Downloaded from UvA-DARE, the institutional repository of the University of Amsterdam (UvA)
http://dare.uva.nl/document/104471

File ID 104471
Filename Chapter 4 Factional rivalries and socio-cultural developments

SOURCE (OR PART OF THE FOLLOWING SOURCE):
Type Dissertation
Title The Iranian political elite, state and society relations, and foreign relations since the Islamic revolution
Author E.P. Rakel
Faculty Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences
Year 2008
Pages 288

FULL BIBLIOGRAPHIC DETAILS:
http://dare.uva.nl/record/270821

Copyright

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)

Chapter 4
Factional Rivalries and Socio-cultural Developments

4.1 Introduction

When Ayatollah Khomeini had become supreme leader after the Islamic revolution, all social areas such as the school system, universities, and public law were changed according to the Islamic ideology he had developed. After the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, and when Hashemi Rafsanjani became President, a discourse emerged among clerical and (religious) lay intelligentsia on the role of Islam and the role of the clergy in politics. Also, the women's movement in Iran and the critical press has had a decisive influence on the political discourse in Iran. Large parts of the population urged socio-cultural reforms, which intensified further with the election of Mohammad Khatami as president in 1997 and again since Ahmadinejad became president in 2005. This development is what Adib-Moghaddam (2006: 668-670) calls the "pluralistic momentum" in Iran and what I call "pluralism from below." It is the driving force of the reformist movement in Iran. It cannot be controlled by a political faction. It has no leader, no institution, and no center. It goes beyond the state and manifests itself in various discourses among intellectuals and the public.

Among the Iranian political elite three main positions on socio-cultural issues can be distinguished:

(1) The first position is mainly represented by the Conservative faction, aiming at the preservation of Islamic culture and lifestyle. The Conservatives fear that Western influences could lead to cultural and moral corruption of the Iranians, in particular of the youth, resulting in a return to the pre-revolutionary culture of the Iranian society under Mohammad Reza Shah, whom they accused of having been corrupted by the West and, above all, by the US. To prevent the influence of Western culture, according to this faction, Iranians must seek refuge in the Islamicity of the political regime of the IRI. This faction supports the veiling of women and advocates freedom of the press only to the extent that it does not undermine the Islamic principles of the IRI. It considers the concept of civil society as contrary to the ideals of an Islamic state and its society. Its supporters come mainly from the traditional middle class and the *bazaar* economic sector;

(2) The second group is mainly represented by the Reformist faction, with much more moderate views, concerning socio-cultural issues, than the Conservative faction, putting tolerance, moderation, and diversity of culture at the centre of its socio-cultural outlook. The Reformists object to the policies for segregating men and women, promoted by the Conservative faction. This faction believes in governmental support of intellectual and artistic freedom and promotes freedom

of action and thought for university students. It objects to censorship in arts and media. Civil society for this group means "pluralism," "tolerance," and "democracy." This entails among other things the protection of the relative autonomy and freedom of citizens, and the right to organize them. The middle class and lower middle class mainly support this faction.

(3) The third position is represented by the Pragmatist faction. The Pragmatist faction is mainly supported by techno-bureaucrats: modern professional associations, employer organizations, as well as the modern business-oriented urban-middle class and industrial groups. Their views on the socio-cultural sphere are similar to those of the Reformists. The Pragmatist faction objects to the segregation of men and women, and instead proclaims partnership of the sexes. Above this, it defends the freedom of the press, with the argument that censorship is un-Islamic. In contrast to parts of the Reformists, however, the Pragmatists aim to make the idea of civil society compatible with the existing political order.

Thus, there are great differences in the socio-cultural outlook of the different political factions and consequently in the policies they pursue.

The post-revolutionary clerical and (religious) lay intelligentsia such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, Mohsen Kadivar, Abbas Abdi, Akbar Ganji, and Saeed Hajjarian, who actually prepared the ground for the Reformist movement to flourish, go even further than the Reformist faction. They have a fundamental critique on the *velayat-e faqih* system, the basic principle of the IRI, and advocate – from different perspectives – a secularization of the political system in Iran.

This chapter analyzes the various positions of the political factions of the Iranian political elite on socio-cultural issues and the impact of the rivalry for power between the different political factions on socio-cultural developments in Iran between 1979 and today. It focuses on the role and position of women in the IRI, the situation of the public media, and the intellectual debates on the relation between state and religion, the type of political system, the role of the clergy in politics, and their view on the *velayat-e faqih* system.

4.2 Socio-Cultural Developments during Khomeini's Leadership (1979-1989)

In 1979 the regime of Mohammad Reza Shah (as has been discussed in chapter 2) was overthrown by revolutionaries with various backgrounds and interests. As soon as Ayatollah Khomeini became head of the state, he gradually eliminated the secular and liberal Islamic social forces that had been part of the revolutionary movement. His criticism of the Shah regime had been less concerned with the repressive state apparatus than with the Shah's non-Islamic practices.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Mohammad Reza Shah had tried to give up the Iranian cultural and religious roots for progress. His definition of progress was the introduction and imitation of Western culture, standards, and behavior, as he saw his own tradition as backward and considered especially the religious values an obstacle to rapid modernization. This policy had been initiated already under his father Reza Shah (1925-1941),

who had forbidden religious symbols such as the veil and traditional clothes for men, which he considered a sign of underdevelopment of his country (Chehabi 1993). During Mohammad Reza Shah's modernization program Ayatollah Khomeini had criticized, especially, his land reform program, his pro-American foreign policy, and his intention to introduce the voting right for women (women received the right to vote in 1963).

4.2.1 Women

The Islamization policies after the Islamic revolution started with a systematic and heavy attack on women's rights, when in even less than a month after the revolution the *shari'a* became the main source of law. Central to this policy was the reversal of all policies of gender equality, introduced earlier by the Shah. For example, the Family Protection Law of 1967 introduced under Mohammad Reza Shah to undermine a man's unilateral right to divorce, was abrogated. Instead new laws were initiated, allowing polygamy for men, a minimum age of 9 for female brides, father or guardian's control of the first marriage, temporary marriage, custody to the father or his family, and free divorce only for men. Veiling became the ultimate symbol of power of the regime and was mandatory imposed. All women working in the judicial profession were systematically dismissed. Many women in professional and governmental positions were set free or excluded from employment in these jobs. In the first ten years after the Islamic revolution the IRI effectively negated for women every single right that was struggled for under the Pahlavi regime. In fact, women's sexuality, marital and reproductive rights, employment, education, citizenship, mobility, and clothing, all became regulated by the Iranian state and its religious supervisory bodies (Mohyeddin 2005: 31; Najmabadi 1994).

Interestingly enough, despite the restrictive policies pursued by Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers concerning gender and family issues, there was also another side of this regime, which was barely noted by its critics in the beginning. This was the necessity of women's mobilization in the public sphere, girls' education – once single-sex education was introduced –, and women's activities during the Iran-Iraq War. After consolidating its power in 1979, the regime promoted women's work in limited spheres, such as in the religious area, the social welfare area, the government area, and the women's movement. Women increasingly entered those spheres open to them, like small businesses, teaching, medicine, and the arts (Esfandiari 1997). Many female lawyers did not accept their dismissal and continued to work under the name of a male family member. Others started to work as legal advisors to companies. The firing of female lawyers soon resulted in such a shortage of lawyers trained in Islamic law, that the government had to revise the law to an extent that women were allowed to work as advisors within the judiciary (Keddie 2000: 417).

Islamic women also tried to find their niches for activities in a number of areas (Paidar 1995: 307-309, 311):

(1) The religious area; the Islamic regime considered the education of female religious leaders as an important feature of the IRI. Due to the Islamization of the

Iranian educational system and the admission of women to theological schools, a rising number of female preachers and *mojtaheds* emerged. Women, however, had only a limited status as *mojtaheds*. They were not allowed to issue decrees, and, if they did, they were not binding;

(2) The social welfare area; women became active in state run welfare agencies, charities, and religious foundations. Sometimes they even acted as directors of these institutions. These women often had a clerical background and had connections to the clerics in the inner circle of the political elite;

(3) The government area; in the government women activities were more limited than in the religious and social welfare area. Out of 270 elected *majles* members in 1980, only 3 were women (Monireh Gorji, Azam Taleqani, and Goharolsharieh Dastgheib), having been supported by Islamic pro-government or Islamic oppositional political parties. In the first ten years of the IRI only 6 women were elected to the *majles*. Also, these women had a clerical background;

(4) The women's movement; many Islamic women did not agree to obligatory veiling as imposed by the Khomeini regime. They had their own ideas of what the position of women in the IRI was. Women set up the Society of the Islamic Revolution and other women's organizations.[73] These women constituted the first representatives of an Islamic feminist movement in the IRI.

Dissatisfied Islamic and secular women started to campaign through the press and the parliament for their rights, leading to new discussions about the position of women in the Iranian society. These women were able to build on the extension of women's rights, education, and economic roles developed earlier in the Mohammad Reza Shah period (Keddie 2000: 412), as well as on their active participation in demonstrations during the revolutionary period. The women's movement gained the support of both secular and Islamic women, which could be noted, e.g. in the readership of the journal *Zan-e Ruz*. This journal as well as *Payam-e Hajar*, from the beginning, played an important role in defending the rights of women in the IRI, and voicing women's complaints about inflation, food shortage, housing crisis, discrimination at work, children's health and schooling, violent husbands, or the new family laws based on new interpretations of Islam (Nakanishi 1998: 62; Paidar 1995: 311). The women's movement even had supporters among state officials, administrators, and clerics, who criticized the non-existence of a true Islamic policy on women. The women engaged also in the international arena, such as the United Nations' programs on women. As Paidar (1995: 311-312) notes, this showed that to pursue its goals, the Iranian women's movement easily moved between both Islamic and secular environments.

---

73. Important websites of women's organizations and discussion forums in Iran are among others: The Iranian women's Study Foundation (http://www.iwsf.org/); Iranian Feminist Tribune (http://iftribune.com/); Focus of Iranian Women (http://www.irwomen.com/index.php); Islamic Republic of Iran Center for Affairs of Women's Participation (http://www.women.org.ir/).

The situation of women since the revolution has become very complex. Beside great limitations to the freedom of women, the situation of girls' education has improved compared to the Shah period, especially for lower-class women in the poor urban and rural areas. As can be seen in table 4.1 the literacy rate among women in 1991 was 55.0 percent, compared to 5.4 percent in 1956.

Table 4.1 Literacy Rate Among Men and Women, 1956-1991.

		1956	1966	1976	1986	1991
Literate Women	Total, million	0.5	1.6	4.7	9.8	14.9
	percent	5.4	12.9	28.9	40.5	55.0
Literate men	Total, million	1.4	3.9	8.2	14.1	19.1
	percent	14.6	29.1	47.1	55.7	66.3

Source: Iran Statistical Center, http://www.scri.org.ir

About 43.6 percent of rural women were literate in 1991, compared to 63.8 per cent of urban women. In 1956 only 0.7 percent of rural women and 14.3 per cent of urban women were literate (table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Literacy Rate Among Women, Urban-Rural, in percent, 1956-1991.

