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# Iran: Modern Media and Electoral Authoritarianism.

A study of the Use of Modern Media in the Presidential Election in June 2009



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## 1. Preface

*As the Internet both globalizes and deepens it gets a real-life impact in the private as well as the public sphere. Citizens and organizations use digital networked technologies to engage in civic life, and at the same time contribute to increasing media diversity at local, national and global levels<sup>1</sup>.*

The presidential election in Iran in the summer of 2009 presented the Iranian population with a distinctive new way of campaigning. Public and modern media was for the first time fully implemented as effective campaigning tools and the Internet and mobile phones became just as important measures of campaigning as the usual ways of bill boards, posters and flyers. For the first time in Iranian history, national broadcasted live TV debates aired and each candidate participated in these debates openly criticizing each other and even the incumbent president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Modern media became the new way of reaching the voters and communicating messages to the public.

The use of modern digital media is rapidly gaining footing as an everyday tool of communication, not only in the developed countries but also in the developing countries. Increasing use of mobile phones and the Internet has introduced the citizens of the new millennium to a whole new world of global and local interactions. Text messaging, blogging and social networking are increasingly used measures of information to reach the public both near and far. Following this precedent, it became common knowledge that the presidential candidates were no strangers to the tools of modern media during the Iranian presidential campaign leading up to the election on June 12 2009.

At the conclusion of the heated campaigning in Iran that gained full momentum in the final two weeks leading up to the Election Day, several things stood out. These included amongst others, the publicly broadcasted debates on national TV and the incorporation of music, media, mobile phones, websites and social networking. This stood in stark contrast to any previously held elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as it was the first time modern media had been implemented in election campaigns in such wide spectra. Additionally, the massive presence of people campaigning for their preferred candidates in the streets as well as the use of color to

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<sup>1</sup> Research Seminar Paper: "Digital media, civic engagement and political mobilization in repressive regimes" pp. 1, Roskilde University, Denmark November 2008

represent the candidates brought about one of the most spectacular scenarios of 2009 in Iran<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, it took election campaigning to a whole new level and presented something new not only to the citizens of Iran, but also to the international community that had never imagined anything like this would be possible in a repressive regime such as the Iranian.

In the aftermath of the election, however, the situation changed severely. The democratic aspects during the months following up to the election were forgotten. The freedom that the opposition and the youth had briefly experienced in the streets of Tehran, Tabriz, Esfahan and Shiraz as well as other major cities was abruptly put to an end in the early hours after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was announced the winner of the election and entered his second presidential term. International press and journalists were asked to leave, and as clashes broke out between police and groups protesting the election results, the people of Iran were left with no one to tell their story, except for themselves. Twitter and Youtube quickly became the main sources of information and mobile phones the favored media of documentation.

The response of the international community to the events in Iran and the Green Movement's efficient utilization of the opportunities provided through internet was a rapid embrace of the Internet and modern media as the road to democratization. Many a theory has been presented both before and in the aftermath of the summer of 2009. The majority of these theories praise the new methods of communication as a place where freedom is possible and not restrained. And where the people in a repressive regime can express their despair, communicate and organize opposition and not least bring about the truth to the people and the outside world.

As presented above, the events of the summer of 2009 evidently introduced the people of Iran to the era of modern media and technology not earlier as apparent in the country. The use of the internet and of mobile phones to cover events and act as reporters documenting the events and the repression of the demonstrations evidently showed to Iran and to the world that the means of modern technology was not only restrained to democratic countries, but surely was of high importance and everyday tools of the people in authoritarian regimes. Further, that these means of communication could function in favor of the suppressed. However, one thing

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<sup>2</sup> In his election campaign Mir Hossein Mousavi incorporated the color green as representing him. This fast became apparent in the streets with supporters wearing green scarves and green bracelets. The remaining candidates followed his example and Ahmadinejad sought to use the colors of the Iranian flag as his symbol, whereas Karroubi followed suit and chose the color white.

appears to be forgotten in the cause of these events: the use of these modern technologies by the governments and official political figures.

I wish to examine to which extent media was incorporated by the candidates running in the 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election in the Islamic Republic of Iran on June 12 2009. Furthermore, it is my intention to demonstrate how each candidate had the advantage of applying media and modern ways of communication in a relatively free campaigning atmosphere in Iran. I feel that it is a subject of importance that seems to have been neglected in the aftermath of the election.

In an increasingly globalized world, where international politics are constantly intertwined with national politics it is of the utmost importance that we understand the dynamics and challenges of the countries with which we interact. Today relations between countries are constantly getting more fragile and can easily break in the absence of respect and understanding of other nations' cultural heritage and religious adherence. Moreover, political tensions within the countries as well as between countries add to the tense atmosphere of harsh rhetoric and minimize the hopes of understanding and respect. In this context, I find it crucial to highlight the events of the election in Iran prior to the clashes between police forces and opposition groups that took place after June 12 2009. This is in order to show how each candidate had equal access to campaigning tools and could therefore campaign relatively freely in an open climate where critique did not lead to arrests and imprisonment<sup>3</sup>. I hope this will help bring light to and provide a better understanding of the Iranian political society and system as well as how the use of media and technology is a significant element of modern Iranian society. I only wish to address the issues of the Iranian election campaign leading up to the election and, consequently, I will thus not address matters post June 12 2009.

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, it is important to understand that despite the fact that each candidate had access to equal campaigning tools, they all operated within the general consensus of the regime. Thereby, it is valuable to keep in mind that the four candidates all are very familiar with the system, and it is to be expected that they each would practice some sought of self censorship, correlating with the ideology of the Islamic republic and the regimes lack of tolerance for opposition not agreeing on the states affairs and foundation.

## 1.1 Thesis Statement

*"We are using new technologies because they have the capacity to be multiplied by people themselves who can forward Bluetooth, e-mails and text messages and invite more supporters on Facebook."* Behzad Mortazavi, Head of Mir Hossein Mousavi's campaign committee<sup>4</sup>.

As it is evident from the quote above, modern media plays a significant role in the theory of freedom of communication, more particularly in repressive regimes and the extent to which opposition and politicians likewise implement modern media as tools of navigation in the political sphere. Researchers of the phenomena of modern media in repressive regimes claim that the ever increasing access to the Internet and the omnipresence of mobile phones in developing countries pose a great challenge to the governments of authoritarian regimes. However, technology and media are not only embraced by journalists, opposition groups and bloggers, who discover ways to criticize the leaders of their countries. These new ways of communication are also implemented in the everyday life of politicians and used for propaganda. A clear indicator hereof is the campaigns for the 10th presidential election in Iran in June 2009, where each of the four hopeful presidential candidates incorporated modern media and technology in their campaigns.

As point of departure my thesis will consist of an account and analyses related to the two main theories of; "Electoral Authoritarianism" and "Digital media in repressive regimes" starting with an account of the political system in Iran. Furthermore, in continuation of, this I wish to examine whether or not the incumbent president had an advantage, seeing that TV and radio are state-owned and to which extend the presidential candidates employed modern media in the election campaign. At the end of my thesis I will put forward the final findings of my research and analysis of my thesis statement in a concluding chapter.

The focus of my thesis will be to which extent the use of media takes part in an election campaign in an authoritarian regime like Iran. Based on the analysis of my empirical data and my fieldwork, including interviews with key actors and experts within the area, as well as personal observations, I wish to analyze and answer the following thesis statement:

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<sup>4</sup> CNN.com, 25-05-2009:"Report: Iran blocks Facebook ahead of presidential election" pp. 1

*“With starting point in an account of the characteristics of the Iranian political system and the Iranian media structure I wish to discuss the use of media by the Iranian presidential candidates in the 2009 election in Iran”*

The structure of my thesis is as follows; first I will address the practical issues presenting a demarcation of the project, then a paragraph on structure, literature and theory as well as a discussion of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Following the theoretical paragraphs and introductory paragraphs I will continue on to the analytical part of my thesis. Firstly, in chapter 3 I will discuss and analyze the concept of electoral authoritarianism, secondly equal to the paragraph on electoral authoritarianism in chapter 4 I will present a discussion and analysis of the theories behind modern media. These two chapters are initial analyses leading up to my analysis on the use of modern media by the candidates in the Iranian presidential election, which follows in chapter 6. In chapter 5 I wish to account for the political situation in Iran today and the power balance and struggle that takes place within the regime, commenting on differing power structures and organizations. Finally, in chapter 7 I will amass my findings and present final and my conclusion.

