

The Iranians' Debate after the Crackdown:

Is Green Movement Revolutionary or Reformist?

Tehmoures Kiani

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Joel S. Migdal

Daniel Chirot

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Introduction:

As one scholar has described it, for those who study social movements, Iran is an interesting case: despite the fact that the country is among the most wired countries in the developing world and has a strong reform movement, no major victory for the Green Movement appears in sight.

After the controversial presidential election of June 2009 in Iran, people took to the streets in Tehran, and other major urban centers, in great numbers to protest against the election fraud. Because the supporters of Mir-Hussein Mousavi, the reformist candidate, who was the main challenger of the incumbent president, had chosen the color green as their campaign's scheme, the following protests against election fraud were called "The Green Movement."

Although the protests, which happened frequently from the mid June 2009 until the mid January 2010, presented a great challenge to the authority of the regime, the recent developments indicate that the regime has been successful in cracking down on the opposition and has regained the authority and control. The two objector candidates are under house arrest and the supporters have not been in the streets lately. What many in the Western media and Iranian opposition groups in exile projected as a new revolution that would lead to the overthrowing of the Islamic Republic is now in disarray. While Iranians' protests inspired Egyptians, as one Egyptian activist said¹, Iran itself politically appears to be calm. Even the new movements in the Middle Eastern and North African countries, the Arab Spring, have not reignited the Greens in Iran.

¹ <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2011/02/wael-ghonim-on-iran/>

Therefore, it is now safe to say that while the war for democratic change and the rule of law in Iran continues, the Green Movement has lost the battle. As the U.S. Embassy's analysts in the United Arab Emirate said, while the Islamic regime has not been able to eliminate the movement entirely, the Greens have also ceased to challenge the government's authority and at this point the Green Movement is more of a persistent problem for the regime rather than an existential threat.²

In the wake of the protests and the regime's brutal crackdown, some factions among the Green Movement pushed for a strategy of an all-out assault on the regime, aiming at rapid regime-change in Iran. These factions argued strongly against the opposition's prevailing reformist strategy and advocated instead for more radical actions. These factions argued strongly against the opposition's prevailing reformist strategy. That strategy advocated civil right movement for the rule of law and a free and fair election. In contrast to that strategy, the rejectionist groups demanded that the two defeated reformist candidates turned-protests' leaders to go beyond the framework of the existing constitution and issues such as elections fraud. Instead of protesting against elections result and demanding vote recounting and advocating the rule of law, the Anti-reformist groups argued, the leaders should directly attack the Supreme Leader and the advocate regime change. They argued that "What do they [the reformist leaders] mean by mobilizing people around 'where is my vote' slogan? Do they know that by advocating this slogan and limiting the protests to such short sighted plans, they are preventing millions of

² VIKiLeaks U.S. Embassy Cables.

http://www.google.com/#hl=en&sa=X&ei=kre5T6uKBlewiQL7hOXFBg&sqi=2&ved=0CAUQvwUoAQ&q=What+Wiki+Leaks+said+about+U.S.+embassy+in+UAE&spell=1&bav=on.2,or.r_gc.r_pw.r_qf.,cf.osb&fp=ee39e6d564b1abcb&biw=1024&bih=624

people, who did not vote in the elections and have been opposing this regime totally, to join the protests?”³

The Rejectionist Camp condemned the reformist strategy and the movement’s reformist leaders blaming them and their tactics for the setbacks. The Reformist Camp continued to advocate the reformist agenda. The agenda was to push for the rule of law rather than seeking a rapid regime change. Their plan was to mobilize people in order to create wide spread bottom up pressure and bargaining at the top. In so doing, starting in early December 2009, after the regime’s crackdown had largely silenced the opposition, they tried to organize protests against election fraud even by co-opting the regime’s ceremonial holidays. They also engaged some factions in the conservative camp and power circles inside the regime. Their aim was to mobilize enough support and pressure for peaceful political changes starting with an overhaul of the election system.

This thesis aims to explain why this sever rift between factions of the Iranian opposition groups opened up after the failed protests in the wake of the 2009 elections.

Rejectionists vs. Reformists:

My argument is that the divisions that opened up in Iran’s Green Movement following its suppression by the regime in 2009 were mainly grounded in the physical location of the two sides on either side of the rift and the varying perspectives that different locations generated. The Rejectionist Camp is largely based in exile, while the Reformist Camp is mainly based inside the country (with some newly established offshore outlets). The rift that developed after the elections, I also argue, followed earlier divisions in the opposition movement. Those earlier

³ The Iran’ Labor Party’s Statement. <http://www.toufan.org/Maghalat%20jadid/Shafaftar%20shodan%20marzha-.htm>

differences had been papered over in the intense period of protests between the 2009 elections and the regime's success in crushing the protests. But the new rift was very much shaped by those earlier differences.

This rift, then, is a result of their greatly different political strategies, visions, agendas, and also is about generational divisions. The exiled stream is mainly consisted of the older generation of the Iranian political activists who still, to a great degree, live in the Cold War's political environment. This camp is divided into two major groupings. The first grouping consists of the leftists, nationalists, and monarchists. Their old grievances against the Islamic regime bring together all these otherwise odd factions into one grouping as an effective unifying force. Each of these factions lost numerous comrades and members in their fight against the regime in the first decade of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The regime basically jailed, tortured, and killed most of the members of these groups and almost eliminated their organizational presence inside the country. The remaining activists belonging to this grouping survived this wave of killings only by fleeing the country to seek refuge in the Western democracies. These experiences made it very difficult for them to agree with any reformist strategy or possible engagement with the regime. In addition, there is one more issue that unites the factions of this grouping: despite their deep ideological differences, they all opposed outside powers' intervention, particularly military intervention, in Iran. While the leftist and, to some extent, the nationalist wings of this grouping have their old animosity toward these powers, the monarchists also have their own grievances for the way these Western powers, particularly the United States during Jimmy Carter's presidency, dealt with the Shah.

The second grouping of the exiled camp is a recently established circle consisting of the former leftists, who have switched their position to the right, several well-known former

Islamists, human right activists, celebrities, and journalists-turned- political activists. In contrast to the first group, this newly established group not only engaged in dialog with the reformists factions of the Islamic regime, but has also been part of the regime in the past. However, while there has not been bad blood between most components of this group and the regime, they have come to the conclusion that all possible reformist and peaceful strategies to make democratic changes in the regime, through the regime's existing election system, have already been exhausted. Also, unlike the first grouping, this grouping has been seeking the Western powers' intervention and involvement in supporting and advancing political changes in Iran. What unites these two groupings in the exiled camp is their common agenda to overthrow the whole Islamic regime rapidly, forcefully, and even violently. But what divide these two groupings in exile are many programmatic issues, personal animosities, and different approaches to the issue. They are united only in their complete rejection of regime and disbelieving in the gradual organizational and political changes in the regime through elections and civil society engagement.

The exiled groups have only a very small portion of population inside the country as their followers.⁴ For example, in 2005 they tried to demonstrate the widespread support for a rapid regime change by initiating a referendum for a complete regime change. In order to collect signatures, they placed a petition on the internet to be signed by supporters of the referendum. But in the end, they collected only 25 thousand signatures from Iranians both inside and outside the country. In addition, they do not have any organizational presence inside the country. Their relations with civil society organizations have been tense because both sides have been criticizing each other's tactics. Even one of the most vocal leaders of these groups, Mr. Mohsen Sazegara, confessed that their Facebook and radio broadcasting show had only 12 thousands

⁴ Ayandeh Public opinion Firm. May 2009

followers among all Iranians.⁵ Further demonstrating is the controversial June 2009 elections, the majority of people participated in that elections and a large portion of voters, more than 12 million according to the regime's official accounts, voted for the same reformist candidates who had been under the exiled camp's attacks precisely for their reformist strategy. Finally, their frequent attempts to mobilize people around regime-change agenda and more radical slogans during the 2009 mass protests failed. It served only as a pretext for the regime's security forces to intensify the crackdown on the protesters, as some reformist activists later claimed.⁶

However, some of these factions were led by well-known political figures and celebrities who were able to command attention, giving them weight beyond their numbers. For example, at the center of the group asking the reformist leaders for more radical strategy and advocating for more involvement by outside powers, were individuals such as, Mohsen Sazegara, co-founder of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards founders who had held top positions in the regime before joining the opposition. He left Iran during Mr. Ahmadinejad's first term in office (2005-2009), and is now a fellow at the President George W. Bush Center. Another figure is Mohsen Makhmalbaf, one of the Iranian's most celebrated film makers, who has won several international prizes for his films, such as *Kandahar* as one of top 100 films of all time. Also among journalists, figures such as Alireza Nourizadeh, one of the most established Iranian journalists in exile, based in Landon and the chair of the Center for Arabic and Iranian Studies (CIAS) is a member of this faction.

In addition to its well-established position in exile and their very well established access to the media, this circle enjoyed a relationship with some factions of the Reformist Camp inside

⁵ www.bushcenter.com/articles/mohsen-sazegara. Accessed on April 28, 2012.

⁶ Abdi, Abbas. www.ayande.ir/1385/09/post_115.html#more. Accessed on April 28, 2012.

the country as the result of their political origin. Through this relationship, they were able to command attention from student groups, bloggers, and freelance journalists in major urban centers. Last but not the least, this group had, and it still has, a disproportionate influence over the Iranian internet, blogosphere, and oppositionist media through which they have been able to have a great impact at times of unrest and crisis. At the time of the post June 2009 election's unrest, in which the regime shut down the remaining reformist and un-embedded print media, people, activists, especially the youth and educated individuals, resorted to the Internet and international news outlets. Because most of these groups have been in exile for more than two decades, they had established several online newspapers, weblogs, radio broadcastings, and had a much greater access to the international media that gave them a greater outreach and impact. For example, Messrs. Sazegara and Nourizadeh both are regular commentators on many international radios broadcasting in Persian, especially the Voice of America.

As a result, in mid-August through October 2009, the Rejectionist Camp, especially its interventionist faction, mobilized small, but very active, groups of the internet savvy youth in the capital and a few other major urban centers who demonstrated sporadically and chanted directly against the Islamic regime's leader. In some occasions they even tore down and burned Khomeini's posters (the Islamic regime's founder who still is, at least formally, respected among many reformists). In another development, which impacted the protests, the Rejectionist Camp, successfully presented itself as the movement's de facto leadership to the international community. They portrayed the Green Movement as a movement with a rapid regime change agenda. All these developments, on the one hand, gave the regime a pretext for more crackdowns and to accuse the activists as the agents of outside powers. On the other hand, it polarized and marginalized the protests.

Both exiled groupings, (the Old Rejectionists faction consisting of the leftists and nationalists, and the Former Reformists-turned-Rejectionist faction) intensively use internet and internet-based media to issue statements denouncing the regime, declaring their agenda, and pushing for uprising rather than engaging in civil society activities such as voting. But it is the latter that has made it very difficult for the different factions of the Reformist Camp inside the country to agree upon a viable political agenda and strategy to counter the regime and to push for democratic changes.

The second camp, what I call the Reformist Camp, is mainly based inside the country. This camp consists of Islamists-turned-reformists, who once were considered one wing of the Islamic regime, consists of a few small circles of intellectuals and activists outside the country, and, more important, a new and vast stream among the youth, students, intellectuals, and the middle class live in Iran, whom I call “the post-Islamism” generation. Inspired by the new developments in the world and the failed Iranian revolution, these groups favor a peaceful and gradual transition to democracy through civil society activities and the bottom up pressure instead of pushing for another uncertain, costly, and more likely, violent revolution.

Ideologically, the main components of this camp are neither anti-western, including Israel, nor anti-capitalist. Also, while they want the state to be separate from the religion, they are not anti-religion, i.e. anti-Islamic.. As one important figure of the Reformist Camp once said, commenting on the ambiguity of Iran’s constitution and the relation between religion and democracy, “the more important issues for us are our national, regional, and international conditions and interests, when they are at stake we should come up with a democratic interpretation of any text, be it religious or constitutional texts. When you can turn English

monarchy into democracy why you cannot democratize the Islamic Republic?”⁷ Despite the fact that most of them are pious Muslims, they nevertheless maintain that piety is to be a choice rather than an obligation. They opposed extremist view of religion and, as one prominent reformist journalist argued “through our history destruction and ruins have come from extremists, be it dictators, kings, revolutionaries, religious ones or secularists. In contrast, what we have and what we have made have come from reformists, be it the moderate prime ministers of the Shah such as Mosadegh and Amini, moderate clergies such as Khatami, or other moderate activists.”⁸

They presented “a new kind of intellectualism” to counter both the “religious fanatics who were preoccupied with God but neglected humans and extremist secularists who focused on human and forgot the God,” as Mohammad Khatami argued before becoming a reformist president. These intellectuals “respect reason and appreciate freedom. They believe that body is more than mere matter and the human as greater than mere nature.”⁹ Instead of trying to make democracy compatible with Islam, they have been trying to figure out how to make their religion compatible with a democratic society. The main intellectual source of this camp came from small group of former Islamists turned reformist intellectuals. “They generated one of the most remarkable intellectual movements in the Muslim world with far-reaching implications for religious thought and democratic practice.” (Bayat, Asef 2007: 84) This new generation and its organizations consisted of relatively disempowered actors and NGOs, particularly women groups, who challenged more powerful politicians and the government, in order to hold them accountable to both the state law and the revolution promises. These activists “work the

⁷ Tajzadeh, Mostafa. “Matn ya Vahn?” <http://www.emruznews.com/2004/11/post-3263.php>

⁸ Behnood, Massoud. <http://www.roozonline.com/persian/opinion/opinion-article/archive/2012/may/05/article/-e5e5c28f2e.html>

⁹ Khatami, Mohammad. *Bim-e-Mowj*, p. 139.

linkages” back and forth between the everyday life and politics and in so doing develop important connections between different social groups encountering the larger political system.

Meanwhile, the Reformist Camp tried to influence the elite and the state through popular social forces and different civic organizations in order to make radical political and structural changes possible. This was in contrast with the traditional picture of social movements, the picture that the Rejectionist Camp had in mind, as organizational outcomes and a project for a sudden overthrowing of a regime. Instead, it built on a new approach that explored how movements could contribute to broader processes of political change. Unlike the Rejectionist Camp, which boycotted all the elections in the past, this camp participated in the elections by supporting the candidates who had favored its political agenda. They also tried to penetrate the political system by voting for those whom they had been considering as potential allies.

Tactically, they tried to co-opt the country’s ceremonial holidays and to turn prayer groups and other social events into political action, in order to confront the regime’s ban on any kind of political gatherings. While the Rejectionist Camp used a very secularist, anti-Islamic Revolution, anti-clergy, and especially anti- Velayat-e-Faqih (the ultimate rule of Supreme Jurist), language for its propaganda, the Reformist Camp used a soft language and focused on the forgotten promises of the revolution and frequent violations of the constitution. It criticized the executive and the judiciary branches, and, more recently, the police and the Revolutionary Guard rather than attacking directly the Supreme Jurist. However, this camp suffered setbacks as the result of its internal disputes and divisions over political agenda and strategy. Some factions inside this camp, influenced by the second grouping among the Rejectionist Camp, occasionally shifted their position regarding the reformist movement’s engagement with the regime and participation in the elections. By their swinging position between the Reformist Camp inside the

country and the Rejectionist Camp, these factions prevented the reformist camp inside the country from becoming united around one single political platform and to be able to exercise its agenda more effectively. I will explain the impact of such shifting position and will provide the evidence of such shift in the next chapter of my article.

In sum, there are two major camps inside the Iranian oppositionist groups. One camp, which I call the Rejectionist Camp, is mainly based in exile. This camp consists of two factions. One faction, which I call the Interventionist Faction, is consists of former reformists, several well-known activists, journalists, and celebrities. They are very well established and have a great deal of access to the media abroad. The second faction, which I call the Old Rejectionists Faction, consists of classic leftists, secular democrats and nationalists. Both exiled camps advocate a rapid regime change strategy although they differ on how to do it. The second camp, which I call the Reformist Camp, is mainly based inside the country. This camp advocates a reformist strategy based on bottom up pressure to make structural and political changes inside the regime.

Reformist Movement: Division & Divergence

Now the pertinent question is: Why has such a deep division and great divergence among the broader reformist movement inside the country emerged in dealing with the Islamic regime? My sources to help explain the Reformist/Rejectionist rift will be the two different camps' language, blogs, and media outlets, as well as their political statements and interviews that have appeared in the press. My argument will consist of four parts. First, I will trace the original split between the two camps, focusing on how they split over the election system adopted by the regime and over power struggles within the regime. This split became evident in

the seventh presidential election in June 1997, a dozen years before the formal appearance of the Green Movement. Second, I will explore the two camps' different approaches to three key issues: elections, NGOs, and power struggles inside the regime. Third, I will look at the ways in which each camp tried to implement and exercise its plans and strategies. Finally, I will compare their distinct analyses and their constitution discourses and how they explained the rise of the democratic movement in Iran, in general, and the Green Movement, in particular. In the research, I will be looking into two different camps' language, blogs, media outlets, and their political statements and interviews. I will discuss their different approaches towards elections, NGOs, and power struggles inside the Islamic regime. Then, I will be looking to the ways in which each camp tries to implement and exercise its plans and strategies. Finally, I will compare, contrast, and utilize two analytical approaches and arguments used by the two major opposition camps to explain the democratic movement in Iran in general, and the Green Movement in particular.

I. The Split of the Oppositionists and Emergence of the Reformist Camp

In the June 1997 presidential election of Iran, Mr. Mohammed Khatami, a former minister and Islamic leftist turned- the presidential reformist candidate, challenged and defeated Mr. Nateq Nuri, the well-established cleric, then the powerful Parliament Speaker, who had been enjoying the full support of the entire regime's establishment such as the state-run media, the military, and most Friday prayer imams. Internationally and domestically, Mr. Khatami's victory was regarded as a radical shift in the Iranian politics. The fact that he had been forced to resign as the Minister of Islamic Culture and Guidance in the previous administration, for his relatively liberal views and his opposition to harsher censorships on the press, underscored such a shift. His victory opened a new political chapter in the country that was depicted by many political analysts as "The Reform Era" or Iran's "Second Revolution." During this period, the country

witnessed relative freedom for the press, economic growth, and improvement in foreign policy based on détente with the West. Such elections in the past, in which competition had been limited only between different factions of the regime, had made it possible for some political groups among the opposition front and the civil society NGOs and activists, who wanted to reform the regime, to rally in support of the reformist candidates in the elections. By participation in the elections and voting for the most favorable candidates from among those who had been allowed to run for the office, these groups hoped to make favorable political and organizational changes in the regime. This strategy was in contrast to the outright boycotting of all the elections which was the strategy of the majority of the exiled groups.

The Emergence of the Reformist Camp

The rise, and then the fall, of Mr. Mohamed Khatami as a reformist president caused the emergence of two new constitutional and election discourses among different Iranian opposition groups. In the beginning, the victory created a new discourse among many former Islamist activists and Islamic groups. They started to publicly debate not only all social and political issues but also many Islamic concepts. The most influential Islamist student union Daftar-e-Tahkim-e-Vahdat (the Office of Consolidation and Unity of Islamic Student Associations, or DTV) emerged as one of the leading organizations representing the new change. They shifted their position from a leftist-Third-Worldist-Islamist group toward a pragmatist and reformist group. The DTV's leaders, the same organization which had been supporting the regime and the establishment for the most of its life, emerged as a new force fighting for civil right and the rule of law through peaceful means. As its leaders said in their statement:

The fundamental role of the student movement is to critique power. We are not a political party seeking to seize the power by revolution or by overthrowing a regime. Rather, our goal is to mobilize people for democracy, to empower civil society, and to reform power.¹⁰

Expectedly, these new developments, in addition to the regime's unexpected acceptance of Mr. Khatami's victory, triggered a rift among the oppositionist groups in exile. For the first time since the 1979 Iranian revolution, one important group in exile spoke out for participation, engagement, and the possibility of reform without an outright revolution, and distanced itself from revolutionaries and political bickering. The Organization of People's Devotees, the Majority (OPDM), an influential and popular leftist group among young and middle class seculars that was involved in guerilla fighting against the Shah, issued a statement questioning the credibility of its own previous approach and other rejectionists toward the elections. The group asked: "Have we been right in boycotting all elections in the past and in fruitless struggle for a sudden and costly overthrowing of the regime while reformists could have been able to penetrate the regime?" They said that "instead of trying for uncertain and more likely violent revolution, we should have supported the reformist candidates."¹¹ As a result, this group began to distance itself from other groups and supported the reformists. Later, they became the center of The Unity of Iranian Republicans, an umbrella group that brought a group of exile Iranians together to support the Reformist Front inside the country.

But, the majority of activists and oppositionists in exile remained opposed to the new approach and interpreted the reformists' victory as "a new tactic by the regime to deceive the people inside the country and to fool international community." MEK (Sazeman-e- Mojahedin-e-Khalgh), all other classic leftist groups, such as the Labor Path and the Communist Party of Iran,

¹⁰ <http://politic.iran-emrooz.net/index.php?/> 1997 politic/more/1661/

¹¹ Fadaeyan statement

and the Iranian National Front in Exile issued statements and rejected “the regimes’ new game”, as MEK called it. MEK rejected the possibility of any reform and in its statement said:

Those who talk about the civil society organizations, the rule of law, and bottom-up pressure and think that with electing good people for national offices we would be able to make favorite changes in the regime want to nailing granite (impossible). It just does not work. The reformists leaders such as Khatami know better than any body else that the clerical rule’ dark roof is based on the pillar of the Velayat-e- Faghih and the smallest change in the structure would make the whole building collapse.¹²

They emphasized the fact that the reformist president and his supporters had been among the most royal supporters of the regime and its policies in the past. One activist, from Secularist and Monarchist front, wrote: “Both Khatami and those members of DTV who have been elected to the Parliament are the children of the regime and vetted by the Guardian Council. Therefore, talking about reform and the conservatives and the establishment being surprised and defeated in the election is a joke and is nonsense.”¹³ Also, the leaders of Jebeh-e-Meli, (the Iranian National Front based in exile) declared that the election of Mr. Khatami would not change anything. They said: “Democracy and being democratic have specific meanings. You cannot have these two things in the framework of the Islamic Republic Regime or its constitution. With elections and electing a ‘reformist’ we change nothing.”¹⁴

Mr. Khatami was one of the revolutionary elite who had previously served in various administrative positions. The "core" of his and the reform movement’s activists and organizers in the beginning was made up of Islamic leftists disqualified for running for office, as they were purged out of the government. But Khatami’s support had cut across regions and class lines. Not only he had gotten the support of many non traditional voters, especially the youth and the women- many of whom were first time voters in an election under the Islamic Republic- but he

¹² <http://iran-interlink.org/fa/?mod=view&id=10335>

¹³ <http://www.kankashtv.com/p/view.php?objnr=44>

¹⁴ *ibid*

also won even over many Revolutionary Guards, Quom seminarians and Basij (the regime's militia) members. The core of his electoral support, however, came from the modern middle class, college students, women, and urban workers.

Despite the fact that several well-known organizations, such as once powerful and popular MEK, vigorously opposed reformist approach, in August of 1999, more than 20 political groups and parties, student unions, women and civil right organizations came together and formed the Reformist Front (Jebhe-e-Eslahat), which became the backbone of the Reformist Camp. The Front represented "both the collective desire for change and the coalition of political and civil groupings that had lent support to Khatami" (Bayat 2007: 107).

However, after a short period of time, in which the conservatives were in shock and awe and the reformists wasted opportunities, the new president and his administration were crippled by the conservative parliament and the regimes' other non-electable governmental bodies such as the judiciary system. In February 1998, President Khatami appointed a group of five prominent law experts as the Committee in Charge of Supervision of the Execution of the Constitution. The committee was assigned to report any violation of the constitution by any governmental body. The Committee proved unable in exercising its initial mandate.

However, the reformists made progress on other fronts. They succeeded in opening of the public sphere and reducing the social restrictions. The pro-reform press flourished and the number of new parties, NGOs, and even political groups sharply increased. While in 1997 there were only thirty-five political parties, NGOs, and other associations, the number increased to 97 in 2000 and to 2,500 in the end of 2001 (Bayat, 2007: 109). But the conservatives began their counter attack on these fronts as well. When the reformists press raised the question of the

president constitutional power and his other leverages, and the impartiality of the judiciary system and asked the reformist leaders to organize protests, the hardliners reacted by opening a new line of confrontation. In addition to closing down the reformist newspapers and periodicals, they began to intimidate the activists and the press by arresting, kidnaping, killing, and assassinating several prominent writers, journalists and activists. The Revolutionary Guard helped the regime's militia, or the plain cloths, crush the student protests. The newly formed nationalist-Religious Coalition, a group combined of Freedom Movement of Iran and several prominent figures of younger generation of liberal-nationalists with religious leanings, was banned. In one turning point occasion, a gunman fatally shot Said Hajjarian, the Vice-President of Tehran Municipal Council and the chief strategists of the Reformist Front, on the doorsteps of the Council in March of 2000.

Even the reformists' landslide victory in the congressional election of February 2000 and another landslide victory of Mr. Khatami in the June 2001 presidential election did not substantially change the situation in the favor of the Reformist Front. Unlike after the reformists' first presidential election victory, in which the hardliners for a short period of time were in shock, this time the hardliners began to attack even before the newly elected parliament was convened. The Guardian Council postponed the second round of the congressional election for the remaining unfilled seats and cancelled the election results in several districts in which the reformists had won. After the new Parliament finally convened, while the judiciary system and the Revolutionary Guard continued their affront on the reformist administration, the Guardian Council and the Maslahat Council, another powerful council appointed by the Supreme Leader to judge between the Parliament and the Guardian council, blocked the Parliament in making any reformist legislation. According to the Islamic regime's constitution, the Guardian Council

would have veto power on any legislation made by the parliament, if deemed unconstitutional. But the Council went far beyond its constitutional right in confronting and crippling the parliament.

When the reformist media and protesting students on the university campuses made it difficult for the Guardian Council to act so defiantly, the Supreme Leader intertwined personally and made the newly elected parliament even more embarrassed. The Supreme Leader asked the parliament to stop its primary debate about a new press law. These confrontations, which exposed the weakness of the executive and the legislation branches against the other two more powerful and non-electable bodies, made Khatami's rule of law and civil society, his major political platform, look paradoxical and unpractical to many of the intellectuals and activists inside the Reformist Front. Before their victory in the congressional election, the reformist leaders had argued that in order to break the gridlock and to progress in reforming the political structure they would have to win the then upcoming congressional election. This argument lost its credibility for many reformist movement supporters after they won the Parliament in February 2000.

The rest of the Mr. Khatami's second term witnessed more progress for the hard-liners and more retreats and defeats for the reformist administration. Confronted with a defiant Guardian Council, on the one hand, and an increasing pressure by his supporters to fight back, the President introduced two bills in September of 2002 to reduce the Guardian Council power and to increase the power of the President as the constitutionally responsible for upholding the Constitution. Both bills were passed by the Parliament and vetoed by the Council right away. The rejection of the both pieces of legislations sparked an intense debate among reformists. Several reformists figure called on the President to resign or ask for a referendum. Some

sporadic protests occurred in Tehran's quarters and the police arrested a group of protesting people outside the Parliament. The hopeless President rejected the calls for resignation and referendum. Instead, he wrote to the Council and withdrew the bills. The withdrawal of the bills and the President hopelessness undermined the reformist movement credibility. It opened up a rift between two emerging political trends inside the Reformist Front. If Mr. Khatami's first victory weakened the Rejectionist Camp in the favor of the Reformist Camp's approach, his failure weakened the Reformist Camp in the favor of the rejectionists and advocates of boycotting all elections. For the first time since the birth of the reform movement, a group of the reformist parties and individuals, who had been trying and hoping to reform the political structure through the elections, aligned itself with the Rejectionist Camp in exile. Before this defection, the Rejectionist Camp consisted of leftists Marxists, secular democrats, secular nationalists, and monarchists. Akbar Ganji, a prominent reformist, wrote an article in the most important reformist newspaper, Etemad Meli (The National Trust) and concluded that reform was no longer possible within the existing political structure.¹⁵

The most important of these groups were The Union of Islamic Student Associations, the DTV (The Office of Consolidation and Unity), and The Organization of Iranian University Graduates (Sazeman-e-Daneshamookhtegan-e-Iran). All the three organizations were Islamist-turned-reformist political parties that enjoyed major influence among the university students and also among young peoples in the urban centers. The UISA and DTV were the crucial forces in the June 1997 election that brought the reformist Khatami to power. Nothing could explain the new division inside the reformist camp better than the split of SOCU over their strategy toward the elections and the whole reformist movement. The organization grew rapidly during the

¹⁵ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/akbarganji/akbarganji cv.pdf

“reform era” and turned into an influential nationwide student movement with vast networks including more than seven hundred local newspapers and magazines, an impressive news agency (ISNA), and more than 1400 cultural and social associations. The leaders of both organizations issued statements announcing that it had been a waste of time, energy, and other resources to support the reformist president. Mr. Ahmad Zied Abadi, the secretary general of OIUG, said that “participating in the election and electing a reformist but powerless president only would give the conservatives an opportunity to blame the reformists for their own wrongdoings and the mismanagement of the country.” He also said “such participation would give the regime, and the dominant conservative faction of it, the legitimacy that they lack.”¹⁶ Also, Mr. Alireza Afshari, the spokesperson for DTV, said “the less participation in the elections the more legitimacy crisis for the regime.” He added that “in contrary to what we believed before the election of the reformist president, boycotting of next elections leads to a faster pace to democratization of the country.”¹⁷

In the days before the election of June 2005, the DTV issued a statement and said:

We will not participate in the ninth presidential election by staying away from the ballot boxes. We believe that regardless of our intentions any participation in the election will help the regime and gives its core establishment the legitimacy it needs. The 8 years of reformist front having the executive and legislative branches of power and being powerless against very powerful and hardline non-electable governmental bodies proved the failure of an unrealistic reformist approach. The people of Iran should not participate in the June 2005 election until the regime changes its behavior completely.¹⁸

Moreover, several well-known intellectuals and journalists among the former Islamist turned reformist issued statements and backed such a move by these two organizations.

Akbar Ganji, a leading figure in the new breed of reformist and post-Islamist journalists issued a statement supporting the boycotting policy from his cell in the prison and then

¹⁶ (Gooyanews, March 2004)

¹⁷ (Gooyanews, June 2004).

¹⁸ <http://news.gooya.com/president84/archives/027291.php>

went on hunger strike.¹⁹ These groups' new strategy and the split in the reformist front were backed by the major opposition groups based in exile.

The split became public and formal when several of well-known leaders of the student organizations and other activists, including Alireza Afshari, Reza Delbari, Mohsen Sazegara, and Akbar Ganji, went into self-exile in mid-2005. The split extended into the pro reform groups in exile and the Union of Iranian Republicans, which had been supporting the reformist front inside the country, split into two factions. One faction, the Union of Democratic and Atheist Republicans, issued statements condemning any participation in the elections and supported the shift in the position of those reformists inside the country and demanded more radical actions by them. Following their first conference, the group issued another statement and boycotted the upcoming election:

We believe that the Islamic regime's framework, its non-electable branches, and the Velayat-e-Faqih have made any reform through the elections impossible. The eight years experience of a powerless reformist administration proved this point. In the current political system all power remains in the hands of the Supreme Leader not the elected president. Therefore, any attempt to implement reforms through the elections is baseless. In our country, the only way out to democracy, justice, and freedom will be through overthrowing the Islamic Republic and establishing a new republic. Today by boycotting the elections the people should say No to the whole regime²⁰

Also, the National Front of Iran (Jebheh-e-Meli-Iran), a secular nationalist party that call themselves as the followers of Mohammad Mosadegh (the legendary Prime Minister of Iran during early 1950s and the leader of the movement to nationalize the Iranian oil industry), the Iran's Nation Party (another secular nationalist party), the Iranian Writers Association, and more than five hundreds of other activists and intellectuals issued a statement and boycotted the June 2005 election. The NFI issued its own statement and insisted on its previous positions about the election. They rejected the notion that the division between the regime's factions was between

¹⁹ <http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/029281.php>

²⁰ <http://news.gooya.com/president84/archives/029302.php>

the moderates, or liberals, and the hardliners. They rejected the idea that supporting the moderate faction would make any meaningful difference. They said:

The Iranian people are -again-faced with choosing between bad and worse. Yet, that the various factions of the regime turned upon each other, is not a surprise; they have always been at war with one another over the division of power, a bigger share of the nation's wealth and Iran's natural resources. What was most surprising was that those opposing forces that have no vested interest in the existing power entered the yes or no games of these elections with such zeal. When after many years, instead of independence and freedom, [the two major slogans of the 1979 Revolution] hanging and stoning are still our daily realities, the discussion of supporting one faction against the other will aid the illusion of choice. Thus, the elections have again and again proved that any force that considers itself as belonging to an opposition, or as backing change, should instead of becoming entangled in the inner regime war, grasp at real opportunities and take the initiative, spending its time and energy to suggest a people's alternative. The introduction and encouraged discussion of an effective alternative program can - instead of guesswork concerning the rise and fall of this or that faction - be the best option for the Iranian nation, regardless of the division of seats between those hand-picked to run as candidates.²¹

Meanwhile, a majority of reformist parties still were supporting the participation in the elections. At the core were the more organized Islamic Participation Party (IPF) and the Mujahidin Organization of the Islamic Revolution (MOIR, another formidable Islamist-turned-reformist organization consisted of Islamic revolutionaries or the Old Guards). They were backed by smaller factions such as Combatant Clerics, the Workers Party, the Hambastagi Party (Unity Party), and the Kargozaran. The reformists argued that the participation in elections was one important way to reform the political system. Mr. Mustafa Tajzadeh, the reformist Deputy Minister of the Interior, the ministry in charge, among other things, of carrying out the elections, argued that without participation in the election the hardliners and conservatives would consolidate their power and fully control the regime. They also said that the Islamic Republic's leadership, so regretful of "the reform period" and so fearful that another such an opportunity would undermine their authority, decided to prevent the reformist candidate from becoming the president by manipulating the vote counting. They argued that the regime's action proved that

²¹www.kouroszhaim.org/DetailsData.asp?IDdata=196

electing a reformists president would make a difference. One former reformist cabinet member argued that:

With a reformist president, even without having all powers to exercise his plans fully, we will be able to penetrate the system and make some changes. By controlling even 30-40% of the power we will be able to make the life of the people a little better. We do not have any other choice. By boycotting the elections, we will deprive people from their basic civil right to participate in their destiny.²²

Some reformist analysts extended the debate beyond whether participation in elections was right or wrong and argued that even in a free election the supposed elected reformist president would be unable to execute his agenda if there were a weak civil society. Said Hajjariyan, one of the most prominent figures among the post-Islamists and the most respected leaders of the reformist movement during 1997-2005, argued that the reformist president could not exercise his constitutional power, not because the constitution is not a perfect law, but because our civil society is weak. He, who was the mastermind of the strategy named “social mobilizing and pressure from the bottom and bargaining at the top”, rejected the idea that a failed reformist president proved that participation in the elections is wrong. Drawing on scholars of state, civil society and democratic transitions, he argued:

The reform movement is dead. Long-live the reform movement. I mean the reform movement that wants to invest only on bargaining with the conservatives at the top without civil society bottom up pressure is dead. In a strong society the people can bring down a bad president but in a weak society even a good president is useless. The real social-political structure of a society is more important than the official constitutional structure. We should try to empower the civil society and one way to do that is to participate in the elections. We should exercise our citizenship right and demand the government to recognize that and at the same time respect our obligations. Instead of boycotting the elections, we should do more in organizing peoples in civil society organizations; we should change our strategy and language and increase our connections to the middle class, the working class, and even to the people in small towns and rural areas. We have been talking to the elites.²³

²² <http://iran-campaign-2005.blogspot.com/2005/02/iran-daily-tajzadeh-reformists-will.html>

²³ <http://johnkeane.info/media/pdfs/iran/Fazlinejad-Velvet%20Revolution-Full-text-English.pdf>

Also, Mr. Mohammad Khatami, the reformist president, facing disappointment among his supporters, supported the pro-participation camp's position and said: "The first step in political development is participation and the primary form of participation is through the elections. Even if some renowned candidates are not nominated or qualifies, the people should not withdraw. In this case we should look for the candidates whose thoughts are closer to our ideas and then vote for them."²⁴

However, despite the fact that the reformist administration failed to deliver, the rift that had emerged with the rise of the reformist president remained solid and became formal. The two camps, the Rejectionist Camp and the Reformist Camp began to lay out their different approaches toward different issues, most notably toward the elections, the power struggle inside the regime, and the strategy to counter the Islamic regime. In the part two of the thesis, as I said in the introduction, I discuss these different approaches

II. The Two Camps and the Elections, Regime's Power Struggle, and the NGOs:

At the core of the two camps' debates were the Islamic regime's elections system and the possibility of reform.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, there has never been a completely free and fair election in compliance with election standards of the world's democracies. Contrary to patterns in all democracies around the globe, in the Islamic Republic from the beginning, with the exception of the first year after the 1979 Revolution, most opposition groups and individuals have been denied the right to nominate their favorite candidates, or to be nominated in the case of independent individuals, in the national elections. Despite the fact that constitution has endorsed

²⁴ <http://news.gooya.com/english/archives/031954.php>

a free election, the Islamic regime has been trying to make it more difficult for any opposition party or individual to participate in the election by passing new restricting laws or by very narrow interpretations of the constitution. According to the current election law, which is a product of a conservative parliament, each candidate has to be vetted and approved by the powerful hardliner Guardian Council before nomination.

Therefore, except for a few occasions or some very small towns, since the passing of the new law only different factions of the regime had been competing in the elections before the June 2009 elections. However, and despite the vetoing power of the Guardian Council, which supervises all aspects and stages of the elections, domestic politics and power struggle between different factions of the government have often interfered with the administration of elections in the Islamic Republic. The fact that the Islamic regime consisted of different competing factions, with different interpretations of the constitution and Islamic concepts of the governance, created a kind of election system in which real competition and relatively honest vote counting was possible up until the June 2009 election. Such a system is a relatively different system from systems under the autocratic or monarchic dictatorships in the Middle East and North Africa.

In the Middle East and North Africa, except for Israel and, to a much lesser extent, post-war Iraq, no country holds legitimate and competitive elections. In this region, elections have increasingly become moments of political crisis. While several countries simply ban political parties altogether, some others allow licensed political parties but restrict any opportunity for them to take office, even for those parties that stand a reasonable chance at achieving electoral victory. In these countries, while there is open competition at lower levels of local offices, the outcomes of elections for the executive branch of government and for the national parliament are never really in doubt. In contrast, in Iran, unlike the rest of the Muslim world in the Middle East

and North Africa, before the June 2009 presidential election, there were semi-democratic elections in which votes were counted, competitions were real, and irregularities were acceptable according to the existing norms in the most developing countries. A good explanation of the Iranian political system during this period was that it was essentially an authoritarian structure with some democratic features. Some scholars and political scientists categorized the Islamic Republic of Iran as an “electoral authoritarian” regime of a special sort. They put Iran in the same basket as Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela or Vladimir Putin’s Russia.²⁵

In the Islamic Republic’s election system, although there were no possibilities for outsiders and outright oppositionists to compete, the competition among insiders and the different factions of the political establishment were real, and vote counting was healthy. Such relatively fair elections in the past three decades, before the controversial June 2009 election, made it possible for some political groups among the opposition, civil society NGOs, and other activists, who wanted to reform the regime and sought democratic changes, to participate in voting processes by supporting the most favorable candidates from among those who had been allowed to run for the office.

At the same time, during the past 30 years since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, in each election the government increased the elections restrictions more than before. One reason for such policy was a growing number of defectors among the Islamic regime’s cadres and elites and an ever growing reform tendency among the younger generation of Islamists. As a result, in each election a much broader range of individuals, including many former parliament’s deputies and other Islamists-turned-reformist, were denied the right of nomination for public offices by the Guardian Council. In doing so, the Council ignored even the

²⁵ Fukuyama, Francis. “Iran, Islam, and the Rule of Law” *The Wall Street Journal*, Monday, July 27, 2009

existing, even mostly conservatives-sponsored, election laws. Also, in each election the level of irregularities relatively increased compare to the previous ones. For example, the 2005 presidential election that brought Mr. Ahmadinejad to power had more irregularities than the presidential elections of June 2001.

However, in the 2005 election the irregularities were relatively minor that was considered normal for many countries in the developing world. In that election, two major defeated candidates protested against the irregularities and complained to the Supreme Leader but in the end they accepted the final result. However, according to many election observers and analysts, the level of irregularities in that election was not large enough to change the result of the election (Majd: 2010). In that election, Mr. Ahmadinejad, who was yet unknown and was not from the political establishment, ran a populist campaign and could mobilize millions of disfranchised and working class people against his main opponent. He successfully portrayed his main opponent, Mr. Rafsanjani, (the former president and one of the main political figures of the Islamic Republic during the past 30 years) as the engineer of all the failed policies in the past. Mr. Ahmadinejad blamed Mr. Rafsanjani's policies for an ever widening gap between the poor and the rich and for accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of a small group of well-connected people, particularly clergies and their families, at the expense of the majority of the people. But the June 2009 election changed such a relatively unique election system.

From Divergence to Convergence Again

As I explained in the previous section, the rise of a reformist president split the oppositionists as a whole to create the Reformist Camp and inability of the reformist administration to deliver split the Reformist Camp. A few but formidable factions in the Camp

came to the conclusion that the reformist president tended to cave rather than standing firm and provoking a constitutional crisis that might have gained some concessions from the hardliners. On the one hand, the defection of these factions and disappointment among many of the Camp's supporters made the reformist front weaker. On the other hand, a division between the remaining reformists over choosing the candidates in the June 2005 presidential elections made the situation even worse. The once united and large pro-participation camp was fighting each other in supporting different candidates. This was an unprecedented development in the Reformist Camp since its birth, and was a result of bitter debates on whom to blame for the failed policies.

When the elections took place, a sharp decline of the voters, especially in major urban centers, and the fact that the elections went for a run off, convinced many analysts that the reformists' defeat was the result of the division between the reformist candidates and disillusion of many of reformists' supporters. While in the previous presidential election (June 2001) 70% of voters had participated, in the June 2005 election only around 57% of voters participated. In the election of the June 2001, in which a reformist candidate was elected, the elected president received more than 77% of the votes and in the June 2005 presidential election, which brought Mr. Ahmadinejad to power, the elected president received only around 19% in the first round and about 52% in the run off.²⁶ The hardliners won the elections and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, as the leader of a new breed among conservatives, was elected as the President.

However, Mr. Ahmadinejad's victory in 2005 created a new situation. On the one hand, a group of activists and political figures left the Reformist Camp altogether and joined those who had been arguing against any participation in the elections for more than 20 years. They declared

²⁶ http://www.chathamhouse.org/files/14234_iranelection0609.pdf

that the era of reform had ended because the conservatives and the hardliners were fully controlling all the branches of the government. In addition, they asserted that the eight years of failed attempts by the reformists proved it was impossible to reform the Islamic regime through elections and in the framework of the current constitution.

On the other hand, Mr. Ahmadinejad's four years in office and the changes he brought for many people in terms of economic hardship, hostile and adventurist foreign policy, and political and social pressure changed the political spectrum once again. Many political activists, different groups of people, especially the youth, several political parties, and many prominent reformists, who had rejected the participation in the June 2005 elections which brought Ahmadinejad to power, publicly or practically regretted their actions.

As a result, prior to the election of June 2009, the tide turned in the favor of participation discourse and it became the dominant discourse once again. As radio BBC correspondent reported from Iran: "Except for the core of the rejectionist camp based in exile that had been boycotting all elections since the 1979 revolution, the boycotting policy has lost ground among all other political parties."²⁷ The tide was so powerful that several prominent former reformists who had rejected the participation in the June 2005 elections, which resulted in Mr. Ahmadinejad's victory, chose to stay silent by neither advocating for nor boycotting the participation. However, this time the Reformist Camp had a clearer political agenda. The main focus was on the conditional participation according to which they supported the candidate who had a clear plan to stand firm against the hardliners and who had clearly stated his plan for reform and to tackle the non-elected governmental bodies.

²⁷ www.bbc.co.uk/.../050615_a_iranelection_discussion. Accessed on April 24th, 2012

One important factor that reflected the new tide in the favor of the participation camp was a change in the both DTV and SOCU's position. Both organizations issued statement and declared that they would participate in the elections and would vote for the most favorable candidate. They insisted that they would focus on a set of specific demands and also on the candidates' agenda, political platform, and his strategy to achieve it. The SOCU' Secretary General, the same organization that actively opposed in the June 2005 election, said in an interview that "four years of Mr. Ahmadinejad's presidency has brought dangers and disasters for our country and also unexpected opportunities. Now, in order to offset these threats we do not have any option but to participate in the upcoming election to remove the current president." Also, the DTV which had boycotted all elections in the previous eight years surprised most observers by issuing a statement that indicated the group would participate in the upcoming election. In the statement the DTV said: "The most important goal is to prevent Mr. Ahmadinejad from winning the presidency again. We will participate in the upcoming election and will vote for one of two reformist candidates whose political agenda is closer to ours."²⁸

Also, several political figures that had boycotted the two previous presidential elections not only switched their position, but also became active supporters for one or the other reformist candidates. For example, Abbas Abdi and Abdullah Moameni, both prominent activist, who were among those figures who had asked Mr. Khatami to resign and had announced the participation policy and the reform strategy had failed, became Mr. Karoubi's, one of the two reformist candidates, political advisors and his chief strategists. He said that "the four years of Mr. Ahmadinejad proved once again that there is no alternative for reform strategy. We made a

²⁸<http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2009/05/087641.php>

mistake when we left that strategy in protest to Mr. Khatami's failures. Instead of abandoning the reformist approach we should have changes our tactics and strategy."²⁹

The same development in favor of participation in the elections happened among a few of political groups in exile. Those groups that had supported the Reformist Camp during Mohammad Khatami's presidency and had abandoned the Front with disappointment shifted their position again to participate in the June 2009 election in support of the reformist candidates. The split between oppositionists abroad was so important that the National Resistance Front, a once very well positioned group led by MEK which had bases in Iraq under Saddam Hussein, issued a statement and warned all oppositionists that "once again regimes' reformists have begun a very dangerous game; splitting the opposition front in favor of a 'reformist candidate' that ultimately like the former 'reformist president' would serve to legitimize the regime under the Supreme Leader."³⁰ It was with such excitement and level of solidarity that the Reformist Camp, broader then before, participated in the June 2009 election.

But, what made the June 2009 presidential election completely different from all the elections in the past was the fact that the level of irregularities and the fraud exceeded far beyond what it had been the norm in the previous elections. For example, "it was a virtual impossibility that Mehdi Karroubi, a former speaker of Parliament and liberal cleric, could have received only one-twentieth the votes he did four years ago, and less votes than there were card-carrying members of his own political party" (Majd 2010: 42).

The June 2009 Elections, the Protests, and the Divergence Again

²⁹ news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2009/05/088158.php

³⁰ <http://www.iran.mojahedin.org/Pages/printNews.aspx?newsid=48239>

On Friday, June 12, 2009, people of Iran voted to elect the president of the country in the tenth presidential election. There were four major candidates competing in the election. The incumbent president, Mr. Ahmadinejad, was competing with three other important political figures of the Islamic Republic. But the main competition was between Mr. Ahmadinejad and Mr. Mir-Hussein Mousavi, the former Prime Minister who had reemerged as a reformist candidate backed by the Reformist Camp. Late in the day, government officials declared that Ahmadinejad had defeated all his challengers. For many, the outcome was surprising, and the vote tabulation had been implausibly fast. Therefore, it triggered massive uproar and anger. With unprecedented fast ballot counting and high levels of electoral support given to the incumbent president in the major metropolitan cities and in some minority ethnic communities such as the Azeri communities, known to support the opposition candidate Mr. Mousavi, the capital erupted and exploded in protesting demonstrations. Over the next few days from June 14th to June 19th, 2009, Tehran and other major cities witnessed the largest street protests unprecedented since the 1979 Revolution that overthrew the Shah.

On Friday, June 19, 2009, despite the huge protests and despite the fact that all other candidates had rejected the result, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei (the Supreme Leader) endorsed Mr. Ahmadinejad's victory and condemned the protests. His action was in contrast to the law and his own precedent in the previous elections. According to the law, the Supreme Leader must endorse the elected president only after the election result formally endorsed by the interior ministry and by the Guardian Council. The Council usually endorses the result after hearing all complaints and after investigating the election fraud claimed by other parties. Such a process normally took several days in the previous elections. The Supreme Leader, also, called on riot police and Basij militia to appear on the streets and restore the order. As a result, on June 20 several individuals

were killed, hundreds were injured or beaten, and thousands were arrested. Over the course of the next few weeks, from the late June to late September, on the one hand, the government increased the level of suppression, shut down the remaining reformist newspapers, and limited the protesting leaders' access to their followers. On the other hand, with increasing threat by security forces, the numbers of protestors declined. The protests that had started with millions of participants turned into smaller and sporadic demonstrations. At the same time, such sporadic and small protests unlike the large ones, which had started over election irregularities and vote recounting, turned against the whole Islamic regime. During the demonstrations, some groups of people, especially the youth, not only chanted against the president but also directly against the Supreme Leader.

In the next phase of the protests, the efforts of the two defeated candidates-turned-protests leaders, Messr. Mousavi and Karoubi, to organize large demonstrations by co-opting the Islamic Republic's holiday days and other ceremonial dates, which was a smart move in countering the government's ban on any gathering, resulted in small gains. The sharp decline and the shrinking size of the protests gradually sparked and intensified the previous debates between the Iranian opposition groups in exile and inside the country. In this regard, many Iranian intellectuals, analysts, and political activists went far beyond the factors such as the brutality of the police and the powerful Islamic regime's oppression machine to explain the setbacks. In their explaining and analyzing attempts, these individuals and groups divided into two major camps: One camp, the Rejectionist Camp, drew on the brutality of the regime, on one hand, and the veto power of the Guardian Council and the Supreme Leader, on the other hand, to argue against the possibility of any meaningful reform in the regime. The other camp, the

Reformist Camp, argued that organizational weakness, to put forward an effective and workable strategy, combined with the weakness of the civil society were the main reasons for the setbacks.

While the Rejectionists blamed the reformist leaders for the setbacks, the reformists argued that in the course of the protests, the government made Mr. Mousavi's leadership and the movement's organizational abilities even weaker by restricting him to a small circle of his aids and limiting his access to media and his supporters.³¹ This new development made it possible for some activists and political figures among the Rejectionist Camp to influence small groups of the youth in the capital and two other major urban centers. These activists, with the help of some celebrities, mostly well-intended but non-political strategists or skillful politicians, tried to deploy conventional models and concepts to the social realities of the Iranian society, "without acknowledging sufficiently that these models hold different historical genealogies" (Bayat 2009: 109).

In the third part of thesis, as I said in the introduction, I discuss how the two camps tried to implement their strategies and also the two camps' different tactics and languages.

III. The Two Camp's Different Tactics, Language, and Strategy:

Similar to their different strategy and viewpoint of the elections, the two camps differed deeply with respect to their language, tactics, and their approach toward NGOs. Civil society in Iran is incredibly wired and estimates of the number of blogs in Iran range from 400,000 to 700,000. Once the universal character became widely used, Farsi rose to be the tenth most popular blogging language globally (Howard: 2010). There is one mobile phone for every two people in Iran, though in urban areas almost all the residents have one or two mobile phones.

³¹ <http://www.insideiran.org/featured/green-movement-engages-in-self-criticism-following-low-turnout/>

About one third of the Iran's 70 million people have used the internet, around 12 million are regular users, and the large cohort of the youth is particularly sophisticated with digital technologies. As a result and in the wake of an established censorship on the media, the exiled-based Rejectionist Camp established a network of blogs and Internet media and used that as the main way of communication and influence. They could mobilize some activists among the youth and some other small segments of the society in a country that "has one of the world's most vibrant social media communities and the most concentrated broadcast media system in the Muslim world" (Howard 2010: 67). Another area in which two camps' approaches were distinct was their approach toward the NGOs and the role they could play in the movement.

Much of the most profound discourse within Islam and democratization processes has been taking place in Iran's NGOs, courtrooms, university campuses, classrooms, and even in show trials of dissidents. Even clerics who once had held high office and intellectuals who were Khomeini's protégés challenged the religion's basic precepts as well as the specifics of theocratic rule. Among those many places the NGOs played a great role in the reform movement by mobilizing many people, especially women, to pressure the regime for the change. The feminists and other NGOs made progresses in many areas such as the women's right for sporting, other social activities, and reforming laws that supervised marriage and all other aspects of women's right. Since 1997 and emergence of the reform movement the number of NGOs, especially women and environmentalist NGOs sharply increased. In 2004, Tehran alone had eighty-five women's basketball teams in five leagues. According to data, up until 2004 Iran had over two million women participant in soccer, basketball, swimming, tennis, skiing, judo, rowing, gymnastics, and car racing, and other sports. In some instances women forced the theocrats to acknowledge their participation officially; at the 2004 Olympics, for the first time, a female

athlete led the Iranian team onto the field (Wright 2004: 145). As to other rights, they succeeded to change some laws in favor of women. For example, in contrast to the Islamic tradition, in which the mother is only allowed to keep a daughter until the age of seven and a son until the age of two, in 1998, the Parliament revised a law to stipulate that a child could no longer be awarded to an unfit father, defining the custody qualifications in a way that could often disqualify men.

In this regard, the NGOs emphasized that they would not ally themselves with any specific political party and introduced themselves as non partisan and non political entities. As one woman activist and NGO leader said, “they [NGOs and women activists] want to reform the system not only through bottom-up political pressure but also through the engagement with the government and through the peaceful and lawful civil right activities” (Tahmasebi 2010: 3). It was this distinction that made many NGOs and their leaders the targets of harsh criticism by the Rejectionist Camp. They called them “the spear tires of regime that prevent people’s struggle for regime change from giving fruit.”³² The Rejectionist Camp, by using the language of “you are either with us or with the regime,” accused the NGOs of not trying to mobilize their base for a regime change instead of engagement with the regime. This approach, on the one hand, split several NGOs at the top, at their leadership, and made them weaker. On the other hand, when some leaders of those NGOs left the country to join the rejectionists, the hardliners in the regime portrayed all NGOs as the political parties with specific agenda and the fifth column of the West.

In contrast to the Rejectionist Camp, the Reformist Camp regarded the NGOs as one of the most useful civil society tools in its struggle for the rule of law and structural and political reform. The reformists emphasized and appreciated the NGOs role in two main areas: first, in bringing in line the nonelected institutions of the state; second, in establishing a democratic

³² <http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2006/05/140125.php>

interpretation of the constitution (Jalaipour, 2006: 44-45). Therefore, while the rejectionists criticized the NGOs and called them the fifth wheel of the regime or obstacles that delay revolution, the reformists regarded the NGOs as a major force in the reform movement.

IV. The Two Camp's Different Analysis and Arguments.

However, the debates went far beyond the protests, strategies, and tactics. It brought up one more time the two different discourses of the constitution, the rule of law, and social movements. As I said in the introduction, the final part of this thesis discusses the two major camps' analysis and arguments and their different constitution discourses.

The Rejectionist Camp's Argument

This approach is basically a state-centered view and argues that the Iranian Constitution and the power it gives to the Supreme leader and the Guardian Council, on one hand, and the oppressive nature of the regime have made any meaningful reform impossible.

The key point of the rejectionist's argument lays in their approach to the Islamic Republic's constitution and the power it gives to the *Velayat-i-Faqih*, or the Supreme Leader in the article 110. They argue that the article 110 of the constitution is in contradiction to chapter 3 of the law which outlines "the people's rights." According to them, central to Islamic regime's constitution is the power granted to the Supreme Leader, or the *Velayat-Faghih*, to govern the Muslim believers. They argued that despite the fact that chapter 3 of the law institutionalizes the Western-style Parliament, yet it was the Council of Guardians, appointed by the *Velayat-i-faqih*, which holds the veto power over the Parliament. In other word, the Islamic regime's constitution is a set of contradictory laws and, therefore, "is unworkable."

By the same token, they assert that “the reformists’ argument that the constitution strikes a reasonable balance between the republicanism and Islamicness rings increasingly hollow” (Arjomand 2010: 76), and seems totally unconvincing to the Green Movement after the brutal suppression of peaceful protests. Also, they refer to the power of Assembly of Experts which supervises and, if necessary, suspend the *Velayat-i-faqi* as another “contradiction” in the constitution because the candidates for the assembly are screened and filtered by the appointed council before the elections (Ganji: 2002). Moreover, according to this view, even a democratically elected Parliament would not be able to make meaningful reforms due to contradictions in the constitution. “There is no chance that the Majlis [the Parliament] will be able to interpret away the Constitution's antidemocratic principles, for only the Guardian Council enjoys the right of constitutional interpretation” (Kar 2003: 134). This argument goes so far as to assert that any elected body of the government which has “any nascent agenda for democratic reform” is “by constitutional design, politically powerless to bring it about” (Kar 2003: 135).

As to the movement’s leadership, or the two protesting candidates in the June election, the Rejectionist Camp argues that the leadership’s weakness and their lack of an effective strategy is the result of their reformist view rather than the result of an organizational weakness and the weakness of civil society in general. In this regard, they assert that “the call for a ‘return to the constitution’ by prominent leaders of the reform movement inside Iran is “part of a somewhat desperate strategy to maintain their position of leadership” (Arjomand: 2009) over the Green Movement. They believe that the defeated candidates-turned-protest leaders, Messr. Mousavi and Karroubi, acknowledged that they could not lead the protest movement because they were the former Islamic revolutionaries who have turned reformists in the recent years (Arjomand: 2009). Therefore, their call for the rule of law and return to the constitution “was

falling flat on the ears of the protesters who preponderantly belong to a different generation born after the Islamic revolution, and to a different gender, women.” (Arjomand 2010: 4) This argument concludes that it was not organizational weakness combined with some spontaneous radical actions by the small groups of youth that caused a sharp decline in the size of the protests and eventually loss of the battle against the regime. Rather, the calls of returning to the constitution by the reform movement leaders undermined the ability of the Green Movement to challenge the regime. According to the argument, the defeated reformist candidates, who led the first wave of the massive protests against the election fraud, and “other graying children of the Islamic revolution turned reformists”, could no longer control and lead the Green Movement which is the movement of a whole new generation unknown to those leaders. Akbar Ganji, once an Islamic reformist and now one of the most prominent supporters of Rejectionist Camp, went so far as to claim that reformists who had been trying to bring about gradual democratic changes not only failed, but also “by cooperating with the authoritarian leader, the reformists have in fact provided it domestic and international legitimacy” (Ganji 2005: 34).

In addition to the argument against the possibility of democratic interpretations of the constitution and gradual reforms, the Rejectionists advocated that the ideological nature of the Islamic regime inherently prevents it from accepting any compromise and left no possibility for reform. For example, Ganji’s main point was that “the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is based on Islamic laws, is basically irreformable and, therefore, the only way to replace it with a real democracy is a referendum” (2005: 54). For evidence, they refer to the constant purge in all levels of the government of reformists and the moderates’ past unsuccessful efforts to make “meaningful reforms” during the years they were in power (1997-2005). In this regard, they do not believe that gradual reforms and the rule of law would bring meaningful changes. In their

view, the real change in Iran is not a formal shift in the political structure and the rule of law. Rather, the meaningful changes occur when new political forces take power. Moreover, they believe that the majority of Iranian people want to overthrow the Islamic Republic. Therefore, the inability of the reformist leaders to catch up with the protesters' demands and the reformist leaders' willingness to save the fundamental basis of the regime have caused the current setbacks and have helped the government regain its almost-lost authority in the aftermath of the election. As a result, in order to reignite the movement a change in leadership, or at least a change in the leadership's strategy, is needed.

To conclude, this approach is a state-centered approach and does not look at state and societies in the Third World as a "complex and diverse" issue. Their focus is on top-down political democratization. Also, in their approach to social movements and mobilization of people, they fail to perceive and embrace the specific fluidity of the people, culture, and social structures in different societies in general and in Iran in particular. Failing to see Iran's sociopolitical realities and stuck to the traditional approaches to social movements and classical social revolution theories, they cannot understand and observe how civil society organizations and ordinary citizens in the country have been challenging the regime and Islamists' power. In short, when they look at state and society, they focus on "state's power and do not look at societies potential abilities" in challenging the state through different ways. In other words, "their approach is a bit like looking at a mousetrap [state] without at all understanding the mouse [society]." (Migdal 1988: 15)

The Reformist Camp's Argument

The Reformist Camp argued that the Green Movement was basically a civil right movement that wanted to reform the current system and struggled for the rule of law. They agreed that the current constitution was not perfect and needed major reforms including removing the article 110 in favor of elected bodies of the government. Even for the Islamic factions of this camp, the constitution was “not the Holy Quran and could be amended according to the will of the people” (Kadivar: 2009). They argued that most articles of the constitution had been ignored by the regime. Most notably, they referred to “The rights of People” chapter in the law that granted the people the right to elect their representatives in free and fair elections without any restriction. “We should again and again point to the rights granted by the Iranian Constitution. Article 56 of our constitution includes the right of God that is given to all Iranian citizens. The citizens elect their leader, president, and parliament. The constitution is very clear on that” (Kadivar: 2009).

As to popular support for regime change project, as the Rejectionist Camp claimed, the Reformist Camp argued that the Iranian people wanted to reform the current system through their civil right struggle. They say the fact that the people carried signs in their rallies that read “where has my vote gone?” was a sign that they did not want to rebel against everything, but they did want justice including a free and fair election. Also, as one women’s right activist argued, the people wanted to reform the system not only through bottom-up political pressure, but also through “the engagement with the government and through the peaceful and lawful civil right activities” and the “movement for democracy must not be misunderstood as an off-shoot of Western liberal democratic projects” (Tahmasebi 2010: 3). In contrast to those who claimed that the Green Movement was basically a regime change movement, they reminded them that the Green Movement began well before protests broke out in June 2009. The origins were in the

election campaign to support the presidential bid of the reformist candidates Messr. Mousavi and Karoubi. The elections were not for a sudden and complete overthrow of the regime but for reform and the rule of law.

On the other hand and from a pragmatist point of view, the reformists argued that the rapid and highly violent uprooting of the norms, values, and practices of the preceding order in the name of a “secular and democratic revolution” to overthrow the Islamic regime would not establish democracy. Instead, democracy would be brought about by "a more modest sociological perspective on the politics of democratization grounded in everydayness rather than flamboyantly imagined philosophical visions of total change" (Mirsepassi 2010: 2).

In response to those who argued that Islamic nature of the regime had striped it from any ability to reform, Abdul Karim Surush, the intellectual father of post-Islamist, made a radical break with the revolutionary characterization of Islam as an ideology arguing that Islam as a world religion is “richer than ideology” because it allowed for a variety of interpretations. Surush also totally disregarded legalistic Islam through the Velayat-i-Faqih and drew heavily on the tradition of mysticism to establish the principle of religious pluralism (Surush: 1997). He argued that the whole shi`ite jurisprudence, which is the basis for Khomeini’s theory of Velayat-i-Faqih, was a historically contingent regimen. Also, Kadivar, a prominent Islamic reformist clergy and a professor at the Duke University, explicitly criticized Khomeini’ theory and rejected the legal arguments for the validity of official doctrine of theocratic government. Kadivar argued that Khomeini’s theory of Velayat-i-Faqih was rejected by most Islamic faqihs (Jurists) even traditional ones and only was one from among eight existing theories. He asserted that while in Islamic laws jurists had some authorities over special categories of persons such as the insane

and orphans, it was only politics that extended that authority over the people in general and incorporated it into Islamic Republic's constitution. (Kadivar 1998: 13, 102-103, 132).

Conclusion

In contrast to the Rejectionist Camp's argument, the fact that any revolution is an explosion of political mobilization, social participation, and the enlargement of the social base of new regime (Arjomand 2009: 112) will not necessarily result in greater political participation, when the power struggle is over. Revolutions more often bring to power new and narrower ruling elites which, in the absence of a strong civil society, tend to exclude the significant sectors of society and roll back democratic participation. Tocqueville rightly pointed to central paradoxical nature of the revolutions when he discussed the French Revolution. In his view, the revolution made the very absolutist state it intended to abolish all the stronger. Weber predicted the same paradoxical outcome for the Bolshevik revolution, and finally some scholars argued that the concentration of power and absolutism are the inevitable consequences of all revolutions in history (Skocpol, 1979; Jouvenel, 1949). In this sense, most revolutions will create only what a forceful foreign intervention can do: a rapid change of the ruling political class and writing a new constitution. But, overthrowing dictatorships and imposing a democracy by forceful intervention, similar to what the United States did in the Philippines and Korea after World War II and recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, do not work either. The so-called exported democracies, like most of revolutions and Nationalist movements of the 20th century, "plunged into dictatorship" and "had to wait for their domestic social movements to push for homegrown democratic rules" (Bayat 2007: 198-199). After all, revolutions, unlike social movements, succeed as the results and "consequences of downfall of political authority" (Arendt 1963: 116). They are not the

causes of downfall of regimes, as the Rejectionists Camp argued. The Islamic Republic regime, however, did not come to the point of “downfall of political authority”.

As to replace the current constitution with a fully democratic one, as the purpose of a rapid regime-change, it would not automatically create or guarantee a democratic regime and good governance either. What makes democracies different from dictatorships, or, to use Robert Putnam’s word, “what makes democracy work,” is the level of rule of law and the influence of civil society organizations rather than the existence of a good law. Putnam’s study of all Italian regional governments, with the same constitutions and systems of laws, indicates that good governance and democracy works only in those states with a certain level of civil society that guarantees the rule of law (Putnam: 1994). A brief investigation of most dictators and most revolutionary regimes shows that they have actually copied at least significant parts of the Western democratic constitutions into their own constitutions only to ignore it since they solidified their power.

Strong social movements for reform not only force authoritarian regimes to respect the law, but also make democratic interpretations of the existing laws possible. Thus, democratic interpretation of the law becomes even more crucial when it comes to a constitution such as the Islamic regime’s constitution which is a “mixed design incorporating theocratic, republican, and even direct democracy components” (Osanloo 2009: 4). For example, the Iranian constitution in articles 20 and 21 precisely emphasize that women and men are equal and rejects any sex discrimination. The NGOs and feminists groups in Iran have been continually elaborated on these parts of the law to push for materialization and execution of these granted rights in the constitution. In addition to drawing on the constitution, in many cases, they have successfully utilized Islamic discourse to push for equality and change within the constraints of the Islamic

republic. As a result, and as some recent studies have shown, the women rights in Iran have gradually but steadily shifted over time, both by legislation and by changes in the governmental and social institutions approach to the issue (Osanloo: 2009).

Also of great importance is another political characteristic of the Iranian political system. As it was mentioned in the introduction, in the “electoral authoritarian” political system of Iran general elections held every four years and the presence of a legitimate and relatively autonomous political opposition and an ever growing number of NGOs is tolerated. Some scholars have even argued that it is this “semi-democratic” aspect of such regimes that has contributed to their longevity (Case: 2001). In such systems, the various restrictions on political activities, civil society associations, and freedom of expression are implemented by producing of the new coercive laws through the Parliament legislation processes, despite the provision of constitutional democracy. Such political characteristics have made the importance and effects of a reform movement all the greater. Such particularity of state’s structuring of dissent through liberal openings and authoritarian closures, which greatly depends on the level of the existing social movement and the pressure from the bottom, offers an opportunity for social changes and political reforms and provides a window into the political stability of such systems and, at the same time, its possible demise. In many cases in Iran, particularly at the time of effective leadership, the reform movement has been able to make changes in distribution of social control among the many organizations in the society. On the one hand, they have been effective in making the rules about how people should behave and, on the other hand, they have organized the people in their daily life in order to make the state unable in achieving its aims at the social level and in ensuring intended changes in people’s social behavior.

In this regard, for Iranian reformists the pertinent question is not whether the constitution is fully democratic or not, but rather how and under what condition they can force the regime to respect the rule of law. Given all the constraints and the ability of regime to suppress, “an alternative view postulates that instead of costly and unsuccessful efforts for an uncertain revolution, with even more uncertainty of its outcome, change should be, and could be, caused by forcing state to undertaking meaningful institutional, structural and political reforms.” In regard to Islamic components of the law and the Islamic doctrine as a whole, for reformists the question is that “how they can legitimize and popularize an inclusive reading of their doctrine in the same way that democrats have been struggling to broaden narrow (white, male, propertied, and merely liberal) notions of democracy” (Bayat 2007: 187-188). As one reformist once put it, they can question all and every religious injunction if they do not lead people to justice. The post-Islamist feminist movement in Iran is a good example. Post-Islamist feminists in Iran are different from Islamists women activists, who are primarily Islamist but pursue women’s related issues through Islamist’s lens only because they are women. In contrast, “Post-Islamist feminists were feminists first and foremost, who utilized Islamic discourse to push for gender equality within the constraints of the Islamic republic” (Bayat 2009: 104). The major challenge to post-Islamist feminism was to show that the struggles for women’s rights were not necessarily alien the Iranian culture or Islam (Tohiedi: 2010).

As to the rule of law, which is the most important component of any democracy, the religiosity components of Iranian constitution would not necessarily prevent the rule of law. Some scholars have even argued that the references in the Iranian Constitution to God and religion as the sources of law are much less problematic. They could, under the right circumstances, be the basis for Iran’s eventual evolution into a moderate, law-governed country

(Fukuyama: 2010). Law scholars such as Noah Feldman have indeed argued that the demand for a return to Sharia in many Muslim countries does not necessarily mean Muslims want to impose “harsh Taliban-style regimes.” Rather, it reflects the desire for a dimly remembered historical time when Muslim rulers were not outright despots, but respected Islamic rulers who had to act in the framework the Islamic rule of law (Feldman: 2008).

Iran could evolve towards a genuine rule-of-law democracy within the broad framework of the 1979 constitution. Had the 1979 revolution leaders agreed on the radical political concessions made by the shah just before his removal from the power, Iran could have done that without a costly revolution which swept away everything. It would be necessary to abolish Article 110, which gives the Velayat -i-Faqih exceeding power and authority, and to resolve the Guardian Council and give its power of interpretation of the constitution to a democratically elected Supreme Court. Eliminating religion altogether from the Iranian Constitution will not bring the rule of law and democracy. The rule of law prevails not because of its formal and procedural qualities, but because it reflects broadly held social norms that makes it so compelling for every important segment of the society. Any political agenda which pushes for rapid changes far beyond those social norms will need a much greater and broader societal pressure to compel both the traditional political and social forces and the regime. That is far beyond the scoop and abilities of the current reform movement in Iran.

Perhaps in the future Iranian people will decide to change the whole law completely and establish an outright secular state. But it is not the goal for the current Green Movement, and it would not be done by a rapid, and more likely violent, regime change. Most of the established Western democracies have gone through a long period of practicing and exercising partially rule of law systems to the fully rule of law systems and, in some occasions, changing the law without

violent revolutions. Last but not least, and from a realistic and pragmatic point of view, it is not clear how the supporters of a wholesale regime change agenda want to achieve that goal when the reform movement has so far been unable to even impose the rule of existing law. The last attempt by advocates of a referendum to change the law completely, backed by most factions of oppositionist groups in exile, could mobilize only a small fraction of Iranian people in spite of wide range media support.

Regarding the Islamic elements and the former Islamists-turned- reformists, which is of great importance for advocates of a rapid regime change in their argument against reformist agenda, I argue, that the reform movement in Iran, which first appeared in 1997 with the election of a reformist president, is the result of the emergence of a new trend in the Muslim Middle East, in general, and in Iran as its birth place in particular that some scholars later called it “the post-Islamist” era (Byat: 2009). The new trend is unlike popular activism, classic leftists and nationalist movements during the post-colonial and the Cold War eras, and the post-Cold War Islamist movements, which all favored angry protests, mostly directed against the West and Israel, and less against their own dictator regimes. This trend is neither anti-West nor anti-Israel. It is a domestic-oriented movement. Just as the Islamist movements emerged on the ashes of Arab Nationalism, the post-Islamists emerged as alternatives to the Islamists after the failures of the Iranian regime and other Islamists in the region.

In the last decade of the Cold War, when it had become public and obvious that Arab Nationalism had delivered nothing but despot rulers, Islamist movements grew sharply. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan made these movements stronger. Since their emergence, although they have been unable to take the political power in the most of the cases, Islamic movements in general have influenced both the states and the societies on two different levels.

On the one hand, and in non-Islamic regimes such as Egypt under Hosni Mubarak, they penetrated deep into the society and culture and have forced the states to incorporate and embrace some of the Islamic concepts into their laws and policies. On the other hand, they have relatively transformed the society by contributing to an active citizenry environment and empowering the people to challenge the authority of their regimes through social organizations (Byat: 2007). For example, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt succeeded in making enormous changes through da`wa and other associational works such as women's groups, clinics, and publications. The emergence of the Islamist movements has had two folds. In several instances Islamist movements resulted in violent confrontations and terrorism and mass killings. On the other hand, a sharp change in the society's sensibilities, an increase in active citizenry, and, more important, a growing presence of people and civil society organizations, which are the preconditions for any meaningful and deep democratic reform, have been the result of these movements. In many cases from Malaysia to Egypt and from India to Lebanon and Morocco such movements have helped to make sense, in Islamic terms, of the social transition and modernity and to encourage men and women to participate actively in the society and democracy and other concepts of modernity into their religion (Peletz :2002; Deeb 2006).

Unlike in other countries with secular authoritarian regimes, under which Islamists could grow and become relatively popular, in Iran, ironically, the failure of the world's only formal theocracy to empower its people provided the biggest boost for new and progressive formulations and interpretations about the Islamic state, law, and the state society relation. The Iranian reform movements, as a whole, and the Green Movement, in particular, is the result of both Islamist movements unsuccessful efforts to reflect the new emerging political trend in the region, in the wake of new social media and new political and social development around the

globe, and the failures of Islamic regime. The Greens reflected the tensions of identity politics between the new post-Islamists, post-violent-revolutions generation, mostly youth and middle and working class, and the older generation who still “sticks to his gun” by emphasizing radical, forceful, and sudden changes. On the other hand, the new trend is against the ultra-secularists who have been arguing the only way out is to getting rid of any religiosity. As Bayat argues, “the movement is neither anti-Islamic nor anti-secular, but spearheaded by pious Muslims. Post Islamism attempts to undo Islamism as a political project by advocating a secular democratic state and a religious society” (Bayat 2009: 104). In this regard, and contrary to the argument that an Islamic tendency in the some parts of the reform movement undermined it or made any meaningful reform impossible, the current political impasse, as some scholars have argued, is less a function of religion than of old structural impediments (Bayat: 2007).

The June 2009 election crisis in Iran triggered dramatic political developments such as massive rallies protesting against the election fraud and an unprecedented pressure for the rule of law and free and fair election. The Green Movement, which emerged in the wake of the elections crisis, initially won the support of many Iranians, but by early 2010 that popular support began to fade and the massive rallies disappeared. Therefore, it is realistic to assert that the Green Movement has been in demise since 2010. In this article, I argued that the Green Movement was a “post-Islamists” struggle for the rule of law, and a democratic interpretation of the constitution. The Green Movement was not a revolutionary movement with a rapid regime change agenda. In this article, I argued and illustrated, on the one hand, how in the wake of the movement’s leadership organizational weakness and its inability to formulate an alternative set of propositions and to mobilize its supporters, a rapid regime change agenda, advocated by the exiled Iranian activists, emerged as the dominant discourse among the remaining protesters. Such

a discourse, and the strategy it projected into protest, served only to derail the massive popular protests for reform and turning it into the declining sporadic protests. On the other hand, in the article, I argued that the decline of the Iranian Green Movement reveals not only the false analysis of the rapid regime change supporters, but also showed how the flexibility of Islamic regime, its specific political structure, and the presence of the reform movement have made mobilization of people for a rapid, and more likely violent, regime change impossible.

I acknowledge that brutal crackdown on the protests has been, and still remains, an important factor in making the reform movement and its leaders inside the country unable to successfully mobilize their supporters, to organize their efforts, and to dispatching their messages to their followers. The brutal crackdown, however, cannot exclusively explain the failures and inabilities of the movement and should not be considered the cause of the current downturn. The Green Movement, however, has not been eliminated and the struggles for political reform and the rule of law and a peaceful transition into democracy will continue in Iran. Iran can evolve as a country of the rule of law and into an inclusive political system through the current social movement and the “post-Islamist” trend among the large segments of the society, particularly among the youth and women.

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