	1956	1966	1976	1986	1991
Urban	14.3	29.6	45.8	54.8	63.8
Rural	0.7	3.1	13.6	28.0	43.6
Total country	5.4	12.9	28.9	40.5	55.0

Source: Iran Statistical Center, http://www.sci.org.ir

The law that granted child custody to the father, or his family, came under attack with the increasing number of war widows from the Iran-Iraq war. In 1985, a bill was passed against objections of the Conservative faction, granting custody to minor children to their widow mothers, even if these women remarried. It even provided government funds for the education of these children through the religious foundations. Another dispute concerned the divorce rights of men, leading to a rising divorce rate in the 1980s. In 1989, a bill was passed in parliament according to which (as under the former Family Protection Law) a divorce could only be registered with court permission. Studies on this issue show that despite this bill, male applications for divorce were never denied (Mir-Hosseini 1993).

Besides restrictions on women's rights in the first ten years after the Islamic revolution, also the media came under attack by the Islamic regime.

4.2.2. The Press

After the Islamic revolution, there was great controversy among the members of the political elite regarding civil rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, and association. Some clerics, including Ayatollah Meshkini, who can be counted to the Conservative faction, argued that Islam provided these basic freedoms. These clerics were concerned that laws granting these rights might be used to undermine Islam, create disorder, and to spread undesirable doctrines. Meshkini argued that no one:

"should go to some village and speak against Islam. This, Islam does not permit" (cited in Bakhash 1987: 87).

Several members of the political elite were uncertain whether or not the uneducated masses of the people could resist rival religions and ideologies. For example, Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, a pivotal figure of the Islamic revolution but now one of Iran's most famous dissident clerics, demanded freedom of association to be denied to Baha'is[74]; other Conservatives wanted the same right to be denied to communists. Ja'far Sobhani (senior member of the Council of Mojtaheds in the Seminary of Qom and Director of the Imam Sadiq Institute in Qom[75]) considered freedom of the press to be desirable, while at the same time arguing:

"should we permit a book that denies Islam and the *hatamiyyat* [the finality of Mohammed's prophetic mission]. On the assumption that people are free would it be wise to let them read it?" (cited in Bakhash 1987: 87).

Some members, such as Ayatollah Jalal ad-Din Taheri (Isfahan's former Friday Prayer leader) even argued against the banning of torture:

"Tomorrow they will form a gang and, based on the constitutional ban on torture, they will commit every kind of crime. Take this article out of the constitution" (cited in Bakhash 1987: 87).

Banisadr, the IRI's first president, warned the delegates to reconsider their positions:

"We are drafting these articles in a manner that, step-by-step we introduce a kind of absolutism in the constitution"

he said.

---

74. The Baha'i faith is a religion, founded in the 19th century by Bahaullah, see Hutter, M. "Baha'is," in L. Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion,* (Detroit: Macmillan, 2nd edition, 2005), 737-740.
75. The Imam Sadiq Institute was established in 1979. Its director is Ayatollah Ja'far Sobhani. The institute carries out research on the history of theology and theology in the context of today to promote the discourse among Muslims on issues of Islam and its principles.

"Tomorrow, a military man might come and use these articles against you" (cited in Bakhash 1987: 87).

Banisadr's warnings, however, did not make a great impression. The final draft of the constitution secured basic freedoms, but only to the extent permitted by law and by Islam.

By mid-1979 Iran had about 260 newspapers, almost twice as many as before the revolution but less than during the Mosaddeq government in 1952, when the country had 300 newspapers of which 25 were dailies (Ayandeh 1979; Molana 1963: 570). The small number of newspapers, shortly before and after the revolution, is even more stunning considering the fact that the population had doubled during the same period to 35 million, of which 50 percent lived in the cities, 70 percent more than in the beginning of the 1950s (Shahidi 2006: 1).

Many of the new newspapers in the early years of the IRI were published by groups criticizing the new regime of the IRI, which included the Islamic Mujahedin-e Khalq's *Mujahed* (The Crusader), and the Marxist-Leninist Fedayan-e Khalq's *Kar* (Labor). The political elite spoke to the masses mainly through radio and television, but also through mosques and a limited number of newspapers. Important newspapers were *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* (Islamic Republic), organ of the IRP, and with a license obtained by the future president (1981-1989) and Supreme Leader Khamenei, and the *Enqelab-e Eslami* (Islamic Revolution), founded by Abolhassan Banisadr. In the first two months after the revolution the new regime had already started to close down a large number of independent and critical newspapers and took over the country's oldest newspapers *Ettela'at* and *Kayhan*. Even before the new constitution was introduced a press law was passed in August 1979. It demanded that within three months all newspapers needed to have a license, resulting in the closing down of many newspapers.

Due to the rivalries among the different political factions of the Iranian political elite and the Iran-Iraq War, the restrictions on the press were further tightened. Journalists were arrested or executed; others chose another job or fled the country. Also, owners and staff of publishing houses and owners of bookstores were arrested (Shahidi 2006: 101; Middle East Watch 1993: 33).

In January 1985, a more comprehensive press law was approved by the *majles*, providing guidelines for newspapers and magazines. While books and films needed permission prior to their release, newspapers and magazines could only obtain this permission once they had already been published. Two copies of every issue published had to be submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Non-compliance with the strict limits on what might be discussed in the newspapers could lead to mob attacks, suspension, closure of publishing facilities, or imprisonment. Because of the strong restrictions many publishers carried out a self-censorship in fear of the harsh persecutions. The government often refused to renew permits, which were needed to print publications. It also restricted the starting of newspapers to only those people which the

government considered to be "moral fit." People who had been close to the Shah or had supported his regime were not allowed to publish (Middle East Watch 1993: 34-35).

The tremendous restrictions on women's rights and censorship of the press became possible not least because of the institutionalization of Khomeini's ideas of an Islamic state, the *hokumat-e Islami* (Islamic Government), after the Revolution in 1979.

4.2.3 Intellectual Debate

The two main intellectuals of the Islamic revolution are Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1900-1989) and Ali Shari'ati (1933-1977). Ayatollah Khomeini radically criticized the Iranian monarchy, the constitutional revolution, and the post-constitutional clergy. He revolutionized the traditional Shi'ite dogma on worldly political power by his new idea on the *velayat-e faqih* system. Ali Shari'ati has to be considered as probably the most important intellectual of the Iranian Islamic revolution. He made an important contribution to the development of the Islamic revolutionary ideology and can be considered as one of the main ideologues of a large political trend in modern Iran, as well as other Islamic societies (Amineh 7 May 1999: 17, 23; Keddie 1981: 215).

4.2.3.1 Ali Shari'ati

Shari'ati's mother came from a small landowning family. His father's side was a clerical family (Abrahamian 1989: 105). Shari'ati was very much influenced by Third World ideologues and revolutionary thinkers and activists such as Frantz Fanon and Aimé Césaire. He was also influenced by Jean Paul Sartre, Jean Cocteau, Albert Camus, Alexis Carrel, Max Planck, Albert Einstein, Tynbee, and Emil Durkheim (Amineh 1999: 490); as well as the German philosophers Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, Edmund Husserl, Karl Theodor Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Herbert Marcuse (Boroujerdi 1996: 106).

Shari'ati developed his revolutionary theory in the beginning of the 1970s when the activities of Iranian guerrilla organizations (the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization or People's Mujahedin Organization of Iran [PMOI] and the People's Fedayan-e Khalq Guerilla Organization) and the repressive state apparatus reached their height (Abrahamian 1989: 108-109).

Like the Third World thinkers Ali Shari'ati gave preference to revolutionary progress and development rather than a democratic state system. He argued that in a democracy the masses, which he considered conservative and, therewith, anti-development, would only elect those leaders who preserved their interests and traditions and, therewith, posed an obstacle to development and change (Shari'ati 1361/1982: 219-221). Ali Shari'ati was in favor of a political system of "directed democracy" in which the government is formed by an enlightened elite, with a progressive and revolutionary political agenda. This leadership should guide the masses from stagnant traditionalism to a progressive society (Shari'ati 1347/1968: 617-619). To fulfill its political goals successfully, the leadership has to be in power for a long period of time. Shari'ati's models for

his propagated path of development were Sukarno in Indonesia and Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia (Shari'ati 1361/1982: 232-233).

Ali Shari'ati was influenced by Marxism and neo-Marxism, especially by Georges Gurvitch. Gurvitch considered religion as an important feature of popular culture, which at its extreme could function as an ideological tool of the suppressed to fight their oppressors. Ali Shari'ati also criticized Marxism, in general, and communist parties, in particular. For him Karl Marx was a militant atheist who looked at the world only from an economic point of view and neglected the role of religion. Equally, he accused communist parties of not considering that in the Third World, religion, like nationalism, was a potential progressive force to fight imperialism as well as national capitalism (Abrahamian 1989: 114-115). Ali Shari'ati considered Islam and especially Shi'ism, an important feature of human history. According to Shari'ati the role of the Prophet was to establish an *ummah* that would be in a "permanent" revolution (*enqelab-e daemi),* striving for a classless society and public ownership of the means of production (Abrahamian 1989: 112).

The Twelfth Imam was the necessary long-term leadership during post-revolutionary reconstruction. According to Ali Shari'ati during the phase of the occultation of the Twelfth Imam, the *ummah* should elect its leader who rules as one of the deputies of the Hidden Imam. The leader is accountable both to the *imam* and the people, but he guides his community based only on the ideology of the *imam* and not on the ideas and needs of his community. The leader should not be just any person, but a learned person (*shakhsiyat-e ílmi*) (Shari'ati 1350/1971: 265, 267, 268).

During the occultation of the Twelfth Imam the *ummah* should seek guidance from the *ulama* (clergy), as well as the *faqih,* chosen by the people as a source of emulation (*marja-e taqlid*). This is Shari'ati's Alavi Shi'ite model. Shari'ati distinguished between Alavi Shi'ism and Safavi Shi'ism. Alavi Shi'ism is a dynamic libertarian religion against repression, exploitation, and despotism, in which the people have the right to choose their leaders. The Safavi Shi'ism to the contrary is conservative. Here, the clergy deprive the people of their right to elect a leader, arguing that the people are incapable of choosing the most learned among the clergy and, therefore, have to rely on the advice of their religious leaders (Shari'ati 1350/1971; Akhavi 1980: 149-150; Keddie 1981: 217-218). With his theory, Shari'ati probably unconsciously laid the grounds for the principle of the *velayat-e faqih* system. But, in contrast to Khomeini's understanding of the principle of the *velayat-e faqih*, Shari'ati put great emphasis on the people's right to elect their leaders.