## **1.2 Demarcation of the Project**

The presidential election in Iran began in the early autumn of 2008 with initial speculations of who would be running for which fraction and who would stand a chance against the incumbent president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Additionally, reports of criticism of the economic policies of the government started finding their way to the public media. This launched the unofficial campaigning that rapidly gained momentum in the national newspapers. Although official campaigning is only allowed for the last 20 days before the actual election takes place, the speculation, pointing fingers and unveiling of specific key issues particular to the potential candidates were already visible in the news media around September and October 2008. In addition to this, the election was characterized by complications that reached far into the remaining of 2009 after June 12.

The aftermath of the election, the accusations of fraud and fiddling with the votes, the large demonstrations in the streets and the following harsh crack down on the opposition kept



the focus on the Iranian presidential election in the international media. It became an urgent subject of interest for Iranians in- and outside of the country. The use of modern technology and digital media was now on everybody's lips and perceived as the tool of the oppressed to let the truth be told. Despite the increasing attention of the new and important role of modern, digital media, little attention has been given to the use of these tools in the time before the election in Iran.

There are many aspects of the use of media in the election campaign, and it will not be possible to analyze these completely without the risk of leaving something behind. My key focus will be on the incorporation and use of media in the official election campaigning in the last two weeks before the election. This is in order to understand the active use by the candidates and their campaign offices of modern media to reach the public. Additionally, I wish to fully understand the dynamics of elections in Iran and the freedoms which the candidates enjoyed during official campaigning.

## 2. Structure and Literature

The first part of my thesis will consist of a presentation and exposition of theory and researchers. The chapter on theory will be divided into two sections. The first section presents theories of electoral authoritarianism while the second section deals with modern, digital media in repressive regimes. Following the exposition of theory and researchers, I wish to include a brief explanation of the political system in Iran in general and the dualism of the power positions and structures of the elected and non-elected bodies in Iran's government.

In the chapter and analysis of electoral authoritarianism, I will employ theories and articles by the following scholars: American political scientists, Jason Brownlee, American political scientist Elliot Hen-Tov, and American-Iranian political scientist Babak Rahimi. They all work with the concept of electoral authoritarianism in theory and in praxis in Iran. Furthermore, they acknowledge the fact that Iran has the relative freedom of electoral authoritarianism, and that this has an impact on the semi-democratic and relatively free elections held in Iran through the years. Additionally, I will include American political scientist Richard Snyder, who emphasizes the importance of the ways of studying and understanding non-democratic states.

The analysis of the chapter on digital media in repressive regimes will be based on literature and theories by Canadian journalist and Professor Marc Raboy, Iranian social scientist Dr. Gholam Khiabany and Danish Middle East scholar Jacob Feldt as well as Danish historian Peter Seeberg. Additionally, I wish to employ the literature of American journalist, John C. Merrill, American journalist and Associate Professor Peter J. Gade and American journalist Dr. Frederick R. Blevens. Both Merrill, Gade and Blevens are university teachers. They have in common that their theories examine the important role modern media plays in repressive regimes. They put forward explanations and theories on the freedoms of digital media and how these can and will have an impact in all aspects of societies.

Moreover, I will include interviews with representatives from the three campaign offices of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mehdi Karroubi and Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Mr. Jason Brownlee and a western diplomat based in Tehran. These interviews will add personal observations to the specific events during the campaigning weeks of the presidential election as well as testify to the use of media during the election campaign in Iran in June 2009. The interviews will help to back

the theories on and the realities of usage of digital and modern media in Iran. Adding to my interviews and my literature is my own observations collected during my stay in Iran in May and June 2009.

## **2.1 Theoretical Standpoint**

I will now briefly introduce my choice of theories and my theoretical standpoint. The theories I work with will be discussed and analyzed in detail in chapter 4 and 5. Therefore, the purpose of this paragraph is to provide an outline of the theories as well as background information in order to understand why I chose them.

Babak Rahimi's "Iran: the 2006 Elections and the Making of Authoritarian Democracy" describes how elections play a central role in further consolidating the conservative leadership through an analysis of what he sees as the four stages of political history in Iran. Elliot Hen-Tov likewise analyzes the stage of electoral authoritarianism in Iran through a political perspective of the past 31 years after the revolution. He takes point of departure in the aftermath of the 2005 presidential election which brought Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power. His theory is based on what he calls "two remarkable aspects of Iran's political development"<sup>5</sup> from which he concludes that Iran is moving from clerical theocracy toward conventional authoritarian regime. Richard Snyder's work is important to my thesis due to his main focus of the way of studying non-democratic regimes, in which he highlights the importance of perceiving the state as it is instead of looking for democratic features. This is highly relevant for the understanding of electoral authoritarianism. Without a pragmatic and realistic approach to these regimes we will not be able to fully understand the dynamics in non-democratic regimes. Last, Jason Brownlee's "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization", analyzes typical features of electoral authoritarianism and provides a theory on the development of electoral authoritarianism in Iran.

I believe that the abovementioned theories supplement each other well and constitute useful tools to analyze electoral authoritarianism in Iran. The reason why I chose these theories is that they all advocate a functionalistic approach to politics and authoritarianism, which means they view politics and governance as being dynamic and in constant development. It is important for me to use theories that acknowledge this and are not too generalizing. Additionally I

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<sup>5</sup> Hen-Tov, Elliot pp. 1

will employ literature by Algerian professor of political science Rachid Tlemceni, British based professor in modern history Ali Ansari and Swedish political scientist Staffan I. Lindberg as well as including background works for a more general knowledge of Iran.

The focus of the article<sup>6</sup> by Marc Raboy is the development of media with the key notion that media should play a role as a medium in and of democratization. From this perspective he highlights the importance of media democratization and the democratic role of media. In “Twilight Press of Freedom” Merrill et al assume a philosophical, theoretical approach to the study of press freedom and the concept of freedom. With starting point in the 15<sup>th</sup> century they seek to explain the development of the concept “freedom” and the way this has affected western press tradition. They argue that the individual freedom of press is on retreat and a notion of common interest and social responsibility will replace the former. Thereby, ultimately, the press will be a tool of the people’s interest instead of a few men in power, and it will serve for the better of the nation and the public rather than the people in power. Additionally, they argue that the idea of traditional press freedom is a concept developed in a western tradition, which has never held a stance in Muslim countries. Therefore, Muslim press, Merrill et al. argue, is exceptional from western press due to cultural inheritance.

Gholham Khiabany presents an exhaustive analysis of Iranian media and modernity. In opposition to Merrill et al. he argues that there is no such thing as specific “Islamic media”. He starts by examining modernization theory and its impact on the study of media in the Middle East. He then moves on to elaborating the concept of Islamic media and criticizes this for being generalizing without respect for diversity within the region and for being blind to the comparison that can easily be made between media in the Middle east and media in both the developed and the developing world. His main topic of the book is the study of Iranian media of which he provides a thorough account. He argues that the development of media in Iran has happened via state control and that this can be seen as continuity through history. Upon the topic of media and civil society in Iran he places heavy emphasis on the fact that civil society is not free of state influence and neither is the media. In short, in Iran, as in many other countries where media theory supports the idea that media and civil society can help spur democracy and a democratic movement, neither media nor civil society are free of state interference. Further, Jon Anderson in

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<sup>6</sup> Media, Democratization and Regulation pp. 1-7. An excerpt from “Media and Democratization in the Information Society

Feldt et al argues that to understand the dynamics of the public spheres of new media it is important to take account of more data about the underlying technologies as well as cultural, material and social-political practices. In general the work edited by Feldt et al is focused on new media in the Middle East, and how to examine and understand the impact this have on society and to which extent new media is apparent and employed by the citizens.

I have chosen to work extensively with these three theoretical texts since I find they cover the important topics in the study of modern media in developing and authoritarian states as well as in Iran in specifically. Together, the theories provide a diverse and many sided insight in modern media and the texts touch upon important subjects which are highly relevant for my thesis. Though they do not agree on the role and the nature of modern media they provide a multifaceted discussion of modern media and thereby provide the reader the possibility to engage in the subject and fully understand the opportunities and restrictions modern media encompasses. It is important for my thesis to have all aspects of modern media in my analysis since they provide crucial information to my final purpose in analyzing how the presidential candidates in the 2009 presidential election in Iran used modern media in their campaigns.

Additionally to my three main works I will draw on information from an abstract from a research seminar hosted by Roskilde University in November 2008 on Digital media, civic engagement and political mobilization in repressive regimes as well as a conference report from a conference hosted by IMS in September 2008 about ICTs and networked communication environments.

Above I have provided a short introduction to the theories I will apply in my thesis and the scholars whom I intend to use in my analysis to clarify and discuss electoral authoritarianism and modern media in repressive regimes. In the following paragraph, I will account for the difference between qualitative and quantitative methods and explain how I shall make use of the qualitative method. Next, I will present and go through my empirical data.

## **2.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Methods**

I regard my respondents, whom I intend to present in the next paragraph, as being leading scholars or experts within the field of electoral authoritarianism or the use of media in the presidential election in Iran 2009. This is due to the fact that the three of them were actively

involved actively in the campaigning in Tehran and are currently living in Iran, one respondent were an Iranian based western diplomat working intensively with the election and the last is an American based scholar within the field of electoral authoritarianism and Iran.

I have chosen the qualitative method for my interviews, as it, in my opinion, is the better method to apply when dealing with a subject in depth where accurate information on a specific topic is needed. In my interviews I placed high importance on the information my respondents could provide, which was specific information on their election campaigning, information I would not have been able to obtain through the quantitative method. I have, therefore, adjusted the questions in my interviews according to the position and purpose each respondent composes in relation to my thesis and according to their competences and qualifications. This would not be possible through a questionnaire that contains the same questions for each person.

The four interviews that took place in Iran were conducted face to face whereas my interview with the expert on the background on authoritarianism in Iran, Jason Brownlee was conducted via telephone. This has ensured a greater extent of confidentiality and possibilities to go into depth with the subject by the respondents in Iran which would not have been able due to the nature of the regime if the interviews had been held through telephone. Rasmussen et al write in their book, *“Essentials of Social Science Research Methodology”*, that qualitative interviews are used in relations with studies, when one does not know much about the answer on forehand, which is why it is important to be able to go into depth with the subject. Hence, the purpose with qualitative interviews is to *understand* what you analyze instead of measuring it. Furthermore, qualitative interviews are preferable since they can capture the emotional aspects of the respondent’s answers and approaches to the subject. The respondents will have to use their own words and thoughts instead of continuing a statement that the interviewer has already expressed through the questions<sup>7</sup>.

In his book *“InterView”*, Steiner Kvale writes that it is important that the number of consulted respondents is neither too little, in which case there would not be sufficient empirical data to interpret, nor too large, in which case it would not be possible to perform thorough

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<sup>7</sup> Rasmussen et al: *“Essentials of Social Science Research Methodology”* pp. 93

interpretation of the relevant interviews<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, I have chosen to use five respondents, since I find this an appropriate number to provide significant and in depth information. If I had conducted more interviews, I would not have had space in this thesis to analyze them all, whereas now I have full opportunity to go in depth with the empirical data.

The respondents represent one scholar, one representative for three of the four main campaigners and one person working in Iran with political affairs. Therefore, it is well thought through to limit the number of respondents to five, since three of them represent the main characters of the presidential election: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. These three respondents provided me with insight information on their campaigns and the tools they applied, whereas the two remaining respondents gave me an expert angle on the matters of elections and Iran and specifically, the presidential election in June 2009.

The questions from my interviews are based both on the theories, which I employ in this paper and on my own eyewitness accounts of the election campaign in Iran during my stay in Iran from May 28<sup>th</sup> till June 26<sup>th</sup> 2009, doing fieldwork and executing interviews. The respondents, therefore, answer questions that provide insight information on the organization of the presidential election campaigns in Iran, which is information I would not be able to obtain anywhere else. Further, they answer questions based on my theories regarding media in repressive regimes. Thereby, my respondents not only provide me with new information, but they also reveal whether my theories are valid by giving specific examples from their everyday life in Iran.

Additionally, performing interviews and research in Iran can be difficult work due to lack of freedom of speech and lack of openness by the Iranian government. It would be difficult to use quantitative methods in Iran due to the restrictions as well as surveillance of the people and the opposition. The risk, both for the researcher as well as for the respondents would be too high. The intense supervision of citizens and visitors in Iran by the Iranian intelligence service can be a threat to the people whom the interviewer chooses to work with. Arrests of bloggers, journalists and individuals that “pose a threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran” are common. As the representative from the Mousavi campaign office put it: “We have some freedom at universities for campaigning, but we cannot feel secure. It is dangerous for us to get involved in politics,

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<sup>8</sup> Kvale, Steiner: “InterView” pp. 108

especially if Ahmadinejad wins. That might have unfortunate consequences for us. And for you since you have been hanging out with us”<sup>9</sup>.

The reason for the intense supervision and the risks for the respondents to talk to western researchers is owing to the negative approach the Iranian government has towards western powers. The regime are constantly trying to repress all threat to the resilience of the Islamic Republic and often western powers, in specific England and America is accused of trying to bring down the regime by spreading propaganda against the regime. Therefore any western researchers asking political questions will be perceived as a possible threat and any Iranian citizen engaging with westerners is in the risk of being placed under surveillance or even arrested.

Thus, the basis for my analysis will be the above mentioned theories supplemented by the five interviews I conducted Iran and on the phone. The theory in combination with interviews provides me with a more solid argumentation base in answering my research question, which is the main purpose of this thesis.

### **2.2.1 Empirical Data**

For this thesis I have interviewed three Iranians, each actively employed in one of following election campaigns of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mehdi Karroubi and Mir Hossein Mousavi. I have interviewed one Iranian based western diplomat and one American, Jason Brownlee, who is associate professor at the Department of Government at the University of Texas.

The interviews of the three Iranians together with the Iranian based western diplomat will be applied in the analysis of the use of modern media in the election campaign in Iran and provide crucial information about the election campaigns. The interview with Brownlee, along with his scholarly work, will mainly be used for the analysis of electoral authoritarianism, which is his area of specialization. However, due to his exhaustive knowledge of Iran, I will employ information from this interview in my analysis of modern media in Iran as well.

I was put in contact with the Iranian based western diplomat through my connections in the expat community in Iran. I became familiar with the three Iranians through my fieldwork in Iran during the election while visiting various campaign offices from each presidential candidate in Tehran. I had read some work by Brownlee and contacted him through e-mail with a request for an interview. He was kind enough to let me conduct an hour long phone interview.

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with representative from the Mousavi campaign office.



I have conducted all interviews face to face except from the one with Brownlee, which was held on the phone.

Due to the difficult political situation in Iran I cannot mention my respondents by full name neither can I provide any other personal information. The information they have provided me with about the campaigns and the political system, and the fact that they have socialized with me, can in unfortunate situations cause them trouble. I will, therefore, use the following terms to cover their identity: I1, I2, I3<sup>10</sup> and “an Iranian based western diplomat”. Their identity is known by the author.

