

Presentation

Democratic Reforms in Iran

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February 5-7, 2007

Cambridge, Massachusetts

The History of Democratic Development in Iran (part 1)

- ▶ Iranians have experienced two types of reforms in their modern history:
- ▶ I. Reforms from the top down, initiated and implemented by the government
- ▶ II. Reforms from the bottom up (Radical & Revolutionary Movements), by the opponents

Question:

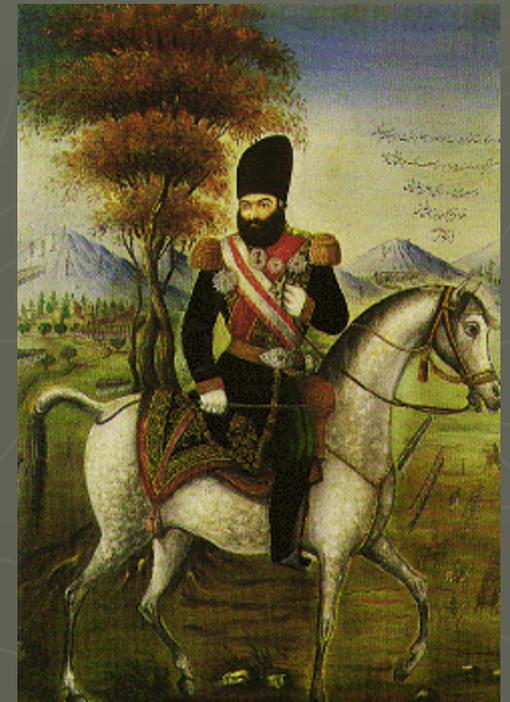
- ▶ Despite changes in the socioeconomic spheres & social fabric of society why still no democracy?

History of Reforms from the top

Background:

As the result of a military gap between Iran and the West, the Qajars suffered humiliating military defeats and the loss of the Caucasus (presently Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) to the Russians in two separate treaties: the Gulestan in 1813 and the Turkmanchay in 1828.

After the first defeat, crown prince Abbas Mirza, The ruler of Azerbaijan and the field commander of the battle with the Russians began to search for the cause of the defeat



The First Reformer

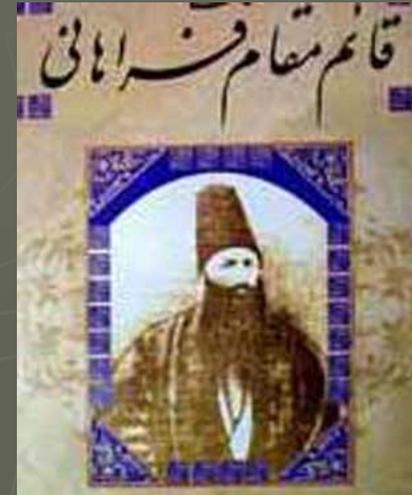
1. Abbas Mirza, a reform-minded ruler hired some Western advisers, became interested in modernization of military forces, industry, & modern sciences and dispatched some students for training to the West

He died untimely in 1833, his half brother Mohammad Mirza, an anti reform tyrant replaced him, crowned in 1834 when Fatali Shah, his father died



Pioneers of Reform in Iran

- ▶ 2. Mirza Bouzorg Farahani, with high spirit of reforms was the minister of Abbas Mirza, initiated some reforms, but died before Abbas Miraza's death
- ▶ 3. Mirza Aboul Qasem Farahani (Qaem Maqaam),
 - ▶ Prime minister of Mohammad Shah.
 - ▶ Proposed a more comprehensive reform plan, including financial and tax reforms,
 - ▶ killed by
 - ▶ Mohammad Shah just one year after
 - ▶ his premiership





Larger Reform Plan

Taqi Khan Amir Kabir, the most prominent representative of reformism in the history of Iran, Prime Minister of the Shah planned a much larger reform project, but was killed in 1852 by the Shah's order

- ▶ After Amir Kabir's death, Iran lost the Central Asian provinces to Russians, and Afghanistan to the Britain

Continued Reform from the Top

- ▶ With 20 years delay, Sepahsalar, the reformist Prime Minister of Naseredin Shah resumed the reforms, but did not achieve much political progress. The clerics were hostile to his reforms such as railroad, and banks
- ▶ Last unsuccessful attempt to implement reforms from the top were done by Amin o Doleh, and Ehtesham o Saltaneh under last monarchs

End of Reform From the Top

- ▶ In the last decade of Naseredin Shah's reign, several prominent social thinkers such as:

Mirza Malkum Khan, Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani, & Seyyed Jamaledin Asad Abaadi, Akhondzadeh lost their confidence in the top-down reform strategy and began theorizing social change from the bottom-up in late 19th century (revolution)

A New Strategy: Reforms from the bottom-up

Just before dying in 1867, Sayyad Jamaledin Asad Abaadi expressed his regret about *"wasting his time by planting on the infertile land of the monarchs instead of sowing his thoughts on the fertile ground of the people."* (Abrahamian)

In 1860s, Mirza Agha Khan Kermani and Akhoond zadeh argued for the necessity of a religious reform, an **"Islamic Protestantism"**,

In the same period, while in exile in London, Malkum Khan advocated **"the rule of law"** to end arbitrary decisions of the Shah. Several publications: Qanoon, Hablo Imatin, Parvaresh, Akhtar, Iranshahr



Approach toward the Clergy

- ▶ **The dual role of the clergy:** Given the influence of the clerics on the people, the reformers sought to utilize the clerics' support despite their association with the corrupt court. They managed to gain the collaboration of some of the clerics in actions against the Shah and its foreign allies (the Russians and British forces).

Major Reforms from bottom-up

- ▶ Mass Movements toward breaking the impasse of the democratic change in Iran:
 - The Constitutional Revolution (1905 -09)
 - The National Movements in 1941- 53
 - The 1979 Revolution

The Constitutional Revolution (1905-09)

Following two years national uprising, Mozaferedin Shah signed the Constitution, however,

A cycle of civil, sectarian, and regional wars ensued with dire economic ramifications,

Which ended in a military coup by Reza khan (Reza Shah) in 1920.

Through a military dictatorship, Reza Shah ended regionalism and tribalism, and established a modern nation-state for the first time in Iranian history, **yet no democratic reform**

The National Movements

1941 – 53

A decade of political, social, national and democratic movements ended in another coup in 1953 against the national and democratically elected government of Dr. Mosaddeq stabilizing the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah

- During Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, foreign investments and higher oil revenues helped Iran to pave the way toward economic and semi-industrial development, **but still no democratic reform**

Twenty-five years after the coup, however, a major revolution aiming for political reforms ended the Shah's power and monarchism (the 1979 revolution)

Conclusion (part 1)

175 years of attempts toward reforms, alternately from the top and the bottom, have been unable to end the political absolutism in Iran. The 1997-2005 reform attempt has been the latest unsuccessful experience this time **from within the government.**

Reforms from the top after The 1979 Revolution

- As a result of the revolution of 1979, the political structure of Iran changed from an autocratic class system to a religious populist regime, a tyranny of the majority under the charismatic leadership of Khomeini.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran has reversed parts of the social and legal reforms previously achieved during the Shah, including family laws & civil freedoms

جامعه شناسی ایران

چرا اصلاحات شکست خورد؟

نقدی بر عملکرد هشت ساله اصلاح طلبان در ایران
(۱۳۷۶ - ۱۳۸۴)



انتشارات: کتاب سرا

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A Challenge from within

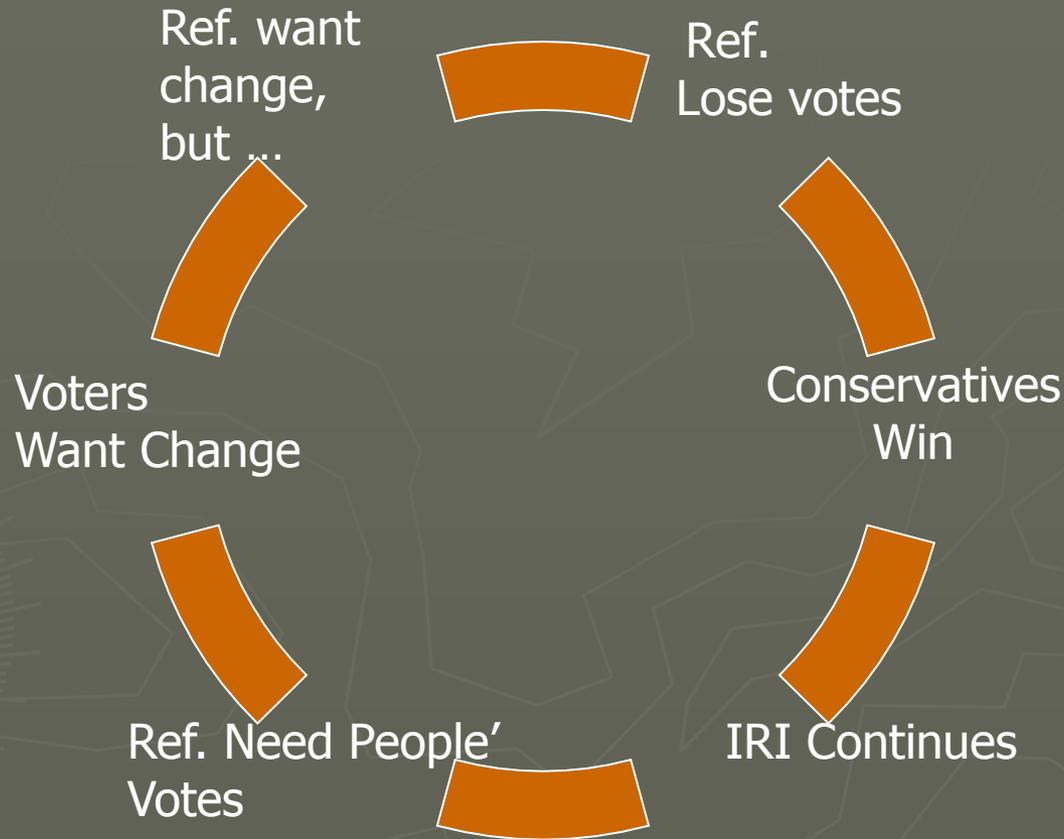
A Failed partnership with the people

- ▶ The IRI has not only failed to meet the political demands of the revolution, but has also reversed some social and legal achievement of the past.
- ▶ This regressive trend violently continued till 1997 presidential elections which coincided with culmination of years of disillusionment with a theocratic project (Islamism)
- ▶ One faction of the Islamic regime joined the people and reforms promising a real change in all social, cultural and political spheres.
- ▶ Unexpected landslide victory of the reformist presidential candidate, Mohammad Khatami, led to a temporary setback of the conservatives and radical groups

The 1979 Reform (continued)

- ▶ The partnership, however, diminished and led to the failure of the reform government due to several factors, discussed in this study
- ▶ In this study my focus is on the reformers operating within the state (state actors), I am not talking about the reformers within the civil society

Vicious Cycle of Defeat of Reforms within the IRI



Fundamental Problems

1. Structural Obstacles to Reforms:

- A. Political
- B. Legal
- C. De facto & de jure power

3. Neglected Institutional & Organizational Needs (civil society)

The means of achieving the goals
Modern political parties

2. No Road Map (strategy)

to achieve the goals stated in the Platform

Lack of mission & vision

Democratic cultural and value shortcomings

4. Conflict of Interests

Reformists intended to please both the reform advocates and anti-reform conservatives

State reformists wanted reform without reforming religion

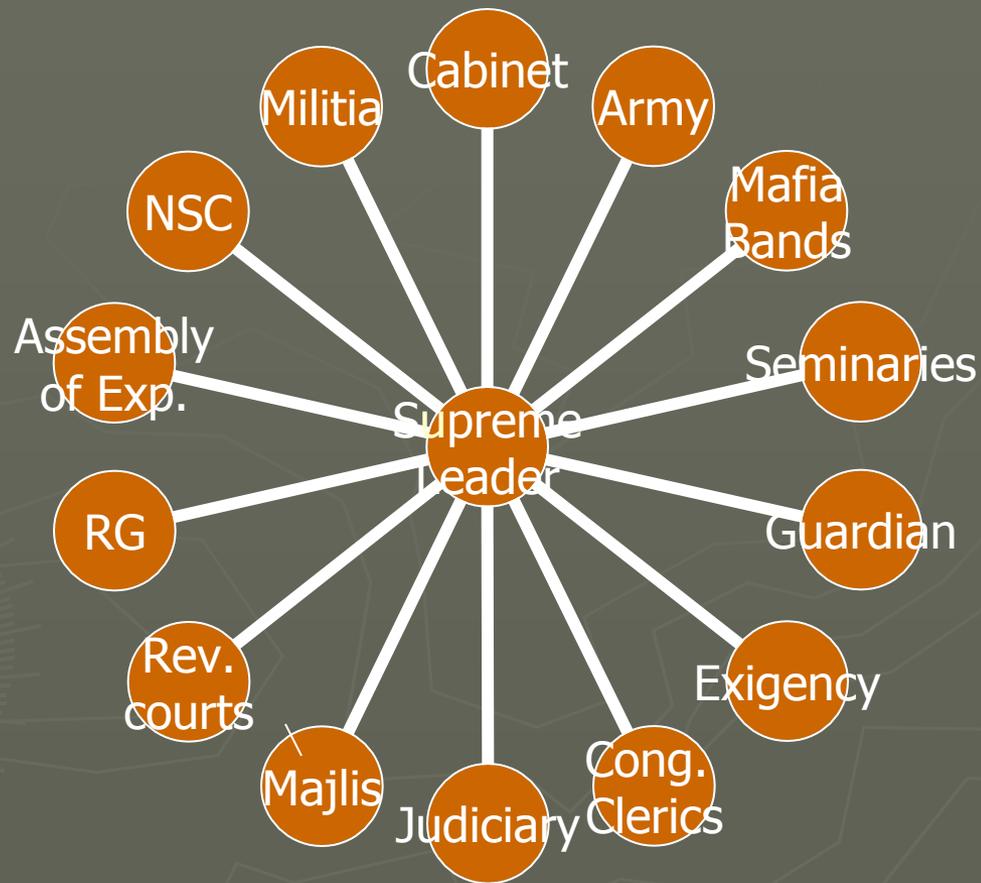
Political Obstacles

- ▶ Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has experienced two non-class power structures:
 - ▶ A. Populism, and
 - ▶ B. Clientelism (canopy rather than pyramid structure).
- ▶ Populism, a product of the revolution, helped Ayatollah Khomeini to rule Iran for a decade with absolute power.
- ▶ Clientelism in Iran is linked to Shiism, as well as a rentier state, and the revolution, which resulted in many autonomous groups formed in patron-client bonds.

Political Obstacles, continues ...

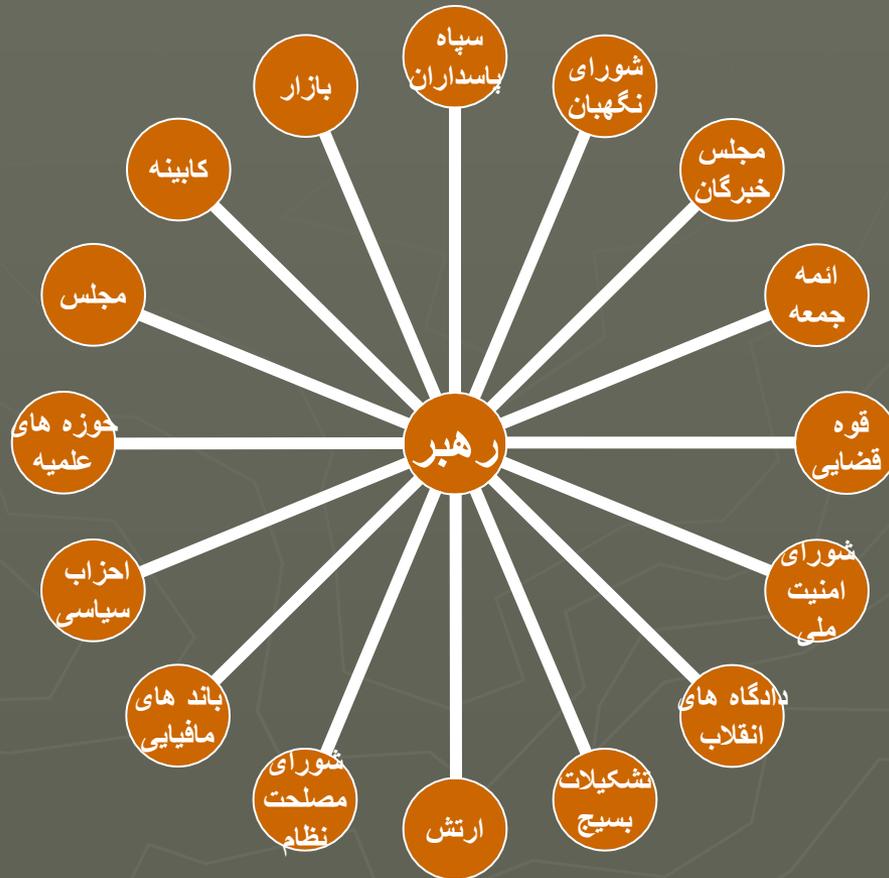
- ▶ Neither clientelism nor Shiism can be analyzed using classical class system theory. Instead of horizontal layers of classes, the power structures in both Shiism and clientelism are based on vertical columns of rival and autonomous groups.
- ▶ The traditional Shi'a institution of Marja`iyat (source of emulation) has come into conflict with an elected government.
- ▶ Iranian society, however, seems to be moving toward pragmatism and utilitarianism, while the political power structure is leaning toward militarism.

Canopy of Clientelistic Structure



ساختار قدرت در ایران

گذار از عوام‌گرایی به حامی‌گرایی و نظامی‌گرایی دولت



Legal Obstacles

- ▶ **Constitutional contradictions and barriers**
- ▶ **Principle 4:** “All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, etc, laws and regulations should be based on Islamic rules and standards. This principle will absolutely or in general be dominant over all of the principles of the Constitution, and other laws and regulations as well, and any determination in this connection will be made by the religious jurists of the Council of Guardians.”

Legal Obstacles (continued)

“De facto & De jure” Power

- ▶ To justify their lack of will for change, the state Reformists exaggerated “de facto power”. Such a separation has no base. Because, all principal positions are held by the authorities defined by the Constitution as follows:
- ▶ The Supreme Leader,
- ▶ The President, and all cabinet members, including the security and intelligence forces,
- ▶ Armed Forces and the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps,
- ▶ The Council of Guardian,
- ▶ The head of the judiciary power,
- ▶ The Assembly of Experts,
- ▶ The Regime's Exigency Council
- ▶ Deputies of Majlis, and
- ▶ The Supreme Council for National Security

The lack of a clear Strategy (Road Map)

- ▶ No clear achievable goal was stated
- ▶ Agents of change were not identified
- ▶ Declared “**strategy**”: “Pressure from the bottom, negotiation on the top” (a well known **tactic** in union bargaining in the West)
- ▶ Even as a tactic they could not implement it due to their neglect of the formation of the civil society org.
- ▶ “Aramesh Fa’ Al” (Active Calmness!)
- ▶ Assumption: In a comparison between “bad guys” and “worst guys”, people will have no choice, but to elect the “bad guys” (reformists)

Lack of mission and vision

Ideological & Philosophical:

Anti liberalism (individual freedom), anti West (isolationism)

- Continued to remain dedicated to revolution & legacy of Khomeini (both anti reforms)
- State Reformists continued to favor religious state
- No plan for religious reform
- No will for required structural changes to share the power (continuous “in-group vs. out-group” attitude and policy)
- Not ready to criticize the past and the violent role of Khomeini and his views

Neglect of Independent Institutional & Organizational Means of reforms

1. Women organizations
2. Students organizations
3. Workers unions
4. Teachers unions
5. Intelligencia (writers, journalists, artists,...)
6. No genuine modern political parties
7. No strong reform leadership
8. No serious will for reform
9. Reformists had fear of the growth of independent organizations

Conflict of Interests: To Reform, or not to Reform!

- ▶ The Reformists had interests in maintaining the IRI which secured their election as an “in-group” people, vs. the “out-group” opposition
- ▶ Reform could potentially drive the system into a secular regime that they did not like
- ▶ The Reformists advocated democracy, but within the IRI legal and political framework
- ▶ only

Puzzle of the defeat (Vicious Cycle)

- ▶ The contradictory interests caused them to lose people's support, and strengthen the positions of conservative and hard liners,
- ▶ The people had voted for Khatami's political platform, advocated democracy, civil society, free media, and self-rule university, equal rights for women, and individual freedom,
- ▶ The more reformists abandoned their promises, the more they lost their bases, & the more strengthened conservatives positions,

Transition to Pragmatism

- ▶ The Reformists did not account for the growing shift toward pragmatic & utilitarian mood within the larger society
- ▶ People have lost ideological motivation for politics, emphasizing instead their practical self-interests
- ▶ Two social groups such as youths and women, crucial in the elections of reformers are growingly pragmatic

Neglected Expatriates

- ▶ 1. Neglected the significant role of expatriates (diaspora) who seem mostly pro reforms
- ▶ 2. Neglected the role of international communities, including normalization of the relations with the US

The Role of President Khatami

- ▶ Despite of his efforts, Khatami fell very short to meet his promises,
- ▶ He passionately defends the “Islamic Regime”, not reforms as well
- ▶ He considered the IRI as a “sacred system”, which has priority over the rights of people
- ▶ He was elected to change, but said he came to maintain the IRI. “some blame me that I changed my words, but I did not, I still believe in independence, freedom, and Islamic Republic”, he said.

The role of Khatami (continued)

- ▶ His eclectic philosophy kept him between two chairs of reform and conservatism
- ▶ He continued to use the discourse of revolution as well as reform
- ▶ He did not commit himself to reformists parties
- ▶ As a Person, he was not the right person for the expected role

Reformists after Khatami

- ▶ Dr. Moein committed himself to act within the framework of the constitutional law, that was exactly what Khatami did and led the reform government into failure
- ▶ Unlike Ahmadinejad, Moein was worried of being accused by the conservatives as a renegade

Why reformists lost the presidency

- ▶ People expected to vote for a radical reformist, not a nice guy like Dr. Moein
- ▶ Reformists had to meet the demands of their social bases: urban middle class, women, and youth

The Impasse of the Elections

- ▶ Elections within the present legal structure of the IRI has no capacity to move beyond the existing level
- ▶ The reform movement has no strategy yet toward its goal
- ▶ No civil, political organizations, activities, free press and assembly are allowed
- ▶ “legal reformists” have no will to share the power with “out-group” reformists

Conclusion

- ▶ Reforms from top-down, bottom-up, and from within the government have failed. Reforms have to be from without
- ▶ Religion must be reformed by modern theologians such as Soroush, Kadivar, and Shabastari
- ▶ A new strategy aimed at changing the Legal system of the IRI has to be articulated
- ▶ Reformers in general must create a “partnership of reform” toward democracy that would include all the reform forces transcending the “in-group, out-group” or any sectarian and ideological divisions