4.2.3.2 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini

Ayatollah Khomeini developed his theory of the *hokumat-e islami* and the main guidelines of the principle of the *velayat-e faqih* (Khomeini 1354/1976) – the fundamental political principle of the IRI – in 1970 and 1971. Like Ali Shari'ati, he was convinced that in the absence of the Hidden Imam a political leader should be chosen to form a

legitimate government. In contrast to Ali Shari'ati, however, he saw only a limited role for the people in his theory of government. Ayatollah Khomeini believed that the political leader should not be chosen by the people but by the clerical elite. According to his theory, since an Islamic government is based on divine law, the political leader is subordinate to the clerical elite. Therefore, political power should be directly assumed by a *faqih*. To assume political leadership the leader has to have an extensive knowledge of Islamic law and justice. As the people are not able to recognize the right leader, they should leave the choice to the clergy (Khomeini 1981). Ayatollah Khomeini set the Islamic government equal to democracy, but shortly after the revolution he rejected the inclusion of the term democratic into the title "Islamic Republic of Iran," as had been suggested by Mehdi Bazargan (*Ettela'at* 11 March 1979: 8). For Ayatollah Khomeini Islam was in itself democratic and, therefore, would make the inclusion of the term into the title obsolete. Khomeini's conceptualization of the *hokumat-e islami* laid the basis for the political power structure of the IRI.

The restriction of women's rights, press censorship, the imposition of the dress code accompanied by an economic crisis, and restricted individual freedom soon led to great discontent with the regime – especially among the younger population, but also among clerical and (religious) lay intellectuals who earlier had supported the revolution. This discontent came to the fore, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, and when Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected president in the same year.

4.3 Socio-Cultural Developments during Rafsanjani's Presidency 1989-1997

When Hashemi Rafsanjani became president, members of his cabinet founded the Executives of Construction Party (*Hezb-e Kargozaran-e Sazandegi*), which is a reform-oriented party and one of Hashemi Rafsanjani's most important supporters. The Executives of Construction Party is also a member of the 2nd Khordad movement that later, in 1997, supported Mohammad Khatami in his electoral campaign to become president. This is interesting as Hashemi Rafsanjani[76] is also a founding member of the conservative Combatant Clergy Association (*Jame'e-ye Rowhaniyat-e Mobarez*), which was established by several clergy, in 1977, to overthrow the Shah regime.

The calls for reform that emerged in 1989, after ten years of political hardship and economic crisis, were driven by three inevitable changes that had taken place after the death of Khomeini:

(1) The long years of war against Iraq, economic crisis, and socio-cultural restrictions made many Iranians turn away from the ideology of the Islamic revolution. Instead, they became primarily preoccupied with economic difficulties. For example, while the population had almost doubled between 1976 and 2000 from 34 million to 64 million, the non-oil GDP per capita in 2000 was lower than in 1976, namely 4,342.0000 Rials

76. See also Hashemi Rafsanjani's website http://www.hashemirafsanjani.ir/

compared to 4,773.000 Rials in 1976. The national income per capita was in 2000 only half of the national income in 1976 (appendix 4);

(2) The large generation of Iranians born in the 1970s and 1980s that have recently entered the political arena were generally disillusioned with the Islamic regime and strongly demanded reform. Young Iranians were frustrated with the poor economic prospects and socio-cultural restrictions. At the same time, however, since the revolution the youth had benefited from better education than ever before. Iran's youth had also benefited from a rapid expansion of educational opportunities. While in 1976 the number of literate men and women in Iran amounted to 47.1 percent, in 1991 this was already 66.3 percent (see table 4.1). Since the revolution Iran had been quite successful in combating analphabetism. In 2004 it even had a higher literacy rate than Egypt or Iraq among 15 year olds and older, but a lower rate than Saudi Arabia and Turkey (table 4.3). At the same time, the country is confronted with the emigration of intellectuals and highly qualified people. Every year 150,000-180,000 people try to emigrate from Iran. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) out of 61 developing countries, Iran stands at the top of the emigration of intellectuals (Iran News 31 December 2001). With a voting right at the age of 15 (since January 2007 the voting right has risen to 18)[77] and more than half of the electorate under 30, Iran's youth constitutes a large, and growing, base of support for reforms. This younger generation has increased in importance, while the older generation of hardened revolutionaries, who were active in the 1960s and early 1970s have been fading, with many key figures retiring from politics, becoming less active, or passing away;

(3) The process of globalization and its influences both on people and states is crucial to understanding the demand of Iranians for reforms. The global system has become more complex and interdependent with the effect that changes in one part of the world can potentially have a profound affect on other parts. Progress in media, information, and communication technologies have facilitated the development of a global consciousness, enabling people all over the world, and also in Iran, to participate in discourses on world peace, human rights, and democratic issues. Politics, gender issues, the concepts of civil society, democracy and the rule of law, questioning of customs and traditions, and finding new friends are the main topics of discussion for the users. Even clerics have set up their own websites (Amuzegar 2003: 52; Mousavi-Shafaee 2003: 194).

Despite these developments the restrictions on women's rights are reversed only gradually, as will be shown in the next section.

77. As Fairbanks notes, the change of the voting right from 15 to 18 in January 2007 was probably an attempt to counteract the many reformist oriented young voters (Fairbanks 2007: 3).

Table 4.3 Literacy Rate in Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, 1990 and 2004

	1990		2004	
Country	**Adult literacy rate (% ages 15 and older)**	**Youth literacy rate (% ages 15-24)**	**Adult literacy rate (% ages 15 and older)**	**Youth literacy rate (% ages 15-24)**
Iran	63.2	86.3	77.0	n/a
Egypt	47.1	61.3	71.4	84.9
Iraq	35.7	41.0	74.1	84.8
Saudi Arabia	66.2	85.4	79.4	95.9
Turkey	77.9	92.7	87.4	95.6

Source: UNDP Human Development Report (2006).

4.3.1 Women

The bill that granted women the right to obtain advisory positions in the judiciary, outlined above, came under great attack from the clerics who tried to abolish it in 1994. The women representatives, however, found support by the speaker of the *majles,* Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, a representative of the Conservative faction, who stood in the 1997 presidential elections against Mohammad Khatami.

As a consequence, the advisory roles of women in the judiciary were even extended. Women lawyers may now be in charge of the custody of minors and are allowed to act as advisors to the Administrative Justice Courts and Family Courts exclusively dealing with family matters such as marriage, polygamy, divorce, marriage payments, wages for housework, husband's support for wives, child custody, and legal guardianship. They become assistants to the public prosecutor, the examining magistrate, and in offices for legal research and preparation of laws. They even become legal advisers in governmental departments. Every court must have a women advisor and has to take their views into consideration in their decisions. By 1997 women had access to most posts at almost all levels in the judiciary (Afshar 1998; Keddie 2000: 418).

Still, most legal reforms have not yet been successful regarding various issues concerning women. Attention in the press and elsewhere have made people aware of issues such as the beating of women and children by men, or the lowering of the marriage age of girls down to 9 years. In reality, the age of marriage of women has steadily been going up, mainly due to better education and urbanization. From 1956 via 1986 to 1996, the average age of women to marry rose from respectively 18.7 via 20 to 21 years (Afshar 1998: 148; Ladier 1996).

Another important struggle concerning the rights of women has been in increasing the few grounds on which women could ask to divorce their husbands, without his authorization in the marriage contract. In 1994, a law that in 1993 had passed parliament but had been rejected by the Council of the Guardian, was reinstated by the Council of

Public Interest, extending the right of women to divorce their husbands for reasons such as the husband's impotence, his imprisonment, his desertion, or polygamy. It also made divorce more expensive for men, giving the right to women to keep half of the wealth and property of their husband, if he wanted a divorce without good cause. This rule was based on the assumption that wives had the right to receive wages for their housework (Afshar 1998: 186-191).

These slow improvements in the rights of women are a reflection of developments also in other areas of the socio-cultural sphere such as the freedom of the press.

4.3.2 The Press

When Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected president and Ayatollah Khomeini had died, the new Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Mohammad Khatami – later to become president – reduced the pressure by the state on cultural activities. In February 1991, the Ministry stated that in 1990 the number of Iran's newspapers had risen by about 50 percent, reaching 274. The number of dailies had risen from 10 to 19, and the numbers of scientific and specialist publications had risen by 150 percent (Aminzadeh 1992: 26-28). The critical monthly papers, *Gardoun* and *Kiyan,* and the daily newspaper, *Salam,* received licenses, but later came into conflict with the state (Pourostad 2001; Kashi 2000). Under Mohammad Khatami, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance allowed the publication of new works of fiction and increased the production of music, which had been sharply sanctioned by Ayatollah Khomeini. It also lifted the ban on board games. But, under the pressure of the Conservatives, Mohammad Khatami had to resign in May 1992 and was succeeded by Ali Larijani, who had been Deputy Chief of Staff and Acting Chief of Staff of the IRGC during the Iran-Iraq War (Larijani 2000: 198-202), and in 1994 was appointed Director of Radio and Television, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) (Shahidi 2006: 4). Despite the abdication of Mohammad Khatami as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance the number of journalists by 1992 was three times higher than before the revolution, with at least 2,145 journalists. Women had a share of 13 percent in the total number, which is double from before the revolution (Mohsenian-Rad 1993: 4-17).

Although further newspaper closures took place, there were also some positive developments, especially in the second term of Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency (1993-1997): the inauguration of the Annual Press Festival in May 1994 (Rasaneh Quarterly Spring 1994); the establishment of the first jury to try lay publishers of newspapers in 1995 (Kashi 2000: 177-78), and the withdrawal of a bill to amend the Islamic Republic's second Press Law, enacted in 1986 and in 1995 (Rasaneh Quarterly autumn 1995: 115). The discontent of many intellectuals with the IRI's economic, socio-cultural, and foreign policies accompanied by a gradual loosening of the freedom to express one's opinion, led to a broader and deeper debate on the necessity for political reform. This development could be noted, interestingly enough, especially among those intellectuals who earlier had been dedicated supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini.

4.3.3 Intellectual Debate

Intellectuals played an important role in developing the worldview of the IRI. Important issues of discussion raised by the Islamic revolution were: whether Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) could find answers to modern social and scientific problems; whether Islam was compatible with modern technology, nationalism, and a parliamentary democracy; whether the advancement of secularism could be halted; and how could the IRI confront the West. These issues were analyzed very differently by diverse people (Boroujerdi 1996: 157). As the new supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei did not have Khomeini's charisma, it has been easier to criticize the regime. It is interesting to note that the critics are not outsiders, but come from the ruling elite itself. It can be said that this movement contributed later to the rise of the reform movement and the election of Mohammad Khatami as president.

In the two decades after the revolution many of the intellectuals, who earlier had supported Khomeini's or Shari'ati's views and were from both Islamic and secular backgrounds, became reformers. These reformers can be categorized into two groups: (1) religious lay and clerical public intellectuals and (2) reform leaders (Sadri 2001: 272).

What these clergy and the (religious) lay intellectuals have in common is their interest in philosophy and rational theology as a means to reform religious thought (Arjomand 2002: 721-722). The main issues of the intellectual debate in Iran, for clergy and (religious) laypersons, concentrate on the *velayat-e faqih* system, the relations between Iran and the West, and the role of Islam and the clergy in politics.

4.3.3.1 Lay and Clerical Public Intellectuals (Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, and Mohsen Kadivar)

Important representatives of the religious lay and clerical public intellectuals, or nationalist-religious (*melli-mazhabi*) thinkers (Kamrava 2003: 106), are Abdolkarim Soroush, Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, and Hojjatoleslam Mohsen Kadivar. The post-revolutionary religious lay and clerical public intellectuals published their ideas in the journal *Kayhan-e Farhangi* (Cultural Kayhan), created in 1984. In this monthly journal issues of Western and Islamic modern and classical thought and literature were discussed. It addressed subjects such as Islam and science, reason and society, liberation and social justice, and Islam and the West. Between 1988 and 1990 it published a series of articles criticizing the ideology of the IRI and suggesting a reformulation of Islam in more secular and liberal terms.[78] The journal was banned in 1990, but reopened in 1991 as the bi-monthly journal Kiyan. *Kiyan* published the opinion of religious lay and clerical intellectuals on issues, such as Islam and politics, Islam and ideology, Islam and modernity, Islam and pluralism; Islam and democracy, Islamic jurisprudence, and the role of the clergy in politics. The journal was banned in 2000.

---

78. *Kayhan-e Farhangi* (Cultural Kayhan) 5(2) (1988), 12-18; 5(4) (1988), 13-19; 5(4) (1988), 13-19; 5(12) (1989), 11-16; 6(4) (1989), 7-15; 6(5) (1989), 6-11; 6(9) (1989), 7-13; 7(1) (1990), 12-19.

Abdolkarim Soroush

Abdolkarim Soroush[79] is a London trained philosopher of science and a pharmacologist. He was appointed to the Commission for Cultural Revolution by Ayatollah Khomeini after the universities were closed in 1980. He was born into a traditional learned merchant family and educated at the Alavi high school (where most of the Islamic religious lay elite were educated). Since the early 1990s, Abdolkarim Soroush has turned into one of the IRI's most important critics (Sadri, M. 2001: 258; Boroujerdi 1996: 158). Not only are his writings important from a philosophical point of view but also because he was one of the first intellectuals who criticized the IRI "from within," making issues debatable that have been a taboo until recently. Most importantly, he made the concept of the *velayat-e faqih* debatable, giving room to others to criticize it more directly (Kamrava 2003: 105-106).

In 1992, Soroush radically broke with the Islamic ideology. Soroush argues that it is not possible in the long-term to advocate a specific understanding of Islam as the ultimate one. The Islamic ideology would reduce the totality of religion to an unchanging ideological world-outlook:

"You contemplate the law of religion, I bid you to comprehend the law of the law; you have seen the water, now look through the water to see the water. You speak of bodies forcefully subdued; I bid you to think of hearts that submit freely. You respect uniformity, emulation, and obedience to religious jurisprudence and jurists, I implore you to appreciate the complexity and colorfulness of belief, liberty, subtlety, and the agility of faiths and volitions. How inferior is body to soul, dirt to hear! Truly the religious community is plural and pluralistic by nature. The plurality of religious sects and factions is but a coarse, crude, and shallow indicator of the subtle, elusive, and invisible pluralities of souls. Only after one enters that realm will one experience the wisdom of these sagacious words. There are as many paths toward God as there are people [or even as many as people's inhalations and exhalations]" (Soroush 2000: 145).

Soroush also critiques the *velayat-e faqih* system. For Ayatollah Khomeini in a "religious society" the *faqih* enjoys the right to rule based on a specific type of religious state with its ultimate source *feqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). Soroush argues that *feqh* can only be considered as one dimension of religion. To understand religion exclusively in terms of *feqh* is impossible and is reductionist. Even if *feqh* provides answers to legal questions, it does not address deeper issues, such as the meaning of justice and freedom (Soroush 1993a). To address these latter issues, Soroush turns to *kalam* (theology):

"The question of religious justice is a question for *feqh*, but the question of a just religion is a question for *kalam*" (Soroush 1993a: 50).

79. See also Abdolkarim Soroush's website http://www.drsoroush.com.

For Soroush a religious state has to be a just state. Justice, however, can only be formulated outside religion (Soroush 1993a: 52). Justice includes a conception of man, of what it means to be human, and of what rights man enjoys. This conception has to be in harmony with religion, but it cannot be defined on the basis of the religious texts alone. Man, by virtue of his humanity, enjoys certain rights that are not defined in the core religious texts. A religious state that reduces its notion of justice to the implementation of *feqh* puts these extra-religious rights in danger (Soroush 1993a: 52). A government ruled on the basis of *feqh* alone not only reduces the range of human rights, it also lacks adequate methodological tools for governance. Soroush argues that religion does not offer a plan for government, and any attempts to derive such a plan from religion are wasted. The rational administration of modern society calls for more than a highly developed code of religious law. Modern methods of government should be derived instead from the modern social sciences i.e. economics, sociology, and public administration (Soroush 1995: 28). These methods should not violate religious values, but they cannot be derived from religion itself.

Still, Soroush sees a place for Islam in politics. He argues that the only type of religious government not making Islam a single political ideology, is a democratic one. Soroush's democratic model is pluralist, a form of government that is compatible with multiple political cultures, including Islamic ones (and Western culture) (Soroush 1993a: 269-272; 1993b: 153-154). A government that rules by one official interpretation of religion, and demands that its citizens live according to this interpretation, sacrifices human rights for ideological purity (Soroush 1996: 12). The guiding criteria for governance, instead, have to be human rights (Soroush 1996: 15). If a government defends human rights, it also defends religion, as a just understanding of religion incorporates human rights:

> "observance of human rights [...] not only guarantees a government's democratic, but also its religious nature" (Soroush 1996: 15).

Thus, a discussion of democracy is not a jurisprudential (*feqhi*) issue in any sense. It is rather associated with the rule of reason and the denial of absolutist authority, the latter being characteristic of a dogmatic understanding of Islam (Soroush 1994: 50-52).

Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari

Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari is a Shi'ite cleric. He was born into a clerical family and educated in Qom. Between 1970 and 1979, Mojtahed Shabestari was the director of the Islamic Center in Hamburg, Germany, where he became acquainted with German philosophy, and Catholic and Protestant theology. He was a member of the *majles* for a short period after the Islamic revolution, but soon turned his back on politics and returned to editing journals, teaching, and writing. He is also professor of theology at the University of Tehran. Mojtahed Shabestari criticizes the "official reading (or discourse)

of religion." His writings are philosophical in nature rather than political, as are the writings of Mohsen Kadivar (Kamrava 2003: 106). Mojtahed Shabestari has made an important contribution to the intellectual debate in pointing out the limited nature of religious knowledge and Islamic jurisprudence. He, therefore, like Abdolkarim Soroush, argues that non-religious sources are necessary, in addition to Islamic ones. In calling for the separation of religious values and secular realities, Mojtahed Shabestari goes further than any other cleric (Sadri, M. 2001: 261). In a published debate (Kiyan Nov. 1995, l5(28): 2-25) entitled "Religious Pluralism," he made a significant contribution to the criticism of the contemporary ruling Islamic political ideology, and the reformulation of Islam in more secular and liberal terms. Shabestari's views are in fact a criticism of the government's attempt to turn religion into dogma. The official view of the theological apparatus of the government is one that validates theocracy on the basis of a traditional jurisprudential understanding of religion. Shabestari differentiates between faith and religious law, associating faith and the essence of religiosity with religious experience rather than with Islamic jurisprudence. He refers to mystics saying that:

"the human problem is the problem of correct interpretation of religious experience and not the experience itself" (Shabestari 1995: 18-19).

This argument has important social implications with strong political consequences. By refusing to identify faith with Islamic jurisprudence, Mojtahed Shabestari rejects the state propaganda, according to which the violation of the government laws (backed by theologians) is tantamount to sinning against religion; and that the decisions of the Islamic government create religious obligations. He also rejects the government efforts to give "religious coloring" to the aspects of life that are not religious, such as politics, economics, technology, arts, etc. (Shabestari 1995: 21). In an article entitled "Modernism va Vahyy" (Modernism and the Divine Revelation) (*Kiyan* Mar-Apr 1996, 5(29): 18-19), Shabestari suggests that as a result of modern social, political, cultural, and economic developments in the Islamic world, the Muslim believers have faced a fundamental question namely "how to reconcile modernity with the divine revelation"? The answer to this theological question has radical political implications due to the intertwining of theology and polity in Iran, since the 1979 revolution.

Mohsen Kadivar

Mohsen Kadivar[80] was a student of electronic engineering during the revolution and switched to the seminaries of Qom as an enthusiastic Islamic revolutionary. Mohsen Kadivar comes from a politically active family. His grandfather opposed the political regime of Reza Shah and his father that of Mohammad Reza Shah. Mohsen Kadivar is less well known in the West but probably as significant, for the intellectual debate in

80. See also Mohsen Kadivar's website http://www.kadivar.com

Iran, as Abdolkarim Soroush and Mojtahed Shabestari. His ideas are close to those of the former two. He differs from them in that he develops his thought solely on the basis of Islamic sources (Sadri, M. 2001: 262). Mohsen Kadivar has published nine books[81], among which is a trilogy on political theology. His writings are mainly concerned with discussions on the religious government and the role of religion in the IRI. Within these discussions he focuses on four main questions: is religion a viable and necessary force in politics? Are religion and freedom compatible? What is the role of the clergy in politics? And what is the role of the *velayat-e faqih* system in politics? It is mainly his criticism on the *velayat-e faqih* system that has brought him into conflict with the clerical establishment (Kamrava 2003: 107).

In the second volume of his trilogy, titled *Hokumat-e Velayati* (Government of the Jurist) (1998), he attacks the principle of the *velayat-e motlagheh-ye faqih* as developed by Ayatollah Khomeini (Sadri, M. 2001: 264). Kadivar studied what is said about the concept in the *Quran*, in the sayings of the prophet, and in Islamic and Shi'ite traditions. He comes to the conclusion that the concept has never been a core of Islamic thinking and practice, but only marginal in the long history of Islamic philosophy (Kadivar 1998).

As a *mojtahed* Kadivar used to be immune to harassment despite his criticism on the fundaments of the IRI. But, in 1999, he was arrested and sentenced to 18 months imprisonment, because of a talk in which he condemned the killing of Iranian intellectuals, and because of an interview in which he stated that the IRI had partially reproduced the absolute authoritarianism of the Shah period (Sadri, M. 2001: 268).

4.3.3.2 Public intelligentsia (Abbas Abdi, Akbar Ganji, and Saeed Hajjarian)

The reform leaders include outstanding figures such as Abbas Abdi, Akbar Ganji, and Saeed Hajjarian.

Abbas Abdi

In 1979, Abbas Abdi[82] was leader of the revolutionary organization Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line and one of the leading figures of the hostage taking of US diplomats and staff at the US embassy in Tehran. He has turned into one of Iran's best-known reformists and a member of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (*Jebheye Mosharekate Iran-e Eslami*) for which he held a seat in parliament. In 2002, he was arrested after having held a poll among Iranians on dialogue with the US, the result of which showed that most Iranians seemed to be in favor of dialogue with the US. Before his arrest, Abbas Abdi and Mohammad Reza Khatami (the brother of former President Khatami and the first Secretary-General of the Islamic Iran Participation Front) said that reformist members of parliament would resign if reforms were not implemented,

81. Mohsen Kadivar's writings have been compiled in a 900 page book titled *Daqdaqe-haye Hokumat-e Dini* (Crises of Religious Government), (Tehran: Ney, 2000).
82. See also Abbas Abdi's website http://ayande.ir

and spoke in favor of relations with the US, which would serve Iran better than keeping up the IRI's anti-US ideology (Savyon 15 November 2002).

Akbar Ganji

Akbar Ganji used to be an intelligence officer in the IRGC and also press attaché at the Iranian Embassy in Turkey. Later he worked for the progressive daily newspapers *Hamshari* and *Kiyan*. Akbar Ganji is the son of an unskilled laborer. He is one of several examples of people who joined the revolution with great enthusiasm and followed it blindly, but later turned away from the Islamic regime and became one of its most prominent critics (Sadri, A. 2001: 277). Akbar Ganji[83] coined concepts such as "follower of a different life style" (*degar-bash*) and "different thinker" (*degarandish*). He called the Conservative faction "mafia" and Hashemi Rafsanjani "godfather." Terms like these pose a challenge to the traditional clergy as they show the emancipation of the Iranian citizens from their government (Sadri, A. 2001: 277). When Akbar Ganji returned from a conference in Berlin in 2000 he was arrested and accused of conspiring to overthrow the government. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and five years of internal exile but was freed on 18 March 2006. Since his release Akbar Ganji has been traveling around the world, giving lectures and speeches on the necessity of reforms in Iran and the obstacles against such reforms. In a recent article he rejects military intervention by the US in Iran to bring about democracy. This can only be done by the Iranians themselves: "[R]regime change," Ganji argues

> "is the duty of Iranians. And it must proceed not by military means but through a sustained, nonviolent civil campaign. The campaign must protect individuals, groups, and professions. And it must aim to bring about free elections and a constitution that recognizes basic political and civil rights and creates checks on institutional power by establishing freedom of expression, the right to form trade unions and political associations, a separation of powers, a guarantee of the political neutrality of the judiciary and the armed forces, the rule of law, and fair trials" (Ganji 2007).

From his prison cell, in 2002, Akbar Ganji wrote the first book of his *Republican Manifesto* (*Manifist-I Jumhurikhvahi*), in which he demands the end of the cleric regime in Iran and the introduction of democracy. In May 2005, he released the second book of the *Republican Manifesto* calling for a boycott of the May 2005 presidential elections.[84]

On the occasion of President Ahmadinejad's visit to the US and the UN in September 2007 Akbar Ganji sent an open letter to the UN-Secretary General, Ban Ky-moon,

83. See also a website on Ganji http://akbarganji.net
84. For the text of the 2nd book of the Manifesto see http://freeganji.blogspot.com/2005/05/republican-manifesto-ii-preface.html

in which he rejects a military attack on Iran and demands from the UN to condemn human rights violations in Iran. About 300 prominent scholars worldwide signed this open letter.[85]

Saeed Hajjarian

Saeed Hajjarian was professor at the prestigious Faculty of Engineering of the University of Tehran during the Mohammad Reza Shah period. He taught himself Western social sciences, as well as Islamic jurisprudence and philosophy. After the revolution he worked for the Center for Strategic Studies where he developed into one of the leading figures of the revolutionary counter-intelligence in Iran. Like Akbar Ganji, Saeed Hajjarian comes from a poor family from the slums in southern Tehran. He admired Ali Shari'ati and Ayatollah Khomeini, and enthusiastically embraced the revolution before he became a leader of the reform movement (Sadri A. 2001: 279). In his editorials in the journal *Asr-e Ma,* which have been published as a book titled *Republic: Demystifying Political Power* (1999), Hajjarian argues that the people do not have to choose between a theocratic and a secular political system, but between different theocracies (theo-autocracy, theo-aristocracy, and theo-democracy). The *velayat-e faqih* system relies both on divine and democratic sources (Hajjarian 1999: 677-688). He argues that the Assembly of Experts, which elects the supreme leader, could be the product of an autocratic, aristocratic, or democratic regime and still be a clerical institution under the constitution of the Islamic Republic (Sadri, A. 2001: 278). Since an assassination attempt in March 2000, by individuals with close connections to the IRGC, Hajjarian has been confined to a wheelchair (Sadri, A. 2001: 279).

Since the late 1990s a growing number of Iranians have been exhibiting public behavior which has been unacceptable to the government. The debate for reform has shifted from those within the regime to those outside it, like journalists, students, the women's movements etc. These people are no longer satisfied with debating issues such as democracy, pluralism, civil society etc., but demand fundamental political reforms (Gheissari and Nasr 2004: 99), such as governmental accountability, economic reforms, the easing of the strict Islamic socio-cultural restrictions, improvements in gender relations, and good relations with the US and other Western countries. These people were mobilized in the 1997 elections and gave a voice to their demands by voting for Mohammad Khatami as president.

4.4 Socio-Cultural Developments during Khatami's Presidency 1997-2005

Mohammad Khatami's election to president was partly made possible because he was supported by the 2nd Khordad movement, which refers not only to pro-reformist parties

85. Akbar Ganji's open letter to UN-Secretary General Ban Ky-moon of 18 September 2007, http://arabist.net/archives/2007/09/25/akbar-ganjis-open-letter-on-iran.

and organizations, but also to everyone who supported Mohammad Khatami's[86] reform program. Important parties that belong to the reform camp are: the Islamic Participation Front, the Association of Combatant Clerics (*Majma'-e Rowhaniyun-e Mobarez*), and the Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (*Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Enqelab-e Eslami*). Abdolkarim Soroush and Saeed Hajjarian are probably the most notable figures, who through their writings paved the way for the emergence of the 2nd Khordad movement. Mohammad Khatami himself is a member of the reformist party, Association of Combatant Clerics. An important aspect of his election was, probably, that the structure of the Iranian population has changed significantly since the Iranian Islamic revolution. Between 1975 and 2004 Iran's population increased by 2.5 percent a year from 33.3 to 68.8 million. In 2015, the total population is expected to be 79.9 million and in 2025 even 90.9 million (table 4.4 and table 4.5).

Table 4.4 Demographic Trends in Iran, 1975-2015

	1975	2004	2015	Annual population growth rate (%), 1975-2004	Annual population growth rate (%), 2004-2015
Total population (millions)	33.3	68.8	79.9	2.5	1.4
Urban population (as % of total)	45.8	66.4	71.9		
Population under age 15 (as % of total)	n/a	29.8	25.6		
Population over age 65 (as % of total)	n/a	4.5	4.9		

Source: UNDP, *Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis,* Human Development Report, (2006).

This is a similar trend to that in other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. For example, between 2000 and 2025, the total population in Turkey, Egypt, Oman, and Saudi Arabia is expected to increase from 68,3 million to 89 million, 67,6 million to 103,2 million, 2,6 million to 4,8 million, and 22,1 million to 39,8 million respectively (table 4.5). In 2004, the number of young people in Iran under the age of 15 amounted to almost 30 percent of the total population, while people over 65 years were only 4.5 percent of the total population. This large proportion of those under the age of 15 is also comparable to other countries in the MENA region, thus not unique to Iran. In 2000, the comparable figures for those under the age of 15 in Turkey, Egypt, Oman, and Saudi Arabia were respectively 31.7 percent, 36.3 percent, 37.6 percent, and 39.7

86. See also Mohammad Khatami's website http://www.khatami.ir/.

percent of the total population (table 4.5). The increasing number of people of working age in the MENA region necessitates the creation of new jobs. If job creation does not succeed, social and economic development will not be sufficient to satisfy the needs of the young people and could lead to mass migrations to Europe and North America (Matthiessen 2005: 5).

Table 4.5 Demographic Trends in the MENA Region, 1950-2025

	1950		2000		2025	
Country	Population (1,000)	Under 15 years (percent)	Population (1,000)	Under 15 years (percent)	Population (1,000)	Under 15 years (percent)
Algeria	8,8	40.1	30,2	35.1	42,4	23.4
Bahrain	116	42.3	677	29.7	1,0	20.2
Egypt	21,8	39.7	67,8	36.3	103,2	27.2
Iran	16,9	39.0	66,4	35.2	90,9	23.7
Iraq	5,2	45.8	23,2	42.0	41,7	32.6
Jordan	472	45.7	5,0	38.9	8,1	26.9
Kuwait	152	36.2	2,2	26.6	3,9	19.5
Lebanon	1,4	34.3	3,5	30.7	4,6	21.2
Libya	1,0	42.0	5,2	32.9	7,8	24.3
Morocco	9,0	44.4	29,1	33.0	40,7	24.4
Oman	456	42.3	2,6	37.6	4,8	31.4
Palestine	1,0	45.7	3,2	46.4	6,9	37.5
Qatar	25	42.3	581	27.0	790	20.8
Saudi Arabia	3,2	42.0	22,1	39.7	39,8	29.4
Syria	3,5	41.5	16,6	39.9	27,0	27.3
Tunisia	3,5	38.9	9,5	30.3	12,0	21.0
Turkey	21,5	40.0	68,3	31.7	89,0	21.4
UAE	70	42.3	2,8	26.9	3,9	20.1
Yemen	4,3	42.3	18,0	49.1	43,2	45.5
Total	**102,391**	**40.7**	**376,958**	**36.0**	**571,69**	**27.0**

Based on: Matthiessen, C. "The Demography of the Middle East and North Africa in a Global Context," *AMID Working Paper Series*, 45/2005, tables 1-3.

Another factor why Mohammad Khatami was elected was his emphasis on improving the situation of women in Iranian society. Women want to get rid of the image of women being inferior to men. It is the striving by women for radical, political, juridical, and cultural change that made them vote for Mohammad Khatami, whether poor or rich, Islamist or secular (Kian-Thiébaut 2002: 57).

One of Mohammad Khatami's goals during his presidency was to make the government more transparent. This manifested itself in the mushrooming of a critical press, and also open discussions at universities, seminaries, and in parliament on the ideology of the Islamic state and how it was manifested in the constitution. Issues of discussions that previously had been the subject of debate among the elite (and intellectuals) were now open to the public and discussed in daily newspapers (Mir-Hosseini and Tapper 2006: 30). At the same time, however, President Khatami was eager to prove his unconditional loyalty to Supreme Leader Khamenei and maintain workable relations with the Conservative dominated fifth *majles* (1996-2000). In the beginning, those who had voted for Mohammad Khatami, more or less accepted that he was not planning to put through major reforms right away. The fact that gradually more openness and freedom was given to cultural activities such as films, the publication of books, access to satellite dishes and computers, internet cafes, and discourse in academic cycles, convinced large parts of his young voters of his argument about the "tedious process" of democratization (Amuzegar 2004: 77-78).