The respondents are:

From Iran:

**I1** is a young student from Tehran University working actively at the main campaign office for Mir Hossein Mousavi in northern Tehran. He, along with many other young students, was involved with the campaigning and rallying in favor of Mousavi throughout the election campaign. He came to the office every day after classes, and he participated in rallying and in distributing flyers. He is 23 years old. It is the first time he actively participated in politics. He is religious and has performed the hajj (pilgrimage) to Mekka with his family. His sister was also a strong supporter of Mousavi. The interview took place on several occasions, both at the campaign office as well as when he took me along to rallies in favor of Mousavi in the week before the election took place.

**I2** is an elderly man working for the Ahmadinejad campaign based in a smaller office in northern Tehran. He has a degree in political science from Tehran University. He became employed in the campaign through his friend who was the owner of the office where they were situated. I will add that it was difficult to get in contact with a representative from the Ahmadinejad campaign, and it took me several attempts at different offices before finding someone who spoke English and was willing to talk to me. Despite this, I still sensed some hesitation or mistrust towards my presence in the office and it was clear that whenever a question was too intrusive, I received vague answer or no answer at all. The interview with the representative from the Ahmadinejad campaign was by far the most difficult, least credible and it lacked specific information.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview 1, 2 and 3

**I3** is a student at Tehran University working for the Karroubi campaign in an office in northern Tehran at Tajrish. He was actively employed with the campaign and was the young leader of this specific campaign office. He is 22 years old, and it was his first time actively participating in politics. He helped carrying out the planning of the campaign activities and the distribution of flyers as well as additional information.

**Iranian based western diplomat** is working at the political section with a western embassy. He speaks Persian and worked intensively with the political situation and the election in Iran. He is 31 years old and has been in the Foreign Service for four years. Iran is his first posting.

From Texas, USA:

**Jason Brownlee** is an associate professor at the University of Texas, Austin with the Department of Government. His focus is on non-democratic states and his expertise, amongst others, is Iran. His book *“Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization”* from 2007 compares opposition movements in Egypt, Iran, Malaysia and the Philippines, which also constitute the basis of my theories on electoral authoritarianism in Iran.

The interviews with the three representatives from the election campaign were mainly conducted at the campaign offices, and, at all times, there were several persons present. However, since few spoke English, I interviewed one person who then spoke on behalf of and translated for the group of people present at the office. Most people employed with the campaign offices of Karroubi and Mousavi mainly consisted of young students from various universities around Tehran, whereas the majority of the people employed with the Ahmadinejad campaign were older men and women above 30 years of age.

### **3. The Political Context in Iran before June 2009**

The purpose of this chapter is to present a short introduction of the political context in Iran today and, more precisely, an explanation of the current political system, which was implemented and has existed since the 1979 revolution. The intention is to underline the many mechanisms and players in Iranian politics and thereby account for the complexity of the political system. This, I find important when discussing subjects related to the election since all groups, individuals and councils play a significant role in the election preparation, campaigning and completion

Today Iran is still strongly affected by the election results of the 2009 presidential election. There is an increasing militarization of society. The Basij and Revolutionary Guard have been given a more important and apparent role in society. The Intelligence Service keeps a close eye on any opposition being a group or an individual. Journalists and bloggers are arrested and news papers shut down. Even the slightest criticism of the regime may result in imprisonment. Hence, censorship and self censorship are widely practiced. Fractures both amongst the reformists and conservatives as well as within the conservative camp are more frequently surfacing. Even the clerics have heated discussions regarding the extent of rule, the way of rule and the heritage of Ayatollah Khomeini and the modern Iranian state.

It is in this context the presidential election took place and the new use of modern media found its way to the election campaigns. I now wish to give a short presentation of the political structure in Iran. This I find relevant because the political system in Iran consists of a parallel structure of elected and non-elected bodies and councils that each enjoy power and importance in the political sphere in Iran. Further, the political system and structure affect the political players in Iran and consequently also the elections, the candidates and their election campaigns.

#### **3.1. The Political Structure: Electoral Bodies and Appointed Councils**

In the following chapter I intend to give a short introduction and description of the many political authorities existing alongside each other in Iran, elected as well as appointed. All together they constitute a large group of councils and individuals, each playing a part in the total political coherence and in the power apparatus. Additionally, I will explain the function and influence they have in the complicated structure they belong to.

The constitution of 1979 forms the dichotomist function of the government, personified through the rule of a president elected by the people and a supreme leader appointed by clerics. Alongside these two individuals placed in top positions, councils, assemblies and organizations function.

The basis for the Supreme Leader originates from Khomeini's concept of velayat-e faqih (the rule of the jurist)<sup>11</sup>. The argument being that instead of waiting for the hidden imam, the Mahdi's return to rule society in true nature of Islam, replacements in form of an ayatollah will function as a legitimate ruler until the prophecy is fulfilled. The myth of the Mahdi is found in shia Islam. He is thought to be hiding until the right time comes and then return to guide and rule the true believers and bring peace and justice to the world. This myth has traditionally resulted in clerics within shia to not interfere in politics but focus on spirituality. However, during 20<sup>th</sup> century Iran, this slowly changed. Although some maintained this vision others, like Khomeini, perceived it differently. Velayat-e faqih can be perceived as politicized Islam used to explain cleric's interference in politics by, which in shia Islam traditionally has been separated. The Supreme Leader is appointed within the clergy in the Assembly of Experts in accordance with the constitution.

The Assembly of Experts is a Qom-based council consisting of 86 clerics, who are chosen by the public for a period of eight years. Furthermore, the Assembly of Experts has the authority to remove the Supreme Leader from power if he does not live up to the expectations or qualifications which are necessary to hold the seat as Supreme Leader. The sitting Supreme Leader is Ali Hoseyni Khamene'i.

The most powerful institution in Iran is the Supreme Leader's Office<sup>12</sup>. The constitution of 1979 gives the Supreme Leader power of the military, state run TV- and radio, the Revolutionary Guard and intelligence services. Alongside the Supreme Leader and conceived to be the second most powerful man in Iran is the President.

The role of the president has developed and changed since the revolution. Originally, it was a relatively insignificant position with little power, however, elected by the people in regular elections. The real power was placed with the prime minister. In 1989, when the constitution was

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<sup>11</sup> Further reading on velayat-e faqih, please see Khomeini's statement written during his exile in Iraq; Iran Chamber pdf. Version: [http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/books/velayat\\_faqee.pdf](http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/books/velayat_faqee.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> ICG: "Iran; The Struggle for the Revolution's Soul" pp. 4

revised, the post of prime minister was abandoned and the president inherited the areas of responsibility formerly held by the prime minister. The president now has the power to appoint and dismiss ministers, control the Plan and Budget Organization, which results in enormous influence on economic policy, furthermore he appoints the leaders of the Central Bank and the Security Council.

According to ICG<sup>13</sup>, the president is estimated to be the second most powerful official in Iran. However, his power is still limited by the Supreme Leader as he has to approve of the policies of the president. In reality, the president has most influence on domestic politics. Additionally, the control of the military is not in the hands of the president, but the Supreme Leader. The real power of the President also depends on his affiliations and contacts with the additional power holding institutions. Ahmadinejad has strong ties to the Revolution Guards and the intelligence service. The relationship has been build and nursed from his young years as an active supporter of Khomeini and his participation in politics based on his strong belief in the revolution and shia Islam.

Besides from the above-mentioned individuals and councils, a range of constitutional councils and secondary organizations exist. Amongst those the Guardian Council, the Majlis (parliament) and the Expediency Council are of high importance and play a significant role in the political context of Iran.

The Guardian Council consists of 12 jurists, of which six are appointed by the Supreme Leader, while the remaining six are appointed by the Majlis. All 12 belong to the elite within the clergy. Their primary function is to read and evaluate whether or not a proposed bill is in accordance with the correct Islamic law (fiqh). In addition, they hold the power to approve of candidates for public election, such as presidential elections. This is to ensure that all candidates are true believers of Islam as well as loyal to the state. For the presidential election on June 12 2009, only four candidates out of 475<sup>14</sup> made it through the eye of the needle for the final list. Amongst those who did not make it were 42 women<sup>15</sup>. It is commonly perceived that the Guardian Council's screening and acceptance of candidates is highly influenced by the Supreme Leader's office. Credentials of the presidential candidates are often questioned based on "shady"

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<sup>13</sup> For more in depth details on power holders in Iran please see the reports by International Crisis Group listed in the literature list.

<sup>14</sup> [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/12/content\\_11362701.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/12/content_11362701.htm)

<sup>15</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8058884.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8058884.stm)

reasoning, such as the avoidance of women running, despite the fact that it is outlined in the constitution that women can run.

The Expediency Council was created in 1988 with the two main purposes: firstly, it was to function as mediator between the Guardian Council and the Majlis. Secondly, it was to advise the Supreme Leader. The council consists of 31 members, all appointed by the Supreme Leader.

The Majlis is the parliament and its members are elected every fourth year by the people of Iran. During the years of Khatami it was briefly dominated by the reformists, however in 2004, one year prior to the presidential election that brought Ahmadinejad to power, the dominance was recaptured by the conservatives. The Majlis has 290 representatives and their jobs consist of reading and passing or rejecting bills, and most importantly they have the power to impeach ministers and even the president if it is decided that the person is not working towards the better of the Islamic Republic or violates the fundamental ideologies of the revolution. If more than half of the cabinet appointed by the president is removed from their position, the constitution requires that the entire cabinet will be up for review. Ahmadinejad came close to this in his last year of his first presidential term when the 10<sup>th</sup> minister was impeached by the parliament. The cabinet in total consists of 21 ministers<sup>16</sup>.

Besides from the constitutional councils, a variety of security forces and organizations exist, which all together shape the national security system. Amongst the most important ones are the Revolutionary Guard and the Basij. The Revolutionary Guard was formed by Khomeini in 1979 with the purpose of protecting the revolution. At the same time, it functioned as counterpart to the regular army that served during the Shah, which Khomeini feared would not be 100% loyal. The Revolutionary Guard has strong affiliations to the hard-liners, amongst them Ahmadinejad, whom they strongly advocated in favor of during the election campaign in 2005. Additionally, they continue to perceive themselves as a political army that sets out to defend Khomeini's revolution and agenda<sup>17</sup>.

The Basij militia is the most powerful paramilitary organization in Iran. The Basij, just as the Revolutionary Guard, was formed by Khomeini in 1979 with the one purpose to create an

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<sup>16</sup> The numbers and facts are from the article "Scandal, Fistfight Erupt over Impeachment Move in Iran" The Washington Post, November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2008. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/03/AR2008110301757.html>

<sup>17</sup> ICG: "Iran; The Struggle for the Revolution's Soul"

army of 20 million people in order to protect the Islamic Republic against America and domestic enemies. The control of the Basij is formally appointed to the Revolutionary Guard's commando. The majority of the Basij force is recruited between the ages of 11-17 years from poor areas and generally poorly educated people. The Revolutionary Guard often employs the Basij militia when extreme methods are taken into use, often in relations to protests or oppression. The Basij is believed to employ a total of 90,000 people<sup>18</sup>.

The above-mentioned organizations are also part of what is known as revolutionary funds. Larger funds also provide the Supreme Leader and his allies in the government with a solid network that ensures support, mobilizes protests and suppresses the opposition. There is a close relationship and corporation between these funds and the government, and as much as 58% of the national budget is allocated to the funds. In this perspective, it is difficult to account for to which extent these funds enjoy autonomy. In any case, their influence on the government and the political context in Iran should not be underestimated nor their loyalty towards the revolutionary Islamic system.

Parallel to the official councils and organizations some of the most influential organizations are the semi-official Bonyads. Bonyads are funds with an extensive capital and they are most often affiliated with the revolution and the conservative factions in Iran. The bonyads allocate money and redistribute money to the poor and the families of the martyrs. The bonyads answer only to the supreme leader and even though these are not official organizations or councils in the political structure in Iran, reality is that they hold an immense amount of power and influence. Through allocated resources from the government, subsidies and religious contributions the financial capital allows the bonyads to be involved in every part of the Iranian industrial market.

I have sought to present an explanation of the political system in Iran and described the most important features and bodies within the political context. This is to provide an outline of the most important actors in the political scene in Iran, all which equally play an important role in the political structure in Iran hence, also in relations to elections. It is relevant to include the outline of the groups and structure of the political system in Iran to further understand what and who can affect elections and politicians within the rule. In prolongation of this paragraph I now

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<sup>18</sup> Further elaboration and analysis of the political system in Iran can be found in Schirazi, Asghar: "The Constitution of Iran: Politics and State in the Islamic Republic"

wish to present an in depth discussion of the political fractions and players in Iran. Following this I will give an account of the conservatives and the reformists and discuss the political reality of these groupings.

I will now briefly touch upon the subject of the rift between the conservatives and the reformists and further elaborate on the factions argued to have emerged within the conservative wing.

### **3.2. Reformists and Conservatives; Rifts and Factions**

In this paragraph I will outline the relations between the reformists and the conservatives in Iran. These two groups make up the dominating political actors in Iran and have done so since the revolution in 1979. I find it important to include this in relation to my thesis as it underlines the real political situation in Iran and helps explaining the context in which the 2009 presidential election took place<sup>19</sup>.

#### **3.2.1 The Conservative Factions**

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution during the years of Khomeini's rule, the conservatives sat tight on the power. However in the following years after the Iran-Iraq war in 1980-1988, the reformists slowly gained power and space on the political scene. In 1997 the reform minded Khatami won the presidential election in. The conservatives suffered a severe blow to their power and had to give up many of their seats in the parliament. Khatami won again in 2001 and this led to a general belief in the west that Iran was now on the right path moving towards dialogue and corporation and an opening and easing of the strictly religious and closed regime.

It is needless to say that in the wake of the reformist era it came as a surprise to the west when the neo-conservative Ahmadinejad won the election in 2005 and entered his first term as president of Iran. Ahmadinejad not only represents the conservatives, but a branch known as

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<sup>19</sup>More detailed discussions on the political landscape in contemporary Iran can be found in Menashri, Davids book: "Post-revolutionary Politics in Iran".



the neo-conservatives or the hard-liners<sup>20</sup>. The hard-liners strongly emphasize Islam and the importance of the religion while simultaneously looking to the principles put out by Khomeini during the revolution. The hard-liners have strongly criticized the old conservatives for compromising and deviating from these principles.

Amongst the conservatives' strongest front figures is the Supreme Leader Khamene'i and president Ahmadinejad. The conservatives reason their legitimacy primarily from the theocratic elements of the revolution. The primary focus of the conservatives and in specific the hard-liners has been and is to hinder political liberalization, which they see as a threat to the religious regime<sup>21</sup>.

Although many labels have been put on Ahmadinejad and his supporters, Sanadaji argues that it is not correct to perceive them as only militant and radical. In his opinion, the more correct term would be "populist-Islamic conservatives"<sup>22</sup>. Ahmadinejad and his presidential policies have pursued an Islamic, anti-western populist appeal. Sanandaji further argues that despite the general belief that the branch represented by Ahmadinejad enjoys great support and influence this is hardly reality. The Populist-Islamic conservatives enjoy great support from the Basij and the IRGC, Bonyads and others alike. However, the traditional support from the bazaar and the main stream clergy is still concentrated amongst the more moderate conservatives and the coalition around Ahmadinejad seems to constitute a minority faction on the far-right of the political spectrum. However, he still enjoys the support of the supreme leader and this together with the support of the Basij and IRGC provide a strong, powerful and influential group despite of the fact that they are outnumbered by the other conservative factions.

The more pragmatic fractions of the conservatives are concentrated around Rafsanjani. His discontent with the conservatives and Ahmadinejad was clear in the presidential elections when he chose to back the reformist wing and not the conservative candidates, Ahmadinejad or Rezaii.

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<sup>20</sup> This faction is also known as the Principlists as for instance used in Iran Pulse no. 20. However, hard-liners or neo-conservatives are just as accepted. For the curiosity of the reader, I felt that this needed to be pointed out. I have chosen to use the latter terms in my thesis. The term originates from the Persian "osulgaran" explained in Sanandaji pp. 632

<sup>21</sup> ICG: "Iran. The Struggle for the Revolution's Soul" pp. 11

<sup>22</sup> Sanandaji, Kaveh-Cyrus: "The Eight Majlis Elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Division in Conservative Ranks and the Politics of Moderation" pp. 633

The Grand Principalist Coalition emerged in 2008 and constituted an alternative to Ahmadinejad's radical movement. Originally this was comprised of the more pragmatic and traditional conservatives and was led by Tehran Mayor Qalibaf, former IRGC Chief Mohsen Rezaei and top nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani<sup>23</sup>. Mohsen Rezaei represented this coalition in the 2009 election as the only other conservative candidate running. Their approach is technocratic and believes that decision makers should be highly skilled in fields of management. They believe in a mixed economy, which is reminiscent of Rafsanjani's approach during his presidency.

The conservatives continue to control the most important political and security elements in the Iranian state, including the Guardian Council, the Assembly of Experts and state radio and TV. Furthermore, they have close affiliations with the Revolutionary Guards and Basij.

It is important to take into account the line-up of political coalitions and factions as David Menashri argue in *Iran Pulse* and the split within Iranian politics in general. It is no longer a struggle between the conservatives and the reformists about power, but an internal fight between the conservatives and the hard-liners<sup>24</sup>. Menashri divides the conservatives into two main groups; the hard-liners and "The Broad Principalists"<sup>25</sup>. The hard-liners support Ahmadinejad and advocate a strong opposition against the West as well as a strong political approach towards the atomic program and the right of Iran to develop and continue its nuclear ambitions.

Further, the attempt alone to divide Iranian politics into fixed parties and coalitions is difficult given the fluid and informal nature of party framework, Sanandaji argues. Hence, he as well points to the two larger groupings of reformists and conservatives.

The Broad Principalists in conservative ranks advocate a more pragmatic approach to foreign policy as well as economical reform. They are typically associated with the strong critics of Ahmadinejad. In this context it is also argued that the reformists "died" with Khatami and the main challengers to Ahmadinejad and power struggle solely exists between the different factions of the conservatives. Mousavi is an example of this. He was the former and last prime minister, before this position was abolished, and served under Rafsanjani when he was president during the 1980s and in the early years of Khamene'i's time as Supreme Leader. Rafsanjani, a former conservative, is said to have eased his strong opinions and in the 2009 election he openly backed

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<sup>23</sup> Sanandaji, Kaveh-Cyrus: "The Eight Majlis Elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Division in Conservative Ranks and the Politics of Moderation" pp. 635

<sup>24</sup> David Menashri in *Iran Pulse* no. 20: "Iran's Majlis Election: All in the Family".

<sup>25</sup> David Menashri in *Iran Pulse* no. 20: "Iran's Majlis Election: All in the Family".

Mousavi in the run for presidency. Mousavi has also softened his political stands over the years and officially represented the reformist coalition in the 2009 election. In fact, Khatami had been strongly encouraged to run for presidency by his support base and did also announce his participation. However, when Mir Hossein Mousavi announced his candidacy Khatami withdrew and officially announced that his support along with his backing would be concentrated on Mousavi.

This change of attitude amongst former conservatives can be observed as a factionalized opposition to the hard-liners, but it is also viable that these former important and powerful conservatives have changed their political conviction. In the 2009 election surprisingly many in Qom was supportive of Mousavi, it was observed, and in correlation with above discussed rifts within the conservatives, it was conceived that this was due to the fact that parts of the older mullahs find Ahmadinejad to pragmatic. As the Tehran based western diplomat put it: "They seem more interested in preserving the state and power than unnecessarily provoke they way they see Ahmadinejad doing in international affairs"<sup>26</sup>. Change of political mind or party is not a stranger to western politics and especially not within Danish politics. Regardless, it is worth keeping in mind, when assessing and examining Iranian politics, that there are strong rifts within the conservatives, and that despite how "reformist" a group might be, they still work within the general principles of the Islamic Republic and the values of the revolution.

### **3.2.2. The Reformist Coalition**

The coalition of reformists support, to some extends political openness as well as a softer approach towards the West. Amongst the prominent individuals within this camp are former president Khatami, his brother Mohammed Reza Khatami, Mehdi Karroubi and former supporter of Khomeini and president during the Iran-Iraq war, Rafsanjani<sup>27</sup>. Additionally the runner up for president in the 2009 elections and the strongest opponent to Ahmadinejad, Mir Hossein Mousavi can be added.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Tehran based western diplomat. Representatives from the embassy travelled around Iran to keep account of the election and to give an impression of what is going on outside Tehran. They found it quite interesting that such a large group in Qom supported Mousavi.

<sup>27</sup> For a further explanation of the relations of the reformists and the political factions in Iran see, Iran Pulse no. 20: "Iran's Majlis Election: All in the Family".

The coalition is made up of both the modern right wing, also known as technocrats<sup>28</sup> and the Islamic left wing (the leftists was later named the reformists<sup>29</sup>). The technocrats are significantly more liberal on both cultural and social matters than the conservatives. Their primary goal, as discussed in ICG and Iran Pulse, is to change Iran into a modern state, without forgetting the Islamic dimension implemented during the revolution. Their main way of achieving these goals is through financial development and industrialization.

The Islamic left wing is divided into three main groups that vary from strong religiously influenced politicians to more reform friendly and “liberal” people such as Khatami and Karroubi. The Islamic left has changed considerably within the last decade. Earlier they were behind a large part of the radical activism from 1980-1992<sup>30</sup>. However, after lack of success at the parliamentary election in 1992, they changed their agenda to adjust to the modern and average conviction in Iran.

The coalition of reformists experienced their biggest achievement in the successful election of Khatami in 1997 and again in 2001. Still, the era of the reformists ended with the election of Ahmadinejad in 2005 and since then the Iranian government has once again been dominated by the conservatives. In the years after the sat back of the reformists, two notable coalitions emerged. One of them was Hezb-e E'temad-e Melli (The National Trust Party) which was established by Mehdi Karroubi. His party projected a more moderate-reformist platform than the main reformists<sup>31</sup>. This was the initial step towards running for presidency in the 2009 elections and thus representing the reformist wing. The second and more influential coalition, according to Sanandaji, was the E'telaf-e Eslah-Talaban (Reformist Coalition). Sanandaji emphasizes that even though these two reformist lists emerged in the mid-2000s the reformists should be measured as one identity.

It is the later list that in both the latest Majlis election and in the presidential election in 2009 brought together the coalition of reformists and moderate conservatives forming the alliance between Khatami and Rafsanjani while backing Mousavi. It can be discussed whether

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<sup>28</sup> ICG: “Iran; The Struggle for the Revolution’s Soul” pp. 12

<sup>29</sup> Sanandaji, Kaveh-Cyrus: “The Eight Majlis Elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Division in Conservative Ranks and the Politics of Moderation” pp 626

<sup>30</sup> ICG: “Iran; The Struggle for the Revolution’s Soul” pp. pp. 13

<sup>31</sup> Sanandaji, Kaveh-Cyrus: “The Eight Majlis Elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Division in Conservative Ranks and the Politics of Moderation” pp. 625

Mousavi is in reality a “reformist” but in the 2009 election contests he was the key representative of the reformist coalition and with the backing of Khatami, the symbolic uniting figure of the reformist movement. In this context, it is arguable that Mousavi represented the reformists and their agenda supported by Rafsanjani and the moderate conservatives. However one of the most important aspects of Mousavi’s campaigning was that the Iranians perceived him as the new major reformist leader replacing Khatami in the hopes of change. As the representative from the Mousavi campaign said: “People remember him as a very close ally of Khomeini, however they also remember that despite the Iran-Iraq war they did not go hungry to bed, as they do today. This is positive, however unfortunately they also remember him for a time with more strict rules regarding dress codes. He is trying to open up and loosen some of the very strict rules. For instance, he has announced that he will remove the moral police from the streets and the first thing he will look at when elected is the women’s situation”<sup>32</sup>. Mousavi further emphasized his focus on women in Iran when including his wife as a part of his official campaign. On one campaign poster they even posed together hand in hand and he has publicly shown affection for her<sup>33</sup>. This is the first time a woman has played such a significant part in elections in the Islamic republic and she was named the Iranian Michelle Obama<sup>34</sup>.

In the months passing since the election in June 2009, Karroubi turned out to be the strongest and most consistent critic of the election and the regime’s handling of the demonstrators. Karroubi withheld his criticism and behind the scenes he constantly pressured the authorities by questioning the human rights issues of the arrested people, claiming exhaustive investigations of the events. Despite this, it was Mousavi who remained the face of the opposition to Ahmadinejad and thereby became the face of the Green Movement<sup>35</sup> calling for fair elections, change and more freedom.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with representative from the Mousavi campaign office.

<sup>33</sup> Information from own accounts of the campaigning in the streets and supported by information from the representative from the Mousavi campaign office.

<sup>34</sup> Islam Online: “Iran’s Michelle Obama” May 24, 2009

<sup>35</sup> The green color representing Mousavi in the election campaign came to be symbolic of the protests in the streets and was named the Green Movement. A discussion of the goals of the Green Movement are not of relevance in this paper, however it can be said that the goals of the Green Movement in Iran and outside Iran have not always been the same. The initial protests in Iran was not against the rule as such, but directed at Ahmadinejad and Khamene’i protesting the election results and the terms of the election implying that the election was rigged and Ahmadinejad was not their true leader. The Green Movement amongst the diaspora in the west called for a regime change and democracy.

It is important to take into account the line-up of political coalitions and factions as David Menashri argue in Iran Pulse and the split within Iranian politics in general. It is no longer a struggle between the conservatives and the reformists about power, but an internal fight between the conservatives and the hard-liners<sup>36</sup>. Menashri divides the conservatives into two main groups; the hard-liners and “The Broad Principalists”<sup>37</sup>. The hard-liners support Ahmadinejad and advocate a strong opposition against the West as well as a strong political approach towards the atomic program and the right of Iran to develop and continue its nuclear ambitions.

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This change of attitude amongst former conservatives can be observed as a factionalized opposition to the hard-liners, but it is also viable that these former important and powerful conservatives have changed their political conviction. Change of political mind or party is not a stranger to western politics and especially not within Danish politics. Regardless, it is worth keeping in mind, when assessing and examining Iranian politics, that there are strong rifts within

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<sup>36</sup> David Menashri in Iran Pulse no. 20: “Iran’s Majlis Election: All in the Family”.

<sup>37</sup> David Menashri in Iran Pulse no. 20: “Iran’s Majlis Election: All in the Family”.

the conservatives, and that despite how “reformist” a group might be, they still work within the general principles of the Islamic Republic and the values of the revolution.

Whether or not one argues that key political opposition and power struggle takes place within conservative ranks or if one supports the notion of the reformist opposition, it cannot be ignored that in the 2009 presidential election the “reformist wave” had its revival. It might have been represented by former conservatives but it did have similarities with the Khatami era and the reformist principles Khatami presented in his first bid for presidency in 1997. And for the Iranians Mousavi did represent the reformist wing in Iranian politics and his candidacy revived the hopes of change and more freedom that Khatami had initially introduced more than 12 years ago.

I have now outlined the relations between the reformists and the conservatives in Iran. The account underlines the real political situation in Iran and helps to explain the context in which the 2009 presidential election took place.

## 4. Discussion and Analysis of Electoral Authoritarianism

Electoral authoritarianism is a significant part of my project since it can be used to explain aspects of the political system which is present in Iran today and treats the question of non-democratic states and the dynamics within these regimes through thorough studies. Further, it can explain the political reality in which the presidential election took place and thereby adds to the concept in general of elections in an authoritarian regime. Therefore, I find it important to analyze and discuss varying concepts of electoral authoritarianism to support my key analysis.

Electoral authoritarianism often appears when discussing repressive regimes and state structures. When talking about electoral authoritarianism, it refers to authoritarian, repressive regimes with electoral features such as presidential, parliamentary and regional elections. As Lindberg puts it; “free and fair elections are acceptable electoral processes, all other cases of regimes holding de jure competitive and participatory elections are considered electoral authoritarian regimes”<sup>38</sup>.

The theory of electoral authoritarianism is constituted by the one key notion that more or less free elections are held for various institutions. These elections are held in order to portray the regime representatives of the people, thereby, verifying the validity of the government. However, these elections are often limited to few candidates and offer no real opportunity for opposition groups’ participation in elections or any real potential for change. Although most scholarly work on electoral authoritarianism supports this argument Ellen Lust-Okar presents an alternative analysis of the role of elections: “Rather (than securing regime authority, red.), elections under authoritarianism provide an important competition over access to state resources.”<sup>39</sup> In this perspective, elections function as a means to secure one self. In this scenario, votes are not cast based on political convincing but based on which candidate can generate most resources beneficial for one self.

Several themes are significant and apparent as key subjects of investigation in scholarly work on electoral authoritarianism. These subjects are noteworthy for my study and are as follows: the study of non-democratic states, political parties and electoral authoritarianism, groups of authoritarianism and ruling characteristics and finally electoral authoritarianism in Iran.

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<sup>38</sup> Lindberg, Staffan I.: “Why Do Opposition Parties Boycott Elections?” pp. 248

<sup>39</sup> Lust-Okar, Ellen: “Elections under Authoritarianism: Preliminary Lessons from Jordan”, pp.5



In the following section I will account for these matters and their importance accordingly and discuss and analyze each subject.

#### **4.1. The Study of Non-democratic States**

The study of non-democratic states is composed of theories on authoritarian regimes, electoral factors and democratic features within authoritarian regimes, people's power, and the nature of the government. The study of non-democratic states attempts to explain and understand the political, social and cultural features hereof. Iran is categorized as an electoral authoritarian regime, and it is therefore relevant and important for my thesis to touch upon the subject of the study of non-democratic states and include a discussion hereof in my thesis.

In his article "*Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes*", Snyder highlights the problematics of modern scholarly work on non-democratic states. The major problem with the theories, according to Snyder, is that most literature on contemporary non-democratic regimes places an overwhelming emphasis on the electoral process and overlooks other fundamental dimensions that are critical for analyzing regimes. It is important for students of non-democratic regimes to focus more attention on how elections interact with a further extra-electoral dimension: the *degree* of rule<sup>40</sup>.

Snyder's thesis is that too much emphasis has been put on the democratic features we, western scholars, wish to find in these regimes. Instead one should focus on the reality of the regime or country studied. Hence, some countries that are put into the category of non-democratic regimes or electoral authoritarian regimes sometimes do not even have democratic features. The idea presented is that the scholarly work and tradition within the studies of non-democratic regimes are understood in the era of modern development strategy, in which economic development and higher education will help turn non-democratic countries into democracies.

Brownlee supports the notion of lack of in-depth-studies of non-democratic regimes and points out that despite the fast development of non-democratic regimes turning into democracies in the last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 2001 more than five dozen regimes still blended

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<sup>40</sup> A clarification of the concept of extra-electoral factors and the degree of rule and the important of understanding how these interfere with the reality of the state and therefore is important to use when studying non-democratic regimes see Richard Snyder: "*Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes*" pp. 3

liberalization with repression<sup>41</sup>. Brownlee's most critical stand on modern scholarly work about non-democratic regimes is that these authoritarian regimes attracted new labels that highlighted their electoral features and that the underlying cause of their resilience drew less attention. This also supports Snyder's critical analysis of the vocabulary and rhetoric prevailing in the scholar tradition of studying non-democratic states where too much emphasis is put on electoral features.

Therefore it is necessary to look beyond this and instead of studying the countries as democracies with adjectives it would make more sense to try to understand them as *authoritarianism* with adjectives<sup>42</sup>. Brownlee, in agreement with Snyder, identifies the main problem of the study of non-democratic regimes as the blindness in social studies to understand what the real study is: "social science is not to tell who will win but to tell that there will be a fight with unlimited means. Who won and why is a problem of military science"<sup>43</sup>.

A constant challenge for scholars studying non-democratic states and electoral authoritarian states is being caught in the trap of modernization theory, according to both Snyder and Brownlee. They agree on the fact that the use of modernization theory limits the understanding of the studied regime and the revealing of the true nature of authoritarian regimes. Focus, in their perspective, should not be on the degree of "democracy" and the steps taken towards a democratic state in these authoritarian regimes, as modernization theory encompasses. Rather, focus should be on the purpose of elections and party organization to realize to which extent these institutions either support or diminish the power of the ruling elite and, thereby, the degree of authoritarian rule.

The purpose of the elections, in their perspective, is legitimating the rule. Lust-Okar, however, argues that elections play a more important role on a lower level. Based on a field study in Jordan she found that voters tend to cast their ballots for candidates whom they think will grant them *wasta*, not for the reason of ideology or policy preferences. She also points to when people were given more than one vote the first vote, would be cast accordingly to her general findings of access to resources, whereas an additional vote would be used for a more overall political convincing.

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<sup>41</sup> Brownlee, Jason: "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization" pp. 16

<sup>42</sup> The idea of the term of authoritarianism with adjectives and not democracies with adjectives see Richard Snyder: "Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes" pp. 1

<sup>43</sup> Brownlee, Jason; "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization" pp. 24

In this perspective, the current situation of Jordan and the traditional political bonds are important to include in such an analysis. The results of the nature of elections in Jordan are not necessarily applicable in other authoritarian regimes and I would argue that Iran is such a case.

Electoral process is a feature implemented in Iran in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and has survived both the Pahlavi rule and the 1979 revolution<sup>44</sup>. Historically, resources have been allocated through the ruler and through the bazaariis and clerics. Tribal institutions and politics as such have not been intertwined in Iran and a representative from ones village does not guarantee extra resources in the interest of a tribe, a village or an area. Instead, Sanandaji argues that elections can provide the population with a medium to express their interests and register their grievances with the central government<sup>45</sup>.

In politics, of course, the agenda is always directed at a specific audience, however, in Iran it is a broader sentiment of voters a politician on national level address and not just those from your village, clan or region. Therefore, Lust-Okar's findings are perfectly suited for Jordan and countries with a similar traditional emphasis on tribal and local dependence whereas Iranians do vote based on political assumptions. These assumptions might not coherence with a party, and the candidate whom receives a vote might be the better choice of the worse. Further, to back this argument, the youth in Iran has a historical role in politics in Iran. University students have throughout modern history been the key actors within elections and played significant roles in major political events throughout the last decade. Most often political opposition has gained momentum amongst students and on universities<sup>46</sup>. Hence, strong political awareness and traditional political participation exemplifies another realm in Iran than that presented by Lust-Okar in Jordan. Therefore, the argument presented by Sanandaji seems more plausible for the Iranian case.

Brownlee, following Snyder's point on extra-electoral dimensions, states that it is important to recognize that both macro- and micro level explanations are invaluable in clarifying when and why regimes become vulnerable to human agency. Thereby, applying structural and

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<sup>44</sup> Sanandaji, Kaveh-Cyrus: "The Eight Majles Election in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A division in Conservative Ranks and the Politics of Moderation", pp. 622

<sup>45</sup> Sanandaji, Kaveh-Cyrus: "The Eight Majles Election in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A division in Conservative Ranks and the Politics of Moderation", pp. 623

<sup>46</sup> For or a more in depth discussion on student participation and politics see Majid Mohammadi: "Iranian University Students' Politics in the Post-Reform Movement Era: A Discourse Analysis".

voluntarist approaches in the study and understanding of non-democratic regimes<sup>47</sup> is beneficial for the final outcome of the work on non-democratic regimes. Concluding on the theories of Snyder and Brownlee, it is important to understand the people, the actors and the historical context when studying non-democratic regimes and employ all these factors in an analysis. Focusing solely on democratic features and elections in authoritarian regimes leads to false and incorrect conclusions, hence the work will not fully explain the structure and realities of a non-democratic regime, Snyder and Brownlee argue in their articles.

All together it should be acknowledged that extra-electoral factors are necessary to understand the dynamics of regimes holding elections and one should not place too much emphasis on held elections. Snyder sums up his own theory and statement in a quote from Huntington: “The most important distinction among countries is not their form of government but their degree of government”<sup>48</sup>.

In this section, I have accounted for the importance of the scholarly tradition normally employed in the study of non-democratic states. I have presented and discussed new theories that challenge the traditional approach and discussed the importance of taking a wider perspective when studying non-democratic regimes. These new theories break with the old tradition and are accounted for in the work of Snyder, Brownlee and Lindberg<sup>49</sup>. I included the work of Lust-Okar to discuss the means of elections in an authoritarian regime and used Mohammadi’s work to specify the political engagement in Iran.

## **4.2. Political Parties and Electoral Authoritarianism**

In this section I seek to account for and discuss the importance of political parties in an authoritarian regime and the theories hereof. The reason for including political parties is that great emphasis has been placed on the major role parties play in the political structure, even in authoritarian regimes. They tend to play a mediating role between politicians and thereby serve to avoid factions within the rule, thereby leading to greater regime stability and maintenance.

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<sup>47</sup> For a more extensive explanation of the importance of additional factors employed when studying non-democratic regimes see Jason Brownlee; “Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization” pp. 22

<sup>48</sup> Snyder, Richard: “Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes” pp. 6

<sup>49</sup> For further information, turn to the literature list to find the works of the three scholars, which is listed accordingly and in alphabetic order.

The 1979 constitution permitted political parties, but the creation of these was later restricted through an amendment in 1981. Political parties and elections have been a part of the political landscape in Iran throughout modern history, and during the Shah elections for the parliament were conducted on a regular basis<sup>50</sup>. After the revolution, the Iranians experienced a boom in elections and have attended more than 20 elections since the approval of the constitution and the official Islamic Republic of Iran. Presidential elections alongside Majlis and communal elections are each held every fourth year. Elections in Iran, argues Mohammadi, serve two purposes; both to enhance government legitimacy and secondly as a process to regulate and limit factional rivalry and ensure stability<sup>51</sup>.

Brownlee draws attention to the importance of elections in an authoritarian regime when stating that “modern, non-democratic states have used participatory institutions in a bit to appease opponents and entrench incumbents”.<sup>52</sup> Tlemcani further states that: “Electoral authoritarianism characterizes regimes that present an illusion of multi-party democracy at the local and national levels while effectively stripping elections of efficacy”.<sup>53</sup> Further, Rahimi says; “the elections, in a sense, create a collective sentiment of solidarity for the government as the embodiment of the national identity, despite the *undemocratic* nature of most of the government’s institutions”.<sup>54</sup>

All three scholars present overlapping theories that have one thing in common: the use of democratic features in a quasi democratic way to legitimize the ruling authority by people’s participation. However, despite this apparent concord amongst leading scholars on the study of electoral authoritarianism, Brownlee directs attention to the concurrent importance of political parties and their role in maintaining power in the hands of the rulers in his book “Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization”. Parties and party participation, he says, help avoiding elite fractions that can lead to inconsistency within the ruling elite and thereby weaken the authoritarian rule. Parties are, thus, used as a significant cause for preventing democratization and

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<sup>50</sup> Sanadaji, Kaveh-Cyrus: “The Eight Majles Election in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A division in Conservative Ranks and the Politics of Moderation”, pp. 622

<sup>51</sup> Sanadaji, Kaveh-Cyrus: “The Eight Majles Election in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A division in Conservative Ranks and the Politics of Moderation”, pp. 623

<sup>52</sup> Brownlee, Jason; “Limited Elections and Enduring Coalitions, