I mean about the Intelligence Minister and so on. [The IRI's enemies] propagated their analysis that a schism is emerging in the IRI, that there is dual power (*hakemiyyat-e dowganeh*), the President did not obey the Supreme Leader orders... Look how seriously they (enemies) are waiting for an excuse, look how like wolves they are ambushing to find an excuse to attack us in any way possible... Both the government and the President himself are working really hard... They are valuable for the country. I, as a humble person (*bandeh-ye haqir*), do not intend to interfere in state affairs because of the principles, after all the

⁹⁰ *Raja News* 30/1/1390 (20/April/2011), <http://www.rajanews.com/news/69113>.

jurisdictions are clear in the Constitution. Everyone has their responsibility. Unless I feel that an [important] interest (*maslahat*) is in danger, that's when one interferes to save this interest. Just like this recent issue [of the Intelligence Minister, where I intervened].⁹¹

Approaching the next Presidential election (2013), Ahmadinejad's confrontation with Khamenei and other state institutions escalated as the popularisation of politics rapidly increased, in the context where domestic social, economic and geopolitical situations were exacerbated following the tightening of international sanctions.

By this time, the public began to feel the serious economic effects of Ahmadinejad's economic mismanagement, in addition to the socioeconomic effects of international sanctions, which Ahmadinejad once called just a "piece of paper." Inflation tripled from 2010 to 2012 and over these two years, housing prices increased drastically.⁹² For instance, average house prices almost doubled over these two. The IRI's currency devalued and lost a large portion of its value by the end of 2012, based on unofficial market prices (from 1USD=11000 to 1USD=35000).

Ahmadinejad had always denied these economic difficulties and/or had blamed other institutions or hidden mafias for not allowing him and his government to do their job. Ahmadinejad understood to have any place in the near future of IRI politics, he might need to reinforce his anti-establishment image. However, despite the political motives behind Ahmadinejad's confrontations, as will be explored below, these confrontations showed the institutional obstacles and inherent contradiction rooted in the Constitution. The climax of these confrontations happened during the impeachment of Ahmadinejad's Minister of Cooperatives, Labour and Social Welfare,

⁹¹ Khamenei 3/2/1391 (22/April/2012), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=12163>.

⁹² Inflation, Consumer Prices (annual %) (FP.CPI.TOTL.ZG), World Development indicators.

⁹³ *Tabnak* (27/4/1392) (18 July 2013), <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/332712/>.

which gained the title of ‘Black Sunday’ in IRI political lexicon.

The reason for the impeachment was the appointment of Saeed Mortazavi as the head of the Social Security Organisation (SSO). Saeed Mortazavi had a very controversial career path. He was the infamous judge of the press court responsible for the closure of all Reformist newspapers during Khatami’s Presidency. He then became Tehran’s district attorney (2002–2009).

Based on the inquiry of the eighth *Majlis*’ committee, regarding the 2009 election events during the Green Movement, he was considered responsible for the death of dissidents of the 2009 election in Kahrizak Prison (an illegal prison facility in the south of Tehran, established to keep the detainees).⁹⁴ He was also deputy of Iran’s district attorney until his dismissal. He was appointed as the head of the Anti-Smuggling Bureau (2009–2012) by Ahmadinejad’s decree. However, it was his appointment as the head of the SSO which became the source of political disputes. The Social Security Fund, a subdivision of the SSO, is one of the largest economic and financial institutions in Iran. It consisted of the retirement pensions of all employees of the Iranian state and their insurance.

Shasta, the investment arm of the SSO, owned more than 250 Iranian companies and a considerable share of large Iranian enterprises, including petrochemicals, refineries and power plants.⁹⁵ By the end of the eighth *Majlis* (2008–2012), the impeachment was initiated but was withdrawn, after Mortazavi promised to resign.⁹⁶ Ahmadinejad persisted with keeping Mortazavi as the head of SSO; therefore, the *Majlis* referred the case to the Administrative Court (*Divan-e ‘Edalat-e Edari*), a judiciary institution responsible for investigating administrative disputes.

⁹⁴ *Mardomsalari* 21/10/1388 (11/January/2010).

⁹⁵ Official Webpage of SSO, <http://www.ssic.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=85>.

⁹⁶ *Fararu* 25/2/1391 (14/May/2012), <http://fararu.com/fa/news/112669/>.

The Administrative Court verdict was the removal of Saeed Mortazavi as the head of the Social Security Fund on January 2013. A few days later, Ahmadinejad changed the statute of SSO. The Social Security Fund was changed to Social Security Fund Organisation. After the dismissal of Mortazavi, he was then appointed by Rahimi, Ahmadinejad's Vice President, as the head of the newly established organisation.⁹⁷ The struggle between Ahmadinejad and the *Majlis* led to the impeachment of the Minister Sheikhol Eslam, one of Ahmadinejad's old comrades, by the ninth *Majlis* (2012–2016), close to the 2013 Presidential election.

The impeachment session of the Sheikhol Eslam became a battleground for Ahmadinejad. He questioned the legality of the legislative and judiciary actions, which were headed by two Larijani brothers, Ali and Sadeq, known as Amoli. Ahmadinejad highlighted the Constitutional contradictions. The way the impeachment session unfolded showed the personal rivalry, while its aftermath revealed Ahmadinejad's conflict with Khamenei.

In the impeachment session, which was filled with Ahmadinejad's sarcasm towards the *Majlis* and MPs, his main argument was that the Administrative Court had no jurisdiction and its verdict was a mistake. Thus the impeachment had no grounds: “If we allow the Administrative Court to act against the law, against the Constitution, then how could we govern the country?” He then began his criticism of the *Majlis* for its interference with his Constitutional prerogatives. He argued that “we should return to the Constitution” to solve our problems. He claimed the roots of these institutional conflicts were in the attempts of different institutions to go beyond their Constitutional jurisdictions. “No one should think that if we gain more jurisdiction beyond the Constitution, this will be good for us and our country’s interest. This would be against

⁹⁷ *Khabar Online* 12/2/1391 (1/May/2012), <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/232518/society/judiciary>.

the national interest.”

He also accused Ali Larijani, the Speaker of the *Majlis*, of exceeding his Constitutional power: “Not only has the Speaker of *Majlis* dominated the government, he also dominated the *Majlis*. This is wrong... The Speaker of *Majlis* is to rule the *Majlis* and the government. Then he should have been elected by direct popular vote and should sit in the President’s office.”

He had already argued:

“If the Constitution needed to be changed, it has its procedure. But if even the appointments of the President [for different state positions] could be dismissed by passing a new legislation or rejecting different government legislations, this could not be sustainable. If you strip the government from its rights of appointment and dismissal, what would it be left with to govern the country?”

He then concluded that there should be some conspiracy behind this impeachment; he and his minister were the victims because of their rebellion against the mafia. To prove this claim, he threatened to display some footage. He played it after Larijani asked him to. This film, which was taken in the Mortazavi office using a hidden camera, showed Mortazavi in a meeting with Fazel Larijani, brother of Ali and Sadeq Larijani. In this meeting, Fazel asked Mortazavi to get him involved in some of SSO’s businesses, and in return he would help Mortazavi to have better access to his brothers. At the end of the session, when Ahmadinejad finished his speech, Ali Larijani responded to his accusation.

Larijani’s comments revealed the Constitutional conflict and the maverick nature of Ahmadinejad. In response to Ahmadinejad’s claim, *Majlis* actions had disrupted the relationship between different government bodies, he said:

The ‘arrangement of the relations between different state bodies’ (based on the Article 110 of the Constitution. This arrangement is one of the responsibilities of the Supreme Leader) is not disturbed. This is just your perception. We [the *Majlis*] passed

laws [but] you did not announce them. Then [in our response], you tell us: I have sworn [as a President] that it is I who should ensure whether or not these laws are against the Constitution?

He called Ahmadinejad's attitude unethical: “[Mr. President], do you think your actions (showing the footage) are ethical? Is it appropriate for a President to act like this? A President who always threatens everyone, threatens the Speaker of the *Majlis*, because of an impeachment, Mr President! These are the problems of the country, the problem of the country is this, (your) behaviour.”⁹⁸

This confrontation was the popularisation of factional politics at its height. Ahmadinejad once again wanted to play his card of being the anti-establishment figure. He chose a public session of the *Majlis*, broadcasted live on radio. However, since the symbols of establishment or ‘other’ in the Ahmadinejad rhetoric was shrinking due to political circumstances after the 2009 he had no choice but to turn against a camp which was once his ally.

Khamenei reacted. In his speech in Tabriz, a day after this event, he showed his dissatisfaction and his strong displeasure and frustration with these conflicts: “I, as a humble man (*bandeh-ye haqir*) became sad because of two things. First, the nature of this event, and second, seeing the sadness of the people.” He called the President’s action “against the law, against ethics and against the Constitutional right of the people.” He then condemned the *Majlis* action in pursuing the impeachment only a few months before the next Presidential election. He called Larijani’s reaction “a bit too much and unnecessary.”⁹⁹

Within a few hours, in an open letter, Ali Larijani thanked Khamenei, expressed

⁹⁸ *Jomhouriat* 14/11/1392 (3/Februrary/2014), <http://www.jomhouriat.ir/fa/content/10075/>.

⁹⁹ Khamenei 28/11/1391 (16/February/2013), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=22042>.

his apology and declared his obedience.¹⁰⁰ His brother, Sadeq Larijani, head of the Judiciary, followed his brother and published a letter thanking Khamenei for his advice.¹⁰¹ However, Ahmadinejad wrote a letter to Khamenei a day after his sermon. It was a disdainful response.

There was no reference to the impeachment events or to Khamenei's criticism, he underlined: "I assure you that I would not step a foot against the national and country's interests," and ended the letter by stating "The devotion of me and my cabinet to you is permanent."¹⁰² It symbolised the scale of the disputes between Ahmadinejad and Khamenei, as well as the popularisation of factional politics given Ahmadinejad's concerns about his popular anti-establishment image.

Ahmadinejad's confrontations with Khamenei, and his increasing attempts toward the popularisation of politics, forced Khamenei to use his Leadership Decree to get different agendas pushed through. Ahmadinejad's position in factional politics and his attempts towards the popularisation of politics had created paralysis across the system, which forced Khamenei to intervene even on everyday political issues and to play an increasingly active role in everyday affairs.

Khamenei became the political symbol of the regime. He gradually became the one who was blamed for all the difficulties and the main target of societal socioeconomic and political discontent. However, Khamenei, arguably, was aware of the danger that this over-interference in state affairs might cause him, particularly given the state of his popular legitimacy.

To settle these institutional deadlocks without his direct involvement,

¹⁰⁰ Official website of the *Majlis* 28/11/1391 (16/February/2013), <http://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/219960>.

¹⁰¹ ISNA 28/11/1391 (16/February/2013), <http://www.isna.ir/news/91112817342/>.

¹⁰² Dolat 29/11/1391 (17/February/2013) <http://www.dolat.ir/NSite/FullStory/News/?Serv=12&Id=224679>.

Khamenei established the 'Supreme Committee of Arbitration and Arranging the Relationship of the State Bodies,' a five-member committee under the supervision of Hashemi Shahroudi, former head of judiciary. According to the IRI Constitution, the arrangement of this relationship amongst these bodies is one of the Supreme Leader's duties. In Khamenei's decree, this committee was considered responsible for "the investigation and giving consultancy opinion to [the leader] in the disputes between different state bodies."¹⁰³

The establishment of this committee added to the institutional structural complexity of the IRI. It was, to a large extent, an institution parallel to the Expediency Council. In the composition of the committee, there were no representatives from the Executive Branch. The establishment of this institution was yet another attempt to contain some of the jurisdiction of the Expediency Council, under the supervision of Rafsanjani. It was also an attempt to restrict the institutional authority of Ahmadinejad, as well as an attempt to clip the wings of the Executive Branch.

To compensate for his shrinking popular legitimacy following the events of 2009, Khamenei gave momentum to attempts to build a new class of religious admirers. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Khamenei's religious authority, as an important component of his total legitimacy, was weak compared with Khomeini's or other Great *Marja*.¹⁰⁴ To compensate for this element of weak traditional religious authority, he empowered other religious institutions and strengthened a new religious class, namely *Maddahs*.

Maddahs are low-ranking religious figures who perform in religious ceremonies. Before the revolution and during the Khomeini Era they did not have a

¹⁰³ Khamenei 3/5/1390 (25/July/2011), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=16782>.

political role. On different occasions, Khomeini forbade them to talk about politics.¹⁰⁴

They resembled the lumpen proletariat of the religious establishment. Khamenei invested a lot in this institution and redefined its role. As elaborated below, he asked them to play a more active role in public religious and political debates. *Maddah*, and their activities in *Hay'ats*, gradually became a parallel religious institution to part of the 'Shi'a seminaries.' *Hay'ats* are the main organisation in which *Maddahs* perform.

Religious *Hay'at*, at least in theory, is a grassroots religious organisation which is formed by people to organise religious ceremonies, particularly during the month of Moharram and the Mourning of Imam Hossein. After the revolution, the state raised its financial support for these institutions, given the role they could play in the making of *homo Islamicus*.

By 2014, the number of *Hay'ats* had risen to more than 91,000, next to 72,000 mosques. Some of these *Hay'ats* kept their traditional identity and remained temporal independent organisations, which only formed during religious ceremonies. There are also some permanent ones which enjoy a fixed budget and have an organisational structure and enjoy state support. The main organisation of *Maddah* are 'Islamic War Veterans Hay'at,' *Hay'at-e Razmandegan-e Islam*, established in 1997.¹⁰⁵

This organisation was established by those *Maddahs* who performed during the Iran-Iraq War. *Maddahs* used to sing both revolutionary and religious rhymes to raise the spirit of the soldiers. They kept the structure they had during the war and, in 1997, made it an official organisation. They also played a political and a cultural role. They supported Ahmadinejad in 2005 and 2009. However, their support for Ahmadinejad ended following Ahmadinejad's support of Mashaei.

¹⁰⁴ Mohammad Hassan Rahimian, *Hadise Rouyesh*, *Memoir of Hassan Rahimian*, (Markaz-e Asnad-e Inqelab-e Islami, 2003).

¹⁰⁵ *Donya-e Eqtesad* 21/2/1395 (10/May/2016), <http://donya-e-eqtesad.com/SiteKhan/917720>.

Maddah's organisational structure and their financial budgeting made them dependent on the SLO, thus a trustful ally for the Supreme Leader. To an extent, they enjoyed celebrity status amongst the *Basijis*. Enjoying the support of security institutions, they had no fear of public scrutiny. They criticised different governmental bodies, their decisions and political figures. It was another attempt to counteract the popularisation of factional politics by employing another semi-state group representing the regime. It was a reaction to the popularisation of factional politics. In reality, it was an attempt to limit the damage-perceived by the regime-because of the popularisation of factional politics.

After the 2009 election, the process of strengthening *Maddah* gained momentum, given that Khamenei was facing a serious legitimacy threat, and he had doubts about the sincerity of the support of seminaries, given that all of his main opponents, Mousavi, Rafsanjani and Karroubi, enjoyed a great relationship with *Marja*'s in seminaries. As a result, *Maddahs* became increasingly involved in public, social, cultural and political debates.

In Tehran's Friday prayer sermon, Ahmad Khatami, a neo-Conservative cleric, asked *Maddahs* to analyse *Fetneh* in their ceremonies.¹⁰⁶ Ezzat Allah Zarghami, a neo-Conservative and the head of the National TV (2004–2014), underlined the loyalty of the *Maddahs*. He argued that the *Maddahs* passed the test of *Fetneh*, while many student activists and politicians failed.¹⁰⁷

He also responded to those who criticised the political role of *Maddahs*: "My answer to those who quibble that *Maddah* should not enter [politics]... If by politics, we mean increasing the 'insight,' (*basirat*), and informing people, especially the new

¹⁰⁶ Asr Iran 14/7/1389 (5/December/2010), <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/147938/>.

¹⁰⁷ Fars News 7/9/1389 (28/November/2010),
<http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=8909070495>.

generation, I think this is one of their [*Maddahs*] main duties.”¹⁰⁸ Khamenei recently proclaimed of *Maddahs*’ duties: “Your main duty should be guiding the people, awakening and expanding ‘insight’ (*basirat*) amongst the people.”¹⁰⁹ *Maddahs* proclaimed their ideological theme as ‘insight’ (*basirat*).

‘*Basirat*’ containing the meaning of knowledge, cognition and faith is a rhetoric adopted by Khamenei which he has emphasised since the 2009 election to keep his ideological grasp on his supporters, and to justify, to an extent, the suppression of some members of the IRI political elite. Khamenei used this concept in his speeches since he became the Supreme Leader; however, after 2009, ‘*basirat*’ gained more discursive and rhetorical weight. In Islam, it refers to an insight that would allow one to have a deep understanding and clear conception of the truth and of right and wrong.¹¹⁰

The official narrative used ‘*basirat*’ as a dividing line in political classification of the people and political parties, defining who is inside and who is outside of the current discourse of the IRI. ‘*Basirat*’ symbolised “the compass” that would help the *homo Islamicus* to find their way and enable them not to end up in the hands of the enemy.¹¹¹ On 27 July 2009, Khamenei said: “If you do not have *basirat*, you cannot tell the difference between friends and enemies. Thus, you may end up attacking friends instead of enemies... *Basirat* is a necessary requirement in understanding who the enemies are.”¹¹² Khamenei also argued that “Most of the catastrophes that various nations faced were because of [their] lack of ‘*basirat*.’”¹¹³

Almost a month later, on 27 August 2009, he underlined the relationship between ‘*basirat*’ and *Fetneh*: “In ‘times of sedition’ (*fetnehgun*), it becomes

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Khamenei 11/1/1395 (20/March/2016), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=32726>.

¹¹⁰ Sahba Centre, *Basirat va Istiqamat* (Muassihssi-yi Imani Jahadi, 2013).

¹¹¹ Khamenei 15/7/1388 (7/October/2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8178>.

¹¹² Khamenei 5/5/1388 (27/July/2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=7770>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

difficult to have a clear understanding of the [political] field. It is difficult to understand who is the invader and who is the defender. It is difficult to understand who is the oppressed and who is the oppressor. It is difficult to see who is the friend and who is the enemy.”¹¹⁴ A few weeks later, he proclaimed: “When there is *basirat*, the opaque of the *Fetneh* cannot fool them (the elite and the people).”¹¹⁵ He argued that many of the mistakes of the elites, whose mistakes are far more influential than the mistakes of ordinary people, have been because of their lack of *basirat*.¹¹⁶

In less than six months, he again maintained this point: “We should know the nature of the enmities are [against the IRI]. The reason that I keep repeating this issue of the importance of the *basirat* amongst the elites, is that sometimes the enmities which are ignored are the ones targeting the foundations, [but] they (enmities) are reduced and perceived as enmities about minor issues.”¹¹⁷ In this line, by bringing quotes from Imam Ali and Khomeini, he also argued: “Even Imam [Khomeini] said if I leave Islam then people will leave me. It means that the gauge is Islam and not the persons.”¹¹⁸

Perhaps Khamenei’s over-emphasis on ‘*basirat*’, to a certain extent, was a self-imposed challenge for his authority. Highlighting ‘*basirat*’ as one of the necessary characteristics of the IRI elites and a pillar trait of *homo Islamicus* could become a double-edged sword, of which he himself could be a victim. ‘*Basirat*’, broadly speaking, meant the power of recognising what is right and what is wrong, which, in theory, everyone could acquire.

By definition, it could, therefore, impose a challenge on traditional religious

¹¹⁴ Khamenei 14/6/1388 (5/September/2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8001>.

¹¹⁵ Khamenei 15/7/1388 (7/October/2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8178>.

¹¹⁶ Khamenei 5/5/1388 (27/July/2009), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=7770>.

¹¹⁷ Khamenei 6/12/1388 (25/February/2010), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8988>.

¹¹⁸ Khamenei 3/8/1389 (25/October/2010), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=10432>.

authority, whose power laid in defining what is right and what is wrong. Furthermore, '*basirat*' could also undermine the Constitutional authority, particularly in the context in which Khamenei introduced and propagated it.

Khamenei claimed neither the institutional position nor the reputation of elites should make their claims right, even if it was Khomeini himself. Meanwhile, he used the rhetoric of '*basirat*' to de-legitimised different political elites who were once his old comrades and associates. This engendered, to an extent, contradictory dynamics, given the political context of this period. Khamenei increasingly depended on the loyalty of his supporters, which was reinforced through Khamenei's religious, Constitutional and ideological authority, or his claims of righteousness.

By propagating '*basirat*', he was setting conditions for possible undermining of his Constitutional and religious authority indirectly; or undermining his exclusive authority on the righteousness of his claims. As a result, Khamenei's ideological and political manoeuvrability was further limited. This limitation showed itself when Khamenei, in order to respond to the challenges imposed by the realities of the government's affairs, needed to support official policies in conflict with the ideological premises of his discourse, i.e., the West and the relationship with the US. For instance, when Khamenei agreed with direct negotiations with the US over IRI's nuclear programme, given the socioeconomic challenges in 2013, he faced a serious challenge of how to justify different outcomes of these negotiations for his supporters. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

A turning point in the evolution of the popularisation of factional politics, came in the events of 2009–2013. Those factions who were promoting the republican aspect of the IRI and calling for more democratic aspirations were thrown out of the state institutions. The so-called *Fetneh* became a reference point according to which

different factions and political figures were categorised by the official hegemonic rhetoric.

For instance, those who supported Mousavi and Karroubi, attended the first rallies and demanded a new election, were called ‘*Fetneh*’s companion’s (*Ashab-e Fetneh*). Subsequently, a large number were imprisoned, and prohibited from political activities. Many fled the country, while their correspondent political organisations were dissolved, for example, MII and *Mohsarekat*. During these events some members of the elite remained silent, waiting to see their conclusion. In other words, they were trying to play it safe. They were called ‘*Fetneh*’s quiets (*Sakitin-e Fetneh*). Political figures from the Conservatives, such as Nateq Nouri, and organisations such as MRM, were amongst this category. Their neutrality cost them part of their power, but they remained in the state’s institutions.

Rafsanjani’s position varied. Some called him *Sakitin*, while the neo-Conservatives considered him the man behind the *Fetneh*. The remaining factions who came out strongly against Mousavi took advantage of this political opportunity offered by these events to strengthen their political power. This category included the hard-line spectrum of the old establishment of the JRM, who kept their close relationship with Khamenei, the neo-Conservatives, part of Ahmadinejad circle, and Mesbah and his circle. This shift in the factional power balance became a significant element in future factional disputes over the Iranian Nuclear Deal and Rouhani’s Presidency (2013–the present).

On the one hand, *Fetneh* became a rhetorical code name with which many Reformists and Moderates were labelled. Many were simply weakened or expelled from the political scene. On the other hand, the neo-Conservatives close to Mesbah labelled Ahmadinejad’s inner circle as *Jaryan-e enherafi* and contained its political

power. Soon after the election, the old disputes between Ahmadinejad and his supporters from the Mesbah camp or the neo-Conservatives surfaced. *Fetneh*, followed by *Jaryan-e enherafi*, provided a unique political opportunity for these neo-Conservatives to consolidate their power.

Therefore, less than four months after Ahmadinejad's house sit-in, on 28 July 2011, they established a new political organisation under the name of the Stability/Endurance Front (*Jebheh-ye Paydari*, hereafter Paydari). However, given that the neo-Conservatives showed strong support for Ahmadinejad in the 2005 and 2009 elections, they could not change their position easily.

Therefore, to justify their new position, they tried to separate Ahmadinejad from his circle, arguing that Ahmadinejad himself had been a 'supporter of guardianship' ('*velayatmadar*'), but he needed to re-evaluate his relationship with those in his close circle and those who surrounded him. In sum, the establishment of *Paydar* was an attempt by the neo-Conservatives to solidify their power position and to institutionalise their identity by differentiating themselves from different political groups, including Ahmadinejad and his circle.

The first statute of *Paydari* proclaimed that it was a supra-factional organisation protecting the Islamic Revolution values. Nonetheless, it distinguished itself from both *Fetneh* and *Jaryan-e enherafi* and declared its goal as: "the continuation of major premises of Khomeini's school of thought, namely: rationality, spirituality and justice centring on the '*velayat*'"¹¹⁹

This point is clarified in its second statute, which states that:

Paydari's membership is open to those who clearly stand against 'seditionists' (*fetneh garan*) and those who are not part of the short-sighted elite (*bibasirat*) without '*basirat*' and also have no

¹¹⁹ First Statute 6/5/1390 (28/July/2011), <http://www.jebhepaydari.ir/main/index.php?Page=definition&UID=1034>.

affiliation or agreement. However small, with *Jaryan-e enherafi* and have not been a member of any futile (*batel*) parties, such as Western *Kargozaran* and anti-religion Reformists.¹²⁰

Paydari has Mesbah as its father figure, who confirmed its political manifesto.¹²¹ Unlike the relationship between Rafsanjani and *Kargozaran*, or Khatami and *Mosharekat*, Mesbah has an organisational link to *Paydari*. *Paydari* has a ‘jurisprudential committee’ whose membership consists of Mesbah and two other clerics, whose main responsibility is to determine the party’s strategy and its general policies.¹²² *Paydari* was another aspect of the institutionalisation of Mesbah’s doctrine. *Paydari* is the most radical conservative faction in the IRI factional landscape. The main ideological pillars of *Paydari* are Mesbah’s ideology of the Islamic government, which was explained in the third chapter, in addition to the new concept of ‘*basirat*'.¹²³

By the time of the ninth *Majlis* election, in light of the fact that the Moderates and the Reformists had been sidelined, the divisions between the Conservatives who held power escalated. Both segments tried to increase their popular support, which influenced the popularisation of politics. The ninth *Majlis* election (2012) became the battleground for different streams of the Conservatives and the neo-Conservatives.

Therefore, the electoral campaign had different Conservatives and neo-Conservatives competing with each other. In Tehran alone there were five main groups: 1) the ‘United Front of the Conservative's, which had a close affiliation with Mahdavi Kani, head of JRM and a prominent traditional Conservative; 2) the ‘Voice

¹²⁰ Second Statute of *Paydari* 29/5/1390 (20/August/2011),
<http://www.jebhepaydari.ir/main/index.php?Page=definition&UID=1493>.

¹²¹ *Fars News* 10/5/1390 (1/August/2011),
<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13910510000278>.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Official Website of *Paydari*,
<http://jebhepaydari.ir/main/index.php?Page=definition&UID=1284039>.

of the People' (*Seda-ye Mellat*), which was established by Ali Motahhari and Ali Abbaspour. Ali Motahhari is the son of Morteza Motahhari, a prominent cleric who had an important contribution to the ideology of the IRI. Ali Motahhari became one of the new political figures from the Conservative camp whose harsh criticisms against Ahmadinejad and his controversial views with regards to *Fetneh* made him famous and different from the neo-Conservatives; 3) 'the Resistance Party' (*Hezb-e Istadeqi*), whose members were those close to Mohsen Rezaee; 4) '*Basirat* and Awakening Front' (*Jebheh-ye Basirat va Bidari*), led by Shahaboddin Sadr, a group close to *Paydari*; and 5) *Paydari*. Following the electoral apathy of many pro-Reform camps and secular Iranians, the results of this election showed the divide in the systematic and organic vote of these groups.

This internal schism led to the collapse of the *Rahrovan* coalition, which was formed in the eighth *Majlis*. The *Rahpuyan* coalition emerged as the main bloc against the *Paydari* in the ninth *Majlis*, having Ali Larijani as their main candidate for speakership.¹²⁴ Thus the Conservatives had decisively moved toward and expanded true popularisation of factional politics.

There were significant disputes between Ali Larijani and *Paydari*. These disagreements showed themselves in Larijani's speech in Qom to his constituency, on 10 February 2013. This was the anniversary of the 1979 Revolution and a few weeks after his clash with Ahmadinejad during Black Friday. Larijani's speech was disrupted. He had shoes and 'prayer stamps' (*mohr*) thrown at him, while the crowd shouted slogans stressing the lack of '*basirat*' in Larijani.¹²⁵

An inquiry by the ninth *Majlis* concluded that these actions were systemically

¹²⁴ *Khabar Online* 7/3/1391 (27/May/2012).

¹²⁵ Slogans such as: 'Shame on you' ('*khejalat*'), '*Basirat, Basirat*,' or '[You are] one of those elites who lacked *Basirat*.'

organised and found clerics close to *Paydari* and Mesbah's Imam Khomeini Institute, namely the *Parto* circle, to be responsible. Based on this inquiry, the intelligence institutions, the governor of Qom and the IRGC branch of Qom also showed incompetence in the field of duty. This inquiry also confirmed that these groups were responsible for similar previous actions against political figures, including the disruption of Rafsanjani's speech in Qom (2006), and the disturbance of Hassan Khomeini's speech, the grandson of Khomeini, on the anniversary of Khomeini's death (2010).¹²⁶

Khamenei also reacted to this event:

I am against this trend that some people go to the streets and call people anti-*velayat-e faqih*, and/or without 'basirat' to accuse them. I do not agree with what happened in Qom (the Ali Larijani event). I do not agree with what happened at Khomeini's shrine (the disturbance in the Hassan Khomeini speech). I warned the officials about these events. If these people are *Hezbollahi* and faithful people, they should not take these actions.¹²⁷

These so-called 'spontaneous' (*khod jush*) activities could also be analysed in the framework of the popularisation of politics. By this time, Khamenei was increasingly trying to organise popular groups to defend his line in response to the popular Green Movement as well as Ahmadinejad's attempts to popularise politics. However, the problem emerged when these groups, more often than not, acted spontaneously, given their understandings of Khamenei's wishes.

So, in other words, on the one hand, Khamenei was trying to institutionalise popular support through these groups to defend his position, but the flip side of that was that he could not control these groups all the time. This point was reflected in what happened in Qom during Larijani's speech. It was one of the first so-called

¹²⁶ *Aftab* 15/5/1392 (6/August/2013), <http://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/204493/>.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

‘spontaneous’ (*khod jush*) activities of these hard-line groups which faced the explicit disapproval of Khamenei. Arguably, Khamenei’s increasing dependence on the neo-Conservatives, given the 2009 election events and his continuous disputes with Ahmadinejad, had led to the empowerment of the neo-Conservatives.

However, Khamenei’s reliance on this faction could impose a challenge to his position. The neo-Conservatives increasingly used these so-called ‘spontaneous reactions’ for political purposes. They justified these actions by the concepts of ‘*basirat*’ and the defence of ‘*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*’. However, when Khamenei decided to support some policies against their views, some of their activities emerged against Khamenei’s wishes. An example of this situation is the invasion of the British Embassy in 2011 and Saudi Embassy by these groups in 2016.¹²⁸

Importantly, all of these domestic political events were unfolding in a geopolitical context. The continuation of UN sanctions targeting Iranian banking and financial services, as well as its export of oil, the threat of foreign bombing of nuclear sites, the emergence of the Arab uprisings and their evolutions, the US withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, the intensifying of conflicts in Syria, and Turkey’s change of foreign policy, were some of these geopolitical challenges.

These elements significantly influenced IRI domestic politics and its popularisation. For instance, Khamenei’s increasing use of security rhetoric, and the large involvement of the IRGC and *Basij* in different aspects of the sociopolitical and economic spheres, were justified under these geopolitical challenges and their possible security threats. Following the Arab Uprising, both Karroubi and Mousavi were placed

¹²⁸ Following the Saudi’s execution of Nimr al Nimr, a Shia cleric, the Saudi Embassy in Tehran was stormed by these groups. This was after the nuclear deal, during the time when Iran was trying to reestablish its relations with Western countries. However, Khamenei disapproved of this action. The people involved were arrested and tried in court.

BBC (3/January/2016), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-35216694>.

under house arrest to nullify their grasp on the Green Movement. Khamenei introduced a new discourse of ‘Islamic awakening’ (*Bidari-ye Islami*) to provide some explanation for these popular uprisings that were sweeping the MENA region.

Furthermore, Ahmadinejad’s attempts to construct a new discourse, based on a mixture of nationalism, *Iraniyyat* surrounding pre-Islamic ancient symbols, civilisational heritage, along with elements of religious mysticism and apocalyptic hidden Imam paradigms, were to a significant extent, responses to these geopolitical challenges. There were also more complicated consequences.

Arguably, the sanctions, within the context of the escalating state security apparatus, opened the door for the institutionalisation of corruption; or in other words, state-supported corruption. To bypass the tight financial sanctions imposed by the West and to find a way to transfer Iran’s income from its exports back into the country, various laws and procedures were compromised. Transparency was portrayed as an unfavourable element, due to security reasons under the sanction regime. Therefore, sanctions became an excuse for systematic corruption. Consequently, a new economic class emerged by taking advantage of this situation. They were called the ‘sanction traders’ (*dallalan-e tahrif*).

Conclusion

The controversial 2009 Presidential election and its aftermath was a turning point in popular politics and the popularisation of factional politics. It represented the confrontation of social forces demanding change in the IRI political approaches to the ‘role of people’ with totalitarian measures of the Conservative factions and guardian institutions of the Islamic/revolutionary pillar. In sum, in response to various social, economic, political, legitimacy and geopolitical challenges, Khamenei and Ahmadinejad increased the security apparatus of the state, strengthening the loyal

forces of IRI security institutions by providing them with more opportunities for rent seeking. The Green Movement was suppressed.

Consequently, the guardian institutions and Khamenei in particular, gained great institutional authority, arguably at the expense of their/his popular legitimacy. Therefore, in order to compensate for this weakness, he strengthened a new class of political spectrum, Mesbah and the neo-Conservatives, a new religious group, *Maddah*, and those factions within the IRGC who proved their loyalty in these events.

Furthermore, in order to compensate for legitimacy challenges, the nuclear ambitions, continuation of aggressive foreign policy and populist slogans — for a domestic audience — were situated at the centre of the IRI policy agenda and attempted to boost both their legitimacy and popular support. Khamenei also successfully contained the power of his rivals, namely Rafsanjani, prominent JRM members and almost all of the Reformists. Therefore, in this period, to a large extent, the authoritarian characteristics of the IRI overshadowed its republican characteristics, despite the fact that the structure of republican institutions remained unchanged.

Nonetheless, the continuous confrontation of Ahmadinejad with other institutions and Khamenei, in addition to the increasing scale of social discontent following the international sanctions and the economic mismanagement of Ahmadinejad, was coupled with an ongoing battle to popularise politics. In response to the popularisation of politics that took place during the Green Movement and Ahmadinejad's new discourse, Khamenei and his allies, namely the neo-Conservatives, also moved in the same direction. They tried to indoctrinate their followers and increased the activities of their propaganda machine.

Altogether, these elements created a critical political juncture by the time of the 2013 Presidential election. Khamenei and the ruling regime, in general, were faced

with a difficult decision: either to continue this authoritarian path, or to open political space, to a certain extent, and to restore the competitive component of the electoral process to a degree; in other words, the restoration of the limited republican characteristics of the IRI. They chose the latter, which consequently engendered new political dynamics, given the new power balance of factions and the state of society. It restored political resilience to the system, due to the dispersion of responsibilities and duties, whilst increasing factional disputes on different levels.

Chapter Six

Foreign Policy and Factional Politics

The popularisation of factional politics in the domestic sphere was accompanied by a gradual electoral popularisation of foreign policy, which reached a peak in the Presidential elections of 2013. During these elections, the main foreign policy issue dealt with the IRI's approach to the nuclear negotiations: Should the hardline approach of Ahmadinejad and Khamenei continue? Or should Tehran be prepared to make concessions in the negotiating process and thus adopt a foreign policy open to limited cooperation with the West?

The first section of this chapter explores the important elements of Khomeinism that played varying roles in the popularisation of IRI foreign policy in the post-Khomeini Era. The second section explores the main foreign policy issues in post-Khomeini Iran, the reasons for their importance in factional politics, and the approaches of the individual factions to these issues in electoral politics. Within this section, the roles of geopolitical changes and the dominant Iranian interpretations of them in these factional politics are also examined. The last section provides a review of the two main approaches in foreign policy by the time of the 2013 Presidential election, focusing on IRI foreign policy doctrines in regard to the West and the US.

Khomeinism and the Rhetorical Popularisation of Foreign Policy

IRI foreign policy, during the Khomeini period, was a mixture of revolutionary slogans and decisions—a degree of pragmatism allowed to the regime by Khomeini's unique position as the revolution's charismatic leader. The IRI followed a revolutionary, ideological foreign policy, whose main pillars were: 1) the export of the revolution, 2) rejection of geopolitical dependence on countries of the West and Communist East

(neither West nor East), 3) campaign against world hegemony and arrogance, 4) independence and self-sufficiency, and 5) Islamic unity and solidarity.¹

Khomeini, as the Father of the Revolution, was able to justify contradictory foreign policies as circumstances demanded. Nonetheless, rhetorical aspects of foreign policy, the anti-West and anti-US slogans, remained an effective state-mechanism means to mobilise the people behind Khomeini.

The rhetoric of anti-imperialism, anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism reflected strong sentiments during the 1979 Revolution. This united all opposition groups, from Leftist secular and Islamist- to- Conservative clerical- to the Pahlavi regime. The hostage crisis institutionalised enmity with the US and the West as a defining criteria of being a true revolutionary.²

In September 1980, amid the hostage crisis, Iran faced yet another serious existential geopolitical crisis when Iraq invaded. The war came to play a defining role in IRI domestic and international rhetoric, in which revolutionary Iran, in its struggle against invading Iraq, was also fighting against the country's traditional imperialist enemies, the USA, the USSR, and great European powers.

If the start of the war was not in the hands of Iran, the decision to continue the war, [after the liberation of Khorramshahr, a border city in the south-west of Iran, in May 1982,] and to reject Iraqi calls for a ceasefire in June 1982, was, to a large extent, a choice made by the IRI. These decisions were influenced by the popular and mobilising slogan, 'War, War up until victory,' in which both the elite and the masses

¹ Rouhollah K Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East* (JHU Press, 1988); Kaveh L Afrasiabi, *After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy* (Westview Pr, 1994); "Ideology and Pragmatism in Iran's Foreign Policy," *The Middle East Journal* 58, no. 4 (2004) 1-11; *Independence without Freedom: Iran's Foreign Policy* (University of Virginia Press, 2013).

² Joe D Hagan, "Domestic Political Explanations in the Analysis of Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in Its Second Generation* (1995): 117-43,

believed. Khomeini and the IRI used such revolutionary, anti-West, anti-US, and anti-Iraqi rhetoric to keep society mobilised behind the causes of the war. However, the slogans were not just politically cynical attempts to achieve this goal. The elite at this time believed in these slogans.

However, divisions emerged in the elite over the continuation of the war, as a result of several domestic and international dynamics. The regime had used the political and emotional atmosphere generated first by the hostage crisis and then Iraq's invasion of the country to neutralise its actual and potential enemies. This included Communist groups, the National Front headed by Bazargan, and the MEK. The regime was domestically stable by the mid-1980s. Concerns raised that a complete victory over Iraq could, perhaps, not be achieved. To address these emerging divisions, Khomeini, in one of his statements, quoted a Quranic verse and rephrased the slogan to "War, War until the elimination of 'sedition' (*Fetneh*) from the world."³

Despite this emphasis on the continuation of the war, disagreements and worries remained. As explored in Chapter One, they represented the early signs of factionalisation within the elite. The IRGC promoted an offensive approach with long-term plans for the elimination of Saddam Hussein himself. Meanwhile, Rafsanjani pushed for one major victory, to obtain better leverage in negotiating a peace agreement.

This reflected Rafsanjani's traditional pragmatism in foreign policy. Years later, an IRGC navy commander in the war, Admiral Ali Shamkhani, in an interview with *Kayhan*, described the different approaches of this period: "Khomeini's slogan was 'War, War until the elimination of *Fetneh*,' while the IRGC propagated the slogan

³ Khomeini, *Sahifeh*, vol.19, 332.

of ‘War, War, until complete victory’ and Rafsanjani pushed for ‘War, War, until a victory.’⁴ The war ended in 1988 with no clear winner.

The successful completion of the war had become an essential part of IRI ideology and popular participation in this endeavour and was propagated as a religious national duty of its citizens. Therefore, ending the war before the achievement of complete victory presented political and legitimacy challenges to the regime. It could be perceived by society as the IRI’s abandoning revolutionary goals and surrendering to the realities of the world order. Nonetheless, Khomeini accepted the need to end the war.

This step was another example of his pragmatic approach to foreign policy and his unique ability to take policy decisions that were, or seemingly, in contradiction with pillars of IRI ideology and slogans. He had shown this pragmatism earlier. In 1985, he approved a secret arms deal with the Reagan administration, the (in)famous Iran-Contra scandal. In 1982, another occasion, in contrast to the rhetoric exportation of the revolution and the support of the Islamic nation, *ommat*, he did not agree to deploy part of the IRGC and/or army to engage in the Israeli-Lebanese conflict.

This pragmatism, consequent ideologically contradicting policies and decisions, continue to provide factions in the post-Khomeini period with the opportunity to assume opposing positions. All while claiming to be the true representatives of Khomeinism. In addition to his worldview, there were other elements which exercised varied influences on Khomeini’s decisions: a) ideological factional disputes between different blocs of IRI politics, the Traditional Right and the Left; and/or b) particular political figures, such as Rafsanjani, Khomeini’s son Ahmad, and Khamenei.

⁴ *Kayhan* 8/7/1391 (29/September/2012).

However, it was Khomeini who made the final decision. To repeat, his unique position allowed him to make final, sometimes contradictory decisions on major foreign policies. This model was, however, impossible to continue after his death.

Despite this pragmatism, he also showed a tougher side in the wake of his decision to end the war. In 1988, a few weeks after the ceasefire, in an attempt to overthrow the IRI, militias of the MEK, living in Iraq invaded Iran. Their mission failed. Khomeini, taking advantage of this attack, ordered the overnight execution of many political prisoners who supported it and *Tudeh*. This incident played, and continues to play, an important role in factional politics and the image of Khomeini, as well as in state-society relations. In February 1989, following the publication of the *Satanic Verses*, Khomeini called its author, Salman Rushdie, an infidel and issued a death decree against him. This decree provoked harsh reactions within the West. One could argue that, given the way the war ended, Khomeini hoped, with these decisions, to reinforce his image as a powerful leader.

In sum, under Khomeini, the role of the people in foreign policy was minimal. In reality, on the one hand, the IRI used particular slogans associated with foreign policy to express their true beliefs; on the other hand, they used them to ensure popular support for their decisions. This process was, in reality, the rhetorical popularisation of foreign policy and it distinguished the IRI from the deposed Pahlavi regime. The public arena was not the site of discussions and debates about the elements and trajectory of IRI foreign policy. Rather, it was an arena for the rhetorical mobilisation of the people around the regime, its foreign policy, and the struggle against the West and the East.

After Khomeini's death, Rafsanjani, as part of his move towards rationalisation of the revolution, established the Supreme Council for National Security (SCNS). This

was to fill the need for an institution responsible for decision-making on major IRI national security issues in the post-Khomeini era. The hybrid characteristic of the IRI is reflected in the structure of the SCNS. The President chairs it, while the Supreme Leader appoints personal representatives to it— one of whom is its Secretary General appointed by the President. All major electoral and revolutionary/Islamic institutions have a representative in the SCNS. SCNS legislation needs to be approved by the Supreme Leader.⁵ The SCNS became one of the main institutions responsible for defining foreign policy doctrine, and, arguably, the institutional symbol of the entire official IRI elite in the post-Khomeini era.

Electoral Popularisation of Foreign Policy

The IRI's relationship with the West and the US remained one of the main foreign policy issues in the post-Khomeini era. The fundamental issue was whether Tehran should have relations with countries of the West and, if so, the extent of these relations. These questions were not unique to the IRI, nor were they new in Iranian history. Similar to the experience of many non-Western countries faced with the military, technological and economic advancement of the West, Iran's history for over the last three centuries has been, to a large extent, shaped by its historical contact with the West, which has gone through different phases.

On a state and intellectual level, Iran, during the late Qajar and Pahlavi periods, believed in implementing cultural, economic, and social Westernisation to overcome Iran's backwardness vis-à-vis the West. However, by the mid-1960s, in the growing popularity of Third Worldism and intense Pahlavi Westernisation, the Iranian intelligentsia and then popular opinion, began a search for the definition of, and path

⁵ IRI Constitution article:176

to, true Iranian cultural authenticity and national identity. By the time of the Revolution of 1979, the rejection of Westernisation and calls for a return to Iranian cultural authenticity and national identity were major elements in the revolutionary mobilising and subsequent official IRI ideology, as noted in previous chapters.

In the post-Khomeini and post-Cold War period the IRI faced new challenges to its official ideology regarding national cultural and political authenticity. New theories dealing with topics, such as globalisation, the clash of civilisations, the end of history, and transition to democracy, found their way into the academic and intellectual debates of the IRI and the public debates. These new theories also shaped the elite's perception of the new world order and thus affected the IRI's foreign policy decision-making. The study of these conceptions and their effect on the IRI's politics is beyond the scope of this thesis.

However, these historical and cultural perceptions of the West together played an important role in the context in which IRI factional politics dealt with the issue of the country's opening the country to the West. This section briefly investigates the extent to which the question of the IRI's relationship with the West has interrelated with the evolution of factional politics and its popularisation. It also aims to investigate the effect of contingent geopolitical incidents and/or the interpretation of these incidents on the popularisation of foreign policy until the 2013 Presidential election.

One of the main pillars of Rafsanjani's programme of *Tose'eh* was the normalisation of IRI relations with neighbouring countries and the West.⁶ As explored in Chapter Two, in response to the rising economic, cultural and sociopolitical challenges of the war, and Khomeini's death, Rafsanjani initiated a series of policies

⁶ Eva Patricia Rakel, "Iranian Foreign Policy since the Iranian Islamic Revolution: 1979-2006," *Perspectives on Global development and Technology* 6 no. 1 (2007): 170-171.

focusing on economic reform. For the success of his economic reforms, Rafsanjani needed sociopolitical stability, foreign financial investment and international financial organisation loans. In 2009, he summarised his policies: Our foreign policy doctrine was ‘normalisation.’ We improved our relationship with the West and then we succeeded in using Western [technological and financial] capabilities for reconstruction projects... We also befriended our neighbours.⁷

To implement this ‘normalisation’ Rafsanjani, with the initial support of Khamenei, modified IRI ideology to justify the shift in foreign policy. He had limited success in this endeavor. On the one hand, the Leftists, due to the end of the Cold War and their political elimination at the hands of the Conservatives, were no longer in a position to oppose Rafsanjani’s moves toward the West and the guiding of the economy toward a more liberal market one.

As these policies gained momentum, new elements in the context of factional politics came to challenge his approach. The Conservatives regarded Rafsanjani’s export-oriented economy, the creation of the ‘mercantile bourgeoisie’ class, and the sociocultural consequences of *Tose’eh*, a threat to their social support base and their trade-oriented economy. As mentioned earlier, the factional dynamic between Khamenei and Rafsanjani led the former to strengthen his ideological and institutional ties with the Conservatives. An important part of his consolidation of power and struggle against Rafsanjani became his slogan of ‘cultural onslaught’ by the West against the sacred and authentic values of Islam, whose source and only defender was the IRI. Together these elements made ideologically and politically difficult moves toward the US and the West.

In addition to factional elements, two geopolitical incidents in Rafsanjani’s

⁷ Rafsanjani 14/10/1388 (5/November/2009), <http://rafsanjani.ir/view.php?id=13319>.

second Presidential term undermined normalisation with the West: The first being, the murder of Iranian-Kurdish dissidents in 1992, in Mykonos restaurant in Berlin, Germany, allegedly on the IRI's order. The second being, the alleged involvement of the IRI in the 1996 Shia dissidents bombing of the US military camp, Khobar Tower, in Saudi Arabia, that provoked the imposition of sanctions by the Clinton administration on Iran (the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act of 1996).⁸

The hostage crisis and events such as these meant that the US approach to Iran was consistently tougher than that of the EU. Since 1992, EU official policy, with regard to Iran was based on the idea of 'critical dialogue,' which was, to a large extent, based on its emphasis on the attractiveness of the West's 'soft power' and on constructive engagement with Iran.⁹

On 11 April 1997, the court in charge of the Mykonos incident convicted Iranian officials. Rafsanjani, Khamenei and Ali Akbar Velayati, without explicitly being named, were convicted of ordering the assassination of the Kurdish dissidents. A few months earlier, an international arrest warrant was also issued for the Intelligence Minister, Ali Fallahian.

A diplomatic crisis dominated the final months of Rafsanjani's tenure. Almost all European countries recalled their ambassadors.¹⁰ The EU's 'critical dialogue' was

⁸ Iran Sanctions Act of 1996, as Amended 50 U.S.C. § 1701; *New York Times* (24/July/1996), <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/07/24/world/foreigners-investing-in-libya-or-in-iran-face-us-sanctions.html>;

⁹ Ali M Ansari, *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Crisis in the Middle East* (Basic books, 2007).

¹⁰ Robert D Blackwill and Michael Stürmer, *Allies Divided: Transatlantic Policies for the Greater Middle East* (MIT Press, 1997); Bernd Kaussler, "European Union Constructive Engagement with Iran (2000–2004): An Exercise in Conditional Human Rights Diplomacy," *Iranian Studies* 41, no. 3 (2008): 269–295.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, 11 April 1997, <http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/11/world/berlin-court-says-top-iran-leaders-ordered-killings.html?pagewanted=all>; K. Pollack, *The Persian Puzzle: Deciphering the Twenty-Five-Year Conflict between the United States and Iran* (Random House Publishing Group, 2004); Seyyed Hossein Mousavian, *Iran-Europe Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*, (Routledge, 2008).

undermined and the US ‘containment’ policy gained momentum. From the point of view of domestic critics of Rafsanjani’s foreign policy, his eight years of normalisation efforts and détente ended with US sanctions, and a reinvigorated anti-IRI stance of the countries of the West.

Khatami’s paradigm of political development had the normalisation of relations with the West at its centre, but had a different approach to that of Rafsanjani. He believed success in normalisation of relations, even economic relations, with the West required an initial ideological and political approach. Thus, Khatami utilised the discourse of the ‘dialogue of civilisations’ which underlined the philosophical shared values and goals between civilisations.

Khatami’s and the Reformist’s paradigm of ‘religious democracy’ was an attempt to reconcile Islam with different elements of the so-called Western model of democracy. Khatami’s emphasis on citizens’ rights, civil society and the rule of law were all perceived as the introduction of a new discourse that included values shared by the West. Therefore, the general conclusion in the West was that Khatami’s election was an additional sign of the IRI distancing itself from its revolutionary phase, which would evolve into detente with the West, and possibly the US.

While the Khatami Presidency was a turning point in the popularisation of factional politics, this popularisation became an important challenge to the success of détente in foreign policy. In January 1998, soon after his election, in an interview with CNN, Khatami signaled his willingness to expand the IRI’s relationship with the West and the US.¹¹ In September 1998, in his speech to the UN General Assembly, he promoted the discourse of the ‘dialogue of civilisations.’ His views in regard to foreign policy were shared by Hassan Rouhani, the SCNS secretary general, Rafsanjani, and

¹¹ Transcript of interview with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, *CNN* (7 January 1998), <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/9801/07/iran/interview.html>.

many figures amongst Reformists and the Modern Right. This relative unity provided him with political capital to follow his foreign policy.

However, the Conservatives and Khamenei, whose authority had already been weakened by the election of Khatami, considered Khatami's foreign policy approach a possible threat to their authority. In response, they increased their anti-Western rhetoric. Thus, whilst Khatami spoke about the dialogue of civilisations and the possibility of improved relations with the West, Khamenei articulated more than in the past the idea of a 'cultural onslaught' led by the West against Iran. The underlying message was that the West, headed by the USA, was determined to undermine the IRI by first destroying Iranian cultural authenticity and national identity. Khamenei ascribed to Huntington's idea of 'Clash of Civilisations.' These conflicting messages coming out of Tehran which were also indicators of domestic factional politics, weakened any enthusiasm and willingness in the West, and especially in the USA, to make major positive moves in regard to the IRI.

Similar to Rafsanjani's tenure, geopolitical contingent incidents influenced the normalisation of relations with the West and the US during the Khatami era. Close to the end of his first term of Presidency, the 11 September attacks by Al-Qaeda on the US took place. They were followed by the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the US foreign policy doctrine of War on Terror. These events influenced the electoral popularisation of foreign policy.

The IRI was one of the first countries to condemn the attacks of 11 September. Khatami sent a message a few hours after the attack expressing his sympathy for the victims. In Tehran, many Iranians held candlelit vigils to show respect for the victims.

Khamenei also condemned the attacks.¹²

When the US attacked Afghanistan, the IRI elite was divided on how to react. Khatami and his foreign policy team persuaded Khamenei to co-operate with the US. As a result, despite Khamenei's pessimism with regard to trusting the US, the IRI provided intelligence to the US, mobilised in favour of US actions its anti-Taliban allies and, beginning in December 2001, provided financial and political aid in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

The supporters of cooperation, Khatami and his team, along with Rouhani and Rafsanjani, argued that the IRI's national interests now converged with US interests in Afghanistan. Such support of US actions could play a decisive role in changing negative perceptions of the IRI in the international arena and show it could be a reliable geopolitical partner in the region if IRI concerns were addressed by the US. This position was similar to that taken by Tehran during the First Persian Gulf War (1990–1991).

However, George W. Bush dealt a serious blow to this IRI foreign policy approach when, in his State of Union Speech of January 2002, he called Iran, along with Iraq and North Korea, members of an 'axis of evil.' He proclaimed: "Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom."¹³ Khatami was personally offended. Khamenei reacted: "The IRI is proud that it is the subject of anger and wrath of the most hateful of all devils."

¹² For Khatami's message:

CNN (12/September/2001), <http://edition.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/europe/09/12/mideast.reaction/>.

For Khamenei's message:

BBC World (17/September/2001), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/1549573.stm.

¹³ The White House Archive, The President's State of Union Speech, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

Khamenei stated in response to Bush's claim that small unelected group ruled the people: "In contrast to the hollow and insipid election of the West, the IRI officials are elected based on the majority of the vote and the emotional support of the people."¹⁴ This new US approach to the IRI had a series of consequences on different levels within the wider framework of factional politics and IRI foreign policy, given the strong historical pessimism about the ultimate motives of the US and the West held by a large number of IRI political and military elites.

Bush's portrayal of the IRI played an important role in the electoral popularisation of foreign policy. Khamenei had shown his sensitivity, in this regard, a few years earlier in 2000, with the then Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright. Apologising for the role of the US in the 1953 coup against the democratically elected government of Mossadegh, divided the IRI into two different segments:—elected and unelected. Albright commented:

As in any diverse society, there are many currents swirling about in Iran. Some are driving the country forward; others are holding it back. Despite the trend towards democracy, control over the military, judiciary, courts and police remains in unelected hands, and the elements of its foreign policy, about which we are most concerned, have not improved. But the momentum in the direction of internal reform, freedom and openness is growing stronger.¹⁵

This portrayal of the regime as two segments, popular-elected and unpopular-unelected, was seen by part of the regime as a new conspiracy and a plot by the US to create divisions between state and society in IRI. Mohammad Javad Zarif, the Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister and, at the time, Iran's representative in the UN, illustrated this issue in his memoir:

The main aim of Mrs Albright's speech was to erase the past. However this speech created a whole new obstacle in Iran-US relations, namely [the concept of] elected officials and unelected officials. In other words, it divided Iran's political society or [its]

¹⁴ Khamenei 11/11/1380 (31/January/2002), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=968>.

¹⁵ Madeline Albright, "Remarks before the American-Iranian Council," *Retrieved November 10 (2000)*, <http://fas.org/news/iran/2000/000317.htm>.

regime into two groups, and underlined that those who were elected in this recent election (the sixth *Majlis*) were good and those who were not elected were bad... this in fact was questioning the [legitimacy of the IRI] political system. From the perspective of a large number of Iranian decision makers, the main point of Mrs. Albright's speech was to undertake a deceitful move in the hope of dividing Iranian officials.¹⁶

In domestic politics, the Reformists hoped to take advantage of the foreign policy crisis in favour of their domestic factional interest. However, their attempts to take advantage of the international situation after Bush's speech aggravated their relationship with Khamenei even further and led to deeper mutual mistrust. Within this context, and at the height of factional politics, in May 2002, a few months after Bush's speech to capitalise on what they perceived as a political opportunity, Reformist MPs of the sixth *Majlis* wrote a letter to Khamenei putting him under pressure to limit restrictive actions of the GC and to allow the passing of the 'twin bills (*lavayeh*)'...

Perhaps in the tumultuous history of contemporary Iran, no period has been as critical as today... The current situation is unique because the [domestic factional] sociopolitical schisms have coincided with external threats and US plans for changing the geopolitical map of this region. Thus, the regime must inevitably act and respond to these actions.

They pushed their agenda by linking the IRI's national security with the empowerment of electoral institutions and the weakening of parallel Islamic revolutionary ones:

It is not tanks, cannons, missiles, or military arms that can nullify these external threats. It is the enhancement of the regime's legitimacy, national unity and the unity of the nation and the state.... And this is only possible if the nation (*mellat*) is assured that its will, demands and votes could be a source of change.... National unity means submission to the vote of the people, it means all [of us to] be with the people, that 'people's votes is the yardstick' (Khomeini's quote). [Thus] adherence to this interpretation of national unity not only can neutralise foreign threats, but also can transform [these] threats into opportunities.

¹⁶ Mohammad Mehdi Rajii, *Aqa-ye Safir (Mr. Ambassador) Interview with Mohammad J. Zarif* (Nashr-e Ney, 2013): 212.

At the end, by accusing Khamenei of hypocrisy, they argued: "One cannot promote free elections in that country [Iraq] from Friday prayer sermons while at the same time depriving one's own people from such a basic right."¹⁷ Arguably, Khamenei could perceive these comments as resonating with what the US and Bush were promoting and what he considered to be a US conspiracy.

The 'Axis of Evil' doctrine influenced, to a certain extent, the IRI's foreign policy approach with regard to the West and the US through reinforcing certain perceptions of the IRI's political elites about the US and the West. The doctrine was the symbol of the essentialist neo-Conservative approach to US foreign policy. It was based on the idea that the US granted itself the right to wage war against whoever the US considered to be a terrorist or a supporter of terrorists.¹⁸

This doctrine confirmed the image of the US constructed by Khamenei. Meanwhile, US pre-emptive attacks on Iraq, as well as increasing pressure on the Iranian nuclear programme, was perceived by part of the IRI elites as confirmation of their perception that the main US policy goal was the overthrow of the IRI. Therefore, the IRI considered the US to be an existential threat. It was the same position that the US had during the first decade of the IRI.

Tehran's cooperation with the US stopped. This US doctrine also influenced IRI foreign policy calculations in Iraq. The IRI's policy now focused on ensuring that Iraq did not become a "client state of the US." They also had to ensure that the Shi'a majority would gain its share of power. From Washington's point of view IRI policy in Iraq was adding to its difficulties in Iraq. Thus, "as the problems of the US

¹⁷ BBC Persian (4/February/2004),

http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2004/02/040217_mps_letter_to_leader.shtml.

¹⁸ Andrew J Bacevich and Elizabeth H Prodromou, "God Is Not Neutral: Religion and US Foreign Policy after 9/11," *Orbis* 48, no. 1 (2005): 43-54; Mark LeVine, *Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil* (Oneworld Publications, 2013).

occupation became apparent, Iran has been emboldened to use its ability to support the insurgency in Iraq as a way of pressuring the US not to attack its nuclear facilities.”¹⁹

A few months after Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ speech the MEK exposed the IRI’s activities in nuclear facilities in Arak and Natanz. The Iranian nuclear programme was placed under international scrutiny. It dominated the main IRI foreign policy agenda for the next decade. In September 2003, a few months after the US-Iraq invasion, The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors adopted a resolution calling for Iran to suspend all its enrichment-related activities. After this resolution, in response to the request of Kamal Kharrazi, the Iranian Foreign Minister at the time, SCNS took charge of handling the issue.

Hassan Rouhani became the chief negotiator. Iran voluntarily suspended its nuclear programme and invited European leaders to find a diplomatic solution. Iran also signed the additional protocol to Iran’s NPT safeguards agreement, an additional document which “grants the IAEA complementary legal authority to verify a state’s safeguards obligations.”²⁰ A series of negotiations followed. In July 2004, Iran resumed its enrichment programme, following domestic political pressure, and in August 2005, after a series of proposals and counter proposals, Iran agreed to temporarily suspend its uranium enrichment activities in exchange for a series of concessions.

However, the agreement failed, given that the next IRI Presidential election was

¹⁹ Kamran Taremi, “Iranian Foreign Policy Towards Occupied Iraq, 2003-05,” *Middle East Policy* 12, no. 4 (2005): 28-47.

²⁰ IAEA official website: <https://www.iaea.org/safeguards/safeguards-legal-framework/additional-protocol>.

For general timeline of these resolutions, see: <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/chronology-of-key-events>.

For the period of 2002-2004 see:

Great Britain. Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: A Collection of Documents* (Stationery Office, 2005); Joachim Krause, *Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Strategic Implications* (Taylor & Francis, 2012).

approaching. A few months later Ahmadinejad became the President, Ali Larijani replaced Rouhani and the Iranian diplomatic approach changed. Rouhani considers his handling of the negotiations to be a success. He stressed that he prevented the referral of Iran's nuclear programme case from the IAEA to the UNSC. He claimed he used the negotiations to set a framework for Iran's future co-operation with the West in order to reach a long-term strategic alliance.²¹ The question of how successful Rouhani's approach returned to public political debate eight years later, during the 2013 Presidential election.

Importantly, in light of the fact that by the time of the Khatami Era the general IRI foreign policy doctrine was conceived at the top of the regime with a framework of relative collective decision-making. Thus, the weight of different players in the decision-making centres, such as SCNS, would be a significant element in the selection of one direction of foreign policy over the other. Khamenei's extent of influence has also depended on his authority relative to that of other main political players.

Zarif confirmed this approach:

In all the time I was in charge, even one word has not been announced without the permission of the Supreme Leader. Of course it is possible that the Leader accepted some issues, such as suspension of the [nuclear activity] half-heartedly, but based on what I heard from a large number of friends, his (Khamenei's) method in [decision-making] over these years was in such a way that he respected the collective decision and, in higher-level meetings, has made decisions after consensus.

The Reformist's return to power reflected the popularisation of domestic politics. It was during Ahmadinejad's two terms as President that the popularisation of foreign policy escalated. Khamenei had gained more influence in decision-making

²¹ Hassan Rouhani, *Amniyyat-e Melli Diplomasi-ye Hasteh-ei* [National Security and Nuclear policy] (Markaz-e Tahqiqat-e Esteratejek, 2011).

with regard to the relationship with the West and the US, due to different domestic and international factors emerging after the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005. First, the dynamics of the factional political power balance changed in Khamenei's favour. Second, Khamenei's pessimism and cynicism regarding the West was reinforced after the events of 9/11 and during negotiations with the West over Iran's nuclear programme. Third, the IRGC and security institutions increased their involvement in state affairs, securitising the sociopolitical and cultural spheres.

Meanwhile, Khamenei's doctrine of 'cultural onslaught' gained momentum, fueling the anti-Western rhetoric of the state. This discourse was rephrased by another title: the 'soft war' (*Jang-e Narm*). The use of 'Soft War' by Khamenei in sermons and speeches reflected the degree to which he felt a threat from the West. For example, in 2009 his usage of it went up 2000 percent compared to the previous year.²²

Based on this discourse, 'Soft War' referred to the attempts of the IRI's enemies to overthrow it by using cultural instruments and modern propaganda tools. The enemies of the IRI were aiming to transmute the IRI into a new regime by emasculating it from within. By making *homo Islamicus* question its values and principles, the IRI enemies aimed for change him from within. This discourse largely shared common elements with the 'cultural onslaught' discourse used during the Rafsanjani period.

In sum, a new foreign policy discourse emerged, arguing that the West not only could not be trusted, but if the IRI wanted to reach its goals, it needed to show resistance and implement a more aggressive tone. Or, in other words, instead of playing a passive role in the international order, the IRI should play an active role. This fear of the 'soft power' of the West was not a new element in the IRI, but Khamenei institutionalised this fear in IRI discourses. To mobilise their supporters

²² Khamenei's official website published a comparative chart on the usage of 'Soft War' see: <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/keyword-content?id=1016>.

behind the new approach in foreign policy, rhetoric was increasingly used in both Khamenei's and Ahmadinejad's speeches.

The revolutionary period of Khomeinism foreign policy gave this discourse enough material to justify its discourse. This change of foreign policy is depicted in the change of the main negotiator of Iran's nuclear programme and the SCNS secretary general. Hassan Rouhani was replaced by Ali Larijani (2005–2007) who was subsequently replaced by Saeed Jalili (2007–2013).

Similar to his populist rhetoric in domestic politics, Ahmadinejad's rhetoric in foreign policy emphasised the return of revolutionary foreign policy that focused on a positive vision for the future of the world and the struggle against Western hegemony. Iran's diplomatic and foreign policy rhetoric differed from that of previous administrations.

In this context, Ahmadinejad and his supporters considered Ahmadinejad's controversial comments and unconventional behaviour symbols of challenging the hegemonic world order. Ahmadinejad questioned historical aspects of the Holocaust while demanding the elimination of Israel from the earth. He sent a series of letters to different world leaders, including US Presidents and the Pope, in which he condemned the current world order, US politics and underlined the defeat of liberalism and Western democracies in meeting human needs. He thus invited them to follow the path of the prophets.²³

Almost all of his letters received no reply. He attended every UN General Assembly meeting that was held during his Presidency. This was where he denounced the US and Israel, as well as questioned the UN's structure and the world order. He called for the need for global management and proclaimed that the Hidden Imam's

²³ BBC Persian (9/May/2006), http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2006/05/060509_ss-iranletterbush.shtml.

reign will soon come.

This new foreign policy discourse was reflected in Iran's approach to the negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme. The IRI retained its nuclear programme, raised its medium-level enriched uranium stockpile, and opened new facilities. This led to the increased isolation of the IRI in the international community. The Iranian nuclear case was referred to the UNSC, where the possibility of future military action against the programme was floated. The escalation of sanctions against the IRI, and the consequent intensification of rhetorical foreign policy in domestic politics, made the foreign policy approach of Ahmadinejad one of the main topics of the 2009 election.

As explored in the previous chapter, Mousavi and Karroubi criticised Ahmadinejad's foreign policy by calling it unnecessarily damaging towards the IRI's international standing and national interests. The dynamics of the electoral debates and the subsequent contentious events popularised the question of the IRI's relationship with the West and the US.

However, with the suppression of the Green Movement and the consequent securitisation of the sociopolitical domain, the regime restricted public debates about foreign policy with regard to the West and the US. The regime, defined as Khamenei, Conservatives and neo-Conservatives, increased the mobilisation of its followers with the hope of widening its support base. In this sense, it was similar to the rhetorical popularisation of foreign policy during the first decade of the IRI. On various occasions, the regime used the *Basij* and other institutions to mobilise their supporters in the streets. They escalated their anti-US rhetoric in order to portray the image of popular support for its foreign policy doctrine. To keep his supporters mobilised, Khamenei intensified his anti-US rhetoric by introducing new elements into the old

discourses and/or constructing new discourses.

After the 2009 electoral events, while the sanctions against Iran tightened, the IRI increased propaganda efforts to show that the sanctions were ineffective and underline the positive role of sanctions in making the country self-sufficient.²⁴ In addition, large amounts of money was spent on programmes showing IRI self-sufficiency and development, such as the space programme, sending animals into the stratosphere and satellites into orbit.

Criticising previous administrations for their efforts to make ties with a few powerful Western countries with whom the IRI had had the most disagreements, in terms of values, and also to counter the image of isolation, the Ahmadinejad administration tried to increase its cooperation with other countries who claimed shared values. For instance, the IRI expanded its relations with the Chavez government in Venezuela, arguing that they both shared anti-hegemonic world order sentiments.

However, the more that the IRI propagated the ineffectiveness of sanctions, the more it solidified the link between the sanctions and deterioration of the living standards for most of the Iranian population. Within this discourse was the implicit issue of the IRI's relationship with the West and the US.

Thus, since these official claims contradicted the reality of the socioeconomic situation as experienced by the people its effectiveness was limited. People concluded that their deteriorating socioeconomic situation had been a direct outcome of the mismanagement of foreign policy. In other words, foreign policy increasingly became popularised. Nonetheless, in light of the events of 2009–2010, the IRI sought to use the issue of the nuclear programme to strengthen its domestic legitimacy, claiming credit for making Iran a member of the exclusive club of nuclear countries, which was

²⁴ Khamenei, 14/11/1390 (3/February/2012), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=18923>.

fighting against Western hegemony. IRI propaganda tried to enflame nationalist feelings by drawing a parallel between Mussadeq's struggle against the British for the nationalisation of Iranian oil and the IRI's struggle with the West over its nuclear programme.²⁵

Ultimately, these propaganda efforts made the nuclear programme, and thus the foreign policy, main elements in the electoral popularisation of foreign policy. This electoral popularisation of foreign policy reached a peak during the Presidential elections of 2013. Foreign policy with regard to the West and the US, became the main subject of the electoral debate, over the management of Iran's nuclear programme negotiations.

Normalisation Doctrine versus Active Doctrine

By the Presidential elections of 2013, Khatami's promotion of a 'dialogue of civilisations' and the 'normalisation' of relations, which were offshoots of Rafsanjani's foreign policy, had become a part of electoral politics. Despite their differences, these two former Presidents did not share rhetorical anti-West views and considered cooperation with the West and integration into the world order the best way to secure the IRI's national interests.

They believed this approach would allow the IRI to be able to fulfil part of its revolutionary goals and to become a significant geopolitical player, at least in the region. In response, the Reformists and the Modern Right were promoting normalisation with the West and the US. The Traditional Right gave birth to the neo-Conservatives, who defined their ideological foreign policy in the mirror of the discourses of Rafsanjani and Khatami.

²⁵ For an example of this comparison see: <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/others-note?id=11860>.

The main components of their discourse were protection and propagation of true revolutionary values, a foreign policy based on pure Islamic values, with anti-hegemonism as its main pillar, and on struggling against the hegemonic powers of the world. They sought renewed propagation of the claimed superiority of the Islamic universalist modernity. In IRI political lexicon, the first general approach is referred to as the 'normalisation doctrine.' The second one is called the 'active doctrine,' which has other labels, including 'threat containment,' 'revolutionary doctrine' or sometimes 'justice-driven principilism.'

Saeed Jalili, a second-generation revolutionary similar to Ahmadinejad, is one of the main promoters of the 'active doctrine.' The EU officials who met Jalili during their meetings over the Iranian nuclear programme described him as "a true product of the Iranian revolution."²⁶ He received his PhD in Political Science from Imam Sadeq University, which had been established by Mahdavi Kani to educate the future cadres of the IRI. His PhD thesis was entitled the 'Foreign Policy of the Prophet Mohammad.' He was a war veteran and an IRGC member who lost part of his right foot in the Iran-Iraq War.

After a year of serving in the SLO as Khamenei's consultant, he was appointed as his representative to the SCNS in 2002. Jalili criticised the foreign policy of Rafsanjani and Khatami while claiming to have a new discourse of foreign policy.

Jalili underlines his belief that a strong political theory must be the catalyst for the domestic and international actions of any politician. He believes that today's politicians lack such theory and thus their political behavior is only a "caricature" of the type of behavior life demands. He has concluded that the main problem of the IRI

²⁶ Reuters (25/February/2013), <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nuclear-iran-jalili>.

political elite and factions lay in their lack of comprehensive political theory that sets the framework for their actions and thought.²⁷

He proposes that “religious thought” is a substantial framework which contains the best political theory and model for such thought and actions and offers the path to the earthly Islamic utopia. He places the short history of IRI within this discourse, arguing that the Islamic Revolution is the depiction of this ideology. The IRI experience of the Iran-Iraq War shows the “practicality” of this discourse.

He considers the election of Ahmadinejad as another opportunity that emerged after “some period of stagnation (implying the Khatami and Rafsanjani Presidencies)...”²⁸ He rejects the “de-ideologisation,” “de-principalisation” and “de-idealisation” of foreign policy. Thus, he diagnoses that the main problem in foreign policy is the compromising over principles.²⁹ In response to the normalisation discourse of the 16 years of the Khatami and Rafsanjani era, he proposes that our principle should be “threats containment.”³⁰ He believes that the IRI should have an active foreign policy and, instead of being in a weak position, defined as trying to justify itself to the world, it should go on the offensive, attacking the hegemonic powers using their own standards and language with example from both their domestic conditions and support of Israel.

Jalili’s foreign policy doctrine echoed that of Khamenei, who also linked foreign policy with the revolutionary values and Islamic principles of the IRI. In 2003, Khamenei proclaimed: “the main principle in the foreign policy of Iran is the protection of the identity of the Islamic regime, its principles and values.” He then

²⁷ *Asr Iran* 2/8/1386 (24/October/2007), <http://www.asiran.com/fa/news/27767/>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Soureh* 9/6/1384 (31/August/2005).

³⁰ *Ibid.*

argued that these principles should not be compromised: “We should not abandon our principle in order to please the West,” since these principles are “our national and collective identity.”³¹

In 2004, amid nuclear negotiations and his pushing for ending the suspension of the enrichment programme, he again emphasised this link between the revolution and foreign policy.³² Almost a month later, in September 2004, in the same context, by quoting a Quranic verse, Khamenei declared that ‘persistent’ protection of values a main element in his foreign policy doctrine. Jalil follows this line.³³ Khamenei argued that “our motto in the pursuit of our goals and our principle should be to ‘persist the way in which you were ordered’ (Quran).”

Khamenei created room for manoeuvre by distinguishing between persistence over the goals with timely flexibility over tactics to justify the possible changes regarding policy directions in the future. He argued: “The [revolution’s] goals are divine goals... [where] no deviation from them is permitted... [However] we prescribe ‘persistence’ with regard to our goals. We should not mistake the goals by the means... With regard to the methods, there is trial and error... but in terms of goals, we should stand solid and strong and not take even a step back.”³⁴

In 2007, Khamenei emphasised the importance of an active foreign policy. Referring to the last years of Khatami’s Presidency he argued:

Back then, in a meeting with officials, which was broadcast on TV, I told them that if they (Western countries) insist on their continuous demands, I will intervene personally. I did it, I told [the officials] you should stop this pattern of retreat and change

³¹ Khamenei 27/5/1382 (18/August/2003), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=1022>.

³² Khamenei 25/5/1383 (15/August/2004), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=1173>.

³³ Jalili stated in 2015: “Those who promote de-ideologisation in the foreign policy of the IRI, should know that, even America, explicitly and bullyingly underlined the right of the use of coercion or force for defending its disgraceful values, such as the rights of homosexuals.” Thus, resistance over our values is the path to our success.”

Entekhab 6/2/1394 (26/April/2015), <http://www.entekhab.ir/fa/news/200876/>.

³⁴ Khamenei 31/6/1383 (21/September/2004), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3250>.

it into active advancement. The first step should be that the very government who started these retreats should stop them and begin an active approach, and this happened.³⁵

In sum, this approach believes that in foreign policy as well as in other spheres, one should define its ideology, its values and its principles first. The foreign policy also should be defined in this ideological framework, which is rooted in the 1979 revolutionary values. It considers 'religious thoughts' as its ideology. The only way to achieve the promises of this ideology and its success would be to have faith in its principles, values and 'persistence' in implementing them. Ahmadinejad's foreign policy rhetoric also fitted within this theme of foreign policy.³⁶ This approach became official IRI policy during the Presidency of Ahmadinejad regarding the West and the US for almost the next eight years.

The 'active doctrine' positioned itself as the antithesis of the 'normalisation' doctrine. The normalisation doctrine also evolved and integrated different elements into its main debates. Mohammad Javad Zarif is one of the main diplomats promoting this foreign policy doctrine over the years. Zarif's educational path in the US acquainted him with Western theories of international relations. Having lived in the US for around 30 years, he obtained a realistic view of the US. His career path familiarised him with the dynamics of international organisations. He served as Iran's permanent representative to the UN from 2002–2007.³⁷ A few months after Jalili was appointed as the main negotiator for the Iranian nuclear programme, in July 2007, he returned to Iran and entered academia.

Zarif links popular sovereignty with international relations. Thus, this

³⁵ Khamenei 13/10/1386 (3/January/2008), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=3416>.

³⁶ BBC Persian (9/May/2006), http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2006/05/060509_ss-iranletterbush.shtml.

³⁷ See Zarif CV for UN,

http://portal.unesco.org/en/files/40284/11926255963CV_Dr_M._Javad_Zarif.pdf/.

interpretation could be an important element in the popularisation of factional politics. In his memoir, broadly speaking, Zarif presents the main elements of this foreign policy doctrine. He argues that the international order, similar to the sources of state sovereignty, is changing. It is now the support of citizens which legitimises a sovereign.

Thus, a state only has the right to oppose a foreign intervention if it enjoys internal popular legitimacy. He points to the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's thesis of sovereignty, as being responsibility not authority, and concludes:

“The fact that the meaning of sovereignty is changing from authority to responsibility is a growing trend... I personally feel that the concept of sovereignty as the authority, or the authority of the sovereign, is gradually crumbling. Authoritarian states may still exist, but they (these states) would be delegitimised to the point that their lifespan in the international society would be limited.”³⁸

In sum, this doctrine links the popular legitimacy of the state to its acceptance in the international community.

This approach stressed that cooperation with the West and integration into the world order were the best ways to secure the IRI's national interests, enabling it to fulfil part of their revolutionary goals and to become a significant geopolitical player, at least in the region. Defending Khatami's foreign policy, Zarif highlighted this goal and argued that this position of being a regional player was taken away by Turkey. During the Ahmadinejad [tenure], because of Turkey's better foreign policy, “the flag that Khatami wanted to raise in the Islamic world, [which would be] the flag of moderation, the flag of dialogue, the flag of rational opposition to Israel and the flag of independence, this flag is now erected by the hands of Turkey.”³⁹

³⁸ Rajii, *Aqa-ye*, 311–337.

³⁹ Ibid., 356.

This view of the West and the international order always preferred diplomacy and negotiation. This anti-confrontational position was depicted in Mohammad Javad Zarif's response to those who called him a liberal during his tenure as a diplomat in the IRI's embassy in the US. Soon after the revolution, "the confrontation with the hegemonic order and imperialism needs rationality, logic, and knowledge, not a war-mongering spirit."⁴⁰

This theme could be found in Rafsanjani's justification for ending the war, for negotiation attempts with the US, or for promoting Khatami's dialogue of civilisations and/or for Rouhani's negotiations with the West over Iran's nuclear programme. The confrontation of these two main themes with regard to the IRI's foreign policy doctrine in relation to the US and the West, and over the IRI nuclear programme, dominated the 2013 Presidential election debates. Part of the next chapter aims to place these confrontations in factional politics and elaborates this confrontation.

Conclusion

In sum, the hybrid characteristics of the IRI, as well as the myriad different, sometimes parallel, decision-making centres, played a significant role in the dynamics of the relationship between foreign policy and factional politics. These characteristics have given the IRI an ability to shift its foreign policy direction easily and to lower the risk of possible legitimacy challenges emerging from such changes.

By giving opposing factions ideological and political room to contest the nature and trajectory of IRI foreign policy, this hybrid regime has also opened the way for different factional forces to hinder the implementation of policies considered ideologically, politically, and/or economically threatening to their interests. In other

⁴⁰ Ibid., 137.

words, since the success of certain foreign policy decisions could translate into popularity for a faction and thus strengthening it, these characteristics of the hybrid regime gives the opposing factions powerful tools and institutional authority to hinder the implementation of foreign policy. As a result, the implementation and continuation of major foreign policy issues, particularly those that can render popularity to the faction(s) behind them dependends significantly on factional politics.

Over the 16 years of the Rafsanjani and Khatami administrations, Khomeini's rhetorical popular foreign policy approach — exercised during the 1980s — was overshadowed by the electoral popularisation of foreign policy, which gained momentum from the mid-1990s. However, this popularisation of foreign policy greatly increased because of Ahmadinejad's intense use of the rhetorical aspects of foreign policy to bolster his position in his struggles with various factions and the concomitant growing economic crisis emerging from the tough international sanctions placed on the country over its nuclear program and Ahmadinejad's approach to negotiations. By the time of the 2013 Presidential elections, the electoral popularisation of foreign policy reached a new peak.

Chapter Seven

The Rouhani Presidency

As the 2013 Presidential elections approached, the popularisation of factional politics as well as the electoral popularisation of foreign policy continued to reach new heights, given the country's increasingly serious domestic and international problems and the consequent increasing factional and personal rancor between the main members of the IRI elite.

The deteriorating socioeconomic situation added to the increasing tension among the factions and played an important role in the increasing disunity within the Conservatives and neo-Conservatives. Increasing public dissatisfaction with these conditions led to a weakening of their electoral support and thus their positions within the factional struggles. The socioeconomic situation was at crisis level; stagflation had set in. A fact even the major figures of the IRI recognised. Inflation hovered between 30-35 percent in the period 2011-2013. The costs of housing and rent were double this rate, while growth rates were negative: -6.8 percent and -1.9 percent in 2011–12 and 2012–13 respectively.¹

Official unemployment statistics showed a persistent rate of 10 percent and above. Unemployment amongst the youth, ages 15- to- 24, remained between 25 and 30 percent during this period. These figures were artificially low given the new criteria used by the Ahmadinejad government to determine who is unemployed.² Contrary to Ahmadinejad's slogans and promises, people's overall living standards suffered a continual and precipitous decline while a small group became wealthy in a short period

¹ Economic Research and Policy Department, "Key Economic Indicators," ed. No.83 Fourth Quarter 2015/16 (Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2015/16).

² IRI Statistical Center, Unemployment Report, https://www.amar.org.ir/Portals/0/Files/abstract/1394/ch_ntank_94.pdf.

of time.³

The IRI was suffering from these economic difficulties when oil prices remained above \$85 a barrel added to growing popular outrage over economic conditions. As noted in the previous chapter, popular opinion blamed both the regime and UN sanctions for the deteriorating socioeconomic conditions. This thus added to the popularisation of factional politics and the factional popularisation of foreign policy.

Ahmadinejad, continuing to project his populist anti-establishment persona, railing against established elites and declaring personal war against figures, such as Ali Larijani, the Speaker of the *Majlis*, and Rafsanjani, and implicitly against the authority of Khamenei. As the economic situation deteriorated, he, also increasingly on the defensive in factional politics, intensified his efforts in this direction and thus gave great momentum to the continuing popularisation of factional politics.

At the same time the Conservatives, realising the dangers both Ahmadinejad and the Reformist-Modern Right could pose to their power position, given conditions also turned to the electorate in an attempt to garner support, talking in broad terms about the importance of the role of the people in the political life of the IRI. Reformists and the Modern Right, led by Khatami and Rafsanjani, witnessing the growing disunity within the neo-Conservative and Conservative camps in the face of challenges from below and within the factional dynamic, began to think of paths that could return them to the republican institutions.

Concomitantly, the establishment, whose pillar is the Supreme Leader, found itself assailed on all sides given socioeconomic conditions and the increasing blame public opinion put on both the Ahmadinejad government and the UN sanctions, a result

³ *Donya-e Eqtesad* 22/4/1393 (13/July/2014), <http://donya-e-eqtesad.com/news/814592/>.

in the people's mind of a specific foreign policy implemented by Ahmadinejad and the Supreme Leader. In addition, the establishment had not yet recovered from the events of 2009-2010. The ongoing state propaganda attempts, including frequent speeches and remarks made by the Supreme Leader and other high-ranking establishment figures, to inculcate the idea of *Fetneh* in the context of these events underlined the regime's realisation that they continued to represent a threat to its legitimacy and stability, especially in light of the upcoming 2013 elections.

In addition to these domestic issues and challenges, the geopolitical situation also added pressure on the country and thus played a decisive role in factional politics. First, as mentioned in the previous chapter, public opinion seeing in the sanctions a major cause for the deterioration in living standards made change in foreign policy, and in particular in the approach to nuclear negotiations, both an electoral and factional issue.

Second, changes in the region posed serious challenges to the IRI's international interests-challenges that could not be effectively managed without some form of reconciliation with the West over the nuclear program. At the time the negotiations were at a dead end whilst rumors spread that Israel or possible the USA would launch bombing raids of the country's nuclear sites in response to Western claims of Iranian intransience in the negotiations.⁴ It will be remembered that Jalili was the head of the Iranian negotiating team. Concomitantly, the ongoing civil war in Syria, increasing instability in Iraq, and the battle against ISIS required increasing amounts of financial, political and/or practical aid from Tehran when the country's domestic political and economic situations were in crisis.

In this overall context and because of it, factions were bitterly divided over

⁴ *NY Times* (19/April/2013), <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/world/middleeast/israeli-officials-stress-readiness-for-lone-strike-on-iran.html?ref=world>.

electoral strategies. With increasing paralysis within institutions resulting from the breakdown in Conservatives and neo-Conservatives co-operation, all groups sought to garner increasing levels of electoral popular support to wage factional war at the top. All groups during this period actively participated in the greater popularisation of factional politics.

The Reformists were divided into two camps. One argued for the need to participate in the elections, given the seriousness of the challenges facing the IRI while the other promoted the idea of boycotting them. This latter group stressed that participation in the election would be of little value since most of the Reformist's main political figures, with some popular following, were in prison or would face rejection by the GC.⁵

In addition, a substantial part of their political base would conclude that participation in the elections, while Mousavi and Karroubi were still under house arrest, would be tantamount to a betrayal of these men, as well as the goals of the 2009-2010 events. Eventually, Mohammad Reza Aref, a moderate Reformist who had been Khatami's Vice President announced his candidacy. He had maintained links with establishment during the events of 2009-2010. For example, he, unlike most Reformists, had attended Khamenei's Friday prayer of 29 June, which started the violent suppression of *Fetneh* or the Green Movement. Thus, it was believed he could survive the GC vetting process.

Rafsanjani, having transformed himself into a popular political figure by implicitly and explicitly supporting Karroubi, Mousavi, and elements of the Green Movement, also announced his candidacy on the last day allowed for registration of possible candidates. The establishment recognised and feared his popularity. The GC

⁵ *Aseman*, 20/3/1391 (9/June/2012), *Tasnim* 16/10/1391 (5/January/2013).

thus did not approve his candidacy, citing his old age. The Modern Right, whose candidate had been Rafsanjani, supported Rouhani.

The Conservatives and neo-Conservatives found themselves hopelessly divided. Attempts similar to those used in 2005 to unify the different groups behind one candidate were unsuccessful.⁶ However, the process of coalition building within these camps shows the extent to which the popularisation of factional politics had fundamentally changed the political calculations of these groups.

Mahdavi Kani, played the role of arbitrator, created a coalition made up of the three main conservative candidates, all of whom represented various elements within these groups: Haddad Adel, Velayati and Qalibaf. Haddad Adel was close to Leadership Office and the neo-conservative *Paydari*. Velayati enjoyed the support of traditional Conservatives and those sharing views with Rafsanjani, and/or Ali Larijani. Qalibaf enjoyed the support of a part of the neo-Conservatives, while trying to gain the support from both the SLO and the Modern Right. He did not succeed.⁷

They agreed that the extent of the popularity of each candidate would determine which one of them would enter the first round of the Presidential elections. They did not want the Conservatives and neo-Conservatives share of the overall vote to be distributed between three candidates. This would bring defeat, as it did to the Reformists during the 2005 Presidential elections. Personality conflicts trumped group unity and none of these candidates respected the pact.

Almost a week after the election, in a long interview about the role of Kani and the overall dynamics surrounding this attempt at a coalition, Mir Lohi, Mahdavi Kani's chief of staff, emphasised an important point that touches on the points made in this work. He admitted that, although from the elite's point of view, "one candidate might

⁶ *Khabaronline* 9/4/1392 (30/June/2013), <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/300815/Politics/election>.

⁷ *Alef* (4/3/1392) (25/June/2013), <http://alef.ir/prtcs4qs02bq418.ala2.html>.

be more competent than others,” it is important to take into account the popularity of different candidates, and “in this situation the elite will not stand against the popular will as long as he (in other words the candidate with less competency) does not show a clear deviation [from Khomeinism].”⁸

Even though it seems trivial in the electoral process worldwide, it was an important shift within the JRM’s ideological views. Mahdavi Kani himself had always stated that the JRM role is to choose the ‘best qualified candidate’ whom the people should follow. In sum, the criterion for choosing the Presidential candidate from the main organisation of the Conservatives, the JRM, had become popularity instead of competency.

In this election, disputes surfaced between the two main clerical organisations of the Conservatives, the JMHEQ and JRM that reflected disagreements between Kani and Mesbah. *Paydari*, as the main group of the neo-Conservatives, supported Jalili, after their initial candidate, Baeer Lankarani, Ahmadinejad’s health minister, a favorite of Mesbah, withdrew, given a possible GC rejection. The disputes between these two leading clerics were such that Jalili announced his candidacy without discussing it with Kani.

Such an action violated IRI political custom. Before entering the electoral race, nominees meet with high-ranking religious clerics, seeking, as a matter of formality, their permission. Mir Lohi confirmed Kani’s umbrage: “Even Aref and Rouhani... met Kani before announcing their candidacy.”⁹

Two controversial candidates in this election were Mashaei and Rafsanjani. Mashaei, with Ahmadinejad by his side, announced his nomination. Rafsanjani also announced his candidacy at the last minute. The GC rejected both men. Despite

⁸ *Jamaran* 1/4/1392 (22/June/2013), http://www.jamaran.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_27491.aspx.

⁹ Ibid.; Hajjarian comments in *Qanoun* 4/4/1392 (25/June/2013).

behind-closed-doors, efforts by the GC to stop Rafsanjani from entering the election, he announced his candidacy. He later claimed Khamenei gave his consent to the candidacy.¹⁰ The GC's rejection of Rafsanjani arguably damaged the legitimacy of the GC. Rafsanjani's announced candidacy and the GC's rejection of it added to the electoral fervour. Rouhani, who had said he would withdraw after Rafsanjani's rejection, stayed in the race. Mashaei's rejection, however, was not surprising. Ahmadinejad's support of him was an opportunistic move by this group to distinguish themselves from other factional players. It was, to an extent, a political investment for future elections.

One priority held by Khamenei was to obtain high voter participation which could be propagated as popular acceptance of the regime. The regime had overcome the challenges to its legitimacy that had emerged in 2009-2010. Two days before the election, in an unprecedented move, Khamenei invited even those who were against the regime to vote: "Some people may not support the Islamic regime — for whatever reasons — but they want to show their support for their country, these [people] should also vote."¹¹

Khamenei showed his support for the foreign policy approach of Jalili and Haddad. On 4 June 2013, he stated:

Some have this wrong analysis that we should give concessions to the enemies of the IRI in order to assuage their temper. [These people] in practice are preferring the interests of [the enemies] over our national interests. This is wrong. Their (enemies') anger is because... the IRI exists... The anger of the enemy should be responded to by the national authority.¹²

Just two days before the election, he announced: "[The] international field is

¹⁰ BBC Persian (14/January/2014), http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2014/01/140124_145_kadkhodaei_hashemi_rafsanjani.shtml.

¹¹ Khamenei 22/3/1392 (12/June/2013), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=22900>.

¹² Khamenei 14/3/1392 (5/June/2013), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=22788>.

not one of compliment and polite society. The more weakness you show and the more retreats you make, the more the enemy will advance."¹³

Electoral Popularisation of Foreign Policy

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in this election, the two main themes of IRI foreign policy with regard to the West and the US, and the conception of national interest, became the subject of public debates. The height of the public confrontation of these two themes was during the candidate's live televised electoral debates. During which the nuclear deal and these two approaches in foreign policy were discussed.¹⁴

In this debate, Rouhani, Aref and Velayati represented the 'normalisation theme,' and Jalili, Hadad Adel and Qalibaf represented the second theme: the 'active approach.'

Qalibaf summarised his views in diplomacy as follows: "the US claims power (authority) is my right, but we say right is power. This is the Islamic approach in diplomacy."¹⁵ However, the main advocacy of the second approach was Jalili, who was, at the time, the chief negotiator of Iran's nuclear programme. Jalili's arguments were similar to those published ten years earlier.

By claiming that "the foreign policy is the sphere of thoughts (ideology) (*andisheh*)," he stated:

We managed the [nuclear] negotiations based on [the discourse of] pure Islam...In the negotiations, we should believe in the discourse of pure Islam in order to get results in IRI foreign policy. If we cannot achieve this (a belief in the discourse of pure Islam) we will become weak. Thus, a strong government able to act [strongly] in foreign policy will not be established.¹⁶

He underlined his anti-hegemonic stance by criticising part of Qalibaf's

¹³ Khamenei 22/3/1392 (12/June/2013), <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=22900>.

¹⁴ There were three rounds of debates covering three main areas: economy, politics and culture, and foreign policy. The last debate, that took place a week before the election, was about foreign policy.

¹⁵ *Asr Iran* 17/3/1392 (7/June/2013).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

diplomatic plans in which it was mentioned that, “If we are pursuing the establishment of a new [world] order, this [pursuit] should not be portrayed as challenging the hegemonic world order.” Jalili pointed out that “one of the fundamental principles in the [IRI] foreign policy is that we do not accept the hegemonic world order and our Islamic Revolution is founded on this belief.”

He also defended the foreign policy of Ahmadinejad: “The power of our regime is in its foreign policy and different state institutions should coordinate themselves with this policy.” He criticised the normalisation approach and argued:

In the Hashemi [Rafsanjani] period, two arrest warrants were issued for Hashemi (referring to Mykonos), [and] in the Mr Khatami [era]. After all of the cooperation with the Western countries in Afghanistan, Iran was called part of an ‘Axis of Evil’... Thus, this approach (normalisation) is wrong ... If we follow this approach [again], we will end up just as we did in those times.¹⁷

Rouhani and Velayati criticised these views. By linking the sanctions to economic hardship and admitting the effects of sanctions on everyday life, Rouhani argued: “It is very good if the centrifuges continue spinning, but as long as the people’s lives could progress, the wheels of industries could also spin. I think it is possible [to achieve both].”

He then blamed the incompetence of the current foreign policy team:

Those for whom the opposite of whatever they had predicted happened, should know that they were unable to correctly understand international issues. [They] told [people] that there will be no referral of the nuclear issues to UNSC, no resolution (against us), no sanctions (imposed on us). [They are] the ones who celebrated every day that the nuclear issue was over, resolved, finalised.¹⁸

While international isolation and sanctions continued to exercise a deleterious

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

influence on the country's socioeconomic conditions. At the same time he defended Rafsanjani and Khatami's diplomatic approach.

He concluded: "These issues (concerning the nuclear programme) could be resolved with rationality, strategy, and negotiation and dialogue with world." In the same vein, Velayati criticised Jalili's achievements and argued:

Mr. Jalili, the diplomatic field is not the class of philosophy where you go (to the negotiation table) to proclaim [afterwards] that our (IRI) logic was stronger [than theirs] and they were condemned... What people are seeing, is that you have been in charge of the nuclear case and not only was not one step forward taken, [but also] the sanctions have increased on a daily basis. It is the people who feel the pressure... The art of diplomacy is preserving the right to the nuclear programme whilst decreasing the sanctions. It is not [the other way round] namely causing sanctions to increase.

Rouhani concluded: "I think our situation is very sensitive. Thus, those who obtain power should have the required expertise. They should know the world so that they can solve the nuclear issue based on negotiations and rationality."

Rouhani linked foreign policy to the concept of the role of the people in politics. After underlining that "our foreign policy issues could be resolved" through negotiation and rationality, he highlighted: "Yet, for resolving these issues, we first need to strengthen domestic national authority and... for increasing the domestic national authority, we should give all people freedom. All people should enjoy the freedom of expression."¹⁹

Then he touched on republicanism versus Islamism:

Unfortunately, today some people think that the Islamic Republic means only Islamic. That it means only *velayat-e faqih*. Of course *velayat-e faqih* enjoys a great position from the religious and Constitutional perspective and should be followed. But the position of the people and republicanism is also very important... In the Islamic Republic, almost all state affairs should be based

¹⁹ Ibid.

on the popular vote. According to Article 6 of the Constitution, and state management should also be based on that (popular vote).²⁰

His remarks were not only an additional sign of the expanding extent of the popularisation of politics, but also the expanding view in regard to the role of people and the institutionalisation of electoral politics reflecting the views of secular Iranians. He also linked elections to Khomeinism, arguing: "This very election... is a symbol of republicanism and religious democracy which is a legacy of the Imam [Khomeini]."
In response, Jalili touched on this issue of republicanism versus Islamism. He claimed that the 2009 election was the triumph of republicanism. He thus denounced *Fetneh* as an act of treason. He then proclaimed: "The sovereign government is not a government with police protocol and such and such... [It] should work based on [the discourse of] pure Islam, which we saw in the '*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*' thesis."²¹

Even though he also underlined the people, as explored in Chapter Three, his emphasis on the discourse of pure Islam and '*velayat-e motlaqeh-ye faqih*' was the promotion of a different conception of the role of people in politics. It was a counter discourse to Rouhani's conception. Jalili believed in the necessity of strong guardianship institutions. In this election, they both presented their conceptions of the people's role in live televised debates.

Rouhani obtained 50.88 percent of the vote. He was followed by Qalibaf (16 percent) and Jalili (11 percent). Khatami and Rafsanjani played a significant role in Rouhani's triumph. Similar to the 1997 election, this election was a coalition of the Modern Right and the Reformists, but this time the coalition figure came from the Modern Right. Rafsanjani explicitly supported Rouhani, while Khatami played a

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ *Tabnak* 17/3/1392 (7/June/2013).

crucial role in his success when he persuaded Aref to withdraw his candidacy, which he reluctantly did the night before Election Day.²²

As the two most popular politicians in the country, Rafsanjani and Khatami mobilised the social support of the Reformists and the Modern Right. In just a few days before the election, through their open support of Rouhani, they transformed the electoral apathy of these social groups as well as secular Iranians into active participation. This included street demonstrations and rallies across the country in favour of Rouhani, even in areas where he did not have electoral offices. In response, Haddad withdrew in support of Jalili, while Velayati refused to withdraw despite exhortations of fellow Conservatives.²³ Once again the trajectory of the election and its result surprised observers, both in Iran and outside it.

The Rouhani election was a return to centre. Arguably, a large part of society, by voting for him, showed that it had abandoned the idealism and romanticised views of rapid change dating from the Khatami period. For the first time a candidate's main promises were clear targets, rather than ideals. Rouhani promised to lower inflation, to settle the nuclear issue with the West, to pass the bill of citizen covenant, to reform the healthcare system and to follow up on the house arrests of Mousavi and Karroubi.²⁴ It was a large agenda that would require serious and skillful politicking. Thus, human agency would come to play, once again, a determinative role in IRI politics.

Hassan Rouhani

Hassan Fereidon (later Rouhani) (b.1948) was born in a rural middle-class

²² *Isna* 21/3/1392 (11-June-2013), <http://www.isna.ir/news/92032111793/>.

²³ However, the efforts to convince Velayati to withdraw in favour of Jalili were unsuccessful. There were rumours that Velayati was unhappy with the organic support of the SLO that had been switched to Jalili. He decided to stay in the election, a step that helped Rouhani, since Velayati shared the same voter base as Jalili and Qalibaf.

²⁴ *Mashreghnews* 25/3/1392 (15/June/2013), <http://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/223978/>.

merchant family. Rouhani claimed that from a young age he earned his living expenses by working as a farmer and a carpet weaver. In 1961 he started his religious studies in Qom. It was during this time, he changed his last name to 'Rouhani' (meaning clergy).

Similar to Khatami, Rouhani belonged to the younger segment of the first generation of revolutionaries. However he was more active in the Khomeini Movement from its early days in Qom. He was arrested around 20 times in the period 1961–78. During his time in Qom, he met Beheshti, who had a great influence on him.²⁵ Rouhani's clerical traits were similar to those of Beheshti and Mousa Sadr. He was not actively involved in theoretical aspects of Khomeini's political ideology, nor was he part of those groups who sought less of a political role for the seminary.

Similar to Beheshti, he was more concerned with the strategic planning and structural details of institutions of any Islamic state.²⁶ In his meeting with Khomeini in Paris during the revolution, he raised his concerns with regard to the structure of the future judiciary system. He also suggested that Khomeini raise women's rights and the form of government in his speeches.

Rouhani's academic and career path was, to a certain extent, different to those of other clerical revolutionaries. Upon completing his religious studies, on Beheshti's advice, he entered university.²⁷ In 1972, Rouhani graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Judiciary Law from Tehran University. He then joined the army as part of mandatory military service. Most clerics refused to perform their military service, considering it cooperation with a dictator.

After his military service, he used his oratory skills in giving political speeches to propagate Khomeini's Movement. In 1978, in one of his speeches, he called

²⁵ Hassan Rouhani, *Khaterat-e Dr. Hassan Rouhani* [Rouhani's Memoir] (Markaz-e Asnad-e Ingqelab-e Islami, 2009).

²⁶ Ibid., 400–420.

²⁷ Ibid., 111.

Khomeini, Imam, a sacred title. This title has stuck with Khomeini ever since. With the encouragement of Motahari and Beheshti, in 1978, he went abroad to continue his studies. Beheshti provided him with financial support. To improve his English, he first went to London. His next destination was Harvard in the US, but after the revolution's success in 1979, he returned to Iran.

However, years later, in the 1990s he received both his MPhil and his PhD from Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland. His MPhil thesis, entitled 'The Islamic Legislative Power,' discusses the legislative structure of the IRI as an alternative prototype for current legislative systems, while comparing it with Western models.²⁸ His doctorate thesis, 'The Flexibility of Sharia, Islamic Law,' discusses that "no laws are immutable" in Islam, which could be placed within the religious intellectual movements of this period to respond to certain challenges of Modernity.²⁹

After the revolution, Rouhani was part of a group in charge of organising the army. During this time, both the Islamic and the secular Left did not trust the army. The IRGC, had been established as a parallel military organisation to counter any coup attempts by the army. In the 1980s, Rouhani stopped the IRGC's attempts to merge the army with it.

Later on, during the Rafsanjani Presidency, Rouhani advocated the IRGC integration into the state. He stated his concerns about possible interference of the IRGC in politics on many occasions.³⁰ He was also a *Majlis* MP for five consecutive terms (1980–2000). His life in parliament ended when the Reformists refused to put his name on their list in the elections to the sixth *Majlis*. His realistic approach in

²⁸ Hassan Rouhani (Fereidon), *The Islamic Legislative Power* (Glasgow Caledonian University).

²⁹ Hassan Rouhani (Fereidon), *The Flexibility of Sharia, Islamic Law* (Glasgow Caledonian University).

³⁰ Akbar Rafsanjani, *Payan-e Defa Aghaz-e Baz Sazi* [End of Resistance, Beginning of Reconstruction] (Tehran/Iran: Nashr-i Ma'arif-i Imam, 2011): 244.

foreign policy could be seen during the early years of the Iran–Iraq war. While he was in the *Majlis* in the 1980s, he established a faction called the ‘Association of Wise Men,’ in which a process for a possible truce between Iran and Iraq was discussed. Khomeini criticised this association’s activities.³¹

Rouhani and Rafsanjani shared similar sociopolitical views and pragmatism. They cooperated with each other frequently. He was, to an extent, Rafsanjani’s protégé. When Rafsanjani was the Commander of Iran’s Joint Chief of Staff in the late 1980s, Rouhani was his deputy. Rouhani was also involved in the McFarlane case as Rafsanjani’s trustee and in negotiations for the Iran–Iraq ceasefire amid the UNSC resolution 598. When Rafsanjani offered him his Intelligence Ministry position in the early 1990s, he refused. He then moved to the SCNS.³² Rouhani also had a close relationship with Khamenei, which went back to 1968 in Qom. He served as Khamenei’s representative in SCNS for almost 20 years. Khamenei also praised him on different occasions.³³

Rouhani’s studies in law following his religious studies, and his few years’ experience in the army, all solidified certain normative, objective views regarding what is right and wrong, or what is legal and illegal. Thus, to a degree different to Khatami, who always seemed to have certain self-reservations, he seemed more confident with his views, while not being dogmatic. He had a pragmatic approach. His experiences after the revolution, and his involvement in decision-making concerning national security affairs, helped him to have a multifaceted understanding of the IRI.

Unlike Ahmadinejad, Rouhani was one of the IRI’s prominent establishment

³¹ *Fars News* 28/7/1392 (20/October/2013),
<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920722001056>.

³² Biography of Hassan Rouhani, 25, online access,
<http://rouhani.ir/zendeginame.php#samples/docs/34>.

³³ *Ibid.*, 26.

figures. He was a technocrat with an elitist attitude. Some of his colleagues found him to be arrogant, but an intelligent politician. He was rather unpopular amongst some politicians.³⁴ Although he did not enjoy the support of the neo-Conservatives, given their fundamental ideological differences, he was familiar with their main political figures and worked with them frequently.

Rouhani's factional and social support base was linked to Rafsanjani's base and political network. Unlike Khatami, he lacked an attractive cohesive political discourse. His 'moderation' discourse was more of an electoral slogan than a cohesive political paradigm. It was different from Khatami's idealistic project of 'political development.' His Presidential victory was due to the successful mobilisation of the pro-reform social groups by Rafsanjani and Khatami.

A few days after Rouhani's victory, Mohammad Qouchani, the *Shargh* editor, elaborated the difference between Rouhani and Khatami:

Rouhani is a diplomat not an intellectual. He is a man of compromise, not a philosopher. He is a lawyer, not a philosopher. Not only does he stand against the colonels, he also stands aside from the philosophers. If there was a need for elaboration of the political philosophy of freedom, it had already been done by Khatami... Now we should find the path to freedom and the science of politics could open the doors.³⁵

Soon after Rouhani's electoral victory, the direction of foreign policy regarding to the West and the US changed, which was reflected in a new round of negotiations on the IRI nuclear programme. With the people voting for Rouhani, he gained a popular mandate for changing the IRI's foreign policy approach. This popular mandate strengthened his position in the factional struggles over the approach to the nuclear negotiations, while weakening that of his rivals.

³⁴ Mirsepassi, *Democracy in Modern Iran*, 139–49.

³⁵ *Mehrnameh* No. 29 (June–July/2013).

New Foreign Policy Direction

Domestic political circumstances in both Iran and the US, and wider geopolitical changes on an international level, created a unique window of opportunity for resolving the IRI nuclear programme. In Iran, the realities of socioeconomic hardship, caused by sanctions, constituted a serious existential threat to the IRI. Therefore, a consensus formed amongst the elites about the necessity of change in IRI foreign policy.

Rouhani was one of the best options to shift this direction. He had proven his loyalty to the regime and enjoyed the trust of Khamenei. He knew how to deal with high-ranking IRGC and military officials, given his experience as the head of SCNS, while being familiar with the dynamics of factional politics. He had clear perspectives on the IRI's national interests with strategic plans to achieve these views. In the US, the Obama administration had signaled that it wanted to settle the ongoing nuclear issues.

In addition, Obama's noninterventionist approach to foreign policy, and his realistic views about the IRI political situation compared with former US Presidents, made agreeing possible. Cooperation between Iran and the US became a possibility. Both the IRI and the US administration took advantage of this window of opportunity. Soon after they came to power, Zarif and Rouhani signaled their interest in conducting serious negotiations within the framework of 'win-win.' This was welcomed in Europe and the USA.³⁶

This new direction needed Khamenei's support to be successful. Only he could curtail the IRGC, which since 2003 had become an influential player in foreign policy

³⁶ Rouhani's article in the Washington Post, Wahshington Post, 19/September/2013, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/president-of-iran-hassan-rouhani-time-to-engage/>.

decision-making. After the events of 2009, a large section of the IRGC's high-ranking officials were supporting Jalili's approach. Khamenei, who had already agreed with the secret direct talks with the US a few months earlier in March 2013, gave Rouhani's approach a chance.

However, Khamenei was in a politically delicate situation. As elaborated above, for at least the last eight years, Khamenei had expressed the untrustworthiness of the West and the US in particular. He had denied any serious social and/or economic effects of sanctions on the IRI.

Therefore, allowing the direct talks with the US and accepting certain concessions during the negotiations could be perceived by his supporters as an ideological compromise. This provided an electoral boost to the factions supporting Khatami and Rafsanjani. Thus, the bilateral negotiations with the US seemed to weaken his power. For instance, in an extreme scenario, part of his fanatic supporters might accuse Khamenei of a lack of revolutionary will; Khamenei could become a victim of his very '*basirat*' discourse.

Khamenei and the IRI needed to justify this shift in foreign policy. Khamenei fine-tuned the official ideology once again. He introduced a new discourse of 'heroic flexibility' (*narmesh-e qahramananeh*). It was part of the title of a book (Imam Hassan's 'Peace') which he translated and published 40 years ago. This book aimed to justify why Imam Hassan chose peace with the perceived unjust government of Muawiyah in 661 CE, while his successor, his brother, Imam Hussein, raised war against Muawiyah's son in 680. Khamenei called Imam Hassan's peace treaty 'glorious heroic flexibility.' In his meeting with the commanders of the IRGC, Khamenei proclaimed:

We are not against proper and reasonable moves, whether in the world of diplomacy or in the world of domestic policies. I believe in the idea

which was referred to as 'heroic flexibility.' Flexibility is necessary in many areas. It is very good and there is nothing wrong with it. But the wrestler who is wrestling against his opponent and who shows flexibility for technical reasons, should not forget who his opponent is and what he is doing. This is the main condition. Our politicians too should know what they are doing, who they are faced with, who their opponent is and which area the opposing side wants to attack.³⁷

This speech came a day after Rouhani in a meeting with the IRGC stated: "The IRGC should not get involved in politics because its position is far higher than factional politics and should not be associated with one faction or group." Perhaps to gain their approval of the nuclear deal, Rouhani compromised on their economic activity and asked the IRGC to help in the national construction projects and war against smuggling.³⁸

In this vein, to justify this shift of foreign policy based on Khomeinism, a week after Khamenei's announcement of 'heroic flexibility', *Jamaran*, a news outlet close to the Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini Works, published an article investigating the IRI-US relationship from Khomeini's perspective. It highlighted two of Khomeini's speeches after underlining it was the US who cut its diplomatic relation.

In the first quotation, Khomeini put people in charge of making decisions concerning their relationship with the US: "In case our awake and dignified nation allows it, Iran will regain a very normal relationship with the United States similar to other countries." In the second quotation, national interest was highlighted: "If the US stops spying against the [IRI] movement, the door to negotiation on those parts of our relationship which are about the interest of the nation are open."³⁹ The article

³⁷ Khamenei (17/September/2013), official English translation, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1827/Leader-s-Speech-in-Meeting-with-Commanders-of-Islamic-Revolutionary>.

³⁸ Official website of the Presidency 25/6/1392 (16/September/2013), <http://president.ir/fa/71272>.

³⁹ *Jamaran News*, 2/7/1392 (24/September/2013), http://www.jamaran.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_31929.aspx.

concluded that according to Khomeini those who should have the final say were the people. The popular will depicted in Rouhani's election should decide the trajectory of foreign policy regarding the US and the West.

This shift in official ideology could also be interpreted as forgetting the values of the revolution and its ideals, given the eight years of propagating the ineffectiveness of sanctions and rhetorical popularisation of foreign policy. However, since the factional popularisation of foreign policy opened the way for a new direction in the nuclear negotiations, the regime portrayed its acceptance of the new direction as its obedience to the popular will.

A new group opposing the negotiations soon emerged under the name of 'the worried' (*delvapasan*). Most of these were the neo-Conservatives, members of *Basij*, the IRGC and '*lebas shakhsī*'; part of the support base of Khamenei. Those who benefited from the sanctions also encouraged the *delvapasan* activities. *Delvapasan* defined their collective identity based on their worries that the ideals of the revolution and the IRI's national interests might be compromised through Iran-US negotiations.⁴⁰

The mobilisation of *delvapasan* was a calculated move by the neo-Conservatives to take advantage of possible political opportunities emerging in the factional and popular debates about the nuclear programme. Thus, it was another example of the symbiotic effect of factional politics and foreign policy. Using their state-sponsored media *delvapasan* put the Rouhani government under pressure. From their point of view, if the negotiations failed, they would regain the position in foreign policy which they enjoyed during Ahmadinejad's Presidency.

If the negotiations reached an agreement, it would allow them to attack Rouhani on different aspects of the possible agreement. It would also allow for leverage in

⁴⁰ *Qanon, Aftab Yazd, Sharqh* 14-18/2/1393 (4-8/May/2014); *Rajanews* 14/2/1393 (4/May/2014), <http://www.rajanews.com/news/171620>.

factional politics during the negotiations. This would also allow them to respond to the criticism of their involvement in the eight years of economic mismanagement of Ahmadinejad's Presidency by moving to an offensive position. Khamenei had to address these worries. Almost a month after proclaiming 'heroic flexibility,' in his meeting with *Basij*, he declared that this 'heroic flexibility' was not a departure from IRI ideals and goals:

When we used the phrase "heroic flexibility," some people defined it as abandoning the ideals and the goals of the Islamic Republic. Some of the enemies too used it to accuse the Islamic Republic of betraying its principles. These interpretations were wrong and they misunderstood this phrase. "Heroic flexibility" means an artful manoeuvre for reaching one's goal. It means that the followers of God's path — any divine path — should utilise different methods, in any way possible, in order to reach their goal and this should be done whenever they move towards the different ideals of Islam. "If any do turn their backs to them on such a day — unless it be in a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own) — he draws on himself the wrath of Allah." [The Holy Quran, 8: 16]⁴¹

In sum, Khamenei justified the act of negotiations with the 'Great Satan' as a political tactic, while declaring that the US could not be trusted. He positioned himself in a way that enabled him to keep his supporters mobilised, but not to be blamed for the failure of negotiations by the pro-deal groups.

After two years of negotiations, on 14 July 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was reached. Based on this agreement, Iran suspended part of its enrichment activities, eliminated much of its uranium enriched stockpile, gave the IAEA access to monitor its nuclear programme, and halted activities of its heavy water plant.

In return, IRI kept its right to the enrichment programme and gained certain

⁴¹ Khamenei (20/November/2013), official English translation, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1839/Leader-s-Speech-in-Meeting-with-Basij-Commanders>.

concessions, including the lifting of all sanctions imposed because of its nuclear programme.⁴²

While the electoral popularisation of foreign policy made reaching a nuclear deal possible, it also opened the way for criticism of opposition groups. Thus, the moment that JCPOA was announced it became the main subject of IRI factional politics. Those factions who criticised Rouhani's foreign policy approach perceived that Rouhani and the factions backing him would obtain great popularity including strengthening their links to the secular Iranians. Therefore, these factions joined forces to attack Rouhani, JCPOA, and his factional and popular supporter base. As a result, if Khatami faced one serious crisis every nine days, Rouhani faced one crisis every four days.⁴³

Rouhani's initial economic plan was to focus on controlling inflation whilst settling an international deal, then to take advantage of foreign investment and the lifting of sanctions to initiate economic growth. However, expected economic growth did not materialise. This became an issue with which Conservatives and neo-Conservatives attacked the Rouhani administration. The anti-Rouhani factions, similar to moves by Conservatives in the Khatami era, targeted his social base. To disappoint his supporters, his critics, using their control of parallel institutions, restricted the sociocultural space, criticised Rouhani's cultural programmes and propagated the economic ineffectiveness of JCPOA.

In this context, Khamenei, who had approved JCPOA, not only did not show his explicit public endorsement of it, he also allowed his supporters to attack Rouhani using his institutional facilities. Khamenei's mixed signals were to deprive Rouhani

⁴² For the information regarding JCPOA in European Union see: https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/2281/iran-and-eu_en. Based on US government see: <https://www.state.gov/e/eb/tfs/spi/iran/jcpoa/>.

⁴³ *Etemad* 21/4/1395 (11/July/2016).

and the factions behind him from an electoral windfall that could change the dynamic of factional politics in favor of Rafsanjani and Khatami.

Khamenei feared the spread of Western cultural and political mores emerging from opening up to the West that could undermine efforts to create the *homo Islamicus* and the regime itself. He was also wary of a growing economic relationship which could bring with it both the spread of West's soft power and economic dependence. These worries were part of the reasons behind the regime's decision, during the Ahmadinejad period, to shift Iran's economic relations from the West to the East, China.

Conclusion

The hybrid regime by creating the conditions for the electoral popularisation of foreign policy, combined with the popularisation of factional politics, provided a means by which the IRI responded to an existential challenge posed by international sanctions imposed because of its nuclear programme. Rouhani's electoral mandate enabled him to change the direction of foreign policy regarding the West and the US with limited ideological and political damage to the IRI, at least in the short-term. If during Ahmadinejad's tenure, the shifts in foreign policy were, speaking, justified by their reference to the revolutionary/Islamic pillar of the IRI, this time, it was the republican pillar which allowed this change to happen.

By 2013 the electoral popularisation of foreign policy reached a peak. Factions now approached the people with varying prescriptions for the trajectory of IRI foreign policy and to garner electoral support that would enable them to fight more effectively in the factional struggles at the top of the system. However, by doing this, the role of the people became implicitly and explicitly more important in the domestic and foreign policies of the country.

Conclusion

The IRI was established, consolidated and legitimised as a hybrid regime, a concept redefined throughout this thesis as a derivative of neither democracy nor authoritarianism, but rather a distinct political structure embodying both republican and authoritarian/guardian institutions that coexist with and exert pressure on each other. These characteristics distinguish it from the regimes coined hybrid in the literature.

The death of Khomeini in 1989 opened a new chapter in the political history of the IRI, whose conclusion remains ambiguous and unpredictable. Whilst the Grand Master was alive, the various factions and individual political figures won and lost political and ideological battles amongst each other depending on the views and opinions of Khomeini and the extent of their closeness to him. In addition, the dynamics of the IRI's unique hybrid political system that is made up of republican and revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions provided additional momentum to the emergence and evolution of factional struggles. By the time of his death even Khomeini faced increasing difficulties in managing the warring factions.

With his passing ideological production became decentralised, as factions claimed to represent the true ideology and vision articulated by Khomeini. They were forced to find within Khomeini's large body of written and public statements, which constitute Khomeinism, this support and approval once given by the Grand Master himself. The ideological and political vacuum that emerged with Khomeini's death was filled by competing conceptions of Khomeinism. This decentralisation of ideological production, the IRI's hybrid institutional structure and the seriousness of the economic, social, and international problems facing the regime after the end of the war with Iraq created the conditions for the rapid popularisation of factional politics.

The first major steps in the popularisation of factional politics were taken when Rafsanjani and Khamenei, the two political pillars of the early post-Khomeini period, worked in tandem to remove the Leftists, who had enjoyed the support and protection of Khomeini, from the political arena, and to establish conservative control over both republican and revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions. Rafsanjani and Khamenei shared short-term political and ideological goals in the problems the regime faced, while regarding the Leftists as their common enemy. The Leftists, ejected from the political arena, sought ways of returning to the country's political life.

Meanwhile, the Grand Conservative Coalition headed by Rafsanjani and Khamenei fell apart as a result of increasing factional disagreements about the direction in which post-Khomeini Iran should go. The supporters of Rafsanjani then found themselves the victim of attempts by conservative factions around Khamenei to fatally weaken them in the political arena. Fighting a rear-guard action, they split from these conservative factions and created a new one, the Modern Right.

By 1997, the year of Khatami's election to the Presidency, the popularisation of factional politics was entering a new phase and picking up momentum. The Reformists, who were once the Leftists, and the Modern Right, had realised that the only means by which they could return to the political arena and struggle against the attempts by conservative factions around Khamenei to monopolise political, ideological and institutional power were to seek and obtain active support from below. From society and thus capture for themselves the republican institutions of the IRI. The factional struggles of the post-Khomeini period produced losers on an elite level who were forced to move toward the popularisation of factional politics.

During the Rafsanjani and Khatami periods this popularisation of factional politics produced a political and ideological challenge to Khamenei and the

Conservatives. Thus, these Conservatives were forced to modify, expand and increase their attempts to create and maintain popular support. One result of these activities was the emergence of the populist neo-Conservatives under Ahmadinejad. However, once these two groups, the Conservatives and neo-Conservatives, obtained control over both the republican and revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions with the election in 2005 of Ahmadinejad to the Presidency, their political partnership fragmented.

When the neo-Conservatives, during Ahmadinejad's second administration, fought a rear-guard action against the Conservatives, they too took the path travelled by the Leftist/Reformists and Conservative/Modern Rightists. They sought to mobilise popular opinion, to fight more effectively in factional struggles. By 2013 the popularisation of factional politics was reaching a peak as Khamenei and the Conservatives found themselves assailed, not only from the left by the Reformists and Modern Rightists, but also now from the Right by a wing of the neo-Conservatives. In sum, every Presidential administration since the death of Khomeini has produced a new major faction. Each has claimed to represent true Khomeinism, setting itself directly against the status quo, the Conservatives surrounding the Supreme Leader and implicitly against him.

The popularisation of factional politics has at its ideological and political centre the debates about the proper role of the people within the political life of the IRI, debates which date back to the days of the revolution but which were muted in the context of the Iran-Iraq War and the towering figure of Khomeini.

The role of the people in this hybrid regime became both the catalyst and subject of the popularisation of politics. As this thesis showed the IRI Constitution, with its hybrid characteristics, enshrined state institutions that symbolised and justified the competing factional claims about the role of the people in the political arena.

Ambiguities in *Khomeinism* provide enough ideological material for factions to justify their respective political positions and claim to be the true representatives of the ideology and vision of Khomeini. This hybridity allowed for emergence and evolution of the popularisation of factional politics.

The Reformists and the Modern Right, which share broad visions of the role of the people in the IRI's political life, and a significant part of the neo-Conservatives challenge Khamenei and the Conservatives on this point. This thesis has shown that conceptions of the role of the people, have exercised a determinative influence on the dynamic and trajectory of the popularisation of factional politics, despite the different interpretations of this role held by the different factions. These different conceptions provide for the political cohesion of the factions. They also influence the factional power struggle between each other and the Supreme Leader, within the grounds of Constitutional politics.

The hybrid character of the IRI plays no small part in the emergence of factional politics and its dynamic as it sets against each others republican institutions. This to an extent represents popular aspirations, expectations and revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions, which protected the system from popular aspirations and expectations, deemed to threaten and damage the system and the interests of those holding power.

The Constitutional changes made at the end of the 1980s provided the SLO with supreme power and the ability to sit atop the entire IRI system in the way Khomeini did. However, this institutional power did not immunise Khamenei from the effects of the popularisation of factional politics and from losing the veneer of a supra-factional political figure. Khomeini, as the father of the Islamic Revolution and Grand Master, was the source of legitimacy for the system.

He gave it its legitimacy. Khamenei, however, has less room for ideological and political maneuvering than Khomeini did as he, similar to the factions, must compete with varying interpretations of Khomeinism to justify his policies and actions. He thus is always open to the possible criticism of deviating from true Khomeinism. No one could accuse Khomeini of doing this as he was the source of the state's ideology and legitimacy. He could change ideological signposts because the ideology was his. Given his unique position he could manage, raise, and politically eliminate groups and figures much more easily than can Khamenei. Unlike Khomeini, Khamenei obtains his legitimacy from the system and is thus constrained by its ideology.

Khamenei's political and ideological position faced increasing challenges as the popularisation of factional politics emerged and evolved, carrying with it the debates over the role of the people and the tendency of factions to position themselves explicitly and/or implicitly against the Islamic revolutionary/guardian institutions, at the top of which he stood. As society distanced itself from revolutionary 'activism' and gave more attention to worldly affairs, the social support base of Khamenei weakened. Exercising his power through Islamic revolutionary/guardian institutions, Khamenei, to maintain his support base, had no choice but to articulate new ideological approaches justifying the powers of the revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions. This included the increasing use of claimed threats posed by foreign and internal enemies, and, second, to expand the patronage network within his support circle and institutions linked to the SLO. He did not limit himself to these actions. He intensified state propaganda campaigns, and strengthened existing semi-state mobilising institutions, such as the *Basij*, and/or creating new ones such as the *Maddahs*.

The move to generate greater levels of active popular support for the SLO and the revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions was a response to the growing

popularisation of factional politics since the Rafsanjani Presidency. They also created new challenges for the SLO. Khamenei became dependent on *Basij*, plain-clothes forces, the IRGC, *Hezbollahis* and similar religious fundamentalists, whose ideological support he needed to maintain. This limits further his political and ideological room for maneuver in the face of the popularisation of factional politics and geo-political challenges.

In addition, the consequent greater involvement of these groups in the people's private sphere, which damaged his popular political standing, and in the political and factional life of the country led to creeping securitisation of society. This result exercised a strong influence on the dynamics of factional politics by creating societal discontent and increasing momentum amongst factional groups to use this discontent to obtain and solidify control over republican institutions and present themselves as the bearers of positive change.

The revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions have hindered the efforts of those factions promoting the republicanism of the IRI and the increasing role of the people in the political arena. These institutions operate on a rational reading of the IRI Constitution and Khomeinism, just as other factions opposing them claim in regard to their understanding of these elements. Those who have controlled these institutions over the last three decades, namely the Conservatives, have also enjoyed the support of certain parts of society, such as the traditional middle-class, rural and small-town populations, and parts of the bazar class.

With the emergence of the popularisation of factional politics and increasing socioeconomic problems, they were forced to expand their social and electoral base beyond these groups. The Conservatives, too, contributed to the popularisation of factional politics. In addition, they, similar to the SLO, mobilised their traditional

supporters through institutions such as the *Basij* to project an image of popular acceptance. These methods produced limited results. The Conservatives based around the SLO were forced to expand their patronage network, while, expanding the use of authoritarian means to strengthen their power position in factional struggles and IRI institutions.

The popularisation of factional politics within this hybridity intensified the Janus-face dynamic of the IRI system. Since the Khatami Presidency contentious politics has become a vital aspect of electoral politics. As noted above, candidates running on anti-establishment platforms, however defined, have gained control of the republican institutions. This shows the reality of socioeconomic and/or political discontent within society.

However, these elections reenergise the fundamentals of the system while giving hope for change, similar to an extent to democratic systems in the West. So far, the elections have allowed factions and their popular constituencies to compete and to offer differing solutions to fundamental issues and existential challenges facing the regime. Factional politics, its popularisation, and their expression in elections provide hope and the opportunity for positive change within the existing political framework.

These elements play a key role in preventing factions and their supporters from deciding to leave the IRI political arena and become opponents of the IRI system. However, popularisation and hybridity offer factions a path of return to the political arena and to countering possible threats to the regime. The revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions have hindered the success of any sustainable popularisation efforts to impose limitations on their power or public scrutiny of their institutions.

Yet, the popularisation of factional politics has led to a situation in which the

revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions and Khamenei face antiestablishment factional claims from both the right and left. The political elements constituting the establishment since the Rafsanjani period have been reduced to Khamenei and Conservatives holding power within the revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions as well as several traditional conservative factions. This could present a challenge to the regime. This danger is exacerbated by the fluidity of the tactics and strategies used by factions in dealing with each other and with the revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions.

This thesis has provided clear examples of this fluidity. For example, the evolution of Rafsanjani, who was considered a major enemy by the Reformists during the Khatami Presidency, to being their preferred candidate in the Presidential elections of 2005. Further evolving to a pillar of the movement against the Conservative and neo-Conservatives after the Presidential elections of 2009. The same can be said for evolution of Ahmadinejad and his wing of neo-Conservatives.

The emergence of the Green Movement in 2009-10 and its continuing influence on factional and popular politics showed that this hybridity also has certain limits, and that the popularisation of factional politics contains a danger for the regime when the hopes and aspirations for positive change are blockaded by the revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions. The events of 2009-2010 symbolised how the popularisation of factional politics and unfilled expectations and hopes for positive change can break out of the limits imposed by the system.

This movement and its suppression was the consequences of the attempts by the Conservatives, in the face of this danger, emerging from the popularisation of factional politics to establish their control over both republican and revolutionary Islamic/guardian institutions and thus neutralise the hybrid nature of the regime.

However, four years later, during the 2013 Presidential election, domestic and international circumstances forced them to return to this hybridity and recognise it as necessary for the survival of the regime.

The institutional development of the IRI has been strongly influenced by factional politics. While factional power in the IRI is linked to control over institutions controlled by factions, the very power of each institution is also linked to the factional power balance. In other words, the source of institutional power is not solely determined by Constitutional power. When a faction gains control of an institution, it tries to use the jurisdiction of that institution to restrict the institutional power of other institutions occupied by rival factions.

The ambiguities in Khomeinism and the Constitution allow such institutional battles. This dynamic has led to a conflict of jurisdiction between different institutions and/or the different jurisdictional authority of one institution. Institutions have experienced contraction and expansion of their responsibilities and jurisdiction to where sometimes an entire organisation or institution was eliminated due to factional politics. The influence of factional politics on the power of various institutions explains to a certain extent why the dynamics of institutional power are changing so frequently between the *Majlis*, GC, the President's office and other state institutions, depending on which faction is in control.

In sum, as we have seen, ongoing debates about the role of people is at the centre of the popularisation of factional politics have created ideological, political, economic and social opportunities for the IRI which has resulted in a certain degree of political resilience against serious political and ideological challenges. This resilience is strengthened by the hybridity of the IRI.

However, this hybridity and popularisation of factional politics has also led to

the escalation of institutional conflicts. These institutional conflicts take place in conditions in which political parties are not institutionalised and the rule of law is weak. Therefore, the role of human agency in these political trajectories increases in importance. The reality and importance of this role creates uncertainty about the factional and political trajectory of the IRI.

Therefore, as this thesis shows, any analysis of IRI factional politics must examine both the dynamic of resilience and the role of human agency, which, as we have seen, have acted as opposing forces. In this context, soon the IRI could face at least two serious challenges. One is the challenge of choosing a successor to the Supreme Leader and the other is the sociocultural and domestic political consequences of Rouhani's attempts at opening to the West. How the IRI, in particular Khamenei can accommodate the 30 years of his anti-Western stance with this new approach towards the West. The outcome of these challenges might rest in the role of human agency.

This thesis has shown what roles human agency plays in factional politics and its popularisation. First, factions form around particular leading political personalities rather than around specific ideologies and ideas. After Khomeini's death and the consequent decentralisation of ideological production factions and political groups emerged surrounding main political figures: Namely, Rafsanjani and *Kargozaran*, Khatami and *Mosharekat*, Mesbah and *Paydari* and Ahmadinejad and first *Abadgaran* and then *Rayeheh-ye Khosh-e Khedmat*. Second, since political parties in the IRI are not institutionalised, it is these personalities determine a faction's position in the political spectrum and its relationship with other factions and state institutions.

These personalities play a large role in not only the overall popularisation of factional politics but also in the form and extent of the popularity of the faction. In

this context, the decisions, mistakes and personal views of these personalities strongly influence the evolution of factional politics and its popularisation. For instance as was shown, Khamenei and Rafsanjani, who enjoy a long history of friendship and political cooperation and have enjoyed almost the same power and authority, have held their different views regarding foreign policy, in regard to the shape and extent of relations with the West. Khamenei institutionalised his deeply held anti-West views. As chapter six showed, many of Khamenei's decisions and ideological initiatives, such as the slogans emphasising the West's 'cultural onslaught' and 'soft war' played a significant role in the trajectories of IRI foreign policy. At the same time Rafsanjani's different approach, which is rooted in his personal views and perception about the West, led to contradictory policy decisions. This exercised a strong influence on the dynamics of the factions in the camp's of both men.

Another example is the influence of the personal relationship between Khamenei and Mousavi on the 2009 election and the events following it. The political dynamics surrounding this rancorous personal relationship form the framework for understanding these events. The personal charisma of Khatami and his consequent ability to mobilise the people play a decisive role at sensitive points in factional and popular politics, despite societal disappointment with his inability to implement his reform programme when he was President.

He played this role in 2009 when he transferred his popular political support to Mousavi which raised Khamenei's already heightened sensitivities regarding Mousavi and the direction of factional politics. The Khatami-Rafsanjani coalition in the elections of 2013 and their joint support of Rouhani brought to life a moribund electoral atmosphere and mobilised the people to vote for Rouhani in a way that surprised even the most seasoned observers of IRI factional and popular politics.

This thesis has shown that the IRI, during the Khomeini era, unlike the Pahlavi system, implemented the rhetorical popularisation of foreign policy. This was done to maintain mass mobilisation in support of the regime. The people had no real role in determining the trajectory of foreign policy, but rather were to mobilise around the decisions taken by the regime. With the passing of Khomeini, factional politics underwent popularisation. This thesis has shown that the expansion of the popularisation of factional politics in the domestic sphere led to the factional electoral popularisation of foreign policy.

The hybrid characteristics of the IRI, and the myriad different, sometimes parallel, decision-making centres, played a significant role in the dynamics of the relationship between foreign policy and factional politics. These characteristics, similar to domestic policy, have given the IRI a resilience to shift its foreign policy direction, while lowering the risk of possible legitimacy challenges. By giving opposing factions enough authority and room to manoeuvre, it also opened the way for different factional forces to hinder the success of different policies. Since the success of certain foreign policy decisions could translate into popularity and the strengthening of the factions promoting it, these characteristics would give the opposing factions powerful tools and institutional authority enabling them to intervene implementing these policies.

As a result, implementation and continuation of major foreign policy issues, particularly those that can engender popularity for a faction, such as opening to the West, is sensitive to the domestic politics and its popularisation. Thus, the popularisation of factional politics came to exercise an increasing influence on foreign policy decision-making.

In conclusion, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the death of

Khomeini and the emergence and evolution of factional politics and its popularisation opened a new chapter in the history of the IRI, whose conclusion is ambiguous and unpredictable. The IRI has survived and evolved to this point given the interaction between practice of different ideological conceptions of the role of people in politics, hybrid characteristics of its system and its dependence on personalities. This thesis has shown that the hybridity of the IRI political system and the popularisation of factional politics do not fit well into the literature on democratisation and hybrid regimes.

This thesis argues that despite the emphasis in this literature on a specific end point of political development, namely Western forms of democracy, other forms of political change with possible different end points exist. Too often the IRI has been examined in the framework of this dominant literature, which has resulted in conclusions that fail to grasp the dynamics of factional politics, their popularisation and the trajectory of political change in the IRI. This thesis hopes to fill this gap.

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