

**THE REFORM PERIOD IN IRAN: A STUDY ON THE REASONS OF
ELECTORAL FAILURES**

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the period under the first reformist president, Mohammad Khatami, in the Islamic Republic of Iran between 1997-2005. In the last two years of his presidency, the reformist faction began to lose in the local, parliamentary and the presidential elections. This thesis aims at finding the reasons behind this electoral failure by looking at the domestic and international developments took place in that period. Besides, the thesis provides a political history of the post-revolutionary Iran with a special focus on factional politics in terms of its influences on the course of reformist politics. It is concluded that the hierarchical state structure of Iran creates a power hierarchy between factions which resulted in the inability of the reformist faction in delivering its promises during the presidency of Khatami. Besides, the lack of a common strategy and organizational discipline, and the unsteady relationship between the reformist faction and its constituents contributed to the electoral failures of the reformists. Additionally, a short discussion on the prospects of reform in Iran based on the inferences from the Reform Period is presented in the thesis. It is pointed out that only if the core state elite would accept a power share with the reformist elite, the reformist faction can have an effective place in the state structure.

Keywords: Iranian Reform Movement, Factional Politics in Iran, Mohammad Khatami

ÖZ

İRAN’DA REFORM DÖNEMİ: SEÇİM BAŞARISIZLIKLARININ NEDENLERİ ÜZERİNE BİR ÇALIŞMA

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Bu tez İran’ın 1997-2005 arasında görev yapmış olan ilk reformist cumhurbaşkanı Muhammed Hatemi dönemini inceler. Başkanlığının son iki yılında reformist hizip yerel, parlementer ve başkanlık seçimlerinde kaybetmeye başlamıştır. Bu tez, bahsi geçen dönemde gerçekleşen ulusal ve uluslar arası düzeydeki gelişmelere bakarak bu seçim başarısızlıklarının ardındaki nedenleri bulmaya çalışır. Ayrıca bu tez, reformist siyasetin gidişatı üzerindeki etkisine odaklanarak devrim sonrası İran’daki hizip siyasetleri tarihini içerir. Devletin hiyerarşik yapısının hizipler arasında güç hiyerarşisine sebep olarak Khatami döneminde reformist hizbin vaatlerini yerine getirememesine sebep olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Ayrıca, ortak bir strateji ve örgütsel disiplin yokluğu, ve de reformist hiziple seçmenleri arasındaki değişken ilişki reformistlerin seçim başarısızlıklarını etkilemiştir. Ek olarak bu tezde, Reform Dönemi’nden yapılan çıkarımlara dayanarak İran’da reformun geleceği üzerine kısa bir tartışma yapılmaktadır. Sadece çekirdek devlet elitinin reformistlerle bir iktidar paylaşımını kabul etmesi durumunda reformist hizbin devlet yapısında kendine etkili bir yer edinebileceği vurgusu yapılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran Reform Hareketi, İran’da Hizip Siyaseti, Mohammad Khatami

To my mother

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1997, the first reformist president of the Islamic Republic of Iran was elected with almost 70% of the votes in an election with an 80% voter turnout. Both a cleric and a statesman, Mohammad Khatami came to power with great hopes of change in the existing status quo which guarantees the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader and the parties loyal to him over the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres of the country. The election of a reformist politician to the highest elected post of the state marked a milestone in the political history of Iran. The country had witnessed severe clashes among different elite groups in its relatively short history since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In this respect, Khatami's election was considered as a defeat of the conservative forces against the reformists who aimed at establishing the rule of law and strengthening the republican side of the regime. Yet, Khatami's election not only changed the course of politics in Iran, but it also showed the transforming social dynamics which were neglected by the elites until that time. From every angle, eight years under the presidency of Mohammad Khatami deserves deliberate analysis since it has an extremely decisive impact on the post-revolutionary Iranian politics.

Very similar to Khatami's election, Mahmood Ahmadinejad's election in 2005 has been a turning point both for the general course of Iranian politics as for the reformist faction. After an eight-year long presidency Khatami could not consolidate the place of reformist faction in the state politics. As a result, the faction lost its electoral support and paved the way of the election of a candidate with an almost opposite worldview in the presidential elections of 2005. In this thesis, I will try to understand the reasons of this electoral setback by looking at the policies of the reformist faction under Khatami administration.

In order to understand the process that resulted in the election of Khatami as well as the developments during his presidency, one should first look at the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and its effects on Iran since it fundamentally changed the dynamics of Iranian politics. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 has continuous effects on the Iranian context which makes it crucial to take into account while studying contemporary Iran. The Revolution is still one of the key points one has to look at while thinking about any phenomenon in the post-revolutionary Iran. Although it is impossible to summarize all of its impacts on Iranian politics with few words, for the purposes of this thesis, it suffices to note that post-revolutionary Iranian elite politics has its roots in the initial power struggles among the revolutionary groups.¹ It is widely stated that the Khomeinists of the early 1980's managed to dominate the state structure in a way that marginalizes the secular/Marxist left and the liberal nationalists.² However, further struggles of power have taken place within the Khomeinist block afterwards, which are commonly analyzed within the framework of factional politics. To put it clearly, post-revolutionary Iranian elite politics are the remnants of the initial struggle over state power within the revolutionary Islamists loyal to Ayatollah Khomeini. Therefore, it is crucial to put briefly that in order to understand the debates on Iranian reformism, one has to analyze the post-revolutionary period in deep.³

As opposed to the common arguments in the literature, Iranian reformism of 1990's has its roots in the transformations in the social dynamics of Iran as a result both of the Revolution itself and the implementations of the new regime. In the studies on the struggle for reform in Iran, it is elite politics that lie at the center of the analysis. No much attention is paid to the social factors. However, the election of Mohammad Khatami proved that both the Iranian elites and the scholars studying Iran should

¹ Bayat, Asef "A Wave for Life and Liberty: The Green Movement in Iran and Iran's Incomplete Revolution" in Hashemi, Nader and Danny Postel, eds. *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future*. New York: Melville House, 2010. p. 41.

² The reason why I chose to highlight the secular aspect of the left is that there are different leftist organizations which cannot be labeled as secular. This emphasis will be preserved throughout the thesis.

³ Buchta, Wilfried. *Who rules Iran? :The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*. Washington, DC : Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2000. p. 4-5.

consider “the social” more in their understandings of contemporary Iran. Thus, in this thesis, I will try to give balanced credit both to elite politics and the social dynamics in my analyses on the Khatami era and Iranian reformism in general.

Mohammad Khatami’s election victory can be considered to stem from two fundamental factors: the effects of the exclusionist political, economic and socio-cultural policies of the conservative state mentality and transformations in the social dynamics in the post-revolutionary Iran. The internal struggles of the Khomeinist block gave birth to different factions which are initially labeled as conservatives, moderates and the Islamic left. The authoritarian attitude of the conservative faction marginalized the other two factions from the state power, which resulted in a counter-struggle of those two elite groups to reclaim the state power. In the course of this struggle, the Islamic left has transformed into what was lately named the reformist faction. The revolutionary and leftist tone of the Islamic left has almost withered away at the end of 1980’s paving the way of a new faction which highlights the importance of the rule of law and republicanism in the state structure and reconciliation in the Foreign Policy. Mohammad Khatami became the symbol of this new political understanding which came to power with the presidential elections of May 1997.

Beyond the internal transformations in the elite politics, there were significant changes in the social sphere that generated new social forces. These forces voiced the same demands with the reformist camp. First of all, the exclusionist and authoritarian policies of the conservative faction did not only affect the other elite groups, but more importantly, it left no room for certain social segments to express themselves publicly. Both in the political and socio-cultural spheres, the domination of the conservative mindset marginalized any kind of social opposition regardless of its content and scope.⁴ The implementation of Islamic codes in the socio-cultural arena contradicted with a society that is highly integrated to a world in a constant change. Secondly, the concentration of economic power in the hands of conservative social sectors created an extreme economic imbalance in the society which was

⁴ Shaditalab, Jaleh. “Iranian Women: Rising Expectations”. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2005). pp. 45-48.

accompanied by a deteriorating economy due to the consequences of the Revolution, the 8-year war with Iraq and the economic isolation of the country on a global scale. Thus, the effects of the political and socio-economic alienation were multiplied with the effects of the inability to integrate to the economic sphere. Therefore, it is safe to argue that the supporters of the reformist faction came out of the social sectors which were affected by these exclusionist policies of the regime that were implemented through the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader and the theocratic institutions.

Among all, the support of the youth and the women are highly stressed in the electoral victory of Khatami in 1997. The socio-cultural and economic policies of the regime affected the youth and the women most in a way that marginalizes them from the public life due to the repressive implementation of Islamic socio-cultural codes. On the other side, the lack of realistic economic policies to decrease unemployment and of an understanding that promotes the integration of the youth and the women to the economy resulted in the marginalization of especially these two important social groups from the economy. Although, women and youth constituted a highly significant part of the reformist electorates, it would be misleading to attribute all of the victory to them as it is commonly done in the literature. Thus, the middle class, especially secular segment, the urban dwellers and the working class should also be kept in mind while analyzing the social support for reformism in Iran starting from 1990's.⁵ The demands of these social sectors and a rising discomfort among the society regarding the policies of the conservative state provided an appropriate ground for reformism. Instead of a top-to-bottom understanding on the emergence of Iranian reformism, a bottom-to-top perspective would serve more in grasping the electoral victory of reformism in 1997. Thus, it is relevant to argue that the overlap of the social incline towards reform and the emergence of the reformist faction resulted in Khatami's election with a great majority vis-à-vis the conservative candidate Nateq Nuri.

When Khatami was reelected in 2001, he gained the opportunity to rule for another four-year term. Moreover, the reformists gained the majority of the votes in the

⁵ Keddie, Nikkie R. *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003. p. 270.

legislative elections of 2000 which brought almost 65% of the parliamentary seats. Thus, between 1997 and 2005, the country has experienced a reformist era with holding the highest posts that could be attained via elections. However, even after a long period in state administration, the reformists could not achieve to preserve their public support which previously provided them with the necessary power against the conservative faction. Especially after 2003, the reformists began to lose their electoral superiority to the conservatives, which finally ended with the election of Mahmood Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections of 2005. The local elections of 2003, the legislative elections of 2004, and finally the presidential elections of 2005 were the signals of the fall of reformist politicians in the eyes of its constituents.

The aim of this thesis is to identify the reasons of why the reformist faction has lost its electoral support during the reform era between 1997 and 2005. In order to understand the reasons behind this setback, three factors will be analyzed in the thesis. First, as a commonly argued point, the state structure will be discussed in terms of its impacts on the organization and the functioning of politics. Although many of the studies on Iranian reformism highlight this factor, relying on one factor would be extremely misleading in understanding such a complex phenomenon. Additionally, internal aspects of reformism and the social dynamics would be missing in the analysis if one solely depends on a state-centric perspective. Thus, internal dynamics of the reformist faction will be examined as a second factor in terms of its influence on the electoral failure of the faction.⁶ Thirdly, the relationship between the reformist elite and its constituents will be studied in close to understand the factors that led to disunity between the faction and the electorates especially after 2003.

Based on the eight-year long period under Khatami's presidency, it can be argued that elections have played a central role in the reformist politics. However, it is apparent that elections were not sufficient in bringing about the political and socio-cultural reforms which both the reformist elite and its constituents have been demanding. Thus, it is necessary to question the central role of elections in the

⁶ Masroori, Cyrus. "The Conceptual Obstacles to Political Reform in Iran". *The Review of Politics*, vol. 69 (2007): 187-190.

reformist politics in order to discuss the prospects of reform in today's Iran. Both the experiences under Khatami's presidency and the Green Movement, the reformist social mobilization which occurred after the controversial presidential elections of 2009, serve as perfect cases to understand the possible place of electoral politics in Iranian reformism. Therefore, a brief discussion on the Green Movement and its place in the Iranian reformist politics will also be provided in the thesis.

In the light of the line of thought that is discussed above, in the first chapter, I will introduce a brief background of 1990's Iran by looking at the post-revolutionary politics before the election of Mohammad Khatami. After a brief introduction of the state structure that was established when Ayatollah Khomeini was the Supreme Leader, the initial power struggles among the elites of the new regime and the emergence of factionalism in 1980's in the IRI will be discussed with regards to its effects on the development of reformism. Furthermore, the impacts of the lack of party politics and the existence of factionalism will be examined since they contribute to political relations both within the elite and with the constituents. Moreover, the transformation of the Islamic Left into the reformist faction and the ideological aspects of this new elite group will be analyzed in this chapter with a special focus on the reasons behind the transformation.

In the second chapter, important developments of the reformist era will be discussed in terms of their influence on the loss of electoral support. From the very first days of Khatami's presidency, the reformists were faced with a political crisis which was mostly created by the conservative faction in order to suppress the reformist politics both on the state level and on the social level. The conservative pressure and the reactions of the reformist elite will be at the center of this chapter in order to see whether there were shortcomings of the reformists in using their legal authority in their struggle for reform. The conservatives used their state power against the reformists which turned each and every political event into a case of intense power struggle. The judiciary, the press, elections, foreign policy, social and moral codes and etc. all became grounds of political struggle between the reformists and the conservatives. Thus, judicial cases, elections in those 8 years, student protests, the

pressure on press and the effects of 9/11 on Iranian reformists will be covered throughout this chapter.

In the last chapter, I discussed the reasons of the electoral failure of the reformist faction in three categories: the impacts of the state structure, the impacts of the internal dynamics of the reformist faction and the impacts of the features of the relationship between the reformist faction and its constituents. The complex, yet, hierarchical structure of the state favors the conservative faction, which blocks almost all the legal ways of reform unless the conservatives promote it. The disorganized and ideologically inconsistent structure of the reformist faction leads to an unsteady and unreliable record for the faction, which creates inconsistencies in their actions. Lastly, the loose relationship between the faction and its electorates are so vulnerable that the constituents can easily pull back their electoral support in case of a disappointment with the policies of the faction. These briefly mentioned points will be discussed in detail in the third, and last, chapter.

Lastly, it is important to mention that I tried to structure the thesis based on the historical order of the events. Additionally, all the events are chosen in terms of their relevancy to the subject of the thesis and discussed with regard to their relationship with the intended topic. Keeping in mind that the international context is extremely important especially for a country like Iran, the focus of this thesis was kept on the domestic side since there is a need to understand the country based on its internal dynamics first. International events are only added if they will contribute to the better understanding of the discussion. In other words, I will try to structure my thesis basically on the domestic dynamics with necessary references to the international context. All in all, I will try to present a consistent analysis of the reformist era under Khatami's presidency in terms of its effects on the electoral failure of the reformist faction and to highlight the lessons to be taught from this experience for the future of reform in Iran.

CHAPTER II

THE EVOLUTION OF REFORMISM IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY IRAN

In the absence of political parties in Iran, factions act as major entities in party politics. Although there are several influential political organizations and fronts such as Jamee-ye Rohaneyat-e Mobarez (Society of Militant Clergy), Majma-ye Rohaniyun-e Mobarez (Militant Clerics Society), Jebheye Mosharekate Iran-e Eslami (Islamic Iran Participation Front) and E'telaf-e Abadgaran-e Iran-e Eslami (Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran), the politics in Iran is usually understood through factions. In order to understand elite politics in Iran, one has to understand the structure and dynamics of factionalism. Needless to say, these inner dynamics played a crucial role in the evolution of elite reformism. Additionally, the actions of reformist political elites and the course of reformism during the Khatami era are strictly related to the structure of factional politics and inner dynamics of the reformist faction. The historical evolution of factionalism is a fundamental phenomenon in understanding the reformist era between 1997 and 2005. Thus, in this chapter I will first try to show why Iran has factions instead of parties as central actors in the political sphere with the aim of understanding the effects of this phenomenon on politics. Then, a brief history of factionalism will be given in an attempt to identify some of the key dynamics that determined politics during the presidency of Khatami. Last but not least, the emergence of elite reformism in 1990's will be analyzed.

2.1. The Political Structure of the IRI

For the purposes of this thesis, it is vital to know the state structure that constitutes the political framework. Most of the political opportunities and constraints are determined by the complex structure of the state. This complexity arises from two phenomena. First, instead of destroying the old ones and establishing totally new institutions, the regime set up new institutions along with the old ones after the

revolution. Second, the new political elite tried to guarantee the supervision of vali-ye faqih over the state via a complex network of institutions. Thus, three sets of institutions have emerged among which power struggles have been experienced through factionalism: republican, theocratic and revolutionary.⁷ Although it may seem misleading to classify these institutions in this way, it is actually a necessity to decipher the place of each institution first within the whole structure, and second, in factional politics. Besides, differences in the features, functions and positions of these institutions create a necessity of categorization.

The first set of institutions is composed of the three branches of government which are inherited from the old regime. Although they were preserved in the IRI, their effectiveness is determined by their position in the institutional structure of the regime.⁸ I picked the word “republican” for this set since in the Iranian context, they mostly represent the power of the elected ones vis-à-vis the non-elected aspects of the state structure. In other words, in the course of factional politics in Iran in which a debate over whether the ultimate authority is held by the “vali” or the “people” is central, these institutions were highlighted for the sake of the latter by the critics of the regime.

Religious-supervisory bodies are the second set of groups which are directly subject to the supreme leader since these post-revolutionary institutions were designed in order for them to protect and to support the “velayat-e faqih” system. This set of institutions are either active in the decision-making process or act as advisory bodies to the supreme leader. Shora-ye Negahban-e Qanun-e Asasi (the Council of Guardians), Majles-e Khobregan (the Assembly of Experts) and Majmaye Tashkhis-e Maslahat-e Nezam (the Expediency Council) are among the religious supervisory bodies that are effective in the decision-making process.⁹ There are other bodies

⁷ Moslem, Mehdi. *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002, p. 31. The original grouping of Moslem is as such: modern, traditional and revolutionary. Based on the very same aspects of classification, I chose to name differently to make more relevant references to the basic elements of each set of institutions.

⁸ Ibid, p. 32.

⁹ Ibid, p. 33.

which are not constitutionally settled but act as an institutional extension of the supreme leader such as Namayandagan-e Rahbar (Office of Representatives of the Supreme Leader), Association of Friday Prayer Leaders and Dadgah-e Vizheh-e Rohaniyat (Special Court for the Clergy).¹⁰ Needless to say, the label “theocratic” was picked for this set of institutions since they are the most powerful means through which the theocratic aspects of the regime is protected.

The third set of institutions is founded or transformed into more effective bodies based on the semi-populist and semi-revolutionary ideology of the IRI after the revolution. These bonyads (religious foundations) such as Bonyad-e Mostazafan va Janbazan (Foundation for the Oppressed and Disabled), Bonyad-e Shahid (Foundation for the Martyrs) and Bonyad-e Astan-e Quds (Imam Reza Foundation) were established with an aim of backing up the revolutionary promises of the new elite with a claim of redistributing wealth on behalf of the mostazafan (the oppressed) and the families of the martyrs.¹¹ However, people who have strong ties to the central political elite and who are loyal to the regime ideology are appointed to these institutions which indirectly strengthened velayet-e faqih in the state structure.

2.1.1. The Impacts of the State Structure on Iranian Politics

Although there is a complex structure of institutions in the IRI, it does not lead to a balanced, thus, equally competitive relationship among them. As a constitutionally settled fact, the supreme leader is the head of the state and his authority is over the authorities of other posts of state. Whoever the supreme leader sides with has a better chance in the decision-making process than the other camps. This situation creates a hierarchy between the three sets of institutions. In other words, one cannot argue for a constitutionally and practically equal position for republican and theocratic aspects of the regime. According to Arang Kashavarzian, the state system in Iran creates a “fragmented authority” which “both generates interelite conflict and resist complete

¹⁰ Rakel, Eva Patricia. *Power, Islam and Political Elite in Iran: A Study on the Iranian Political Elite from Khomeini to Ahmadinejad*. Leiden and Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008, pp. 34-35.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 39.

regime breakdown”¹². However, it is important to stress that the system favors the conservative faction. For instance, the decisions of Majles-e Shora-ye Eslami (the Islamic Consultative Assembly) have to be ratified by the Council of Guardians as well as the presidential and parliamentary candidacies.¹³ Additionally, the advisory religious bodies are also act under the authority of the supreme leader and reinforce his sphere of influence in the society. The importance of the Association of Friday Prayers derives from its influence in the social mobilization processes. The Friday prayer imams (Emam-e Jom’eh) are very effective in the propagation of the official ideology of the regime and the circulation of the then stance of the supreme leader. As another religious body, the Special Court for Clergy, which is active since 1979, is responsible for the ideological subjection of the clergy to the “velayat-e faqih” system and to the “vali” himself. The Court immediately puts pressure on the dissidents within the clergy like it was seen in the cases of Mohsen Kadivar, Abdollah Nori and Hojjatoleslam Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari.

Besides, although the religious foundations were established with an aim of redistributing the wealth on behalf of “the oppressed”, they have mostly ruled by people from a certain factional affiliation and served as a significant center for economic and political power for that faction. These institutions have lost their ideological and revolutionary aspects and turned into centers of profit. They are not independent from the political elite; rather they have formal and/or informal relations with specifically the conservative faction. Plus, very much alike with the effects of Emam-e Jom’ehs, they have a very wide sphere of influence and mobilization capability through the importance of Friday prayers and preaches.¹⁴ Considering all the power that these foundations hold in the social and economic spheres, they also contribute to the conservative stance in the decision-making process. Thus, it is extremely hard for a faction other than the conservatives to have place in this

¹² Kashavarzian, Arang. “Contestation Without Democracy: Elite Fragmentation in Iran”, in Posusney, Marsha Pripstein and Michele Penner Angrist, eds. *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*. London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2005. p. 65.

¹³ Rakel, 2008, p. 34.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 39.

complex network of institutions. The claim for change in the existing system and further claims of state power can hardly find place in the state. These phenomena should necessarily be kept in mind while analyzing the reformist attempts of the Khatami era.

2.2. Factionalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran

After the revolution of 1979, Iranian politics has been shaped by different factions which are classified and defined in different ways by different scholars. Before discussing the classification which is used in this thesis, it is important to highlight one certain point. A brief overview of the literature reveals that the changing nature of the factions is highly neglected in the studies of Iranian politics. However, every aspect of a faction can change in time, from its basic principles to the people associated to it. The evolving nature of these factions necessitates a constant reconsideration of the definitions and perceptions of factions and factional politics for academics and researchers. The loose and unorganized structure of factionalism makes them vulnerable to the developments of the context. Thus, a faction which exists in 1980's can be in a totally different position in 1990's. Although it complicates the study, it is necessary to categorize the factions considering the aforementioned time period instead of a fixed classification. Keeping this point in mind, I will now discuss whether the factional categorization is actually relevant and necessary or not and then briefly introduce the factions that have been active in Iranian politics until 2005.

2.2.1. A Brief Discussion on Factionalism

The term factionalism is a widely used tool by social scientists who are interested in Iran. However, before using it in analyses on Iran, it is necessary to discuss its relevance to the Iranian case. The major criticism on factional classification is that concepts such as "conservative, radical, fundamentalist etc." are mostly Western-oriented and hardly able to reflect the Iranian context. If these concepts are defined and implemented totally in the same way with the way they are used in Western cases, the criticism inclines to be valid. However, universal concepts can and should be used for specific cases with some contextual clarifications and additions based on

the peculiarities of the case. In other words, a midway between the universal and local can and should be found through these concepts by combining the universal aspects of an issue with the peculiar characteristics of the case in hand. Otherwise, the study would either turn out to have a totally Western-centric perspective as the mentioned criticism anticipates, or lapse into orientalism by overtly highlighting the uniqueness of the case. Thus, in this thesis a combination of common English and Persian titles of the factions will be used as follows: Traditional right/Conservatives/Rast-e Sonnati, Modern Right/Rast-e Modern, Islamic Left/Chap-e Eslami, Reformists/Eslahtalaban.¹⁵

Secondly, it is argued that although the notion of factionalism is categorically useful, it leads to a fixated understanding of Iranian politics. This criticism would be valid if the study is written irrespective of the dynamic structure of factions and politics in Iran. It is vital to analyze Iranian politics taking factionalism into consideration for three reasons. First, although there is not a firm organizational structure such as party structure, it is apparent that there are certain groupings and alliances in the political sphere. These alignments around certain principles or interests etc. necessitate a categorization for a better understanding of Iranian politics. Secondly, the lack of a categorical understanding which is provided by the notion of factionalism in the Iranian case may lead to an individualized understanding of the already loose Iranian political structure. It is hard to reach a macro-level analysis with an individualized perspective which tends to conceal systemic effects. Thirdly, the loose nature of Iranian politics hinders the usage of any other categorization tool and fits best to the features of factional politics. The looseness, easily-changing nature, the lack of active political parties and temporal alliances around developments of the time can be easily grasped with the tools that the notion of factionalism provides. Therefore, factionalism is certainly helpful as a categorical means in understanding Iranian politics with keeping away from fixated and constant classifications and modifying our understandings of factions regarding the context. Otherwise, it may hide the dynamic structure of factionalism in Iran which is a key phenomenon without which a consistent perspective on Iranian politics cannot be generated.

¹⁵ Menashri, David. *Post-revolutionary politics in Iran: Religion, Society, and Power*. London: Frank Cass, 2001, p. 78.

2.2.2. Factions in Iranian Politics

In this section, I want to introduce the factions that will be mentioned throughout the thesis.¹⁶ Naming the factions has been a central problem in studies on Iranian politics, although categorizations do not differ as much. The problem in naming mainly arises from two points: the transformation of factions and the ideological perspective of the author/scholar. An evolved version of the older one or a totally new faction may arise from a transformation of a faction. In that case, the existing name may be inadequate to grasp the new situation of a faction. However, differences in the standpoints of scholars actually lead to major differences in naming in the literature. Although major differences in the explanations of the features of each faction do not exist, the naming may differ in various studies. In the following paragraphs, I will try to cover major features of factions very briefly with a discussion of the naming issue one by one with respect to each faction.

In 1980's, there were basically two factions: the conservatives and the Islamic left. The former is the most organized faction in the IRI, which was dominant in most of the key state institutions, especially the ones that are under control of the supreme leader. First, although it has strengthened especially after Khamane'i became the supreme leader, the conservative faction has been a firm advocate of the velayet-e faqih system and the absolute authority of the vali over the other state institutions and the country in general. Secondly, they support the strict implementation of Islamic rules in the socio-cultural sphere, which necessitates a heavy state control over the everyday socio-cultural life. Lastly, it is crucial to stress the alliance between the bazaaris and the conservative ulama, which leads conservatives to stand for an economy based on the bazaar system. Thus, any proposal that endangers the interests of the bazaaris faces with a harsh opposition from the conservatives. It is important to notice that the conservatives are the least changed faction in the IRI, which derives from the fact that they constitute the hegemonic power in the state with the support of Khamane'i and this situation rendered a change in their ideological position unnecessary.

¹⁶ Since the thesis covers the era until the end of Khatami's second term, active factions until 2005 will be discussed in this section.

Islamic left constitutes the second faction which was effective in the first decade of the regime. They were the most ideologically committed faction in the IRI with a strict loyalty to the ideological stance of the regime. They stressed the revolutionary aspect of the regime in a populist tone with a belief in a strong and redistributive state with the guidance of the vali-ye faqih in domestic politics and export of the Islamic revolution in external politics. Thus, the urban poor and the working class were the basic supporters of this faction in 1980's. They were dominant in the republican institutions of the regime such as the Majlis in 1980's. Moreover, they supported a less restrictive stance regarding the socio-cultural life, yet preserved a belief in a strict obedience to the vali-ye faqih. This faction has undergone a comprehensive transformation after 1990's as a result of certain internal and external developments and turned into the reformists of 1990's, which will be discussed in later paragraphs. This is why both of the labels are used in this text with respect to the time period which is being mentioned.

The debates in the first decade of the regime brought about a third faction into the political scene, namely, the modern right. They were differentiated predominantly by their economic principles. Whereas the conservatives supported a bazaar-based open economy without the intervention of the state, the Islamic left stood for a central and redistributive state in the sphere of economy. Yet, the modern right advocated a liberal open economy based on industrial development with the promotion of the state. Moreover, this perspective necessitates the integration to the international economy. The prominent figure of the modern right, Hashemi Rafsanjani, was considered as the initiator of neoliberalism to Iran due to his policies during his two terms of presidency between 1989 and 1997. In addition to that, the modern right is less strict than the conservatives in the socio-cultural sphere.

2.3. The Emergence of Factionalism instead of Party Politics

The need to control politics in the first ten years of the new regime is one of the most important reasons of why Iran does not have active political parties. As in the monarchical period, mosques and religious establishments were fundamental organizational places for clerics. Although the new political elite was fragmented within itself, they did not want to give up this superiority by encouraging party

politics that will result in the emergence of a political sphere with which they were not familiar much. Additionally, according to Khomeini and revolutionary clerics, the need of “a loyal mass” could only be fulfilled through traditional ways of organization.¹⁷ The constitution of IRI does not ban political parties; on the contrary, Article 26 of the constitution openly permits party formation as long as they are in line with Islamic norms and values. The article reads:

The formation of parties, societies, political or professional associations, as well as religious societies, whether Islamic or pertaining to one of the recognized religious minorities, is permitted provided they do not violate the principles of independence, freedom, national unity, the criteria of Islam, or the basis of the Islamic Republic.¹⁸

Due to post-revolutionary clashes between different components of the revolution and the opposition towards the clerical takeover of state power, Khomeini and the Islamic revolutionaries tried to create a political structure which will absolutely remain under their control. Their first step was to ban all the political parties in Iran except for the Islamic Republic Party¹⁹. Thus, the new Parties Law of September 1981 introduced obstacles to any kind of political organization by initiating the formation of a commission that will give legal permission to parties in order to be established.²⁰ The formation of the Commission of the Parties Law is based on the Article 10 which reads as follows: “In order to issue license for applicants and to supervise over activities of groups and discharge of duties set forth in this law, a commission is set up in the Ministry of the Interior”²¹. The commission is composed of three representatives of the State Public Prosecutor, High Judiciary, the Ministry of Interior; and two representatives elected by the Majles. Although, some organizations that are close to the conservative clerical establishment functioned for

¹⁷ Razavi, Reza. “The Road to Party Politics in Iran (1979–2009)”. *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 46, no. 1 (January 2010) p. 85-86.

¹⁸ “The Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran”, <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution-3.html> (accessed on 25.02.2013)

¹⁹ Razavi, 2010, p. 85

²⁰ Fairbanks, Stephen C. “Theocracy Versus Democracy: Iran Considers Political Parties”. *Middle East Journal*, 52:1 (1998:Winter) p. 20.

²¹ “Parties Law of IRI”, <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4c35e25a2.pdf> (accessed on 26.02.2013)

years without even getting a license, this law and the commission was mostly used in order to put pressure on reformist politics.²²

2.3.1. The Impacts of the Absence of Party Politics

While the core conservative establishment has tried to impede party politics, the party tradition in Iran itself does not provide a powerful framework for political activities and organization. The lack of a deep-rooted and independent party tradition in Iran has led to a rupture between parties and the electorate. Attitudes of the party elites have also contributed to this phenomenon.²³ Nevertheless, the absence of a more organized relationship between the electorate and the elites through political parties has brought about several consequences which are crucial in understanding the features of factional politics in the IRI.

First and foremost, the existence of factions instead of political parties affects the relationship between the electorate and the political elite. The loose structure of factions and the lack of a distinct political organization obstruct an enduring alignment of the electorate to the factions. First, whereas political parties have the capacity to build a more organic relationship with the electorate, the alignment of the electorate to the factions tends to remain on a more temporal level. Second, in relation to this situation, the unorganized structure of factions creates a ground for the personification of politics. In other words, if there is a lack of political parties or equivalent political organizations, the electorates may tend to vote by taking powerful figures of factions into consideration.

Compared to factions, the components of parties are forced to remain ideologically more compact and consistent through the party program and its other written documents. However, as a third aspect of factional politics, ideological transformations are more likely to occur in factional politics since there is not a binding program to provide a particular common ground. The unorganized and unstructured nature of factionalism in Iran renders rapid transformations in factions

²² Fairbanks, 1998, p. 22.

²³ Razavi, 2010, p. 88.

possible which was observed frequently in the 34-years history of the IRI. For instance, the anti-imperialists of 1980 have turned into the advocates of foreign policy softening towards the West in 1990's. Obviously, these transformations originates from various national and international factors, however, the contribution of the inner structure of factionalism should not be underestimated.

Fourthly, the possibility of ideological transformations may not necessarily be comprehended as a weakness since the absence of a rigid ideological stance allows the factions capture the political necessities of the day and adapt themselves based on these necessities. However, a change in political positions of political figures may turn into a lack of confidence in the eyes of the electorates. For instance, some of the intellectuals and politicians who were particularly associated with Khomeini and his revolutionary inner circle in the first years of the regime were considered with distrust by the public when they announced their alignment with the reformists.²⁴ The fifth point is that it becomes harder for a faction to stay firm and united on the factional level when they are faced with a predicament in the absence of a unifying political program to provide the tools for dealing with times of crisis.

All the mentioned dynamics of factional politics do not influence each faction in the same way. However, these are important factors to be kept in mind while analyzing the historical emergence of a faction in Iran. Although, it would be a mistake to consider these dynamics of factionalism as the only factor in politics in the IRI, the fundamental position of factionalism in the political framework should not be underestimated. Thus, the history of the rise of elite reformism and abilities of the reformist faction is closely associated with the inner structure of factional politics in Iran.²⁵

²⁴ Cohen, Jared. "Iran's Young Opposition: Youth in Post-Revolutionary Iran". *SAIS Review*, vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer-Fall 2006), p. 11.

²⁵ Kian-Thiebaut, Azadeh. "Political and Social Transformations in Post-Islamist Iran". *Middle East Report*, no. 212 (Fall 1999), p.15.

2.4. The Emergence of Factionalism in 1980's

After the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, Iran witnessed post-revolutionary power struggle among liberal-nationalists, Islamists and radical leftists such as Mojahedin-e Khalq. However, it was the Islamists who could succeed in settling their authority over other groups through capturing a central position in the newly emerging state structure. Radical leftist organizations did not hold positions in the state structure; rather, they were active among non-elite revolutionaries and their fundamental place for struggle was the street. Thus, mere coercive power was the basic tool that the clerics used against them.²⁶ However, liberal-nationalists were faced with more tactical means on a political and institutional level. The Khomeinist revolutionaries kept the institutions of the old regime, and established new and more powerful ones which they would dominate on their own. IRP was one of those institutions that brought all the Islamist revolutionaries together. Although, the tools that the Islamists used against the liberal-nationalists will be dealt with in detail in the following chapter, it is relevant to make an introduction here because of the central role of the IRP as an indicator of the clashes within the Islamist revolutionaries.

2.4.1. The Islamic Republic Party

Islamic Republic Party (Hezb-e Jomhuriye Eslami) was founded in mid-February 1979, just before the declaration of the Islamic Republic. Khomeini brought all his disciples together in the IRP in order to stay unified against the opponents of velayat-e faqih system and to avoid any cracks within the clerical block either. Key pro-Khomeini clerics such as Mohammad Beheshti, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Ali Khamenei, and Abdolkarim Mousavi-Ardabili were among the founders of the party. Besides, many important politicians such as the later reformist politician Mir-Hossein Musavi were very active in the party. Although Khomeini was not the formal leader of the organization, the party was regarded as the legitimate representative of the velayat-e faqih system and Khomeini himself. Thus, the party

²⁶Matin-Asgari, Afshin, "From Social Democracy to Social Democracy: the Twentieth-Century Odyssey of the Iranian Left", in Cronin, Stephani, ed. *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, pp. 46-48.

was very effective in the formation of ideological and institutional domination over non-Khomeinist revolutionaries.²⁷

The power struggle between different groups of revolutionaries kept the IRP united until the elimination of liberal-nationalists and radical leftists from the political system. The failures of Mehdi Bazargan and Abolhassan Bani-Sadr in their inability to preserve their posts in the state were decisive in the marginalization of the liberal-nationalists. However, it was heavy coercive power that was used against the radical left without any hesitation until they were unable to perform within Iran even in an illegal fashion. Manipulation towards the radical left was easier since they were not represented in the political system, which was a handicap in the power struggle.²⁸ Mojahedin Khalq (Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran) was the most active and organized one among these radical leftist revolutionary organizations which the new state dealt with through both ideological and coercive tools. In the first four years of the revolution, this ideological and coercive struggle against both the radical leftists and liberal-nationalists provided the Islamist revolutionaries an opportunity to pose themselves as the legitimate representatives of the revolution. Their ability to seize the state power and the leading position of Khomeini throughout the revolution were among the factors that enabled this ideological victory.

2.4.2. First Factional Splits and the Deepening of Factional Rivalries

Beyond the victory that the Islamists gained vis-à-vis other revolutionary actors, the first decade of the revolution had witnessed an internal dissociation within the Islamist revolutionaries. The first decade of the revolution has also been important in terms of its effects over the post-Khomeini elite politics. When the opposition toward the Islamic revolutionaries could be suppressed, new debates began among the pro-Khomeini Islamic political elite over how to build the new state and based on which pillars to do this.²⁹ This is the first time that apparent discrepancies emerged within

²⁷ Rakel, 20085, pp. 50-51.

²⁸ Arjomand, Said Amir. *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 24-25.

²⁹ Behrooz, Maziar. "Factionalism in Iran Under Khomeini". *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 27, no. 4 (October 1991), pp. 599-601.

the pro-Khomeini forces during the post-revolutionary period. Six years between the abolition of legal parties except for the IRP and the closure of the party in 1987, the IRP has been one of the centers that provided a ground for these debates which led to the emergence of factionalism in later years.³⁰

Especially after the elimination of the opponents of *valeyat-e faqih* from the Majles after the 1984 parliamentary elections; the economic, political and socio-cultural orientations of the new state have been widely debated in the political scene.³¹ A class perspective is helpful in understanding the positions of different elite groups vis-à-vis these questions. The positions of the political elite groups were influenced by the interests of the social class with which they are aligned. Although, they were both firm advocates of *valeyat-e faqih* until the death of Khomeini, they showed different stances in many other important issues. Traditional conservatives, which were traditionally educated in the Qom seminary, have had a historical alliance with the bazaaris and traditional bourgeoisie. They were in favor of a neoliberal economy, a sharia-based and highly-Islamic socio-cultural sphere, and a non-revolutionary foreign policy.³²

The radical branch of the Islamist elite was more loyal to the revolutionary principles. Their alignment with the poor that backed the revolution has contributed to their commitment to state-centric egalitarian revolutionary sentiments. They were supporters of a comprehensive land reform, an economy in which state acts as the protector of the lower classes and a more aggressive and ideological foreign policy. The reformists of the 1990's such as Mir Hossein Musavi, Behzat Nabavi, and Mohammad Khatami were mostly aligned to this faction in the first decade of the revolution.³³

³⁰ Rakel, 2008, pp. 51.

³¹ Moslem, 2002, p. 47.

³² Ibid. pp. 47-50.

³³ Behrooz, 1991, p. 599.

The first fundamental topic that led to ideological differences within the clerics derives from their understanding on how to interpret the Islamic code. This debate has been integral to the political disputes since the first day of the revolution. Each group had legitimized their political, economic and socio-cultural ideas based on these perspectives referring to theological debates within Islam. The conservatives have supported an absolute implementation of the traditional fiqh (fiqh-e sonnati) without any room for contemporary interpretation. Whereas the radicals of 1980's and later reformists have advocated a dynamic understanding of the fiqh (fiqh-e puya) in line with the necessities of the contemporary context without changing fundamental principles. Interestingly, each side could find arguments within Islamic theology to support their own positions.³⁴ For instance, the conservatives argued that Islam praises private property, thus, redistributive policies of state such as land reform and state intervention into the economy are fundamentally unacceptable. However, the radicals highlighted the emphasis on social justice in Islam while supporting the very same land reform and state-interventionist policies.

Ten years under the rule of Khomeini was a decade of political struggles for Iran. While there was a severe war with Iraq that contributed to the revolutionary position of the new regime both in the international arena, and in the internal arena, the Islamist political elite was busy with internal debates which are basically related to the economic orientation of the state. These debates had finally resulted in a new institutionalization phase for the radical faction which could not find a place for itself in predominantly conservative organizations. There were a number of developments that paved the way for the deepening of factionalism in Iran. One of those developments was the closure of the IRP. Although Khomeini aimed at unifying all the Islamist revolutionaries through the IRP, the party has failed in realizing this function, and was finally closed in June 1987.³⁵

Together with the IRP, the Society of Combatant Clergy (Jame'e-ye Rowhaniyat-e Mobarez) has been one of the most powerful clerical organizations since its

³⁴ Mahdavi, Mojtaba. "Post-Islamist Trends in Postrevolutionary Iran". *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2011), pp. 95-99.

³⁵ Razavi, 2010, p. 85.

foundation in 1977. The Society was very effective in the institutionalization process of the IRI. Very much alike the IRP, it included both the radicals and conservatives in the first decade. However, the debates within the political elite had led to the split of some radical clerics from the Society. After a long period of disputes, prominent radical clerics such as Ali Akbar Mohtashami, Mohammad Mousavi Khoeinihnia, Mohammad Khatami, Mehdi Karroubi and Mohammad Tavassoli split from the Society and established the Majma-ye Rohaniyun-e Mobarez (the Association of Militant Clergy). In 1990's, Rohaniyun became one of the most influential reformist organizations and had a distinctive position in factional politics.³⁶

The second critical development affecting the deepening of factional politics has occurred after the necessity to determine the successor to Khomeini. With the recommendation of Khomeini himself, Assembly of Experts started to look for the successor of the then vali-ye faqih. In 1985, Khomeini suggested one of the prominent revolutionary clerics as his successor. Hussein Ali Montazeri had been very influential during the first years of the revolution in the institutionalization process. He was one of the authors' of the re-written draft of the constitution in which the Islamic aspect of the new regime was highly stressed. However, he could be thought of as an Islamic leftist cleric who has stood for a both democratic and Islamic Iran since the first day of the revolution, yet he was a respectful cleric even in the eyes of Khomeini because of his central position in revolutionary politics since 1960's. Although he was against the notion of export of revolution like the traditional clergy, his later statements based on the need for a less repressive regime that challenged the absolute authority of the clergy led to Khomeini's reconsideration of him as the next supreme leader of Iran. Montazeri harshly criticized the way the regime dealt with the opposition members, especially regarding the executions of 1988 and 1989. Finally, in March 1989 he was dismissed by Khomeini with a more extensive defamatory campaign. Although his title of Grand Ayatollah had withdrawn at that time, Montazeri has continued to be known as Grand Ayatollah due to his central role in the reformist politics afterwards. The dismissal of Montazeri

³⁶ Kazemi, Farhad. "Civil Society and Iranian Politics", in Norton, Augustus Richard Norton, eds. *Civil Society in the Middle East*. Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1996, pp. 135-140.

created a shock for the Islamic leftist which was a situation that deepened the split between the factions.³⁷

During the first decade of the new regime, Khomeini's stance vis-à-vis the disputes within the elites has been exclusively important. Although Khomeini has tried to create a balance between the two competing factions within the clergy, it is argued that he implicitly protected the Islamic leftist faction.³⁸ However, in the last couple of years before his death, he signaled his thoughts about what kind of an understanding should rule after him. Thus, the Montazeri incident was one of the indicators that Khomeini had excluded those perspectives which stood for a freer political atmosphere or for a more participatory political system.

2.5. The Structural Factors behind the Transformation of the Islamic Left

During the first decade of the revolution, the reformists of 1990's were what called the "Islamic left". They have emphasized the redistributive, expansionist and militarist pillars of the initial form of revolutionary ideology. They had a close relationship with the Revolutionary Guards and the militia; and tried to keep the popular support alive based on militarist sentiments through the war with Iraq. The transformation of this highly committed radical faction into a more moderate group toward revolutionary ideals is worth to study for the purposes of this thesis in order to grasp the nature and dynamics of this group.³⁹

In the second half of 1980's and in the first half of the 1990's there were few national and international developments that led to a transformation in the political stances of the reformists. Although it is hard to see a consistent and all-encompassing change within the Islamic left, it is stated that there is an apparent fall in Islamic radical revolutionary politics right from the beginning of 1990's. A few developments have resulted in implicit self-criticisms within the Islamic leftist faction which later turned

³⁷ Mashayekhi, Mehrdad. "The Revival of the Student Movement in Post-Revolutionary Iran". *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 15, no. 2 (Winter 2001), p. 293.

³⁸ Moslem, 2002, pp. 70-73.

³⁹ Rakel, 2008, pp. 50-52.

into elite reformism in the second half of 1990's. In the following paragraphs, major national and international factors contributing to this transformation will be analyzed.

The first development that affected the transformation of the Islamic left was the end of the war with Iraq. The Islamic left of 1980's was very much intertwined with the radical revolutionary ideology through the eight-year war with Iraq. The war had served as the major factor to preserve and regenerate the revolutionary ideology of the regime. The opposition to the clerical establishment has been marginalized due to the war. Besides, major transformations that the regime proposed could be postponed without resulting in any apparent resentment due to the urgent requirements of the warfare. Nevertheless, what was important in terms of factional politics is that all the ideological pillars of the Islamic left had been continuously rejuvenated by the reinforcement of revolutionary ideology through war.⁴⁰ Key pillars of the Islamic left such as the export of revolution, the internal and external preservation of the regime through military means and the vanguard role of Iran in the "war" for the mostazafeen were interrelated with the mainstream ideology in the first decade of the regime. Besides, this interrelatedness was not solely on the ideological level. The Islamic left provided manpower both to the war and to the basijis that were active in the terrorization of everyday life, in turn; their position within the elite in general and in the administrative posts had been strengthening.⁴¹

Eight-year war with Iraq came to an end in August 1988 when Iran accepted the UN Security Council Resolution 598 which was actually adopted on 20 July 1987. With the end of the war, an alteration in the ideological tone of the regime has occurred in the IRI. Needless to say, the military requirements have also declined in terms of manpower. The major source of legitimacy both for the revolutionary ideology and the military acquisition of men were lost with the end of the war. In the following years, the destructive outcomes of the war became to be observed especially in the economic and social spheres of the society. This resulted in a criticism of the war ideology and the insistence on the war by the regime which in turn created a decline

⁴⁰Razavi, 2010, pp. 85-86.

⁴¹ Golkar, Saeid. "Politics of Piety: The Basij and Moral Control of Iranian Society". *Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, vol. 2 (2011), pp. 208-210.

in the credibility of the mainstream militaristic and radical discourse. Additionally, legitimacy of the discourse of the Islamic left has begun to be questioned as a result of the general criticism toward the radical assertive ideals of the regime at that time.⁴²

As the foremost advocate of the war and the basic militaristic and revolutionary pillars of the IRI, the Islamic left faced with a similar decline in their popular support and a change in their central position within the political elite. Briefly, first, the withering away of the radical tone of the regime, then disappearance of the major source of legitimacy of the key pillars of the Islamic left are the two prominent and interrelated reflections of the end of war onto the transformation process of the Islamic leftist faction.

The second development was related to the death of Khomeini and its impacts on the factional politics. The role of Khomeini in factional politics during 1980's was very crucial in terms of the shaping of factionalism both during his rule and after his death. Each of the factions was strict supporters of *valeyat-e faqih* during Khomeini's rule. The position of Khomeini vis-à-vis different clerical groups was defined as "dual containment" by Mehdi Moslem⁴³. He tried not to favor any of the factions at the expense of the other. He tried to pose the factional disputes as pluralism within the Islamic regime instead of major discrepancies within the revolutionary political elite.

Although Khomeini tried to balance the discrepancies within his disciples, it is argued that he revealed his support for the Islamic leftists in the last couple of years of his life. His decree which was published on 8 January 1988, he stated that the state holds the right of even destroying a mosque if it is needed in terms of the interests of the regime. This decree is interpreted as his apparent support for the republican aspect of the regime instead of the revolutionary and religious dimensions. Since the

⁴² Mashayekhi, 2001, p. 293.

⁴³ Moslem, 2002, p. 72.

Islamic left primarily found itself a place in the republican aspect of the regime, this decree could be read as an indirect support for the Islamic left either.⁴⁴

Another development favoring the republican aspect of the regime, thus the Islamic leftists, was the foundation of the Expediency Council which was dominated by the leftists in February 1988 in order to solve the disputes between the Majles and the Guardian Council. Thus, the Guardian Council was no longer the ultimate decision-maker in disputes with the Majles. In addition to that, another important step of Khomeini putting forward the leftists was his statement before the 3rd parliamentary elections of 1988 in which the leftists took the majority of the votes, reading: “vote for the candidates who work for the bare-footed and not these adhering to capitalist Islam”⁴⁵. Thus, it is not wrong to argue that the leftists were gaining importance in the elected bodies of the regime with the effect of Khomeini’s support, although they lost their positions within these bodies in the first half of 1990’s.⁴⁶

The strengthening of the position of the leftists did not last so long when Khomeini passed away and Khamane’i replaced him. Khamane’i was chosen the new supreme leader a day after Khomeini had passed away. Khamane’i who was a Hojatoleslam, a middle ranking title in the clerical hierarchy, at that time could be elected with the amendments in the constitution which removed the necessity of the Supreme Leader to be a marja-e taqlid. On 4 June 1989, the previous president of the IRI, Hojatoleslam Ali Khamane’i, was elected as the new Supreme Leader of the IRI with the support he took from the traditional conservatives. The Islamic left has lost its paramount support after this election.⁴⁷

In the July 1989 amendments in the constitution, the post of prime ministry was eliminated, and instead, the authority of presidency was strengthened by the transfer of most of the responsibilities of the post of prime minister to the president. Although

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 70-73.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 74.

⁴⁶ Gheissari, Ali and Vali Nasr. *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 109.

⁴⁷ Menashri, 2001, p. 17.

the presidential post was not held by the Islamic left, Mir Hossein Mousavi who was considered to be one of the Islamic leftists had been the prime minister for eight years. With the abolition of prime ministry and the election of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani who was aligned with the traditional conservatives at that time as the new president, the Islamic left was largely marginalized from the significant administrative posts of the IRI except for the Expediency Council and the Majles which they were to lose in the next year.⁴⁸

Together with these two domestic developments, a third development in the international sphere changed the course of international politics in the end of 1980's. Besides its devastating impacts on all around the world, the collapse of the Soviet Union had affected Islamic left of Iran in a specific way.⁴⁹ The greatest socialist experience of all time had come to an end after around seven decades of struggle after the collapse of the bi-polar international system. In addition to its practical supports to leftists all around the world, The Soviet Union was the major source of legitimacy for leftism throughout the 20th century. Thus, the collapse of the Soviet Union was identified with the end of the era of grand ideologies and state-based economies which entail a total restructuring of state systems favoring the lower levels of societies based on macro-level analyses. In general terms, it is not wrong to argue that it is mostly claimed that the era of social ideals targeting the whole society with an aim of fundamental transformation had come to an end. This analysis had primarily referred to the state ideology of the Soviet Union from which the Islamic left of Iran was ideologically nourished. Iranian Islamic left had preserved its radical revolutionism through 1980's; however, the questioning of grand leftist ideologies had shaken their legitimacy grounds either.⁵⁰

Considering all the other mentioned factors that weakened the Iranian Islamic left, it is apparent that the beginning of 1990's was a period of self-consideration and

⁴⁸ Abrahamian, Ervand. *A History of Modern Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 183.

⁴⁹ Keddie, 2003, p. 266.

⁵⁰ Tazmini, Goncheh. *Khatami's Iran: The Islamic Republic and the Turbulent Path to Reform*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009, p. 132.

vacillation that turned into ideological and practical transformations in the second half of the decade. Revolutionary Islamic left had lost its sources of legitimacy in three years basically during the developments between 1988 and 1991. At the outset of the decade, the radicalism of Islamic leftists was no longer a socially appealing political strategy which is a fact that was proven by the electoral setbacks up until 1996. The electoral failures of 1990's were the indicators of the need for a transformation in the fundamental aspects of the Islamic left.

Apart from the domestic and international developments of 1980's, the course of factional politics in the beginning of 1990's has also influenced the Islamic left. The factional alliance against the Islamic left and the course of this alliance constituted the fourth factor behind the transformation radical of the faction. The alliance of the traditional conservatives and modern right which was pioneered by Rafsanjani created one of the major obstacles to the Islamic left in the institutional arena in the first half of 1990's. For instance, a new arrangement in the Election Law was adopted in December 1991 which necessitated the approval of electoral candidates from both the Ministry of Interior and the Guardian Council. The conservatives were very effective in the counter-propaganda against the already-weakened leftists. Additionally, the disqualification tool was actively used against the leftists in the elections. For instance, in the parliamentary elections of 1992, almost one third of the leftist candidates were disqualified by the Guardian Council.⁵¹ In the end, the conservative block which was directed by the Rohaniyat won more than half of the seats. The Islamic left had lost its majority in the Majles that it obtained in the elections of 1988. Furthermore, the only effective institutional power that the Islamic left retained was delivered to the conservatives with this election. After this failure, the Islamic left leaned toward a reconsideration of their political and ideological radicalism.⁵²

⁵¹ Tezcür, Güneş Murat. Intra-Elite Struggles in Iranian Elections, in Lust-Okar, Ellen and Saloua Zerhouni, eds. *Political Participation in the Middle East*. London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2008, p. 62.

⁵² Ehteshami, Anoushirevan and Mahjoob Zweiri. *Iran and the Rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran's Silent Revolution*. London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007, p. 9

The alliance of the traditional conservatives and modern right had continued in the presidential elections of 1993. Although there was a collision regarding the economic policies of Rafsanjani, the traditional conservatives backed him in this election in order not to give the leftists a chance of revitalization. Additionally, there was not a valid alternative to Rafsanjani in terms of competency and authority in a politically and economically fluctuating period. With the lack of a powerful competitor, Rafsanjani was elected as president for a second term, yet with a relatively low turnout.⁵³ In the first presidential term of Rafsanjani, he tried to incorporate the leftists to the cabinet to some degree. For instance, left-leaning figures such as Mohammad Khatami and Abdollah Nouri were given important ministry posts in this period. However, in his second term, conservatives were more effective in the formation of cabinet through the majority they held in the Majles. Thus, Rafsanjani formed a cabinet dominated by the conservatives with the heavy pressure from the conservatives who used the vote of confidence against the leftists for instance the proposed minister of economy and finance, Mohsen Nourbaksh.⁵⁴

Like the emergence of the alliance between the conservatives and the modern right, the collapse of it also effected the transformation of the Islamic left in terms of a political room that has opened for the faction to maneuver. The relationship between the traditional conservatives and the modern right was not free from problems. The major point of dispute was the economic policies of president Rafsanjani. The revolution and the eight-year war after that had brought about serious economic problems which affected the everyday life in a significant manner. Rafsanjani, with the technocrat ministers in his cabinet, tried to establish a semi-open economy in order to solve these economic problems. However, his policies have favored a mercantile type of economy in which traditional economic networks could not function well. In addition to that, the role of the state was highlighted as a promoter in the economic perspective of the modern right. However, this mixed economic program of the modern right was opposed by the conservatives due to the changes it projects in the class composition of Iran. Roughly speaking, the traditional

⁵³ Moslem, 2002, p. 202.

⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 204-205.

conservatives insisted on an economic program that preserved the central position of the bazaaris in the economy. Thus, any attempt of the Rafsanjani administration to liberalize the economy in favor of new industrial economic classes was faced with harsh criticism from the traditional conservatives.⁵⁵ There were long discussions on economic programs and budgets in the Majles especially in the first half of 1990's due to this disagreement in the economic sphere. For instance, an agreement on the budget could not be reached in the 1994-1995 financial year which left the country without an approved budget planning for a year.⁵⁶

Disagreements between the two right factions necessitated another form of organization for the modern right to separate from the traditional conservatives. Existing political organizations were primarily dominated by the traditional conservatives, thus, did not provide an adequate ground for the politics of modern right. Thus, when the disunity between the two right factions became inextricable, the final split had occurred before the parliamentary elections of 1996. Kargozaran-e Sazendegi was founded to run in the fifth parliamentary elections as a result of this organizational deficiency by the key figures of modern right close to Rafsanjani such as Gholamhossein Karbaschi.⁵⁷ Kargozaran became a key organization in the parliamentary politics of the IRI throughout the 1990's. The split of the modern right from the traditional right and the formation of the Kargozaran are important developments for the Islamic left since they provided the Islamic left with the first opportunities of reintegration to high politics in 1990's.

The parliamentary election of 1996 is an extremely significant indicator of the transformation of the Islamic left from a radical standpoint to a reformist one. The political debates of the time can be considered as the reflections of the self-criticism of the Islamic left on the political arena. Those debates were primarily derived from the developments within the Islamic left. The absolute authority of the vali-ye faqih was first questioned in the course of 5th parliamentary elections. The concept of rule

⁵⁵ Rakel, 2008, pp. 81-84.

⁵⁶ Moslem, 2002, p. 201.

⁵⁷ Rajaei, Farhang, "A Thermidor of 'Islamic Yuppies'? Conflict and Compromise in Iran's Politics", *Middle East Journal*, vol. 53, issue 2 (Spring 1999), p. 219.

of law and the issue of socio-economic freedom were first debated in this period. Moreover, the disagreement between the modern right and the Islamic left was eliminated since the Islamic left has softened its tone in many politico-economic and social issues and no longer could be termed as “Islamic left” starting from mid-1990’s. Although the traditional conservatives gathered 45% of the votes in the election, the new alliance of the modern right and the reformists has also gained a significant victory with roughly 30% of the total votes.⁵⁸

To sum up, four important developments in 1980’s and early 1990’s forced the Islamic Left to transform itself. Those four developments were: the end of the Iraq War, the death of Khomeini, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the alliance between the conservatives and the modern right against the Islamic Left in the beginning of 1990’s. These developments revealed the inability of the Islamic Left of surviving in the faction. Beyond acknowledging the need for change, there were certain factors that resulted in a transformation in the ideological orientation of the Islamic Left. What is important here to analyze is that the way certain social dynamics influenced the ideological transformation of the Islamic left. In the following paragraphs I will try to discuss the bases of this transformation apart from the four already-mentioned factors.

2.6. The Bases of Ideological Transformation of the Islamic Left

Apart from the four dynamics that were already mentioned, there are peculiar factors that led not only to an organizational transformation, but also an ideological one. The transformation in their standpoints had brought electoral victory to the reformists in the second half of the 1990’s. Thus, factors of ideological change are specifically important for the purposes of this thesis. First of all, when the Islamic left had lost its position in the important institutions of the regime, it was marginalized from the mainstream regime ideology as well. The main settlers and holders of the regime ideology were considered to be the conservatives. The Islamic left had to reclaim its share on the regime ideology, if it wanted to pursue its claim on the state power.

⁵⁸ Menashri, 2001, pp. 70-73.

There were two directions for the Islamic left in the beginning of 1990's for their claim for the state power to be continued. Since if they had remained as the "Islamic left" of 1980's without any ideological or practical change, there would be no chance for them to reclaim state power in the new conjuncture of 1990's. The first option was to move to a more conservative line, however, this option was less likely to bring a political advantage to the Islamic left since they would directly come under the sphere of influence of the conservative faction in which they could not preserve a separate political line. Secondly, the marginalization of the Islamic left from the state power would result in an ideologically oppositional stance towards the holders of the central authority. Together with other factors which will be discussed in succeeding paragraphs, this direction is the most explanatory one for the course of the Islamic left in the first half of 1990's.

Even if it inalterably changed in the 21st century, the working class and the slum dwellers in general have constituted a very significant place in the electoral base of the Islamic left since the beginning of the revolution. First and foremost, the militia was mostly established by the supports of the Islamic left in 1980's through which a strong link between the Islamic left and the slums was formed. Moreover, the Islamic left represented the leftist egalitarian aspect of the Islamist revolutionaries. Thus, by reflecting the expectations of social and economic redistribution of the lower classes, they could incorporate these classes into the Islamist revolutionary movement. Although, the relationship between the poor and the Islamic left relied on various dynamics, the ideological references to the needs of the poor were fundamentally important for the Islamic left. This alignment provided the faction with a basic ideological framework by which it reacted to the developments of the first half of the 1990's. However, a change in the discourse of the Islamic left altered this relationship either. The electoral base of the Islamic left has changed; furthermore, the faction could no longer be called "the Islamic left" since the mid-1990's.

First, the social and economic developments of the first decade of the revolution have a vital effect on the transformation of the Islamic left. These developments, which can be classified as political, economic and social, doubled the uneasiness within the society, especially the middle class which could not get its social and

political demands from the revolution either. The revolution itself brought about these crises, however, the lack of a certain roadmap for the post-revolutionary period, and the clash between different elite groups resulted in a gridlock in the normalization process. In order to understand the political course of conducts in 1990's, one should look at the crisis points within the society.

As Nomani and Behdad argue, the post-revolutionary state inherited a badly administered economy through 1970's oil crisis which was furthered by the structural crisis that the revolution itself leads to⁵⁹. The eight-year war with Iraq had further devastated the economy in 1980's. High inflation, food shortages, a high rate of unemployment became permanent aspects of the Iranian economy. Because of the vital importance of an economic recovery for the middle and lower classes, economic projects of each faction became a central point of rivalry.⁶⁰ When he was elected in 1989, Rafsanjani envisaged an open yet a semi-regulated economy with an aim of reintegrating to the international economy.⁶¹ However, the pragmatist faction was unable to fulfill its own economic prospects and the demands of the middle class and the poor, criticized by the Islamic left and irritated the bazaaris and the conservatives with its indifferent attitude towards the interests of the traditional middle class⁶². Rafsanjani could succeed in initiating a free economy in which state keeps its guardian role; however, the monopoly of the bazaaris could not be broken. The lack of an economic roadmap which could equally incorporate other classes to the economy was one of the major problems in the 1990's. Yet, it is argued that it was the problems of socio-cultural and political spheres which led both to the transformation of the Islamic left and the election of Khatami in the presidential elections of 1997. However, the need of a deliberate economic plan that could incorporate economically marginalized groups is the first factor that created the need of an ideological change for the elites in general and for the Islamic Left specific.

⁵⁹ Nomani, Farhad and Sohrab Behdad, *Class and Labor in Iran: Did the Revolution Matter*, (New York, Syracuse University Press, 2006), p.4-5

⁶⁰ Menashri, 2001, p. 105.

⁶¹ Ansari, Ali M., *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change*, (London: Chatham House, 2006), pp. 52-54.

⁶² Rakel, 2008, pp. 80-87.

The second factor that shaped the ideology of the elite reformism in 1990's was related to the most politically active sectors of the society in that decade. It is widely stressed while explaining the social mobilization of 1990's that with the founding ideology of the regime and the commitment of the Supreme Leader and especially the conservative faction to its basic principles, strict Islamic rules were followed in the everyday social life which was a situation that affected mostly the women and youth. It is argued that these strict socio-cultural codes politicized women and youth which resulted in rising demands for socio-cultural freedom.⁶³ With regard to the women movement in 1990's, Behdad and Nomani states that: "the quick and quite demise of the Islamization project in the post-Khomeini era, punctuated by the state's turn-around from its populist-utopian objectives, opened the political arena for women to express their indignations toward the repressive, segregationist policies of the Islamic state"⁶⁴. Women's movement and their expectations have been very effective in the political life of the IRI. The degradation of women was firmly highlighted by the economic, social and political practices of the regime.⁶⁵ For instance, although literacy rates and educational status of women were bettered in the IRI, they are still faced with a harsh segmentation in the labor sector. Moreover, the insistent harassment of the state over the women body in everyday life politicized women.⁶⁶

On the other side, the youth were also politicized which is generally understood to stem from the restrictions on issues such as relations with the opposite sex, on technological issues in a period of rising global interconnectedness; and the state perception of the individuals as subjects and not as citizens.⁶⁷ Additionally, it is

⁶⁴ Nomani and Behdad, 2006, p. 198.

⁶⁵ Esfendiari, Haleh, "The Politics of the "Women's Question" in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1999" in Esposito, John J. & R. K. Ramazani (ed.), *Iran at the Crossroads*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 76-77.

⁶⁶ Kian-Thiébaud, Azadeh, "Women and the Making of Civil Society in Post-Islamist Iran" in Eric Hooglund, ed. *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transition in Iran since 1979*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), pp. 60-61.

⁶⁷ Yaghmaian, Behzad, *Social Change in Iran: An Eyewitness Account of Dissent, Defiance, and New Movements for Rights*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), p.8

argued that the youth is not committed to Khomeini and the authority of the regime like the older generation, since they have not experienced the revolution personally.

There is a common tendency to underline the role of women and youth while discussing the victory of reformists in 1990's, however, the uneasiness of these social groups should not be considered separately from the general socio-cultural crises of the post-revolutionary Iran. Iran in 1990's was still under the detrimental effects of the revolution itself and the war with Iraq. These two major phenomena led to strengthening of some social segments and the weakening of some others. Each politically active social segment of 1990's have played a role in the revolutionary process, however, not all of them could get their demands afterwards. On the one side, the conservatives and the traditional middle class have consolidated themselves politically, economically and socially; but on the other side, the leftist revolutionaries, the new middle class, the working class and the slum dwellers have almost been marginalized from the political, social and economic spheres. 1990's had witnessed a strong claim of a central place in the new system of these disadvantaged segments, which led to an alliance especially between the leftist revolutionaries and the new middle class.

2.6.1. Ideological Aspects of Iranian Reformism in 1990's

With the rising criticisms to the regime, critical voices within the Islamic left began to be heard. The centrality of the conservatives highlighted the religious-theocratic aspects of the IRI. Thus, the notions of rule of law, constitutionalism, and personal freedom came to the forefront of discussions. Additionally, the absolute rule of the vali-ye faqih was one of the most significant topics of the debates and criticisms in 1990's. Prominent thinkers such as Abdollah Soroush, Saeed Hajarian, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, Mostafa Malekian, Akbar Ganji and clerics such as Ayatollah Montazeri, Mehdi Karroubi were very influential in the transformation of the Islamic left, although ideological diversities existed within them too.⁶⁸ In combination with

⁶⁸ Mahdavi, 2011, pp. 97-100

the developments mentioned above, this ideological dynamism of the first half of 1990's brought about a new trend in the politics of IRI: reformism.

Especially after the defeat in 1992 legislative elections, the reformist thought began to be developed among the Islamic left. As a first feature of 1990's Iranian reformism, it is relevant to argue that the aim was to recover the democratic aspect of the regime and highlight the republican component of the revolution⁶⁹. Although, there were clear differences between the reformist thinkers in their understandings of the place of Islam within the political system, they agreed that there was a need for a reconsideration of Islam and its place within the regime. Abdolkarim Soroush, stands for an Islam which is experienced in the private sphere and stresses the importance of rule of law in politics. Ervand Abrahamian states that:

By reducing faith into personal piety, Soroush is able to sever Islam from its many contemporary entanglements-from the ulama; from the *Velayet-e Faqeh*; from *feqh*, the sharia, and the *Qanun-e Qesas*; from *fatwas* against apostates and those who "sow corruption on earth"; and from laws that blatantly contradict the UN Declaration of Human Rights-especially the premise that all humans, irrespective of religion and gender, are equal before the law.⁷⁰

Although, the ideas of Soroush have been widely accepted and he is considered as *the* ideologue of Iranian reformism, it was not the hegemonic vision of Khatami's administration. As opposed to Soroush, Khatami considers Islam as an indispensable aspect of politics. Despite this difference, they all advocated "popular sovereignty" and the rule of law vis-à-vis the unelected figures and institutions of the IRI. Khatami's discourse could create a consensus by highlighting the most common points among the reformists. Güneş Murat Tezcür states that: "Khatami defined the reform movement as a force that embodied the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, the nationalization of the oil industry in 1951, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979"⁷¹. Thus, although there are different views on the weight of Islam within the political

⁶⁹ Tezcür, p. 63.

⁷⁰ Abrahamian, Ervand. "The Islamic Left: Radicalism to Liberalism" in Cronin, Stephanie, ed. *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004, p. 275.

⁷¹ Tezcür, 2008, p. 63.

system, the focus on the democratic side of the regime is the fundamental principle of Iranian reformism which made them support Khatami as well.

Their stress on the republican aspect of the regime directly brought about discussions on the role of the supreme leader due to the hierarchical structural system which necessarily strengthens one part at the expense of the other. Thus, needless to say, strengthening the democratic side of the Iranian political system necessitates the weakening of the vali-ye faqih system. Although, they differed in degree of it, a limited role for the vali-ye faqih was one of the common points among the reformists. Despite the fact that it has been a long debated issue even among the reformists, balancing the power of the supreme leader can be considered as a common argument of reformism in 1990's. Thus, the criticism of vali-ye faqih and the emphasis on the democratic aspect of the revolution constituted one of the most important and inseparable principles of reformism in 1990's.

The first two aspects regarding the political sphere brought about a specific socio-cultural understanding which can be considered as the third principle of Iranian reformism. Based on their emphasis on the rule of law and civil society, the reformists advocated a free socio-cultural life in all respects. Freedom of thought and speech, and freedom of press can be considered as the fundamental points in the reformist struggle since 1990's. The socio-cultural and political spheres are inseparable from the reformist perspective since the lack of one renders the existence of the other impossible. Khatami stressed three points for the realization of popular sovereignty in one of his speeches: freedom of thought, rational dialogue and legal action⁷². Moreover, the reformists support a less restrictive implementation of socio-cultural Islamic codes in everyday life which necessitated the softening of state control on everyday social practices. Parallel to these ideas, Khatami's era is marked with a lively printing life, intense public intellectual debates and a lively cultural and

⁷² Hamshahri Online, 30 Shahrivar 1377 (21 September 1998),

"اصول سه گانه خاتمی برای تحقق حاکمیت مردم: آزادی اندیشه، "گفت و گوی منطقی و عمل قانونی" (Three principles of Khatami for the realization of popular sovereignty: freedom of thought, rational dialogue and legal action),

<http://hamshahronline.ir/hamnews/1377/770630/siasi.htm#sias1> (accessed on 17.04.2013)

intellectual atmosphere, in which, for instance, the first open pop concert of the IRI could be organized.⁷³

⁷³CNN, 12 February 1999, <http://edition.cnn.com/WORLD/meast/9902/12/iran.concert/>. (accessed on 07.04.2013)

CHAPTER III

THE KHATAMI ERA

On May 23, 1997 (2 Khordad 1376) Mohammad Khatami won the sixth presidential election with 69.05% of the eligible votes.⁷⁴ The voter turnout at 79.92% was the highest among all the elections in the IRI at that time.⁷⁵ Although it is not the only indicator, the high voter turnout of that election can be considered as a sign of the ability of the reformist-modern right coalition to mobilize especially the middle class. However, it can also be argued that the electoral base of reformist faction was gone temporarily after two terms of holding the post of presidency⁷⁶.

Khatami came to power thanks to the rising social expectations for social and cultural rights as discussed in the previous chapter. The middle class, especially the youth and women, brought Khatami to power with demands for more freedom, which was internalized into Khatami's discourse as rule of law and civil society. The social mobilization with demands of change and reform in the state system paved the way of coalitions on the elite level for the presidential elections of 1997. 18 political parties and organizations including Islamic Iran Participation Front and the Association of Combatant Clerics formed the widest political coalition in the history of IRI which was later labeled as the 2nd of Khordad Movement referring the date of elections. Despite this kind of a mobilization for the victory of the reform movement, it had failed to preserve the social support behind it. At the end of eight years, Khatami's administration has lost its popular electoral base due to their inability to

⁷⁴ Hamshahri Online, 4 Khordad 1376 (25 May 1998), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1376/760304/siasi52.htm> (accessed on 12.04.2013)

⁷⁵ For now, the ninth presidential election of 2009 holds the highest voter turnout with 85.21%. Source: <http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/> (accessed on 09.04.2013).

⁷⁶ I felt the need to add "temporarily" here because the relationship between the elites and the electorate is a dynamic one which is in a constant change. The dynamism and the volatile nature of this relationship is one of the key factors that will be discussed later in specific in terms of reformist politics.

fulfill these social demands. In this chapter, I will try to discuss key events and phenomena that led to this split between reformist elites and electorates. Although the chapter will proceed in a chronological fashion, throughout the chapter I will examine by looking at three angles: the conservative pressure over Khatami's government, the reaction of the reformist camp to this pressure, and, the social reaction to this intra-elite struggle.

3.1. Government Formation Process

The first matter of tension between the reformists and the conservatives was the members of the new Khatami government. Although there were harsh criticisms from the conservative faction, Khatami could manage to form a government constituted from several reformist politicians. Most of the ministers were technocrats who have held different posts in the state before and known to be close to the Kargozaran, the pragmatist party which was founded in 1996. Among all, three ministers' appointment was more controversial than the others: The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ata'ollah Mohajerani; the Minister of Interior, Abdollah Nuri; and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Kamal Kharrazi.⁷⁷ The appointments of Mohajerani and Nuri to such important posts drew reaction from the conservatives since they were well-known reformists and critics of the absolutist power of the vali-ye faqih. On the other hand, the appointment of Kamal Kharrazi was criticized since he studied and worked as an academic in the U.S.A. Moreover, although Khatami promised high visibility for women in high posts before the elections, he appointed only Masoumeh Ebtekar as the vice-president in order not to irritate the conservatives with another controversial ministerial appointment. This led to a major disappointment among the women who supported and work for Khatami during the electoral process. Yet, it was the highest post that a woman politician could hold in the IRI until that date. With all the opponent figures in it, the cabinet could get a vote of confidence from the Majlis, however, reformist cabinet members were faced with conservative pressure on an individual level in the following months.

⁷⁷ Menashri, 2001, p. 80.

3.2. The Karbaschi Case

The conservatives and Khamane'i used their institutional power in order to intimidate both the reformist elite and the reformist electorates. Alongside their hegemonic discourse backed by the regime ideology, they used the law enforcement forces in order to suppress the reformists. In 1998, another tool was incorporated into this pressure network: the judiciary. The involvement of judiciary into factional politics took place with the trial of Gholamhossein Karbaschi, the then Mayor of Tehran. Karbaschi has been a prominent figure of modern right especially after the establishment of Kargozaran-e Sazendegi. Since the beginning of his post in 1989, he has struggled to improve environmental and infrastructural facilities of Tehran and to transform the city into an educational and art center through which he gained extensive prestige and popularity. However, his socio-cultural initiatives and the new taxation system he introduced on the bazaars drew reactions from the bazaaris of Tehran who have close kinship and/or commercial relations with the conservatives. Thus, Karbaschi was considered as an epitome of the opposition toward conservative settlement in the state which in turn brought about a campaign against him in 1998. On April 4, 1998 (15 Farvardin 1377) he was put in jail with charges of embezzlement and stayed under 11 days of arrest.⁷⁸ On July 23, 1998 (1 Mordad 1377) he was sentenced to two years of imprisonment and twenty years ban from state employment⁷⁹.

His arrest and trial was harshly criticized by all sectors of reformist and modern right factions both in the public and in the media who argued that the trial and the sentence were more of a part of a political struggle rather than being a purely judicial

⁷⁸Sciolino, Elaine, 26 April 1998 "The World: The Mayor and the Mullahs; The Mouths That Roared in Iran".

<http://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/26/weekinreview/the-world-the-mayor-and-the-mullahs-the-mouths-that-roared-in-iran.html> (accessed on 09.04.2013)

⁷⁹ Menashri, 2001, p. 97.

process.⁸⁰ Abdollah Nuri, the then Minister of Interior gave a statement right after the detention of Karbaschi, questioning the credibility of the judiciary:

How is it possible for a normal citizen to hope that law will protect his rights ... when the Mayor of Tehran, who is a member of the administration, is being arrested without the information of the Minister of Interior, and even the President himself?⁸¹

Apart from Abdollah Nuri, prominent figures such as Ata'ollah Mohajerani, Faezeh Hashemi and Hashemi Rafsanjani made statements on the unlawfulness of the incident. The Karbaschi case is important in terms of three phenomena. First, it can be considered as an indicator of the institutional power of the conservatives, second, as the beginning of the intensification of conservative pressure, and third, as a precursor of the spread of the struggle to the judicial sphere.

3.3. The Impeachment of Abdollah Nuri

As it was stressed before, one of the key factors that lead to the weakening of reformist politics during the presidency of Khatami was the conservative attack on the reformist faction through various means. Two elements that have been subject to this struggle were the politicians and the media. In a similar fashion to the case of Gholamhossein Karbaschi, Abdollah Nuri, a senior cleric at the same time, has been one of the prominent reformist figures who had to deal with conservative pressure throughout his political life. This pressure has risen after the election of Khatami and during the cabinet formation process. Known as one of the major critics of conservative institutionalization and absolute authority of vali-ye faqih, Abdollah Nuri's appointment to the post of interior ministry irritated the conservatives. However, Khatami was able to get a vote of confidence for his first cabinet in which other clerics such as Ata'ollah Mohajerani and Kamal Kharrazi also took part.

⁸⁰ Hamshahri Online, 3 Mordad 1377 (25 July 1998), "یادداشت حکم قضائی یا بیانیہ سیاسی؟" (A judicial verdict or a political declaration?), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1377/770503/siasi.htm#siasi3> (accessed on 09.04.2013)

⁸¹ Hamshahri Online, 18 Farvardin 1377 (7 April 1998), "هنگامی که شهردار تهران که عضو هیات دولت است، بدون اطلاع وزیر کشور و حتی شخص رئیس جمهوری بازداشت می شود... برای یک شهروند عادی چه جای امیدی باقی می ماند که قانون مدافع حقوق وی خواهد بود؟" <http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1377/770118/siasi.htm#siasi2> (accessed on 08.04.2013)

Although, Abdollah Nuri was widely appreciated by the reformist elite and electorate, his criticism of the velayate faqih system and insistent support for the dissident cleric Grand Ayatollah Hossein-Ali Montazeri put him forward in the factional struggle. During the four years he served as the Minister of Interior under President Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Ministry has represented a more liberal stance vis-à-vis oppositional voices. This stance became more apparent in his second term under the presidency of Khatami. The presence of a reformist and critical figure in such an important post has been one of the matters of dispute in the eyes of the conservatives. The excuse for an open counter-propaganda against Nuri came with the Karbaschi case. As it was mentioned, Abdollah Nuri harshly criticized the arrest and trial of the then Mayor of Tehran, which in turn brought about demands of his impeachment. On March, 18 1998 a student protest took place in Tehran demanding the impeachment of the minister of interior claiming that was he was taking partial decisions and turned the ministry into a political party⁸².

On 21 July 1998, Abdollah Nuri was impeached with 137 votes against 128 on a session which was held with the participation of 260 MP's after the proposal of 31 conservative parliamentarians arguing that the minister was giving demonstration permits to political groups and changing key managers in the Ministry with political aims⁸³. Afterwards, Khatami immediately declared on July, 22 that he appointed Abdollah Nuri as the Vice President of Development and Security Issues. Although, it was a quick response, it is widely argued that the inability of the reformists to protect one of their outstanding figures from impeachment had disappointed the reformist electorates in their belief in their common struggle with the reformist elite⁸⁴. Abdollah Nuri faced with harsher pressures due to the critical articles in his daily *Khordad* which could be published for about 2 years until it was banned by the

⁸² Brief on Iran no. 854, "Rival Faction Wants Interior Minister Impeached", http://www.iran-e-azad.org/english/boi/08540311_98.html (accessed on 12.04.2013).

⁸³ The impeachment was widely covered in Hamshahri for about a week from the legal procedure to the details of the sessions in the parliament. For details: Hamshahri Online, 31 Khordad 1377 (21 July 1998), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1377/770331/siasi.htm#siasi4>; and, 1 Tir 1377 (22 July 1998), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1377/770401/siasi.htm#siasi4> (Accessed on 15.04.2013)

⁸⁴ Yaghmaian, 2008, p. 51.

Special Court for Clergy resulting in a sentence of 5 years imprisonment for him. Abdollah Nuri was a critical figure in the eyes of the reformist electorates; however, the inability of the reformist elites to support him is a factor which contributed to the break between the elites and the reformist electorates.

3.4. Chain Murders of November 1998

The institutionalized and broad power of the conservative faction surrounded the reformists on each sphere of struggle. Intellectuals who backed the reformists were also under heavy pressure. In November and December 1998, Iran experienced one of the biggest political crises in the latest decades. Four prominent intellectuals were assassinated in a brutal manner and found dead after several days. The conservatives and their supporters in the Ministry of Intelligence and the Law Enforcement Forces were publicly blamed for the crimes, although there is still not an evident link between these events and the conservatives.

Chain or unsolved murders were not new phenomena in Iran, however, the method and the victims were shocking at that time. Dariush Forouhar, Parvaneh Eskandari, Mohammad Mokhtari, Mohammad Jafar Pouyandeh and Majid Sharif all were prominent secular intellectuals who were assassinated in similar veins. In November-December 1998, all had disappeared and found dead days after their death. The funerals of these intellectuals turned into public protests with the attendance of thousands who chanted against the state⁸⁵.

Among them all, the assassination of Dariush Forouher was the most condemned one due to his popularity deriving from the Pahlavi era as a firm nationalist and as a critic of the injustices of the IRI. On 25 November 1998, Khatami ordered the Ministries of Interior and Intelligence the formation of a commission in order to identify the murderer of Dariush Forouher and his wife, Parvaneh Eskandari⁸⁶. Although it has been a long debated and investigated issue, only two officials accepted their role in the case. The Minister of Intelligence Ghorbanali Dorri-Najafabadi resigned and his

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 30.

⁸⁶ Hamshahri Online, 4 Azar 1377 (25 November 1998),
<http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1377/770904/siasi.htm#sias3>

deputy Saeed Emami was arrested as the only convict in the whole chain murders as if he planned and executed the murders individually.

According to Mehdi Moslem, the aim of these chain murders, the subtext of it all, was to prove that civil society can only bring “chaos”⁸⁷. Although, the chain murders did not put an end to reformist politics, they did have a certain influence on it. The impacts of the chain murders and the investigation period afterwards were twofold. First, in the short run, they contributed to the social grievances against the state in general which showed itself in the social protests of June-July 1999. Second, in the medium run, the inability of the reformists first to protect the intellectuals, second to fully solve the crimes contributed to a general disappointment with the reformists in the eyes of the electorates.

3.5. Municipal Elections of 1999

Although the reformist administration was relatively unsuccessful in the institutionalization of an administration closely linked to civil society, one thing they introduced is generally considered to be an important step in terms of decentralization of state authority. Local council (Shorahaye Eslamiye Shahr ve Rusta) elections were first introduced in the first term of Khatami. The introduction of these elections is considered by Ali Ansari as “the first attempt at decentralization and empowerment of population”⁸⁸. The first local elections in the history of Iran which took place on 26 February 1999 (7 Esfand 1377) was similarly considered as a victory in the struggle for civil society by reformist circles⁸⁹.

Although these local councils are relatively powerless vis-à-vis other state institutions, it was primarily thought to be a symbolic victory against the conservative institutional hegemony since the Guardian Council does not have a

⁸⁷ Moslem, 2002, p.265.

⁸⁸ Ansari, 2006, p. 196.

⁸⁹ Hamshahri Online,
“انتخابات سراسری برای تشکیل گسترده ترین نهاد مدنی کشور- وعده خاتمی برای واگذاری قدرت به مردم تحقق یافت”
(National elections for the formation of the largest civil institution of the country-Khatami’s promise to transfer power to the people was substantiated), 8 Esfand 1377 (27 February 1999),
<http://hamshahronline.ir/hamnews/1377/771208/siasi.htm#siasi4>.

control power over these elections⁹⁰. Secondly, it was literally a victory against the conservatives in terms of the results. With 23.6 million votes, the election holds a relatively high voter turnout of 64.5%. Reformist candidates took 71% of total votes, while conservatives could get 14.6%⁹¹. Thirdly, this election provided a new ground for reformist politicians who were under heavy pressure from the conservatives. For instance, Abdollah Nuri was elected to the Islamic City Council of Tehran with the highest percentage of Tehran⁹². Thus, the first local council elections marked a rise in the electoral successes of the reformist faction. However, the high percentage of reformists in the city councils could barely turn into real institutional power vis-à-vis the conservatives due to lower position of local councils in the institutional hierarchy as one can observe from further political and social developments which will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.6. Student Protests of 1999

The student movement in Iran is the only organized youth movement in Iran which desires special attention since the youth has a considerable contribution in the election of Khatami in 1997. Although, the universities were dominated by Marxist organizations before the revolution, “the cultural revolution” of 1980’s was successful in creating a controlled and co-opted student politics.⁹³ In parallel with the country-level struggle against secular leftist politics in 1980’s, secular leftism was tried to be replaced with the regime ideology in the universities; and, universities were purged of leftist students and academics. Instead, staff that is loyal to the new regime was mostly preferred in university cadres and no political organization was permitted other than the ones that are directly controlled by the regime. Thus, Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat (The Office for Strengthening Unity) was the only student

⁹⁰ Keddie, 2003, p. 276.

⁹¹ John J. Esposito & R. K. Ramazani, 2001, p. 45.

⁹² Hamshahri Online, 18 Esfand 1377 (9 March 1999), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1377/771218/siasi.htm#siasi7>.

⁹³ Mashayekhi, 2001, p. 293.

organization in universities for a long time until 1990's⁹⁴. Daftar functioned as the student organization of the new regime and was very effective in the "cultural revolution" process.⁹⁵

By 1990's, the student movement experienced a transformation in parallel with the general transformation in the Islamic left. The factors that lie under the emergence of reformism have also affected the student movement which embraced a more liberal and universalistic ideology with an understanding of human rights by 1990's.⁹⁶ Interestingly, all the prominent student organizations that were mostly backed by the state turned into reformists of 1990's. In other words prominent figures and organizations of the Iranian student movement in 1990's were once the advocates of regime ideology among the students. For instance, Hashmetollah Tabarzadi and Manoochehr Mohammadi, two prominent figures of 1999 student protests, were once very loyal to Khomeini and his valeyate faqih system.⁹⁷

As it was mentioned, the trials of Karbaschi, the impeachment of Abdollah Nuri, the chain murders gathered a strong reaction from the reformist electorates. As important supporters of reformists and one of the most active parts within the faction, students were intensively politicized by that process. Additionally, the conservatives raised the pressure on the media by 1999 which mushroomed after the election of Khatami. 1999 was full of political struggles and the media was playing an important role as a

⁹⁴ Student Basij, which was established in 1989, is another organization targeting university students, however, it is not recognized within the student movement due to its defined and organic relationship with the regime. However, the Student Basij Organization should be also discussed in terms of its position within the student movement. Although it has different dynamics and organization ways than the commonly studied branch of the student movement, it also gathered students around it and has been active in universities. Student Basij is very effective in organizing the students who are ideologically committed to the regime which can be thought as a loyal, yet a different type of student organization. Student Basij is not related to the topic of this thesis, however, it is relevant to state that it would be an interesting to rethink the place of hardliner students in the student movement in Iran. For a discussion on the effects of the basij in the universities and student basij in specific, see: Golkar, Saeid. "The Reign of Hard-line Students in Iran's Universities". *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. 17, issue 3 (Summer 2010).

⁹⁵ Razavi, Reza. "The Cultural Revolution in Iran, with Close Regard to the Universities, and its Impact on the Student Movement". *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1 (January 2009), pp. 6-8.

⁹⁶ Mashayekhi, 2001, p. 305.

⁹⁷ Yaghmaian, 2008, p. 81.

vital means for reformist politics. It is not wrong to argue that the media and press were the backbones of reformist politics at that time since there was not a legitimate place other than that for reformist politics.

On July 7, 1999 the Special Court for Clergy banned the daily Salam, which was a leading reformist newspaper.⁹⁸ Organizations such as Society of Militant Clerics, Association of Researchers and Teachers of Qom and Islamic Iran Participation Front harshly criticized the ban on Salam. The other day, on July 8, thousands of students from Tehran University was gathered to protest the ban on Salam and the pressure on the press. That night, hard-line students and security forces of the regime raided the dormitory of Tehran University leaving tens of beaten up students and one reported causality behind.

The Minister of Culture and Higher Education, Mostafa Moeen resigned in reaction to the event, though it was not approved by the president⁹⁹. Spokesman of the Ministry of Interior declared that the involvement of the Police Forces to the event took place without the information and permission of the ministry¹⁰⁰. These last two points are highly important in terms of observing the inability of the government, the highest administrative organ of the country, to control the institutions they are in charge. Thus, they indicate the institutional power of the anti-reformist forces within the state. Additionally, moderate statements of Khatami regarding the issue were criticized by the reformists, which contributed to the future disengagement of the reformist electorate from the reformist elite¹⁰¹.