In the course of time, however, when it became obvious that President Khatami moved away from the reform path, and several times gave in to the Supreme Leader's and other Conservative clerics' wishes, his voters' and members of the Reformist faction in parliament, who gave him political backing, started to doubt the honesty of his will to reform. In May 2003, a group of 130 members of parliament out of the 290 total members sent an open letter to Supreme Leader Khamenei. They warned Ayatollah Khamenei that the country would fall apart if he did not tolerate freedom of expression in Iran. Before it was too late, he had to choose for the people. In their open letter the members of parliament asked for a referendum, in which the people should decide on the type of regime in Iran (BBC News 30 June 2003). In 2002, President Khatami tried to break the impasse introducing two bills that would strengthen his power and reduce the power of the unelected conservative bodies. As was expected, the Conservative faction blocked these bills. The Reformist faction thus was in a dilemma. A call for a referendum is constitutionally difficult unless backed by Supreme Leader Khamenei, who did not have any intention of doing so. Some parliamentarians, such as Abbas Abdi, called for mass resignation of members of parliament, but they were a minority and thus not successful.

The first group of voters who no longer supported President Khatami was the youth, who so eagerly had campaigned for him during the election campaigns and had proclaimed him their spiritual leader. This group showed its discontent with the pace of reform for the first time in July 1999 with a peaceful demonstration against the banning of the pro-Khatami newspaper *Salam.* This demonstration was brutally crushed

by members of the *Ansar-e Hezbullah*[87] (Followers of the Party of God) (Amuzegar 2004: 78-79). About 1,400 demonstrators were arrested. During the gathering, in 2000, to remember the first anniversary of the July 1999 demonstration, organized by the *Daftar-e Takhim-e Vahdat* (Office to Consolidate Unity), the largest organization of Muslim University students claiming to have more than 500.000 members, the participants shouted: "Khatami show you power or resign" and "Khatami, this is our final notice" (The Guardian 10 July 2000 quoted in Amuzegar 2004: 79). Thus, during these demonstrations President Khatami himself became the direct target of student protests (Amuzegar 2004: 79). The demonstrations do not only challenge the political regime in Iran, but also show that the struggle for reform has shifted from the powerful people among the political elite to the masses urging constitutional change and secular democracy (Gheissari and Nasr 2004: 103). Nevertheless, in the presidential elections of 2001, Khatami broke his own record, winning 77 percent of the votes up from 70 percent in 1997. One reason for this success was, probably, the huge number (6 million) of first time voters (Iran Press Service 10 June 2001). Mohammad Khatami was the first ever Iranian president who increased his votes in a re-election (Abootalebi 3 September 2001).

4.4.1 Women

The second group disappointed with President Khatami was the women. Although the dress code was gradually relaxed and women had more rights in their "personal space," President Khatami did not fulfill the expectations of women, such as integrating more women into the political establishment (Amuzegar 2004: 80-81). In the academic year 1998-1999, for the first time since 1939, when women were first admitted to universities, the number of female students reached 52 percent, 2 percent more than men. But, of 2.16 million people working for the government or semi-governmental organizations, like the religious foundations, less than one third are women, often occupying the low-level jobs (Kani-Thiébaut 2002: 63). Although more than 50 percent of university students are women their participation in the workforce, as can be seen in tables 4.6 a-c, between 1976 and 1996 has not significantly changed.

87. The Ansar-e Hezbullah is a militant group and declares itself to be absolutely loyal to the supreme leader. Most of its members are also members of the *Basji* militias or veterans of the Iran-Iraq War.

Table 4.6a Gender Composition of Employment, shares in percent, 1976

	Males	Females	Total
Professional	66.22	33.78	100.00
Administrative	96.66	3.34	100.00
Clerical	85.52	14.48	100.00
Sales	98.60	1.40	100.00
Services	84.27	15.73	100.00
Agriculture	77.19	22.81	100.00
Production	80.24	19.76	100.00
Miscellaneous	92.43	7.57	100.00
Total employment	80.54	19.46	100.00
Total employment (000)	**7649.70**	**1848.30**	**9498.00**

Table 4.6b Gender Composition of Employment, shares in percent, 1986

	Males	Females	Total
Professional	67.43	32.57	100.00
Administrative	96.55	3.45	100.00
Clerical	87.27	12.73	100.00
Sales	98.51	1.49	100.00
Services	92.96	7.04	100.00
Agriculture	91.93	8.07	100.00
Production	93.67	6.33	100.00
Miscellaneous	95.97	4.03	100.00
Total Employment	91.06	8.94	100.00
Total employment (000)	**10054.3**	**987.1**	**11041.4**

Table 4.6c Gender Composition of Employment, shares in percent, 1996

	Males	Females	Total
Professional	67.10	32.90	100.00
Administrative	87.20	12.80	100.00
Clerical	83.00	17.00	100.00
Sales and services[1]	94.90	5.10	100.00
Agriculture	91.10	8.90	100.00
Production	89.00	11.00	100.00
Miscellaneous	94.70	5.30	100.00
Total Employment	87.90	12.10	100.00
Total Employment (000)	**12808.40**	**1763.10**	**14571.50**

[1]Classification of occupations has changed slightly since the latest census in 1996; sales and services are combined according to new classification.
Sources: Statistical Center of Iran, *National Census of Population and Housing 1976, 1986, 1996*, Islamic Republic of Iran, Plan and Budget Organization 1985, 1988, 1997; International Labor Office, *Yearbook of Labor Statistics*, Retrospective edition 1945-1989, (Geneva 1991); Alizadeh, P. "The State and the Social Position of Women: Female Employment in post-Revolutionary Iran," in Alizadeh, P. *The Economy of Iran-Dilemmas of an Islamic State*, Library of Modern Middle East Studies, 29, [London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000).

Overall female employment even declined after the revolution, from 19.46 percent in 1976 to 8.2 percent in 1986, with a slow increase to 12.1 percent in 1996. Women account for only 3 percent of Iran's engineers or physicians, but for 46 percent of the jobs at the Ministry of Education, and 42 percent of the jobs at the Ministry of Health and Medical Higher Education (Kani-Thiébaut 2002: 63). Of the 238 candidates for the presidential elections in 1997 only 8 were women. One of them was Azam Taleqani, daughter of Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani[88], and founder of the Iranian Islamic Women's Institute (Kani-Thiébaut 2002: 58).

The fight of women for their rights has led to a solidarity and active cooperation between secular and Islamist women (Kani-Thiébaut 2002: 66). The struggle of women organizations and arguments in the *majles*, the public media, and elsewhere has resulted in changes to the laws that had protected in-egalitarian treatment of men and women. These changes, however, have still not gone as far as the pre-revolutionary Family Protection Law. The struggle for reform continues and has even received support from some clerics. As these clerics are still in a minority, they have to be careful when speaking out for women, as they still act in a conservative dominated environment regarding gender and family issues (Mir-Hosseini 1999).

During Khatami's Presidency, a shift could be noted from emphasizing the status of women in Iran (with no bill on women's rights having passed parliament during this period) to issues such as freedom of the press, civil society, and democracy. Many women see the latter three as a precondition for improving their own rights (Keddie 2000: 419). In 2003, the Iranian human rights lawyer, Shirin Ebadi, received the Nobel Peace Prize for her fight for the rights of women, children, and dissidents in Iran. Shirin Ebadi was the first Muslim woman to receive the prize.[89]

To be able to make major steps forward, concerning the rights of women, what is needed, is not only the cooperation between secular and Islamic female activists, but also the support of secular men and Reformist clerics with a high status in society. Although some laws affecting the dress code of women, family planning, and other individual laws have been loosened, the status of women in the Iranian society is still low. Women have suffered severely under the economic difficulties and the decline in the standard of living in the last decades.

At the same time, it has to be noted that despite many restrictions, most religious and political leaders have no objections to the participation of women in politics, in the market, and social activities. Furthermore, the wider access to education for women, internal migration, and rapid urbanization has supported the mobilization of women in society. As Khosrokhavar (2000: 23) states:

---

88. Supporter of Prime Minister Mosaddeq in the 1950s and candidate for the parliamentary elections in 1952. He was also one of the key figures of the Iranian Islamic revolution.
89. See Shirin Ebadi's website http://www.shirinebadi.ir/

"Women are much better educated than before and they are by far more conscious of their unjust situation […]. In comparison to the Shah's times when they were accorded a partial juridical equality with men, they are now more mature in terms of human agency. Before the revolution, the great majority of women had no clear consciousness of their rights, now, they are much more aware of the necessity to engage in social action to convince public opinion (particularly men) to change the laws in the name of social justice."

When the Conservatives gained the majority in parliament in 2004, they were able to slow down the legislation process of the Reformist government. When the Reformists had the majority in parliament they aimed at improving the position of women in Iran. The Conservative dominated parliament passed two bills to counteract this development. The first bill was the "Adaptation of Medical Services to Religious Law," which aimed at extending gender segregation to medical services. The second bill "Banning the Exploitation of Women's Images and the Creation of Conflict between Men and Women by Propagating Women's Rights Outside the Legal and Islamic Framework," intended to end the public debates in the press on women's rights. Although these bills could not be implemented, during the Reformist led government, they put pressure on the Khatami government (Mir-Hosseini and Tapper 2006: 31).

4.4.2 The Press

The Ministry of Culture was more tolerant of the press when Mohammad Khatami was president. Also, independent filmmakers enjoyed more freedom. During the first year of Khatami's presidency the number of newspapers rose to more than 850 (Mo'tamednejad 1998: 45). In September 1997, the Association of Iranian Journalists was established (Ruznamehnegar 1999: 1). But, the first four years of Khatami's presidency were accompanied by assaults by Conservatives on Reformists after the former's severe losses in elections, particularly during the sixth *majles* (2000-2004) elections in February 2000, followed by the presidential elections in May 2001. In the summer of 1998, Conservative figures of the IRI repeatedly attacked Iran's new press (Rasaneh Quarterly Summer 1998: 159-160). Even Supreme Leader Khamenei warned that the increasing number of newspapers was a "cultural offensive by the West," with its "old technique of "divide and rule," sometimes using "negligent, careless elements" within the IRI. On 16 September 1998, during a meeting with IRGC commanders and officers, Supreme Leader Khamenei said that the Islamic Republic believed in "freedom of expression and freedom of social activities," but these freedoms were limited by Islam. There was no "freedom to commit treason" or to "conspire." He warned the officials, giving them an ultimatum, to

"take action, to see which newspaper is stepping beyond the limits of freedom" (Rasai 2001).

A survey of the Iranian press during the period 1994-1999 concluded that there was a

rise in "sensitive" criticism of the Iranian political elite criticizing not only the president but also the supreme leader (Mohsenian-Rad 2001: 136-139). In July 1999, the newspaper *Salam* was closed by the Special Court for the Clergy. It had printed an article on the Senior Intelligence Minister, Saied Eslami, who was considered the chief person responsible for the killings of the writers and political activists Darioush Forouhar (and his wife Parvaneh), Mohammad Mokhtari, Majid Sharif, and Jafar Pouyandeh in 1999 (see Kaviani 1999). The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ata'ullah Mohajerani, criticized the closure of the newspaper (Poroustad 2001: 210-11). The closure of the newspaper also led to the student demonstrations in Tehran in July 1999. During a meeting with members of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council in December 1999, Supreme Leader Khamenei underlined his dissatisfaction with Ata'ullah Mohajerani and his Ministry. At the Friday Prayer in Tehran in the same month he argued that part of the domestic media belonged "to the enemy" and were "lying" and "crying out all the time, complaining of oppression" (Rasai 2001: 1, 200-204).

After a conference in Berlin, in April 2000, to discuss the Reformists' victory at the parliamentary elections, most of the speakers from Iran were prosecuted and six of them, including two of the four women, were imprisoned briefly. Ezatollah Sahabi, Akbar Ganji, and Ali- Reza Afshari received longer prison sentences, based on charges not related to the Berlin Conference (see Zakariaee 2000). The Conservatives who had the majority in the fifth *majles* tried to push through a new press law before their term had ended. When the Reformists gained the majority in the sixth *majles* they declared that changing the law, passed in the fifth *majles,* would be one of their main priorities (Rasai 2001: 1, 206-209). In the sixth *majles* the Reformists introduced an urgent bill to parliament to amend the Press Law. The Speaker of Parliament, Mehdi Karrubi, however, removed this bill from the agenda, after he had received a hand-written instruction of Supreme Leader Khamenei warning against

> "the enemies of Islam, the Revolution and the Islamic system taking the press in their hands" (Rasai 2001: 2, 247).

This was the first of many failures to come for Reformists, in their attempts to push through new legislation when they had the majority in parliament. Furthermore, between 1998 and 2002, many pro-reform activists were harassed. These assaults manifested themselves in the closure of pro-reform publications, imprisonment of influential journalists, the curtailing of the powers of the reformist-dominated *majles,* and the arrest of some students being accused of "plotting against the regime" (Iran Press Service 4 April 2001). On 8 April 2001, 40 members of the Liberation Movement of Iran were arrested. The Revolutionary Court in Tehran also issued a warrant to arrest the Secretary-General of the Liberation Movement of Iran, Ebrahim Yazdi, who had been residing in the US for cancer treatment. In late March 2001, Mrs. Haqiqatjoo, a member of the *majles*, was arrested for six hours for having openly criticized the arrest of the

journalist Fariba Davoudi-Mohajer. In a Norouz address on 20 March 2001, President Khatami himself said of some elements in the political elite as reaction to the arrests:

> "opponents of reform are threatening the country's future. Those who do not understand the nation's genuine and historical demands for freedom, independence, and progress, those who sow the seeds of hatred and violence, have chosen an ill-fated journey […] The Iranian nation will say no to them all" (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty 26 March 2001).

When President Khatami held the inauguration speech to his second term as president, in August 2001, he stressed the importance of freedom of speech and the right to protest within the law, as preconditions for reform (Asia Times 15 July 2001 in Amuzegar 2004: 82). Reality, however, was different. In December more than 2,000 Internet websites were blocked by the government and 200 reformist publications gradually banned. According to a 2003 report by Reporter without Borders, Iran is among the world's ten worst countries for freedom of the press. The PEN Society even lists Iran among the top five countries in repressing writers and censoring publications (*Iran Times* 12 December 2003).

Because of the closure of a great number of newspapers, the Internet became an alternative and efficient means of communication for journalists and the youth to continue their debate on reforms in Iran. According to the former Minister of Communication and Information Technology, Seyyed-Ahmad Mo'tamedi, by January 2005 Iran reportedly had six million internet users compared to 250,000 in 2000 (*Shargh* 24 January 2005: 4: Basmenji 2005: 315), most of these being in Tehran and other larger cities (Shargh 2 March 2005: 5.) but gradually also in the countryside.[90] A report by Reporters without Borders notes that from 1994 privately owned Internet Service providers (ISPs) started to operate beside the public Intelligence Ministry run ISP, Data Communication Company of Iran (DCI). Privately owned IPSs need the permission of the Intelligence Ministry to operate. They also have to use firewalls for viewing websites and emails. Users have to sign a statement that forbids searching "immoral and anti-revolutionary" websites. When Mohammad Khatami was elected president in 1997, Internet cafes mushroomed, especially in the large cities (Basmenji 2005: 52-53). Web logs[91] in the Persian language first appeared in 2001. Since then they have increased rapidly. Persian is currently the third most used language by "bloggers" (web log writers) in the world behind English and Chinese (Basmenji 2005: 315).

The Internet has also reached hardline clerics and the religious schools in Qom. Like the youth, many clerics use the Internet to share their views. Although the Conservatives distrust the Internet, they use it to spread their own propaganda, on sites such as

---

90. In the countryside villages with more than 100 inhabitants have telephone connections.
91. On the usage of web logs in Iran see Alavi, N. *We are Iran: The Persian Blogs,* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2005).

daricheh.org and *jebhe.com*. In Qom several thousand students are trained in information technology each year. Still, the Internet continues to be mainly used by regime critical intellectuals, dissidents, and the youth (Basmenji 2005: 55). Mousavi-Shafaee 2003: 194).

Despite this rapid growth in Internet use in Iran, by world standards it is rather modest. For example, in January 2005 Iran had, in absolute terms, almost as many Internet users as Sweden. However, this was only 7 percent of the total population whereas in Sweden it is about 74 percent, the highest internet usage in the world (*Jahan-e San'at* 2 March 2005: 5).

By the end of 2004 there were more than thirty online news agencies and news sites that represented the ideas of various political factions of the political elite, but about 10,000 sites, reportedly, were blocked[92] by the Iranian government on grounds that they constituted a threat to the "national interest" of Iran. Even more sites were blocked that came from abroad. This puts Iran – together with China – at the top of the countries in the world with restricted Internet use (Internet Filtering in Iran in 2004-2005: A Country Study). When the Iranian government started to close down websites, a rapid rise in the use of mobile phones and simple text messages (SMS) could be noted. By the end of 2004, about 3.5 million Iranians had mobile phones (Shargh 2 March 2005: 11). At the end of the same year Iran had more than 1,200 newspapers and more than 5,000 journalists, which is a growth rate much faster than that of the growth in the population since the revolution (Shahidi 2006: 25).

Probably, the most important achievements of the Iranian press since the revolution has been the introduction into the country's political vocabulary of concepts such as "citizenship," "civil society," "pluralism," "transparency," "accountability," and "the rights of women, children, and minorities."

4.4.3 Intellectual Debate

In contrast to Ayatollah Khomeini, who believed in the holistic character of Islam as well as its holy nature, Mohammad Khatami distinguishes between what in religion is essential and what is not. While advocating the rights of minorities and showing his respect for human rights, Mohammad Khatami rejects the idea of natural human rights and a social contract as characteristics of the "western civil society." He does not consider the veil as essential and understands that the youth needs more freedom.

The change in outlook could more clearly be recognized at the governmental policy level. While Ayatollah Khomeini's era was characterized by repression and intolerance, during Khatami's presidency there was more dialogue and persuasion. The press was allowed to criticize the government more openly and to debate future perspectives. During the electoral campaign in 1997, presidential candidate, Mohammad Khatami, broke away from the rhetoric of the early revolutionaries. Instead he chose to use a new

92. Reporters Without Borders' website http://rsf.fr/article.php3?id_article=10733.

terminology discussing concepts such as "civil society," "the rule of law," "citizens' rights and dignity," "political participation," and "women's presence," a novelty in the political discourse in the IRI. The concept of civil society became a political project (Boroumand and Boroumand 2000: 304). His thoughts have been heavily influenced by religious lay and clerical intellectuals, such as Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari (Adib-Moghaddam 2006: 667). Mohammad Khatami's slogans of civil society and the rule of law (*hukumat-e quran*) showed an implicit contrast to *hukumat-e eslami,* the slogan of the revolution. Khatami's first Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ata'ullah Mohajerani, lifted many restrictions on the press, with the result that pro-Khatami newspapers flourished spreading his political discourse and neologisms such as "civil society" (*jame-ai mahani*), "legality" (*qanan-mandi*) "citizens" (*sharvandan*), and "law-orientedness" (*qanun-gira-i*), many of which had been introduced by Khatami himself (Arjomand 2002: 726). The fact that the concept of civil society appeared on the political agenda during Khatami's presidency does not mean that it necessarily led to the empowerment of civil society. The development of a civil society in a theocracy is a contradiction in itself, since civil society means the autonomy of individuals and associations, the precondition for which is the ideological and religious neutrality of the state (Cohen and Arato 1992: 18-26; Gellner 1994: 188). Still, Mohammad Khatami's rhetoric shift from the *ummah* to civil society suggested that the regime was willing to deal with the social realities in Iran, rather than to ignore or reject them (Boroumand and Boroumand Summer 2000: 308-309).

However, though Khatami used expressions clearly linked to modern democracy, one has to be aware that he integrated them into a philosophy, hostile to modern democracy (Khatami 1997; Khatami *Kayhan* 29 July 1989 [8/5/1368]; Khatami *Kayhan* 25 November 1980 [4/9/1359]; Boroumand and Boroumand Summer 2000: 309-310). This philosophy is based, among others, on the following assumptions: (1) all Iranians are Muslim; (2) religion and politics are one in genuine Islam, (3) secularism and humanism have no place in the heart of the Iranian people; and (4) most importantly, his acceptance of the concept of the *velayat-e faqih* (Khatami 1997: 198-99).

Mohammad Khatami's concessions to the Conservatives, particularly his support for the concept of the *velayat-e faqih*, posed an obstacle to political reform, and split his supporters (Amuzegar 2004: 83). He disagreed with Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's religious edict, according to which in Islam no single clergy (the supreme leader) should be the ultimate political authority. During the course of Khatami's presidency, reform minded-clerics who had been his supporters, such as Abdollah Nouri, Mohsen Kadivar, and Hassan Yousefi-Eshkevari, were all sentenced to various prison terms by the Special Clerical Court. They had argued that the *Quran* should be interpreted according to changes in time and place. Abdolkarim Soroush was harassed by the Islamic paramilitary *basji* and stopped giving speeches at public gatherings. The history professor and Mohammad Khatami's supporter, Hashem Aghajari, had openly called for an Islamic Protestantism and was imprisoned (Amuzegar 2004: 84).

The movement for democracy in Iran is missing leadership. However, although it has yet a mass base, it is sufficiently developed not to be kept silent any longer through limited concessions from above. The socio-cultural debate will play an important role in how the Iranian political elite will deal with the pressures for change from below, while preserving its own interests and at the same time being confronted with economic and political domestic, as well as international challenges (Gheissari and Nasr 2004: 105), especially since the neo-Conservative Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been elected president.

4.5 Socio-Cultural Developments during Ahmadinejad's Presidency (since 2005)

It can be argued, according to Sohrabi (April 2006: 3), that Ahmadinejad and his supporters were successful in the presidential elections of 2005 due to the success of the reform discourse, although Mahmoud Ahmadinejad stands for the ideology of the Islamic revolution. Ahmadinejad is a member of the Islamic Society of Engineers (ISE) and an important figure in the Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran (*E'telaf-e Abadgaran-e Iran-e Eslami*)[93], an alliance of several conservative political parties and organizations.

During his second presidential campaign, in 2001, President Khatami stated in a speech that the reform movement had been successful in introducing the term *mardum salari* (the rule of the people) into the political discourse in Iran. Even the Conservative faction, and particularly President Ahmadinejad, are using the term in their vocabulary. Ahmadinejad refers to himself as a "man of the people" (referring to his social background and simple lifestyle) (Sohrabi April 2006: 3). President Ahmadinejad has even opened his own web log[94], on which everyone can react and give comments.

Since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took office, pressure on Iran's socio-cultural issues has been continually increased. Critics of the government have been removed from their jobs, imprisoned without any legal grounds or recourse to a lawyer, and forced to make accusatory confessions. Universities have let go numerous liberal lecturers, administrative staff has been replaced, and critical students have been prevented from continuing their studies (Nirumand 2006). Similar to the first ten years after the revolution, the educational system has come under the control of the paramilitary organizations of the political system, the *basji* and the IRGC. They observe students with newly installed video cameras (Nirumand 2006; The Associated Press 5 September 2006). The measures taken against universities, professors, and students have provoked massive protest among students. A demonstration organized by Tahkim Vahdat, with thousands of participants, was held on 6 December 2005 (the annual Students Day) on the campus of Tehran University. According to the Iranian Students News Agency (ISNA) there were violent clashes between students and the authorities, with

93. See the organization's website www.abadgaran.ir.
94. See http://www.ahmadinejad.ir/

students injured and some arrested (Nirumand 2006). Since Ahmadinejad has been president, human rights violations, the arrest of writers, journalists, political activists, labor leaders etc., deaths while in detention, and the execution of teenagers have all been intensified,[95] as has the pressure on women.

4.5.1 Women

Since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has become president the women's dress code has been tightened, women are hindered in participating in sport or recreational activities, and even from entering universities. The Iranian Ministry of Education announced the re-introduction of separate university education for men and women (Nirumand 2006; The Associated Press 5 September 2006).

Since 2007, the Iranian government has increased arrests of women for wearing too tight overcoats or letting too much hair peek out from under their veil. Since the death of Khomeini, crackdowns on women regarding their dress code had never been that harsh. It seems as if President Ahmadinejad wants to impose the strict dress code of the early years after the Islamic revolution, which has been more and more loosened in recent years. Some Conservative forces seem to be in favor of such policy, such as Mostafa Pourmohammadi, the Interior Minister in charge of the campaign:

> "People are unhappy with the social and moral status of the society. They expect that the fight against social insecurity be properly implemented" (cited in Darein 23 April 2007)

Young Iranians, however, are angry, for example 23-year-old student Elham Mohammadi said:

> "What they do is really insulting. You simply can't tell people what to wear. They don't understand that use of force only brings hatred toward them, not love" (cited in Darein 23 April 2007).

The government has also made attempts at limiting female activities. In June 2006 a women's demonstration for more rights of women was broken up and in January 2007 three Iranian journalists who were on their way to India to follow a journalism training course were temporarily arrested. The arrest of the three journalists was reported by many bloggers on their web logs. One day later the three women were released. One of the arrested women, Farnaz Seifi, has written about her arrest on her own web log. This really is a new development in Iran according to Keddie (2007: 29).

As has been outlined above, secular and Islamic women in Iran have joined together in their fight for more rights for women. They also cooperate with feminists who were born in Iran but now live abroad. Their activities are undermined by women who are not in favor of equal rights for women, some of which have been Members of Parlia-

95. See www.memri.org/bin/opener, 6 December 2006; www.iran-emrouz.net, 30 October 2006.

ment. Again, other women parliamentarians have promoted women's rights (Keddie 2007: 28).

4.5.2 The Press

A number of independent newspapers have been banned (e.g. the newspaper *Shargh* which was reopened in May 2007 and closed again on 6 August 2007), censorship has been tightened, and great pressure has been put on cultural and scientific institutions that are not willing to act according to the dictates of the government. Also, independent journalists and bloggers have been harassed and websites closed (Nirumand 2006). Reporters Without Borders considers the years 2005-06 as the worst post-revolution years for journalists in Iran.[96] Freedom House's "Freedom in the World 2006" categorizes Iran as "not free," with a score of six (seven being the worst).[97] The Index of Economic Freedom 2007 places the IRI at 150th out of 157 countries.[98] News reports do not only see the personal freedom, the extent of political repression, and social restrictions below international norms, but also in violations of the IRI's own constitutional guarantees. Domestic and foreign analysts agree that, while since the Islamic revolution there has been a gradual move towards greater personal freedom, since Ahmadinejad's presidency this trend has been reversed going back to the state of affairs in the early post-revolutionary years. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's move against university professors is but one example in the new "cultural revolution".[99] Since Ahmadinejad has been president there has been an increasing discrimination on the basis of religion and language, pro-reform newspapers have been closed, non-Governmental Organizations suppressed, bloggers harassed, more internet sites filtered, satellite dishes have been confiscated, the headquarter of the Islamic Students' Association has been closed, and foreign correspondents harassed.[100]

Also, Iranians with a double nationality have been harassed in Iran. On 11 July 2003 (which was still during Khatami's presidency), the Iranian-born Canadian journalist, Zahra Kazemi, died in prison. Kazemi was arrested on 23 June 2003 while taking photos in front of Tehran's Evin prison. She was accused of spying. The circumstances of her death are still unclear, but Dr. Shahram Azam, an emergency-room doctor who examined her before she died, says she was beaten, tortured, and raped while in custody (Haeri 1 April 2005). On 8 May 2007, Haleh Esfandiari, Director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, with Iranian-Amer-

96. http://rsf.fr/article.php3?id_article=10733.
97. See www.freedomhouse.org
98. See www.heritage.org
99. www.radiofarda.com/iran 30 October 2006. The so-called "Cultural Revolution" in Iran took place 1980-1987 during Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership aiming at freeing the academia in Iran from all western influences and bringing them in line with Islamic principles. Since the latest attacks on students and professors since Ahmadinejad's presidency people speak of a new Cultural Revolution in Iran.
100. "Ahmadinejad Clamps Down on Speech: Reformers, Conservatives Oppose Censorship," *Washington Times,* 6 November 2006.

ican nationality, was arrested and put in Evin prison.[101] She was charged with seeking to overthrow the Islamic government (Woodrow Wilson Center 22 May 2007). Her detention took place shortly after the arrest on 1 May 2007 of Hossein Mousavian, former nuclear negotiator and former Ambassador to Moscow and Berlin, on charges of having contacts with western officials. He was released nine days after his arrest. The release of Mousavian was seen as a victory for allies of former President Rafsanjani one of the main critics of President Ahmadinejad (Smyth 21 May 2007). Haleh Esfandiari was reportedly released from prison on 21 August 2007 on US$330,000 bail (Wright 21 August 2007). Another Iranian-American has been held in prison, on the same charges as Esfandiari, since early May 2007. Kian Tajbbakhsh is an urban planning consultant working for the Soros Foundation's Open Society Institute. Finally, the Iranian-American, Parnaz Azima, a journalist who works for Radio Farda was held in prison and is now free but barred from leaving Iran, and Ali Shakeri, a founding board member of UC Irvine's Center for Citizen Peacebuilding is imprisoned. These arrests put great pressure on relations between Iran and the US.[102]

The increasing pressure on intellectuals, writers, artists, and journalists by the Iranian government has led to a new wave of emigration to Western countries. The emigrated intellectuals play an important role in the intellectual discourse in Iran through their activities in Persian language media abroad. Although the Iranian government has tried to filter Internet websites and block the receipt of foreign radio and television satellite programs, it has not been able to quieting their voices. With their programs from outside Iran, these intellectuals have greatly influenced the students and women's movement in Iran (Mohammadi 2007).

4.6 Summary

During Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, in the early years after the Islamic revolution, strong restrictions were put on the socio-cultural freedom of the Iranian people, especially women. Shortly after the IRI had been established the *shari'a* became the main source of law. Central to this policy was the reversal of all policies of gender equality, introduced earlier by the Shah. Despite the restrictive policies concerning gender and family issues, there was also another side of the regime, namely the necessity for the mobilization of women in the public sphere, female education, and women's activities during the Iran-Iraq War. After consolidating its power in 1979, the regime promoted women's work in limited spheres, such as in the religious area, the social welfare area, the government area, and the women's movement.

Despite the great pressure on women, starting shortly after the Islamic revolution, women, both Islamic and secular, started to organize themselves to fight for their equal

101. http://www.wilsoncenter.org
102. "Iran Makes Arrests in Cases Against Americans," *Los Angeles Times,* (26 July 2007), http://www.latimes.com.

rights, as Iranian citizens, with men. The fact that female education has increased immensely since the revolution has opened the door for women to articulate their aims and visions in a more organized form. Today, about 50 percent of university students are women.

After the Islamic revolution, great restrictions were also imposed on the press. Fewer newspapers existed in the early years after the revolution than during the Mohammad Mosaddeq period in the early 1950s. Though the number of newspapers rose immensely during Khatami's presidency, even then, and especially since Ahmadinejad's presidency, many critical newspapers have been closed.

The restriction of women's rights, press censorship, the imposition of the dress code accompanied by an economic crisis, and restricted individual freedom have led to great discontent with the regime – especially among the younger population, but also among clerical and (religious) lay intellectuals. This discontent came to the fore, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, and when Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected president in the same year. It was driven by three inevitable changes that had taken place after the death of Khomeini:

(1) the long years of war against Iraq, economic crisis, and socio-cultural restrictions made many Iranians turn away from the ideology of the Islamic revolution;
(2) the large generation of Iranians born in the 1970s and 1980s that recently entered the political arena, were generally disillusioned with the Islamic regime and strongly demanded reform;
(3) the process of globalization and its influences both on people and states was crucial in this context. Progress in media, information, and communication technologies facilitated the development of a global consciousness, enabling people all over the world, and also in Iran, to participate in discourses on world peace, human rights, and democratic issues. Even clerics have set up their own websites.

The composition of the Iranian society has changed significantly since the revolution. In 2004 the number of young people in Iran under the age of 15 amounted to almost 30 percent of the total population. Young Iranians are frustrated with the poor economic prospects and socio-cultural restrictions in Iran. They are the driving force that urges political and economic reform. The demand for reform started gradually with the death of Khomeini and reached its heights during Khatami's presidency, and was propagated mainly by women, students, and other young Iranians. It has also been reflected in the more open intellectual discourse on issues such as democracy, civil society, the rule of law etc. Involved in this discourse are religious lay and Islamist intellectuals, reform leaders, as well as the public. Some of these figures had earlier been followers of Khomeini and the Islamic revolution, but now have turned into reformers both with an Islamic or secular background. It can be said that they prepared the ground for the Reformist movement to flourish, with their fundamental critique on the *velayat-e faqih* system, the basic principle of the IRI, and their demand for a secularization of the political system in Iran.

The decline of the Islamic ideology combined with the failure of economic reform, confront the IRI with the greatest challenge to its legitimacy since the revolution. Both the public and the press openly question the role of Islam and the concept of the *velayat-e faqih*. Even the election of Ahmadinejad as president, with the extensive restrictions in the socio-cultural area that have been introduced since his presidency, does not change this development.

In the next chapter continuity and change in the geopolitical visions and foreign policy of the Iranian political elite since the Islamic revolution are analyzed.