Protests of the night raid continued days after the event which marked the biggest student uprising since the revolution of 1979. July 1999 student protests started a

⁹⁸ Hamshahri Online, 17 Tir 1378 (8 July 1999),
“با حکم دادسرای ویژه روحانیات روزنامه‌سalam توقیف شد” (The daily Salam was banned with the verdict of Special Court for Clergy),
<http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1378/780417/ejtem.htm#ejtem1>

⁹⁹ Hamshahri Online, 20 Tir 1378 (10 July 1999),
<http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1378/780420/siasi.htm#siasi8>

¹⁰⁰ Hamshahri Online, 19 Tir 1378 (9 July 1999),
<http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1378/780419/siasi.htm#siasi11>

¹⁰¹ Tazmini, 2009, p. 109.

new era for the universities which experienced new waves of student protests in the following years. Since they are one of the engines of reformist movement, it is vital to follow the universities in order to discuss reformist politics. However, despite the scope of the student mobilization, its effects on politics remained relatively low. As it will be discussed in the next chapter, it originates from the inability of the reformist elite to base its policy on the popular support it has. In other words, rather than transferring the popular support into political power against the conservative faction, the reformist elite preferred not to cross the lines that are drawn by the conservatives.

3.7. The State Pressure on Press

The place of the media and press in the reformist struggle should be adequately grasped due to its critical role in the flourishing of ideological discussions and questionings of the Iranian reformists after 1990's. With liberally inclined governments and ministers of Culture and Islamic Guidance such as Mohammad Khatami (1982-1992) and Ataollah Mohajerani (1997-2000) taking charge, intellectuals could find a ground to publicly discuss the issues and questions regarding the IRI especially with the presidency of Hashemi Rafsanjani. The mushrooming newspapers and periodicals being published created an intellectual atmosphere in which taboos of the Islamic regime such as *valeyate faqih* are being questioned and republican ideas are being raised. In the absence of a legitimate organizational framework to do such discussions, the media filled a huge gap and became the backbone and motor of reformist politics. This is why any attempt on constraining the freedom of press has led to huge reaction since 1990's.

Especially after 1999, the conservatives increased their pressure on the press which increased its "anti-conservative" tone. However, in the second half of 1999, the conservatives were more cautious on their reactions against the reformists compared to 2001 and afterwards due to the ongoing popular support for reformism and the general acceptance of the importance of popular democracy discourse in politics. Popular reactions against the chain murders and social protests of 1999 are effective in this temporal "softening" of the conservatives. Yet, it can be understood as a "wait-and-see period" in which the conservatives did not totally abandon their

institutional pressure. For instance, the press law was altered by the conservative 5th Majlis in such a way that strengthens the state control over the press with the argument of protecting the regime against foreign powers¹⁰². The conservative discourse against the press represented the press as a tool of “enemies” which can be understood from these words of Nateq Nuri, the then Speaker of the Parliament, in defense of the alterations in the Press Law: “A central force works outside the country and the media is the tool of it. The infiltration routes of the enemy must be blocked”¹⁰³.

There were many ways for the judiciary and conservatives to restrain the freedom of press, from detentions and arrests of journalists to the closures of newspapers. The closures and arrests have been especially rising before the elections. In the year 1999, prominent newspapers such as Zan, Salam, Jame’eh, Tous and Neshat were shut down. Similarly, there was a huge operation against the printed press and the journalists before the 2001 presidential elections. Although, the closed newspapers were immediately reopened with only a change in the titles, the judiciary was instantly shutting down them too. Needless to say, these pressures constituted one branch of the judicial pressure on the reformists. However, it was a vital one due to the importance of the press which cannot be fulfilled with any other method. In spite of the dynamism of the press in revitalizing itself despite the judiciary, again, the reformist government and the president in specific were considered to be impotent in protecting one of the most effective tools that brought them to power.

3.8. Parliamentary Elections of 2000

The sixth parliamentary election of the IRI took place on 18 February 2000 (29 Bahman 1378). The reformist faction gained a landslide victory in this election by securing about %70 of the votes¹⁰⁴. This election is important especially in two

¹⁰² Hamshahri Online, 17 Tir 1378 (8 July 1999), <http://hamshahronline.ir/hamnews/1378/780417/siasi.htm#siasi2>.

¹⁰³ Ibid, "اراده متمرکزی در خارج از کشور کار می کند و ابزار آن رسانه ها هستند. باید راههای نفوذ دشمن بسته شود."

¹⁰⁴ Raisdana, Fariborz. “The Composition and Capabilities of Sixth Majles”. *Iranian Journal of Research and Analysis*, vol. 16, no. 1 (April 2000), p. 31, accessible at: <http://www.cira-jira.com/Vol%202016.1%209%20Mohammadi%20April%202000.pdf>.

aspects: first it showed that the support for the reformists still continues, and second, it increased the burden on the reformist camp in terms of the realization of the reforms since the electorate provided them the hegemony in another state institution¹⁰⁵. The data on the 6th Majlis may differ, but the voter turnout is between %67 and %69¹⁰⁶. It is a relatively high percentage, but it is lower than the turnout in the previous parliamentary election which was %71. Yet, it can be still considered as an indicator of the hope of “reformism through the ballots”.

It is important here to highlight one point: the pre-election process showed the temporal acceptance of the importance of popular participation in politics in general. One of the most significant contributions of reformism to the Iranian political system is the introduction of popular and republican discourses to the political arena. The election of 2000 was an important indicator of this phenomenon. In the last month to the election, conservative politicians increased the democratic tone of their statements. Although, it has been a general trend in the IRI to emphasize the role of “the people” in order to increase the voter turnout, if we take into account the wider picture, it can be considered as an acceptance of the importance of policies with a participatory and republican tone. 2 days before the election, the supreme leader Khamane’i stated that:

The country belongs to the people. So the people own the right to shape the destiny of the country and to elect the administrators and legislators by proper and free elections in accordance with the laws. And since the destiny of the system and the country depends on the realization of this right, the people have a duty to use this right. All the eligible voters should participate in this election.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Namazi, Siamak. “The Sixth Majlis Elections in Iran: What Happened and What Can We Expect”. *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis*, vol. 16, no. 1 (April 2000), p. 19, accessible at: <http://www.cira-jira.com/Vol%20%2016.1%208%20Namazi%20April%202000.pdf>.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 14, and, Princeton University Iran Data Portal, <http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/elections/parl/2000/> (accessed on 20.04.2013).

¹⁰⁷ Hamshahri Online, 27 Bahman 1378 (16 February 2000), "کشور متعلق به مردم است. بنابراین مردم حق دارند که سرنوشت کشور را به دست خودشان رقم بزنند و با انتخابات صحیح و آزادانه، مجریان و قانونگذاران را به ترتیبی که در قانون معین شده است، انتخاب کنند و از آنجا که سرنوشت نظام و کشور به احقاق این حق، بستگی دارد، مردم در استفاده از این حق، دارای تکلیف هستند و همه واجدین شرایط باید در انتخابات شرکت کنند." <http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1378/781127/siasi.htm#siasi2>

The second aspect of this election is a two-sided one. On the one hand, the reformists gained the control of another state institution along with the government. In other words, the reformists had gained the control of two major republican institutions after the 2000 elections. Thus, the legislative obstacle which was relevant through the majority of the conservatives in the previous Majlis was overcome with this victory. However, this placed a burden on the reformists since they became more powerful in the eyes of the electorates in terms of the realization of reformist promises. Moreover, after 2000 the reformists were faced with even harsher pressure from the conservative faction, which was backed by domestic and international developments that will be discussed below.

3.9. The Intensification of Conservative Pressure and the Presidential Elections of 2001

There was an apparent increase in pressures on the reformists in the course of 2000 and 2001. The pressures were seen in many spheres of political and social life. From physical attacks to reformists to restrictions on the press, the conservative faction and the supreme leader Khamene'i increased the pace of pressures on the reformists after 2000.

Together with the institutional power, coercive power was among the tools that were directly used against the reformist figures. Physical attacks to the reformists first started in Shahrivar 1377 (September 1998) when Ataollah Mohajerani ve Abdollah Nuri were beaten up by a group of hardliners after Friday prayer¹⁰⁸. A second attack occurred right after the parliamentary elections of 2000. On 23 Esfand 1378 (13 March 2000), Saeed Hajjarian was attacked by two motorcyclist and heavily wounded. After a long period of treatment, he survived the attack, but he was paralyzed for the rest of his life as an ideologue and a politician. He was one of the prominent figures of the reformist faction. He was identified with the reformist movement, which can be understood from the heading of the news in Hamshahri:

¹⁰⁸ Hamshahri Online, 15 Shahrivar 1377 (6 September 1998), <http://hamshahronline.ir/hamnews/1377/770615/Index.htm>, and New York Times, 6 September 1998, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/09/06/world/the-president-of-iran-orders-a-crackdown-on-vigilante-groups.html> (accessed on 20.04.2013).

“Hajjarian is always alive! Reforms will not be stopped!”.¹⁰⁹ His position in the faction was so central and important that the attack on him stayed as a top topic for weeks in Iran. It was widely believed that his centrality within the reformist faction, and more importantly, his position in the revealing of the offenders of the chain murders of 1998 were the reasons of the attack.

This assassination attempt should be understood in the wider picture as the intensification of attacks on the reformists after the victory gained in the last parliamentary elections and before the upcoming presidential elections of 2001. Another setback for the reformists was the resignation of the “bête noir” of the conservatives, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ataollah Mohajerani. During the ministry of Mohajerani cultural activities such as concerts and festivals increased and the reformist press flourished. Mohajerani was known not only for his cultural initiatives, but for his harsh criticisms on the conservatives and Khamane’i. After a long period of debate, he resigned in late 2000 due to his conflict of years during his ministerial post with Khamane’i. The resignation of Mohajerani was important for the conservatives in two ways. First, needless to say, they got rid of a person who is in an open conflict with them and their socio-cultural codes. Second, and more importantly, they forced Khatami to accept Mohajerani’s resignation, which is considered as a huge setback and a compromise with the conservatives since Khatami gave up one of the most determined reformists.

After the sixth parliamentary election, in April 2000, the supreme leader Khamane’i made a speech about the harms of the free press on the regime as a tool of the enemies and called on the judiciary to prevent this danger. The first wave of detentions of journalists and bans on newspapers started and about 18 newspapers were banned with the order of Khamane’i. Newspapers Mosharekat, Aftab-e Emruz, Iran-e Farda and Bamdad-e Now were among the newspapers that were initially banned by the order of the supreme leader in April 2000.¹¹⁰ Moreover, prominent

¹⁰⁹ Hamshahri Online, 23 Esfand 1378 (13 March 2000),
"حجاریان همیشه زنده است! اصلاحات متوقف نخواهد شد!",
<http://hamshahronline.ir/hamnews/1378/781223/siasi.htm#siasil>

¹¹⁰ David Menashri, 2001, pp. 326-327.

reformist figures such as Hassan Youssefi Eshkevari and Akbar Ganji were put in jail. In the year 2001, the reformist press was faced with the harshest pressure in the two-decade history of the IRI. Since Mohajerani was effective in establishing a relatively free atmosphere for the press, his resignation and the symbolic victory that the conservatives gained with it provided a more adequate ground for increased pressures on the press from the perspective of the conservatives. Although the successor of Mohajerani, Ahmad Masjed-Jamei, has also tried to protect the freedom of press, his individual efforts did not serve the purpose and more than 20 newspapers and periodicals were banned in 2001. Thus, the reformists were having the harshest times since the election of Khatami in the last two years of his first term. Needless to say, the aims were to discourage the reformists from entering into upcoming presidential elections by suppressing all the critical figures and destroying all the organizational tools of the movement.

Although they are not the ultimate indicator, elections should be considered as a valid source to observe the course of politics. Khatami and the leading reformists were unable to repel the intensified conservative pressures of the last two years. Yet, they were able to be elected for a second term in the presidential elections of June 2001. The voter turnout was 67% and Khatami could manage to get 77% of the votes against the conservative candidate Ahmad Tavakkoli who could get only 15%¹¹¹. However, this election is the last election in which the reformist faction could win out. The studies on the reformist experience during the presidency of Khatami generally focus on his first term. Although the experiences of those 4 years are critical in understanding the fall of the popular support for the reformist faction, domestic and international developments occurred after 2001 also contributed to the fall of the popularity of the faction.

3.10. The Aghajari Case and Student Protests of 2002-2003

The youth's relations with the reformist experiences need to be discussed in detail since they constitute a dynamic group in the political life of Iran. Specifically,

¹¹¹ Princeton University, Iran Data Portal, <http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/elections/pres/2001/>. (accessed on 21.04.2013).

university students can be considered as an engine of social movements especially after the first student protests of the IRI in 1999. Since then, certain developments result in serious street clashes between the students and regime forces. It is important to understand the nature of the developments that led to student protests.

The second of such a protest wave after 1999 began when a respected academic sentenced to death.¹¹² It was announced on 16 Aban 1381 (7 November 2002) by the lawyer of Hashem Aghajari, a well-known university professor and a member of Central Council of Sazmane Mojahedin Enghelabe Eslami (Organization of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution), that he was sentenced to death in addition to 10-years ban on teaching, 8 years in prison and 74 lashes¹¹³. Two Majlis representatives from Hamedan, where the verdict was rendered, resigned after the sentence was declared. Additionally, most of the reformist parliamentarians and government members criticized the sentence¹¹⁴. There was one week-long protests after the declaration of the verdict in cities like Tehran, Tabriz, Bushehr, Hamedan and Ahvaz. These protests were much less violent in contrast to 1999, yet tens of students were detained during the demonstrations.¹¹⁵ One can observe the premises of a future split between the politically active university students and the reformist elites in the course of this protest. A protester student explained their demands as such:

Students' demands have been declared in a manifesto. [They include] the reversal of Aghajari's death sentence and his acquittal. The judiciary's apology for mistreating the professor and students. The president's clear and

¹¹² After nation-wide reactions against the verdict, the death sentence was turned into 5-years in prison in 2003.

¹¹³ Hamshahri Online, 17 Aban 1381 (8 November 2002), <http://hamshahronline.ir/hamnews/1381/810817/newsp.htm#newsp6>. (accessed on 24.04.2013)

¹¹⁴ 3 days after the declaration of the verdict, Majlis opened with a speech of Mehdi Karroubi, the then Speaker of the Parliament, condemning the death sentence given to Aghajari. Additionally, 181 MP's handed in a letter to the Speaker, showing their opposition to the verdict. Hamshahri Online, 20 Aban 1381 (11 November 2002), <http://hamshahronline.ir/hamnews/1381/810820/siasi.htm#siasi2>.

¹¹⁵ RFE/RL Iran Report, 18 November 2002, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1342806.html>.

decisive reaction. And the resignation of the head of the judiciary or his dismissal.¹¹⁶

In addition to emphasis on a more reliable and determined stance from the reformists and the President in specific, according to Reuters, slogans demanding the resignation of Khatami was also chanted during the protests¹¹⁷. According to Ali Ansari, with his reactions against the Aghajari case, Khatami was considered as a leader who cannot take risks even in cases of injustice¹¹⁸. In addition to that, the reformist leaders did not react against the detentions of students afterwards. For instance, Khatami declared that: "The detentions of the dissident university students are the decision of National Security Council"¹¹⁹. It was generally perceived that Khatami did not risk himself by protecting the youth who contributed excessively to his election, very much alike in 1999 events. Thus, it is not wrong to argue that the gap between the students and the reformists were widening as it could be observed in further developments.

A similar wave of protest started in June 2003 against a new arrangement for the privatization of some state universities. This time, the students were openly chanting for the resignation of the president. The protests took place in several cities such as Tehran, Shiraz, Esfahan and Tabriz and hundreds of students were arrested during the events. Khatami's and other reformists' position against the protesters were much more clear this time. They were arguing that these protesters were only pleasing foreign enemies and serving to the benefits of the U.S.¹²⁰ in specific. After cancelling his program in Khorasan due to the protests, referring to the Ministry of Intelligence, the judiciary and the law-enforcement, Khatami said that: "Iran has a state and

¹¹⁶ RFE/RL Iran Report, 11 November 2002, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1342805.html>.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ali Ansari, 2006, pp. 250-251.

¹¹⁹ Hamshahri Online, 14 Azer 1381 (5 December 2002), <http://hamshahrionline.ir/hamnews/1381/810914/siasi.htm#siasil>
"خاتمی: بازداشت دانشجویان مخالف نظر شورای عالی امنیت ملی است."

¹²⁰ RFE/RL Iran Report, 16 June 2003, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1342739.html>.

authorities must prevent the disruptive activities”.¹²¹ The reformists had always avoided from being identified with street protesters, however, the harshness of the tone in their reactions was unprecedented in the six-year long administration of Khatami. This change in the tone and references to “foreign enemies” can be explained with a foreign policy change, which has a great role in reformists’ coming to terms with the supreme leader, thus, losing their electoral support.

3.11. 9/11 and Its Impact on Iran

One of the fundamental pillars of Iranian reformism in 1990’s was the reconsideration of the relations with the West and a more reconciliatory foreign policy understanding. Foreign policy understanding of Khatami and the reformist leaders contributed to their social popularity, however, it also led to the electoral decline of reformism after 2003. Although, a detailed analysis of Iranian Foreign Policy during the Khatami administration would be excessive for the purposes of this thesis, I will briefly cover the basics and the turning points of Khatami’s foreign policy with an aim of understanding their influence on the course of reformist politics. The change in the US foreign policy toward Iran affected Iran in two fundamental ways: first, it took the only card left to the Khatami administration, and second, it created a sense of a need of a more nationalist foreign policy instead of a reconciliatory one in the eyes of the Iranian public.

In the initial years of his first term in presidency, Khatami was considered as a moderate Iranian leader who can cooperate with the international actors. This perception was originated from Khatami’s emphasis on an interdependent world and the place of the West in it. Parallel to his views on foreign policy, he generated the notion of “Dialogue among Civilizations” as opposed to Samuel Huntington’s idea of “Clash of Civilizations”.¹²² Despite the conservative opposition to the softening of relations with the West, Khatami managed to integrate Iran into international political system in a limited way. Together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs,

¹²¹ Hamshahri Online, 20 Khordad 1382 (10 June 2003),
“ایران يك دولت دارد، مسئولان جلوي تحركات آشوبگران را بگیرند”,
<http://hamshahronline.ir/hamnews/1382/820320/news/siasi.htm#s45225>

¹²² Menashri, 2001, p. 206.

Kamal Kharrazi, Khatami tried to recover Iran's relations not only with the West, but also with the regional countries, especially the ones in the Persian Gulf with which Iran had a very remote relationship especially after the revolution.

Although the conservatives oppose an open foreign policy on a discursive level, they were very tactical in their reactions to Khatami's foreign policy. Khamane'i and conservative figures used the issue to degrade and to delegitimize the reformists by referring to the Western roots of reformists and reformism, and to the betrayal to the regime by cooperating with enemies. Thus, Khatami and the reformist administration were trying to create a balanced foreign policy which can be considered as cooperative on the one side, and as loyal to the basics of the regime on the other¹²³.

One significant event altered Iranian foreign policy and the possibility of a reform in international relations for a long period of time. 9/11 attacks and the change in the American foreign policy with the introduction of "Axis of Evil" principle by George W. Bush not only put an end to the reliability of a moderate Iranian foreign policy, but also made Khatami to come to terms with Khamane'i. In my humble opinion, the effects of the change in the American foreign policy on the course of reformist politics were not properly scrutinized. It is widely argued that Khatami's foreign policy collapsed after the consolidation of Bush's foreign policy. However, it is important to mention that this collapse took the only tool of the reformists to show their ability to make changes in Iran. As it is discussed up until now, the reformists were unable to take a stand against the conservatives regarding the domestic issues. When the possibility of the continuation of an open foreign policy is also removed, Khatami chose to compromise with the supreme leader. Thus, Khatami and the discourse of reformists came under the influence of Khamane'i. This process is explanatory in the correspondence the timing of the hardening of the reformists to social oppositions and the change in the Iranian foreign policy.

¹²³ The foreign policy of the IRI is ultimately determined by the supreme leader. Thus, how the reformists could manage to adopt a relatively open foreign policy is an issue that should be debated; however, it would be irrelevant here in terms of the structural framework of the thesis. Yet, it is enough here to mention that it should not be forgotten that a relatively open foreign policy is not necessarily detrimental to the interests of the conservatives. More than three decades long history of the IRI showed that the ideological stance of the conservatives especially in the international issues is very much related to the power structure and their position within that structure in the domestic sphere.

Secondly, the change in the American foreign policy toward Iran downplayed a reconciliatory foreign policy trend, and promoted the need of a foreign policy that highlighted Iranian national interests in a more uncompromising way. The “Axis of Evil” discourse and the new direction in the American foreign policy created a feeling of being under threat from the international community in the eyes of the Iranian public. It is widely argued that this feeling of “being targeted” by international powers generally result in a wave of unification against foreign threats, which ultimately strengthens the hands of political actors that has a more nationalist and non-conciliatory tone in foreign policy. In the Iranian context, the only political faction that had such a foreign policy perspective was the core elite of the state and the conservative faction in general. Thus, the final defeat of a reconciliatory Iranian foreign policy after the change of the American foreign policy due to 9/11 attacks ultimately contributed to the rise the conservative faction in terms of a foreign policy perspective. The invasion of Iraq finally crystallized the fear among the Iranian public regarding the possibility of Iran being under physical threat from the US.¹²⁴ Therefore, the road that leads to a more hardliner foreign policy was paved by the developments in the regional and international context, which in the end contributed to the election of a conservative president in the presidential elections of 2005.

3.12. Electoral Failures After 2003

In the year 2003, the reformists had lost their reliability in terms of their ability to make changes in the Iranian political system. It is apparent that their inability to make significant changes in the domestic politics in accordance with the demands of their electorates, together with a sudden collapse of their foreign policy vision substantially influenced the course of Iranian reformism under the presidency of Khatami. Although some scholars argue that Khatami tried to implement a “managed change”, I believe that the change in the actions and discourse of Khatami and other leading reformists show that they accepted their failure vis-à-vis the conservative structure and adapted their policies in accordance with that after 2003¹²⁵. Future

¹²⁴ Arjomand, 2009, p. 197.

¹²⁵ Tazmini, 2009, p. 123.

failures in the elections prove the disappointment with the reformist politicians and the decline in the support for reformism in the first half of 2000's.

The first election after the apparent "compliance" of Khatami took place in February 2003. Second local elections in the history of Iran show the disenchantment of the electorates with an approximately 40% voter turnout as opposed to 64.5% in the first elections. The conservative candidates managed to capture most of the seats in the important cities, which was the first electoral setback since 1997 from the perspective of the reformists.

In the parliamentary elections of 2004, the number of disqualifications of the Guardian Council was relatively high compared to the previous elections. Nearly 44% of the applicants including some prominent figures within the reformists such as Reza Khatami, Behzad Nabavi and Mohsen Mirdamadi were disqualified by the Guardian Council.¹²⁶ The aforementioned politicians stood for a more confrontational politics vis-à-vis the supreme leader and the conservatives¹²⁷. This new group within the reformists could capture the reformist electorates; however, they were constantly marginalized from the legal political framework. The data on this election show a great deal of variety. While the official data shows the voter turnout as 50%, some Western resources argue that it was actually 30%¹²⁸.

One important point regarding the parliamentary election of 2004 is that although the conservatives have also increased their vote, the majority of the votes were pulled by the hardliners. By hardliners, a segment within the conservatives that are close to the Revolutionary Guards and loyal to the basic principles of the regime ideology is meant. This hardliner group differentiated themselves from the conservatives with an emphasis on the urban dwellers, working class and war veterans. It can be considered

¹²⁶ Ibid, p. 116.

¹²⁷ Takeyh, Ray. "Iran's Municipal Elections: A Turning Point for the Reform Movement?", The Washington Institute Policy Analysis/ PolicyWatch 721, 6 March 2003.
<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/irans-municipal-elections-a-turning-point-for-the-reform-movement>.

¹²⁸ Princeton University, Iran Data Portal,
<http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/elections/parl/2004/>.
Tazmini, 2009, p. 116.

as a revitalization of the regime ideology of the Khomeini era with some adaptations. It was understood with this election that economic policies would be more important than socio-political policies of the reformists. Gheissari and Nasr argue that whereas a reform process based on the middle class and youth was dominant in the Khatami era, the importance of socio-economic problems; and, “lower classes and disadvantaged provinces” was revealed with this election¹²⁹.

The final setback of the reformists took place with the presidential elections of 2005. The reformists were structurally so dispersed that they could not agree on a candidate. 7 candidates ran for this election including 3 reformist figures. During the presidency of Khatami, reformists could succeed in showing the importance of generating a discourse based on the aspirations of the youth and socio-cultural problems of the country, which can be understood from the election slogans of even the conservatives¹³⁰. The only candidate who stressed economic policies and addressed working poor was Ahmedinejad¹³¹. Thus, the fade of the middle class from the scene put the urban dwellers and working class forward as a result of both the differentiation in the electoral preferences of the reformist electorates and the deteriorating economic situation of the IRI. Thus, eight-year long reformist administrative experience has come to an end in 2005 with a landmark victory of the hardliners.

In this chapter, I have tried to show the key events affecting the electoral base of reformism during Khatami’s presidency between 1997 and 2005. It is important to analyze this period in a detailed fashion in order to understand the dynamics of reformism in Iran. A faction which was elected with historical victory has lost its electoral power within almost six years. A political movement that was able to gather the highest percentage of votes in the history of the IRI has lost this support despite the presidential post in hand and the parliamentary majority that would bring institutional power.

¹²⁹ Gheissari and Nasr, 2006, p. 150.

¹³⁰ Güneş Murat Tezcür in Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, 2008, p. 68.

¹³¹ Ibid.

The cases that are examined throughout the chapter shows three important points which will be analyzed in systematic way in the next chapter. First of all, it is apparent that the Supreme Leader and the conservative faction did not accept the reformist faction as a partner in the state power. Thus, they used every mechanism that the state provides in order to block the growth and strengthening of the reformist movement in any sphere. Thus, it is apparent that electoral victories did not turn into organizational and institutional power for the reformist faction since the core conservative elite did not allow. Secondly, despite the heavy conservative pressure which was felt in every level of social and political life, the intellectual and social support for the reformist faction continued for years. The social support was on such a level that led to the biggest grassroots mobilization between 1999 and 2003 since the 1979 Revolution until that time. Additionally, intellectuals still continued to back the reformist project despite the threat of being under attack by the conservatives and its supporters. The scope of the movement is apparent in this ongoing social and intellectual support for reform even in the presence of conservative pressure that was felt both in the political and socio-cultural spheres. Thirdly, it is obvious that the reformist elite were unable to repulse conservative attacks in an organized fashion although they held the greatest electoral support that a faction in Iran could hold until that time. These are three main findings that can easily be inferred from the cases in this chapter, which will constitute the ground for the analyses in the next chapter.

The reformist era is not only important for understanding a significant period in the Iranian history, but also to envisage the future of reformism in Iran. Thus, in the next chapter, I will first try to deal with the reasons of the electoral failure of the reformist faction especially after 2003 based on the events discussed in this chapter; and then to discuss the prospects for the future of reformism in Iran.

CHAPTER IV

THE REASONS OF ELECTORAL FAILURES DURING THE KHATAMI ERA

The question of why reformism failed during the Khatami period has been a widely studied matter in studies on Iranian politics. Focusing on the state structure, most of those studies are based on the arguments on the powerful position of the conservatives in the state structure and the reformists' lacking meaningful tools to resist the conservative pressure. However, there are other factors which are usually being undermined despite their central importance in the reformist struggle. The structural and ideological flexibility of the reformist faction and the features of the relationship between the reformist elite and the constituents are as important as the role of the state structure not only for understanding the failure of reformism under Khatami presidency but also for future prospects of reformism in Iran. In this chapter, I will first discuss the factors that led to electoral lapse of reformism in the first half of 2000s, and then try to figure out key points of a future reformist path based on the experiences of the Khatami period and of the Green Movement.

This chapter is structured on two interrelated questions. Although reformist candidates got the majority of the votes in the elections between 1997 and 2001 there was an apparent decline in the electoral success of reformism starting with the municipal elections of 2003 and ending with the victory of a hardliner candidate, Mohammad Ahmadinejad, in the presidential elections of 2005. The first question is that which factors enabled the failure of reformism in electoral politics in the first half of 2000s. After two terms of reformist presidency, another major experience took place after the 10th presidential elections in 2009 which is commonly known as the Green Movement. After this historical process that lasted a year, Iranian reformism should be reconsidered with the light of this experience. The 2009 elections made the effectiveness of electoral politics for reformism questionable

considering the fact that even with millions of supporters, reformist candidates cannot be elected due to the conservative will. Accordingly, the second question is that whether electoral politics is still an effective means for Iranian opposition. Parallel to that, another question whether one can think of any other tool within the boundaries of legal framework keeping in mind that there is a social distance to revolutionary changes.

4.1. Problems of the Literature

Before discussing the abovementioned questions, it is necessary to highlight the deficiencies of the existing literature. There are two points to be criticized in the current argumentation of the failure of reformism in Iran. The first one is the over-emphasis on the role of the state structure. Although, it is a key phenomenon that shapes the political framework, it is not *the* factor with which one can read the political developments in Iran. If one exclusively relies on this factor, one cannot attribute any agency neither to the reformist elite nor to the society. Thus, any possibility of change is unwittingly excluded based on the argument that the conservatives are at the core of the political system in a way that blocks any kind of change in the current system. If there is a possibility of reform, there must be a possibility of changing the state structure either. Thus, it is apparent that if the core of the state structure resists reform, the pressure for and the engine of the change must exist out of that structure, which shows the importance of dealing with factors other than the central role of conservatives in the state structure. Therefore, in this chapter, a balanced view will be presented with an aim of grasping the abilities and inabilities of the reformist movement based not only on the factors focused on conservative power but also on the internal dynamics of reformists and reformism in Iran.

The second problem would be exceedingly focusing on Khatami's role during his two terms of presidency. Although Iranian politics provides an appropriate ground for bringing about a political atmosphere in which individual power can be effective, stressing Khatami's role in the success or failure of the reformist project of 1990s again leads to undermining the role of social actors in politics. Khatami's election in

1997 was a reflection of social transformations of 1990s, not a personal victory. Neither the electoral setback of reformists between 2003 and 2005 could merely be seen as the personal failure of Khatami. As the highest reformist authority during those 8 years, Khatami certainly played a crucial role in reformist politics. However, if the personal role of him is excessively stressed, social dynamics of reformism would be neglected very much alike with the first point made above. It is not wrong to argue that it was this misinterpretation of the role of Khatami and undermining of social dynamics which led to a surprise when the Green Movement took place. Therefore, I will try to put forward the social forces of reformism throughout the chapter without neglecting the role of Khatami.

4.2. The Factors behind the Reformist Electoral Failure

After stating two misleading features of most of the studies on Iranian reformism, major factors behind the reformist electoral setback can be discussed. There are three fundamental drivers affecting the course of reformist politics: the institutional state structure, the internal structure of reformist elite politics, and the relationship between the reformist elite and the constituents.

4.2.1. Obstacles to Reform in the Legal Framework

As it was discussed before, the institutional state structure of the IRI is established in a way that only the Supreme Leader and the conservative elites can be effective in it. As a powerful head of the State the Supreme Leader is the ultimate authority that determines the course of political events. After the revolution, the ruling elite kept the republican institutions of the old regime, but dwarfed them with two sets of institutions in which the new ideology of the regime based on the velayat-e faqih system could be functional. Three branches of the government, the executive, legislative and judicial branches, constitutes the republican set, while theocratic set is composed of the post of the Supreme Leader and the unelected institutions which are directly responsible to the Supreme Leader such as the Guardian Council and the Expediency Council. The last group is composed of the foundations some of which existed before the revolution has functioned as the social and economic branch of the revolutionary regime. Except for the executive and legislative branches of

government, the Supreme Leader has an unquestionable authority over the state institutions. Moreover, any ideology excluding or even questioning the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader is directly excluded from state power since it is the foundational state ideology to which opposition is harshly suppressed.

Among the threefold set of institutions, namely republican, theocratic and revolutionary, any faction other than the conservatives can only be represented in the executive and legislative branches via elections. In other words, republican aspirations can only be pursued in these two institutions.¹³² Yet, the hierarchical structure of the state does not allow these institutions to function free from conservative pressure. Although the state structure seems to be composed of several institutions balancing each other's power, there is a constitutionally set hierarchy among them. The actions of the Majles and the government are closely monitored by the institutions that are responsible to the Supreme Leader. Thus, only the Majles and the government are composed of elected members (except for the Assembly of Experts which does not have a direct role in the legislative and executive decision-making processes), yet they are monitored by the harshest control mechanism in the country. This institutional hierarchy led to two interrelated consequences: On the one side it enables the factions who are loyal to the Supreme Leader, especially the conservatives, be powerful in the state, and on the other, it deprives the others of necessary legal means to deal with the conservative pressure.¹³³

The powerful position of the institutions in which conservatives are dominant enabled them block any legal reform attempt of the reformist faction, while leaving no room for withstanding that constraint. Although most of the developments of the period between 1997 and 2005 were discussed in the previous chapter, it is important to rethink them with the light of this debate. During the 8 year-long presidency of Khatami, the most widely and effectively used legal means by the conservatives were as follows: the ratification of all Majles decisions by the Guardian Council, the

¹³² Since the theocratic and revolutionary institutions are mostly dominated by the conservative faction, the names of the institutions and the conservatives are used interchangeably throughout the text.

¹³³ Keshavarzian, 2005, p. 63-65.

approval of electoral candidates by the Guardian Council, the judiciary, and direct physical violence via security forces. As a result, surrounded by a network of constitutionally legitimized theocratic institutions which are directly responsible to the Supreme Leader, the reformist Majles and the government did not hold meaningful tools to counterbalance this pressure and implement reforms. Now, with an aim of observing the functioning of each of these tools that are used against the reformist elite and the constituents by the conservative elite, I will try to present key examples from each.

The important position of the Guardian Council in the legislation process constitutes the first tool, which implies that, the Guardian Council, as a non-elected body and as the representative of the Supreme Leader, holds a higher position than the Majles, the elected organ of legislation. Apart from the developments which were discussed in the previous chapter, the most renowned clash between the reformist faction and the Guardian Council regarding legislation was the attempt of Khatami to limit the role of the Guardian Council in the elections via a bill, which was vetoed by the Guardian Council on September 1, 2002.¹³⁴ Sair Amir Arjomand narrates following developments regarding the bill with these words:

In the beginning of March 2003, the Majles passed amendments to the electoral law with the same effect in March 2003. Khatami threatened to resign or put the bills to referendum. But the Maslahat Council let its position be known by quadrupling the Council's budget at a meeting on March 15, which Khatami and Majles Speaker Karrubi walked out of.¹³⁵

One of the key demands of the reformist faction was the strengthening of the republican aspect of the regime, of which these bills can be considered as a part, however, the control mechanism around the Majles and the government did not allow an alteration in the existing hierarchical structure of the state that favoring the unelected bodies rather the elected ones.

¹³⁴ Arjomand, Said Amir. "The Rise and Fall of President Khatami and the Reform Movement in Iran". *Constellations*, vol. 12, no. 4 (2005): 502-520, p. 515.

¹³⁵ Ibid. The Maslahat Council (the Expediency Council) is an organ which was established with the constitutional amendments of January 1988 with the task of settling disputes between the Guardian Council and the Majles. For more information on the history and role of the Maslahat Council, check: <http://maslahat.ir/DocLib2/About/History.aspx>

The second legal obstacle to reform was the inability of the reformist politicians to run in various elections due to the power of the Guardian Council of disqualifying any candidate who are deprived of the right of appeal the decisions. Between 1997 and 2005, this power of the Guardian Council has been influential mainly in the parliamentary elections rather than the other 3 types of elections, namely municipal, presidential and the elections of Assembly of Experts. In the municipal elections, which were initiated in 1999 with a claim of realizing popular sovereignty, the Guardian Council does not have an authority to disqualify the candidates. In the presidential elections of 2001 and 2005, reformist candidates were allowed to run. In the Assembly of Experts, only the mujtaheds can be elected which usually brings about a conservative-dominated body. The highest percentage of disqualifications among these elections took place in the parliamentary elections of 2004 in which 33% of the registered candidates were barred from running in the elections.¹³⁶ 80 reformist representatives of the 6th Majles were among the disqualified candidates, which led to protests of reformist parliamentarians. 131 MPs went on strike and 123 MPs resigned after the decision, however, the Guardian Council did not withdraw its decision.¹³⁷ After the electoral setback in the municipal elections of 2003, which was most probably derived from the apathy of the reformist constituents, the parliamentary elections of 2004 was the second electoral failure of reformism under Khatami presidency.

The head of the judiciary is appointed by the Supreme Leader that generates a direct responsibility of the judicial branch to the Supreme Leader. The judiciary has been one of the most influential tools of the regime in suppressing the opposition since the first day of the revolution. However, its involvement to the clash between the reformist and conservative factions occurred with the trial of the then renowned Tehran Mayor Gholamhossein Karbaschi. Afterwards, most of the prominent intellectuals and politicians of reformism were faced with judicial pressure. Abdollah

¹³⁶ Princeton University, Iran Data Portal.
<http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/elections/parl/2004/>

¹³⁷ Arjomand, 2005, p. 503.

Nuri, Hashem Aghajari, Akbar Ganji, Mohsen Kadivar and Abbas Abdi are some of those reformists who were imposed with penalties ranging from imprisonment to death. In addition to reformist politicians and intellectuals, the reformist constituents were also exposed to judicial pressure. As one of the social engines of the reform movement in Iran, the students were under the attack of judiciary especially during the protests of 1999, 2002 and 2003. Most of the student leaders were either jailed and sentenced to long years of imprisonment, or forced to leave the country¹³⁸. The pressure on the printed press constitutes the third element that faced with judicial constraints. The relatively free atmosphere in the socio-cultural sphere which was initiated by the reformist government was harshly suppressed especially after 1999. With this threefold encircling, it is not assertive to state that the reformists were under an attack of one of the most influential tools of state power to which they did not hold a legal mechanism to object.

Last but not least, coercive power was the fourth tool that the conservative elite used against the reformists either directly or indirectly via basijis and paramilitary forces. The onslaught on Abdollah Nuri and Ataollah Mohajerani in 1998, the partially resolved Chain Murders of 1999, the night-raid on Tehran University dormitory in 1999 and the brutal crackdown of the following demonstrations, the assassination attempt to Saeed Hajjarian in 2000, and the violence used against the students in the protests of 2002 and 2004 are some of the most important examples of physical attacks attempted at the reformists.

Because of the implementation of these four mechanisms by the conservative faction, namely the position of the Guardian Council in the legislation, the decisive role of the Guardian Council in the election process, the judiciary, and the coercive power of the state, the reformists were able to use neither the legislative, nor the judicial branch effectively. Reformist participation in the elections remained in the boundaries that were drawn by the Guardian Council. Additionally, they could not use their right to protest due to the physical attacks of the security forces and the

¹³⁸ Yaghmaian, 2008, p. 20.

basij militia in the first place. Yet, the reformist administration tried to resist this pressure and to implement certain changes in the state structure in many ways. Since the legal and institutional means were blocked by the conservatives, the reformists developed a wise strategy with three inter-related pillars based on their intellectual capacity. As the first pillar of this strategy, the reformist administration created a relatively free socio-cultural atmosphere in which the press could flourish as a tool of resistance. Secondly, with the effect of the rich intellectual debates started in the first years of 1990s, the reformists managed to change the political discourse and put across the importance of popular sovereignty, rule of law and republicanism after the election of Khatami in 1997. This discourse has altered the political language in a way that even the conservatives had to adopt their discourse and tactics based on the principles of the reformist discourse. After the introduction of this reformist mindset to the political arena, the mainstream state understanding stressing the unquestionable authority of the Supreme Leader and leaving popular consent aside was no longer convincing. Therefore, although, they could not manage to deliver the reformist ideals in the eight-year presidency of Khatami, the alteration of the mainstream political discourse can be considered as one of the most important contributions of the reformist administration.

Related to the other two pillars, the third pillar was the reclaim of the power of the president on a constitutional level vis-à-vis theocratic institutions with the intent of highlighting the republican aspect of the state system. For instance, Khatami's stress on the role of the president in the protection and implementation of the constitution against the Guardian Council symbolizes the struggle for reversing the institutional hierarchy in favor of popular sovereignty based on the legitimacy derived from the constitution.¹³⁹ Yet, despite the deepness and complexity of the reformist intellectual tactics, the power of the conservatives did not allow them to make any changes in the existing conditions of the state structure. Although an extremely important factor, the conservative pressure was not the only determinant of the failure of the reformist project.

¹³⁹ Arjomand, 2005, pp. 513-515.

4.2.2. The Internal Structure of Reformist Elite Politics

A perspective which only deals with the conservative pressure in explaining the failure of reformism during Khatami's presidency since it undermines the agency of reformists and the effects of the internal dynamics of reformism over the whole process. However, if one does not look at the internal problems of reformism, it is hard to generate an idea on how reformism can reach a position in which it is able to alter the state structure. It is important to discuss these features in a detailed fashion for two reasons. First, it is vital to understand how the reformists could lose the chance of implementing reforms while they had authority over two powerful institutions of the regime. Second, this discussion may provide indications for the future of reformism in Iran in terms of their own structural deficiencies. Two interrelated features of the reformist faction were influential in the loss of electoral support: organizational looseness and ideological flexibility.

As I have tried to discuss before, Iranian factionalism provides a loose ground for politics due to the absence of institutionalization of political action. In the lack of a political party tradition, political factions are deprived of the necessary institutional tools for staying intact. However, each faction has not experience this phenomenon in the same way. It is not wrong to argue that the state structure replaced the necessary organizational framework for the conservative faction which has been dominant in the core state institutions since the beginning of the regime. Moreover, they could use non-administrative organizations such as the mosques for keeping organizational status quo alive. Thus, as the hegemonic faction of the regime; the conservative faction could preserve its organizational and ideological unity through its powerful position in the state. In other words, power kept them intact throughout the three-decade history of the IRI. However, other factions such as the reformists and the modern right neither possessed such powerful positions in the state nor had control over powerful institutions like mosques which could have a more firm political ground. Therefore, it is pertinent to claim that two phenomena affected the organizational structure of the reformist faction: the situation of being on the

opposition to the holders of the political power and the lack of powerful unifying organizations.

The consequences of these two factors are connected, yet different at the same time. The first factor, being on the oppositional side, makes the factions both open to state pressure and vulnerable to change if they want to claim their share in the state power in the Iranian context. Although staying firm against the regime pressure may have contributed to their success, oppositional factions have usually altered their positions due to this pressure, which brought about a loss of electoral support. The softening of the discourses or giving up certain claims due to the regime leverage has been considered as a compromise or even as a betrayal by the constituents as it happened in the last years of Khatami's presidency. One of the most important chances of showing their decisiveness in making a change in the course of politics on behalf of the popular sovereignty was missed by the Majles in 2000, which Arjomand explains in these words:

On August 6, 2000, the Leader told the Majles to stop its deliberations on the new press law, and clerical judges were emboldened to close down the last important reformist paper, *Bahar*, and arrest more journalists... The reformist Majles lost the first and best (and probably the only) chance it had for confronting the Leader, who had clearly stepped beyond his ample constitutional jurisdiction by telling parliament to shut up, to stand up as the legislative power against the judiciary.¹⁴⁰

The second factor, the lack of a powerful unifying organization and a tradition of an institutionalized politics have influenced the possibility of creating and preserving a factional unity. Although, there were powerful organizations such as the Association of Combatant Clerics and the Executives of Construction in which reformists and the modern right were active, the fact that Iranian politics has functioned through individuals, not organizations has rendered the impacts of these initiatives relatively limited. On the one side, there were the conservatives who were using the institutional network of the state for preserving their own factional unity, and on the other, there were the reformists who lacked an organizational structure through which they could resist the conservative pressure more firmly. Although, it is not the

¹⁴⁰ Arjomand, 2005, p. 510.

only reason of the weakness of reformists vis-à-vis the conservatives, it is apparent that the lack of a powerful institution facilitated the disintegration of the faction when faced with the conservative attack. The disorganization of the reformists is apparent in the lack of a presidential candidate in 2005 over which the faction could reach a consensus. Thus, one of the key factors of the electoral failure of reformism in the second half of 2000s was this inability of the reformists to keeping their organizational unity intact vis-à-vis the conservatives.

The second factor related to the internal structure of the reformists was their ideological flexibility. As it was discussed before, political and socio-economic factors such as the end of the Iran-Iraq war, the death of Khomeini, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the socio-cultural repressive atmosphere and regime's inability to deliver an effective economic program resulted in social transformation out which a reformist segment emerged both within the social strata and within the elites. Khatami's election should be considered as a result of this transformation which he could grasp through his all-encompassing political discourse. This intention of addressing to all the social segments that demand certain changes can be considered as the first reason of an ambiguous reformist elite discourse. Although, the importance of the political discourse of the reformist elite in the 1990's in terms of their failure in the following elections is widely neglected in the literature, it is apparent that the ambiguity of the reformist elite discourse has affected the loss of electoral support. This ideological ambiguity has resulted in a flexible and ambiguous way of politics in practice which disappointed the constituents on the one side, and strengthened the hands of the conservatives on the other. Cyrus Masroori summarizes this phenomenon in these words:

To sum it up, Khatami was left with three choices: First, he could reject Khomeini's divine right doctrine in favor of popular sovereignty. Second, he could abandon popular sovereignty in favor of the divine right doctrine. Third, he could remain conceptually ambiguous. He selected the last choice, hoping an arrangement for the Leader as an elected and impartial supreme arbitrator could be achieved. However, once that hope was not realized, the

contradictions in his position were exploited by both the fundamentalist opposition and those reformers radicalized by Khatami's failures.¹⁴¹

However, beyond the inconsistencies of Khatami, there was a general ideological disunity among the reformists during Khatami's presidency. Social demands for a free socio-cultural sphere, popular sovereignty and the rule of law could have been embraced by the reformist elite; however there was a disagreement on how and to what extent these demands would be delivered. This ambiguity among the elites contributed to the inconsistency of Khatami's political discourse on the one hand and actions on the other, which influenced the plausibility of the reformists in the eyes of the electorates.

The second reason of a vague reformist discourse derives from the fact that reformism was a new phenomenon in the IRI with only almost one decade of history. During two terms of presidency of Khatami, it was still a newly emerged and an evolving process in which ideological and practical capabilities were tried to be discovered. The materialization of differences within the reformists has occurred during this period which affected the course of the reformist administration. These ideological splits have also contributed to the perception of a disunited and a less promising reformist elite in the eyes of the constituents.

The most successful policy of Khatami which did not suffer from neither of these factional problems was his foreign policy based on a reconciliatory attitude towards the West and the USA in specific. However, after the 9/11 attack and Bush's declaration of Iran as a part of the "axis of evil" on January 2002, the most powerful card of Khatami which gained a wide support from its constituents had gone and made the faction much more vulnerable to the conservative attack. After the loss of the only tool in which the reformist faction could resist the conservatives due to the factional unity, the collapse of the reformist project has accelerated. This is an important development actually shows the importance of factional coalescence both on an organizational and ideological level that results in a harmony of theory and practice. However, as a newly emerged faction, the reformists neither could create an organizational structure nor an ideological unity. Together with the conservative

¹⁴¹ Masroori, Cyrus. "The Conceptual Obstacles to Political Reform in Iran". *The Review of Politics*, vol. 69 (2007): 189.

attack on the faction, their inability to establish an internally firm and strong faction have a deep impact on the failure of reformism under Khatami.

4.2.3. The Relationship between the Reformist Elite and its Constituents

Apart from the factors outside the reformist faction such as the conservative pressure and the internal structure of the faction, there is a third factor which I find extremely important to discuss in terms of its impacts on the loss of electoral support to reformists: the nature of the relationship between the reformist elite and the constituents. Understanding the dynamics of this relationship would help to understand the points that the reformist movement should take into consideration in the future struggle.

The first important phenomenon is related to the discussion in the previous paragraphs. The lack of an organizational framework affected not only the internal relationships of the reformist elite, but also their relationship with the constituents. The absence of a powerful organization deprived the movement of a framework through which a consistent and a lasting relationship could be established. The existence of an organization does not necessarily bring about a steady movement, yet it paves the way for it. Nor the absence of such a framework was the preference of the reformists, but it is apparent that there is an organizational deficit in the reformist movement which prevents a deeper and a long-lasting reformist tradition. Although, such a tradition does not exist in any of the political factions in the IRI, the need for an organizational tradition is urgent to fulfill especially for the factions in the opposition. In the absence of an organizational platform which could have provided a ground for a lively reformist politics, the elections emerged as the engines of the movement that could draw people together. However, a vulnerable and a temporal commitment came out with this election-oriented relationship. Elections and electoral politics have not provided a solid ground for an organized and a firm movement on its own, which will be discussed in the following paragraphs. Therefore, it is relevant to argue that the lack of a powerful organization has contributed to the highly fluctuating electoral support for reformists, which resulted in the electoral failures between 2003 and 2005.

The second point is that the reformist administration has failed to deliver the expectations of its electorates which basically originate from the idea of the

limitation of the theocratic aspect of the regime and the strengthening of popular sovereignty. It is argued that together with the existing looseness of the relationship, the inability of the reformist administration in realization of these social expectations result in the disappointment of the electorates with the reformist elite. As it was discussed before, there were two spheres in which the reformist administration could make a change: the socio-cultural framework and the mainstream political discourse. First, a relatively free socio-cultural atmosphere emerged in which harsh discussion could be made on topics that were previously taboo in the IRI such as the position of the velayet-e faqih. Secondly, the idea that stresses the importance of popular share in the political power has become a part of the political discourse during the presidency of Khatami. However, the reformists could not use their greatest asset on their own behalf. According to Ali Ansari, reformists lost their attachment with their constituents since their struggle was based on institutional and legal framework instead of on using their biggest opportunity, their popular support.¹⁴² The reformists opened a new way of politics by stressing the need for popular legitimacy instead of a divine one; however the conservatives were the ones who could use this asset due to the impotence of the reformists in reflecting the demands of their political base. In Ansari's words:

...whereas leading reformists were confronting the traditional conservative elites and their traditional patrimonial methods of divide and rule, others on the right were seizing on the new democratic agenda defined by the reformists, concentrating on people's particular anxieties and appropriating those general ideas where there was a sufficient overlap in the intent and vision between themselves and the reformists.¹⁴³

The inability of the reformists in turning their popular support into an asset vis-à-vis the conservatives paved the way for electoral failures through leading both to their inability to deliver the reformist ideals, and with related to this, to the apathy of the reformist electorates.

The third factor affecting the alienation of the electorates from the reformist elite was originated from the political flexibility of the reformist faction. Two most important

¹⁴² Ansari, Ali M. *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change*. London: Chatham House, 2006, p. 229-31.

¹⁴³ Ibid, p. 272.

groups within the reformists which had a great role in the election of Khatami could not get a satisfactory support from the reformist administration throughout the presidency of Khatami, the youth and the women. The socio-economic position and political visibility of women has strengthened during the reformist period, however, the administration did not take a concrete step towards women rights on a constitutional level. Parallel to that, the youth has been suffering from unemployment and the strict socio-cultural rules of the regime in the everyday life.¹⁴⁴ Although the latter was relatively solved through a general relaxation in the socio-cultural sphere, the administration did not address the economic problems of the youth who were great supporters of the reformist campaign. More importantly, the reformist administration did not firmly protect the youth when they were marginalized and physically attacked by the conservatives especially during the student protests after 1999. All these disappointments with the reformist administration alienated the youth from the reformist elite which was apparent in the protests during 2002 and 2003 in which slogans in favor of Khatami's resignation were widely heard.

As a consequence of these three factors deriving from the state structure, the internal structure of the reformist elite politics and the relationship between the reformist elite and electorates led to a disunity and disorganization in the last years of Khatami's administration. These three factors facilitated the inability of the reformist elite to resist the conservative pressures especially after 9/11 and George W. Bush's "Axis of Evil" statement which took away the only card that the reformist administration held vis-à-vis the conservatives. One of the most successful areas in which the reformist administration fulfilled its political promises was the Foreign Policy. However, the normalization process of relations with the West and the US in specific was blocked after the speech of Bush in which he placed Iran in the "Axis of Evil" with North Korea and Iraq and annihilated any possibility of future rapprochement between Iran and the US. However, the reformist administration would not have affected the domestic sphere in the same way from this sharp change in the US Foreign Policy if it was not already in a weak and stagnant position because of the abovementioned three factors. The reasons of failure of reformism under Khatami's presidency are

¹⁴⁴ In 2005, 70% of the unemployed was composed of people under age 30, see. Salehi-Isfahani, Djavad. "Iranian Youth in Times of Economic Crisis". *Iranian Studies*, vol. 44 no.6 (2011): 789-806.

briefly summarized by Said Amir Arjomand through pointing out the “disconnectedness” of the reformist elite in several political spheres with these words:

This brief survey should suffice to show that the major problem of the political wing of the reform movement as the true children of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and its undoing was a double disconnect: a disconnect between the President and the reformist members of the Majles at the organizational level, and a disconnect of both Khatami and the reform movement from the people in general, and from the new generation, and the university students in particular. Nor was the reform movement able to build any bridges connecting to the urban poor.¹⁴⁵

Thus, there are three fundamental problems to focus on for the reformist elite in order to generate a policy which can fulfill its promises. First, they have to find ways of overcoming the institutional power of the conservatives. This aspect can be realized in two interrelated ways. On the one side, they have to find ways of breaking the internal integrity of the conservatives in order to harm their institutional abilities, and on the other, they have to use their electoral support in a more effective manner vis-à-vis the conservative power originating from the hierarchical state structure. Combining the second and third aspects, it can be argued that the reformist elite has to overcome the “disconnectedness” both in its internal structure and with its constituents. Yet, it should be kept in mind that it is hard to generate an all-encompassing reformist policy that could unite the reformist forces in the country since Iranian reformism has several branches which makes it harder to come to terms on certain issues such as the position and authority of *vali-ye faqih* within the state structure and whether to choose a reconciliatory or a confrontational political stance toward the conservatives. On the other hand, the removal of the disconnectedness with the constituents will empower the reformists in two ways; first through strengthening the position of the popular democracy discourse within the political arena, and secondly through balancing the conservatives’ institutional power with changing the main political “battleground”.

¹⁴⁵ Arjomand, 2005, p. 512.

4.3. Future Prospects of Reform in Iran

It is apparent that Iranian reformism has a lot to learn from the reformist experience under Khatami's presidency. Although, it is a widely studied period, the lessons to be learned from that experience have less taken into consideration. However, there is an urgent need to forge the link between the most important reformist practice in Iran and today's Iranian reformism in the light of recent developments. Since the system blocks all the possible legal ways of reform or pushing for reform, elections have been the most effective and the only tool for reformist politics. Yet, an 8-year long experience in the country's most powerful elected post while constituting the majority in the Majles as well did not suffice to realize reformist demands. Thus, it is relevant to ask that whether electoral politics is still a meaningful framework for the reformists given that it is almost impossible to make concrete changes with this existing state system, and if not, in what ways electoral politics could serve reformism in Iran. In this part, I will try to discuss the place of elections in the future of Iranian reformism in the light of the developments of the last 4 years which have been historic not only for Iranian reformism, but also for the whole political system.

Before discussing the opportunities that could be gained through electoral politics, I would like to highlight three highly inter-related points which are crucial to take into consideration while thinking about possible strategies and the future prospects of Iranian reformism. In my humble opinion, any failure or success of the reformist movement could be perceived through these three points which should be considered as the fundamentals of a reformist strategy in contemporary Iran.

First and foremost, it is obvious that legal framework is blocked for the reformists for any kind of change that would harm the Supreme Leader's and the conservatives' authority given that almost all of the decisions are needed to be ratified either by the Supreme Leader or by the Guardian Council. Reform in Iran should be considered as a long process in which elections may only be considered as temporal victories or failures by the reformists, however, elections do not provide them with direct and effective tools of implementing reforms due to the institutional power of the conservative camp. Thus, it is obvious that there is not a direct relationship between reforms and electoral victories, which is a fact that was proven during the Khatami era as well. This phenomenon brings one to the second point I want to raise. Instead

of struggling for directly implementing the reforms they are intend to, the reformists should convince the Supreme Leader and the conservatives to accept a power share with them or find ways of compelling them to substantiate such a power share. Here, a balance between the theocratic and republican forces is meant with the term power share. Yet, the content of this share which can be a topic of another study itself will not be discussed here. That kind of a discussion must take into account in deep several other dynamics including the disputes both within the conservatives and the reformists. The point here is that, the reformist agenda should be twofold. Together with thinking about Iran's political, economic and socio-cultural problems and the ways of struggling with them, the reformists should consider under what conditions the Supreme Leader and the conservative clique would give up their authority over the state in a certain extent.

The third point I would like to discuss is about the basic characteristics of the strategy of the reformist movement. This paragraph is written with purposes of predicting possible circumstances for reform within the existing state system of the IRI, not with an aim of promoting or supporting it. When the reformist faction is on the political scene, they have always pursued an active politics by which it is meant a direct demand or attempt of the implementation of a certain reform. However, this attitude did not prove to be influential due to the lack of state power on behalf of them and the unwillingness of the conservatives. Moreover, whenever reformists pursued that kind of a direct and active politics, conservatives quickly unite and use all their institutional forces against them, despite their internal disputes. Thus, it is apparent that instead of pursuing instant solutions such politics, an indirect and a long-term strategy would better serve for the purposes of the reformist faction because of the centrality of conservative power in all the ways that lead to a change in the status-quo. Therefore, based on the second point which was raised above, that indirect politics would be one that struggles for the weakening of the conservative power, instead of empowering itself. A combination of a sudden crisis originating from either an internal or an external development and the deepening of the cracks within the conservative elite would create such a weak position after which the Supreme Leader or the conservatives may agree upon a power share with the democratic forces in the society. The disintegration of the unity within the

conservative block and the withdrawal of the support of important political and socio-economic forces such as the Revolutionary Guards would be crucially important in that respect. Keeping in mind that the movement pursues a reformist path rather than a revolutionary one, this situation may create the only possibility of convincing the conservatives to compromise. In case of such a vulnerable position only the conservatives may agree on weakening the theocratic pillar of the regime.¹⁴⁶ Based on the threefold line of thought discussed above, I will now try to discuss the possible place of elections in the framework of reformist political strategy. Elections can provide the reformists only with the legislative and executive power, which are relatively powerless vis-à-vis the structural superiority of the conservatives. Thus, depending solely on the power that the elections may provide the reformists with is a hopeful, yet unrealistic strategy. Elections and electoral politics can be a part of a meaningful reformist solution only in case of contributing to the creation of such a crisis situation that was discussed above. Thus, electoral victory is not an end-in-itself; rather it should be a part of a long-term strategy that aims at weakening the conservative elite through strengthening the disputes within it.

4.3.1. The Green Movement

In June 2009, Iran has experienced the greatest social uprising since the Iranian Revolution when Mahmood Ahmadinejad won the tenth presidential election with serious claims of electoral fraud, in which strong reformist candidates such as the former PM Mir Hossein Mousavi have also run. In an election with 85.21% voter turnout, the candidate who was backed by the conservative block, the President Mahmood Ahmadinejad, captured the 63.1% of the votes against two reformist candidates, namely Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, and a conservative, Mohsen Rezai¹⁴⁷. Afterwards, millions of protestors poured into the streets chanting “Where is my vote?” referring to a possible fraud on behalf of Ahmadinejad. It was considered as a civil rights movement which revealed the frustration within the society against regime repression and the incompetent politicians that could not alter

¹⁴⁶ A personal interview with Prof. Nader Hashemi inspired me a lot in the thoughts in this paragraph.

¹⁴⁷ Princeton University Iran Data Portal,
<http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/elections/pres/2009/>.

the status-quo.¹⁴⁸ The protests began in June 2009, spread throughout the country and lasted for almost 8 months. The regime suppressed the protests through heavy physical violence and judicial pressure. Thousands of protestors were arrested and the prominent figures of the Movement, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi were put under house arrest in February 2011. Despite the massive support behind it and months of active struggle, the Movement could not bring about a concrete change in the political structure, which is a crucial phenomenon to discuss for the future of reform in Iran.

For the purposes of this thesis, the Green Movement is important in terms of its place in the broader reformist movement and its political consequences. The Green Movement is considered as a part of a broader movement whose roots can be found in the initial clashes among the revolutionary groups after the Islamic Revolution. These initial clashes over the Revolution paved the way of a long-lasting power struggle of which both the reformist movement and the Green Movement are a part. The domination of the political and economic spheres of the country by the conservative faction and the transformation of the socio-cultural arena from above in accordance with the conservative mindset triggered these clashes and led to a social accumulation which was exploded with the Green Movement. The relationship between the Revolution and the Green Movement can be understood deeper in Asef Bayat's words which read:

The root cause of the crisis lies in a historic twist: Iran experienced an "Islamic revolution" without first developing an "Islamist movement", one that could "socialize" and connect the expectations of the people to the visions of the Islamist leadership. In the absence of such an Islamist movement, "Islamization" was then inaugurated primarily *after* the revolution by the Islamic state from above, and often through coercion and compulsion. As a consequence, from the very first days of the Islamic Republic the process of Islamization provoked dissent. Today's crisis is the legacy of that disjuncture over the very meaning of the revolution.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Dabashi, Hamid. *The Green Movement in Iran*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2011, p. 65.

¹⁴⁹ Bayat, Asef "A Wave for Life and Liberty: The Green Movement in Iran and Iran's Incomplete Revolution" in Hashemi, Nader and Danny Postel, eds. *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future*. New York: Melville House, 2010. p. 43

As it is widely discussed, it is relevant to gather the reasons behind the Green Movement around two fundamental factors. First of all, the absolute control of the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres of society by the Supreme Leader and the conservative block without leaving any room for any kind of opposition throughout the three decades after the Revolution triggered the unresolved problems originating from the very first times of the Revolution. The combination of the uneven power-share within the state structure, the hegemony of the social sectors which are loyal to the Supreme Leader in the economy and the absolute authority of the conservative forces on the socio-cultural arena created socially, economically and politically marginalized groups which consist of the women, the youth, the secular middle class, the urban dwellers, the working class etc. Although a discussion on the demographic composition of the Movement goes beyond the aims of this thesis, it is vital to observe the marginalization of certain social sectors through state power throughout the short history of the Islamic Republic. Additionally, it is important to state that those groups created the social base of reform in Iran which have also took part in the Green Movement. Secondly, although the regime could create its opposition within the elites, those oppositional elite groups could not generate a relevant ground for social opposition which could have facilitated the realization of certain social demands. The reformist and moderate factions can be considered as oppositional due to the fact that they have relatively less or no power-share in the state structure compared to the conservative faction. However, as it was discussed throughout the thesis, they were unable to reverse the hierarchy in the state structure which could have substantiated the social demands on political and socio-cultural freedom. In such a case of a deadlock in the legal framework, the streets remained as the only viable ground for opposition when the belief in the reliability of the regime was finally destroyed after the alleged victory of Mahmood Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections of 2009 despite a massive reformist election campaign that the IRI has ever witnessed.

The reformist faction has an unsteady record in the electoral campaigns and election results. As it was discussed several times in previous chapters, the faction was either unable to generate a reliable and well-organized election policy, or could not simply

mobilize its potential electorates because of the multi-dimensional disconnect both among themselves and with the constituents. Although further reasons behind it require a deep analysis of the first presidential period of Mahmood Ahmadinejad which would go beyond the scope of this thesis, it is important to highlight the fact the reformists were able to run in an organized way with the active participation of the electorates both before and during the elections in the presidential elections of 2009 very much alike with the one in 1997. This election is not only important for the history of reformism in Iran, but also for the internal dynamics of the conservative faction and its effects on the course of politics. Whereas the reformist faction had three ratified candidates, the conservative faction had agreed upon one candidate, the previous president Mahmood Ahmadinejad. Even though the conservative faction was relatively united and organized in itself, it did not suffice to prevent a massive mobilization around the reformist candidates, especially around the former PM Mir Hossein Mousavi.

Compared to the relatively small-scale protests of the early 1990's and student protests during the Khatami era, the Green Movement was the largest massive mobilization in number since the Revolution in which millions of protestors were involved¹⁵⁰. This kind of a massive mobilization could have created a crisis situation after which the conservative block would have agreed to realize the demands of the protestors. Yet, it served for the further unification of the conservative block vis-à-vis a serious threat against the status-quo, rather than altering the existing power-share in the state structure which would have paved the way for reforms. Because of this initial consequence and the inability of the Movement to bring about concrete results in terms of reforms, the Green Movement is widely considered to be "failed". Although it has certainly contributed to the path of reform and became a milestone in the history of reform in Iran, it is apparent that it could not attain its demands. There are two main factors for this "fail" of the Green Movement. The first factor is related

¹⁵⁰ Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the then Mayor of Tehran, in a speech he made in the Majles regarding the street protests in June 2009 told that: "Based on the measurements that are performed, there were at least three billion protesters at the Azadi Square at the gathering of the supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi."

"براساس مترآژها و اندازه گیری های صورت گرفته در تجمع حامیان میرحسین موسوی در میدان آزادی، حداقل سه میلیون معترض حضور داشته اند"

[توضیح-قالیباف-در-مورد-دلیل-بهبودی-آزادی](http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/8937/توضیح-قالیباف-در-مورد-دلیل-بهبودی-آزادی)
<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/8937/>

to the features of the Movement which enabled it to become that much massive, yet disabled it at the same time vis-à-vis the state power. Main features of the Movement can be named as non-violent, non-revolutionary and lack of an organizational structure. Rather than toppling down the regime, the Movement aimed at reform within the existing regime, not a total breakdown. This phenomenon indirectly bestows agency on the conservative block in the course of events, since it ultimately seeks for “compromise” or “negotiation” with the central authority.

On the other hand, the second factor is related to the internal dynamics of the conservative block. In conjunction with the first factor, the integrity within the conservative block and the continuation of the support from the important political and socio-economic forces, especially the Revolutionary Guards’, constituted the foremost reason of how could the regime resisted that kind of a massive mobilization. The conservative faction was united against the Movement with all the political, economic and military forces behind it. If there was a break within the conservatives, or the Revolutionary Guards have withdrawn its support to the regime, the Supreme Leader and the conservative clique would be forced to accept a power share. Thus, although the first necessity of the situation in which the regime would accept to compromise was realized through this crisis, the second necessity was lacking which led to the continuation of the absolute conservative rule over the state.

The Green Movement is a historical event that should be studied from several angles; yet, its importance in terms of the struggle for reform in Iran makes it extremely important for the purposes of this thesis. Not only the development and the course of events, but also the consequences reveal various points about the factors that should be taken into consideration while thinking about reform in the IRI. Among all, I would like to stress two arguments which coincide with the inferences of this thesis from the reform period under Khatami’s presidency. The Green Movement and its political and socio-cultural consequences verified many of the lessons that were perceived during the reform era, which are vitally important both for the struggle for reform in Iran and for the studies on Iranian political reformism.

First of all, rather than being a strategy on its own, it should be kept in mind that election politics can only be a part of a broader strategy aiming at creating a crisis

situation because of which the conservative elites and the Supreme Leader would accept a power share. Both the 8-year-long reform period and the Green Movement have shown that it is almost impossible to reach a solution with a reformist strategy through legal means unless the conservative block is divided in itself. Because of the central importance of the conservative faction and the Supreme Leader in the state structure, a reformist strategy should be based on breaking the unity among them which empowers them in their attachment to the state power. Given the existing state structure and the absolute power of the Supreme Leader and the conservative faction over it, it is apparent that electoral victories cannot directly bring about concrete gains for the reformist faction with the authorities that the elected posts would present. Rather, the elections and electoral victories should be considered as tools of damaging the solidarity within the conservative block, which would weaken them vis-à-vis the reformist movement, result in further disputes over state power within themselves, and finally, convince them to make a power-share with the reformist faction.

The second point that will be raised here is both important in the reformist practice and in academic studies on Iranian reformism. When the Green Movement took place, it created a shock both within Iran and in the academic world, which derived from misleading or deficient interpretations of the struggle for reform in Iran. The reformist movement in Iran is widely studied as a part factional politics and considered as an elite phenomenon that occurs among different competing elite groups. Furthermore, the arguments on the inability of the reformists to achieve their aims were fundamentally based on the centrality of the conservative power in the state structure, which deprived the reformists of necessary means of political reform. Thus, not only the transformations in the social dynamics in terms of social mobilization, but also the effects of the elite struggles over the society were ignored both by the Iranian elites and the scholars studying on Iran. Social mobilization and elite politics are considered as two different phenomena; therefore, the demonstrations after the 2009 elections were unexpected for many observers. The need to include the social dynamics to academic analysis of domestic politics is often said but rarely actually practiced. The centrality of struggles over state power is still

a highly important factor in terms of reformism in Iran; yet, the Green Movement has shown that it is misleading unless social dynamics are also taken into account evenly. This chapter has aimed at understanding future prospects of reform Iran in the light of the reformist era under Khatami's presidency and the Green Movement. Both phenomena should be considered as parts of the same historical wave that at least aims a state based on rule of law, not on the arbitrariness of the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader. During the Khatami period, the reformists held the widest authority they could ever gain in the state structure, yet, they lost their electoral superiority even after an 8-year-long reformist administration. Three of the factors contributed to this electoral failure most: the hierarchical state structure favoring the Supreme Leader and the loyal clique around him, the internal inconsistencies and disorganization of the reformist faction, and the *disconnect* between the reformist faction and its constituents. The combination of these three factors brought about the electoral failures of the reformists between 2003 and 2005. Based on the lessons of this highly important era, the Green Movement shed more light on the path of reform in Iran. It first reshaped the perception of electoral politics and highlighted the importance of the unity of the conservative faction in terms of its effects over possibilities of reform. Secondly, the "unexpected" Movement once again showed the significance of "the social" in the analysis of "the political".

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

When Mohammad Khatami was elected in the 6th presidential elections of the Islamic Republic of Iran, there was a hope of change in the existing state structure and power share of the country on the side of certain sectors of the society and the international community as well. Most of the women, the youth, the middle class, urban dwellers and etc. supported the reformist project of 1990's which brought Khatami to power. Moreover, the countries that Iran had deteriorated political relations were hopeful about the reconciliatory attitude of Mohammad Khatami regarding Iran's foreign policy. There was a common belief that Khatami and his reformist clique would break the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader and the conservative block in the decision-making processes, thus, create a more moderate and compatible Iran both inside and outside the country. However, despite the massive domestic and international support to the President, there was not a major and fundamental change in the state structure on behalf of the reformist promises. On the contrary, even after an 8-year long reformist presidency, a candidate who is supported by the conservative faction, Mahmood Ahmadinejad, was elected in the presidential elections of June 2005. In this thesis, the reasons of this setback of the Iranian reformist faction were discussed basically focusing on the internal dynamics that paved the way for this electoral defeat. Additionally, the place of elections in the wider reformist agenda was examined based on the experiences of the Green Movement of 2009-2010 due to the fact that although the reformist faction has given a central role to electoral politics in their political strategy, elections did not bring about opportunities to realize the reformist promises. Thus, there is an urgent need to reconsider the possible future gains that could be achieved through elections, especially if one takes into account the election of a moderate president, Hassan Rouhani, in the 11th presidential elections of June 2013, which should be added briefly to the analysis due to its relevancy to the purposes of this thesis.

After the Islamic Revolution on 1979, the revolutionary groups began to compete with each other in order to have a more say on the shaping of the new regime. On the one side there were the secular/Marxist left and the liberal nationalists, whereas on the other there was the Khomeinist Islamists as a united group fighting against the other with an aim of gaining absolute state power. The first group, the secular and/or Marxist groups which were represented by the Fedayeene Eslam, Mojahedine Khalq etc. were suppressed through physical violence in the first 3 years after the Revolution. Those groups had little representation in the state power which made it easy for the Islamists to marginalize them and legitimize the use of force against them. Whereas the second group, the liberal nationalists, held high posts in the state structure such as the prime ministry of Mehdi Bazargan and the presidency of Ebu'l Hassan Beni-Sadr. The clash between the Khomeinists and the liberal nationalists occurred at the state level over the control of state institutions. Yet, the strategy of the Khomeinists against the liberal nationalists was more subtle and deliberate compared to the one against the secular/Marxist left. While the liberal nationals kept the old institutions of the Shah regime, the Khomeinists built up new and more institutions which dwarfed the others. The state structure in the very initial days of the revolution was formed in a way that established the superiority of the institutions of the new regime over the republican institutions of the old one. Thus, with the opportunities that the new hierarchical state structure provided to the Khomeinists, the marginalization of the actors other than the Khomeinist revolutionaries was much more easy which occurred only within 3 years after the revolution. In fact, it is not assertive to argue that with the election of Mohammad-Ali Rajai in place of Beni-Sadr in the second presidential elections of 1981, the liberal nationalists lost their institutional power in the state structure. With that election and the elimination of the liberal nationalists from state power, the Khomeinists declared their victory over the control of the new regime.

In 1980's, Iran witnessed the emergence of factionalism as a result of severe clashes among different elite groups within the Khomeinists with claims on state power. The attitude of the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khomeini himself, did not suffice to get rid of the difference in thought and interest within the Islamist revolutionaries. In the

first decade after the Revolution, the nucleus of today's factions was very much apparent. On the one side, there were the conservatives who were in favor of a relatively free economy with the economic liberty of the bazaar, a socio-cultural sphere in which the Islamic laws are strictly implemented, and a political system under the tutelage of the Supreme Leader. On the other side, there were the moderates who supported a more reconciliatory economic policy through which Iran could be integrated to the world economy and a more free socio-cultural life in which fundamental rules of Islamic social life is protected. The last faction in 1980's was the Islamic Left which was strictly attached to the revolutionary ideals of Khomeini. An egalitarian economic policy which favors the *mostazafeen*, a political and economic mindset that prevents the emergence of new tyrants over the society, the absolute patronage of the Supreme Leader were the basic tenets of the Islamic Left of 1980's. Parallel to these, the revolutionary ideals must be pursued in the international arena with a focus on the export of the Islamic Revolution even if it would result in the isolation of the country.

The factional rivalry of 1980's showed itself in many of the issues that had a direct role in the reshaping of the new regime. For instance, the economic orientation of the new regime was the foremost matter of debate among the different groups within the Khomeinist block. While the conservatives stressed an economic policy that went in line with the interests of the old bazaar class, the moderates supported a neoliberal economic orientation which would indirectly harm the advantageous economic position of the bazaaris. Lastly, the Islamic Left was in favor of an egalitarian economic policy which would prioritize the poor. Although it is hard to make overarching comments on the Iranian economy in the last three decades, it has been hard to implement economic policies that would make any harm on the interests of the bazaaris. Based on this argument, it is relevant to argue that the economy of Iran benefits the supporters of the conservative faction, which makes the conservatives the hegemons of the economic sphere. A second matter of dispute began when there was a need to choose the successor of Khomeini. Although the Grand Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Montazeri was suggested as the next Supreme Leader in 1985 by Khomeini himself, his leaning toward the Islamic Left and his criticisms on the anti-

revolutionary actions of the state brought him under heavy attack of the conservatives. This dispute was ceased when Montazeri was dismissed from this position and Hojjatoleslam Seyyed Ali Khamaei was elected as the new Supreme Leader the day after Khomeini's death in June 1989.

Based on the initial debates and the way that these debates were resolved, it is apparent that the conservative faction was able to declare its authority over the economic and political spheres. Especially after the election of Khamanei as the heir of Khomeini, the political power of the conservative block was crystallized due to the hierarchical institutional structure of the state favoring the institutions which are directly responsible to the Supreme Leader. The new state structure was divided into three groups of institutions: republican, revolutionary, theocratic. The first group of institutions is composed of the three branches of government two of which obtain its legitimacy through popular elections. The second set of institutions is composed of new foundations or the transformed version of the old ones. These religious foundations such as Bonyad-e Mostazafan va Janbazan (Foundation for the Oppressed and Disabled), Bonyad-e Shahid (Foundation for the Martyrs) and Bonyad-e Astan-e Quds (Imam Reza Foundation) were aimed at supporting the revolutionary regime in its egalitarian socio-economic policies. However, these foundations turned into backyards of the conservative faction through which it consolidates its political and economic power instead of supporting a welfare regime on behalf of the *mostazafeen*. The last set of institutions is consisted of higher assemblies that are responsible for the implementation and protection of the will of the Supreme Leader in the decision making processes and in the general course of state affairs. The Guardian Council and the Expediency Council are the two most important examples of the theocratic group of state institutions.

Although the IRI has a very complex structure of state institutions, it does not have a horizontal check-and-balance system among these institutions which would create a democratic atmosphere in politics. In fact, there is a strict vertical relationship between these sets of institutions which guarantees the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader over other state institutions, even over the elected ones. For instance, all the decisions of the Majles must be ratified by the Guardian Council

which has been mostly composed of clerics who are loyal to the velayet-e faqih system. Moreover, even though the Supreme Leader does not have a direct control over the elected institutions, he controls the third republican institution, the judiciary, through his authority to appoint and dismiss the head of the judiciary. Thus, it is obvious that the state system of the IRI creates an uneven power structure on behalf of the Supreme Leader and the conservative faction which finds its place in the high state institutions through the appointment of the Supreme Leader. Therefore, a brief glance at the state structure of the IRI shows that after the election of Khamanei as the Supreme Leader, the conservative faction gained the total control of the political, economic and socio-cultural spheres of the country.

After the establishment of the conservative rule over the state structure and the election of moderate Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as the 4th president in the elections of 1989, the Islamic Left was remained as the only faction that held little representation in the state. Together with the marginalization from the state power, few other factors resulted in the transformation of the Islamic Left into the reformist faction of 1990's. The fall in the credibility of the assertive revolutionary ideals especially after the deteriorating effects of the 8-year long war with Iraq and the collapse of the Soviet Union as the foremost bearer of the Marxist egalitarian and revolutionary ideals created a necessity for a reconsideration of the basic tenets of the Islamic Left. Thirdly, the death of the biggest supporter of the Islamic Left faction, Ayatollah Khomeini, took away the greatest source of legitimacy of the Islamic Left. Together with all these domestic and international factors, the alliance of the conservatives and the moderates against the Islamic Left in the beginning of 1990's and the faction's inability to deal with this pressure created another practical necessity to reconsider the ideals and means of politics on behalf of the supporters of the Islamic Left. As a result, after long and continuous discussions and with the effect of thinkers and clerics such as Abdolkarim Soroush, Mojtaba Shabestari, Grand Ayatollah Montazeri and Mehdi Karroubi Iranian reformism began to emerge starting from early 1990's. The main focus of this new faction was not the strict protection of the revolutionary ideals, but, it was a call on the strengthening of the republican aspect of the regime to the detriment of the uneven distribution of power

among different sets of state institutions, and parallel to that, the establishment of rule of law for the preservation of position of the republican side vis-à-vis the theocratic side.

The emergence of reformism on the elite level coincided with a new phase of reformist wave among the society. The marginalization of certain sectors from the political and socio-cultural spheres by the conservative faction and the impacts of the economy of a country that experienced a revolution and an 8-year war only in a decade over the very same sectors created tensions within the society which paved the way of significant demands for reform in the existing status-quo and for the end of the absolute authority of the Supreme Leader's and the conservative faction's over the country. As it was mentioned several times throughout the thesis, an important part of the women, the youth, the middle class and urban dwellers etc. built up a significant support for reform, which later formed the main electorate profile of the reformist faction. With this much massive support behind him, Khatami could managed to win successively in two presidential elections of 1997 and 2001. He remained for 8 years in the presidential post, yet ironically, his two terms of presidency has ended with the election of a conservative candidate in 2005.

Throughout this thesis, I have focused on three main factors affecting the loss of electoral support for the reformist faction in the first half of 2000's. First of all, the hierarchical state structure provided the conservative faction with all the necessary legal means to deal with the rise of reformism. From the judiciary to Law Enforcement Forces and to the control of the press, the conservative faction used each and every chance to prevent the reformists to consolidate itself in the state structure and to implement the demanded reforms. Although, the effects of the state structure over the possibility of reform are widely discussed in the literature, I highlighted in this thesis that it is not enough to understand the inability of the reformist faction to realize a satisfactory reformist agenda. In other words, it would be misleading to attribute the entire agency to the conservative faction while explaining the fail of another faction. Otherwise, the problems with that exact faction must be highlighted too in order to understand the responsibility of the agent over a process that it directly experiences.

One has to look at the internal dynamics of reformism in order both to understand the failure of the reformist project of Khatami and to think about the prospects of reform in Iran. First of all, I stressed the problems that arise from the internal dynamics of the reformist faction in explaining the loss of their bond with the electorates. The unorganized and ideologically diverse nature of the reformist faction both empowers and disempowers the faction. The ideological diversity attracts a wide range of constituents which increases the electoral power of the faction. However, it also results in inconsistencies in their actions, which ultimately contributes to the withdrawal of the electoral support with ease. Moreover, the faction is internally so disorganized that its electoral performance may vary depending on time and context. In other words, the lack of a disciplined and organized political tradition of the reformist faction because of its extremely short political history shows itself in practical unsteadiness. Secondly, I pointed out that the relationship between the reformist faction and the constituents is a relatively weak and vulnerable one which is prone to change easily depending on day-by-day developments.

Based on these three factors, it can be argued that although the conservative faction used its institutional superiority to suppress the reformist faction, the faction itself did not use its own power to resist that pressure. That power was originated from the popular support which continued for two terms both in the elections and on the streets. However, instead of turning this popular support into an effective tool against the conservatives, the reformist faction accepted the game whose rules are set by the conservatives.¹⁵¹ This must be considered as the first and foremost mistake of the reformist faction in explaining their electoral failures between 2003 and 2005. The second problem was that the faction was unable to generate a consistent and organized structure and political plan through which the popular demands would be realized and a powerful resistance to the conservative pressure would be performed. Although the reformist faction and its supporters come from a wide ideological spectrum, it is important to be able to come up with a consistent line of thought and political strategy for the future of the movement.

¹⁵¹ Ansari, 2006, p. 272.

The Khatami era is important to see the mistakes of the reformist faction that are crucial not to be repeated for the success of the movement. The lessons that are learnt from the Khatami era must be thought in line with the lessons that are learnt from the Green Movement experience in 2009 and 2010. The Green Movement showed that a strategy based solely on electoral victory is not enough to achieve the means to substantiate reforms. Despite the entire massive support and months-long demonstrations, the reformist movement could not manage to thrust itself on the conservative establishment. Regarding the Green Movement and its place in the broader reformist movement, I highlighted two points in the thesis: first, elections and electoral victories cannot be the ultimate aim of the movement; second, the movement cannot reach success unless the core regime establishment accepts a power share with the reformist elite. Combining these two points, the reformist faction needs a strategy that aims at creating unsolvable crises for the conservative faction so that there will be a share in the state power on behalf of the reformists. Given the institutional superiority of the conservative block that has the authority to block all the legal ways of reform, elections can only be a part of the wider strategy, not an end-in-itself means to cope with the conservatives.

While this thesis was being written, some developments have occurred that are crucial to discuss with regard to the inferences of the thesis. On June, 14 2013 the 11th presidential election of the IRI took place. Months preceding the election, severe disputes have occurred regarding the elections. Unlike the previous presidential elections in which the reformists could manage to field candidates before the ratification of the Guardian Council, the candidate of the reformist wing has become clear after the ratification of the candidates by the Guardian Council. The decisions of the Guardian Council were so scandalous that even Hashemi Rafsanjani, a statesman who served as president for two terms, was disqualified on the grounds that he is not in an age that he can effectively perform the necessities of presidency. Moreover, one of the most debated figures in this process, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, the prominent aide of Mahmood Ahmadinejad was also disqualified by the Council without any declared excuse. In total, the Guardian Council disqualified 678 candidates out of 686 applicants. Among them all, there was not a non-conservative

candidate to be put forward by the reformist camp. However, Hassan Rouhani, the Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council for more than 16 years, a member of Iran's Expediency Council, a member of the Assembly of Experts, and a close ally of Hashemi Rafsanjani, came out to be the candidate of the reformists and moderates. After two ratified candidates dropped out, six figures competed in the elections: Hassan Rouhani, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, Said Jalili, Mohsen Rezai, Ali Akbar Velayati and Mohammad Gharazi. Hassan Rouhani won the 11th presidential elections with almost 51% of the votes while the voter turnout was relatively high with 72.7%.¹⁵²

The election of Hassan Rouhani can be discussed from many angles regarding the purposes of this thesis. First of all, despite the entire hindrances of the conservative block, a non-conservative candidate can still be elected even in the first run. This point is important in terms of two aspects. First, this election showed that even the capabilities of the conservative faction has a limit and the legal framework may not be under a total and absolute control of the conservatives depending on the context. Secondly, the election of a moderate candidate showed the significance of the popular support vis-à-vis the institutional superiority of the conservative faction. In other words, although the regime used all its abilities to block a reformist comeback especially through the Guardian Council that has disqualified hundreds of applicants one of which has served as a president for two terms and still is the head of the Expediency Council, there is room for hope in case of a unified popular support.

Despite the hopeful inferences that are mentioned above, I want to stress a point in parallel with the arguments in this thesis. Although the election of a moderate candidate sent a shockwave to the Supreme Leader and the conservatives, the very same event may serve the core elites of the regime in two ways in the long run. First of all, the new moderate leader can amend the image of the regime both in and outside of the country which suffers from heavy international sanctions because of the nuclear issue. The predicament of the foreign policy under Ahmedinejad

¹⁵² The data is taken from the web site of the Ministry of Interior.
<http://www.moi.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=News&CategoryID=cc1955c9-7610-428d-b15c-fafc947cc884&WebPartID=47942904-35b9-4ecc-bfc4-4d6d3bee26d8&ID=ab52b9a8-e2a6-41e4-bbcc-15665125a6b2>

administration required a reconsideration of Iranian foreign relations in a way that put forwards a more reconciliatory understanding which can serve to the preservation of the domestic status quo through saving the image of Iran in the international arena. The negotiation process had almost come to a deadlock under the previous administration. Although the ultimate say on the nuclear issue is under the responsibility of the Supreme Leader, a new and moderate president who has a reconciliatory attitude in the international arena may serve to gain some credit from the international community.

The second point that I want to raise regarding the last elections is related to domestic politics, and considers the recent developments in the factional politics. The conservative faction has experienced serious disputes within itself which is apparent in the marginalization of Mahmood Ahmadinejad within the camp. Moreover, although it was argued that the conservative faction will announce only one candidate among the three close aides of the Supreme Leader, none of the conservative candidates dropped out of the presidential race. In my humble opinion, this inconsistency is related to the internal power struggles of the faction which resulted in the loss of an extremely important post to the rival camp. When the disputes within the faction were that much explicit, a moderate candidate may pave the way of a reunification within the conservatives against the reformist/moderate “threat”. As it was discussed before, it is apparent that there will not be a substantive change in Iranian political system unless the powerful conservative block agrees on it. If the opposition will remain in a reformist framework, it should be kept in mind that the only possible way to make the conservative camp accept a power-share is to disempower them through an irresolvable crisis. However, it is apparent that Rouhani’s election cannot have an effect on the creation of such a crisis; rather it can only postpone the emergence of it.

Reform in Iran has been a long process. Even an eight-year long presidency and an eight-months long active mobilization did not suffice to make the core of the regime to accept the popular demands for a more participatory administration and the

establishment of rule of law.¹⁵³ However, those experiences are crucially important to perceive the dynamics and future prospects of reform in Iran. Based on each of the cases that are examined throughout this thesis, one can readily argue that instead of relying on the established rules of politics in Iran, there is a need to rewrite those rules on behalf of popular sovereignty with the support of the holders of it.

¹⁵³ Thanks to Nader Hashemi for his extremely helpful insights.

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APPENDIX

TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü

☐

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

☐

Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü

☐

Enformatik Enstitüsü

☐

Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü

☐

YAZARIN

Soyadı :

Adı :

Bölümü :

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) :

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans

☐

Doktora

☐

1. Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

☐

2. Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

☐

3. Tezimden bir bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

☐

TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ: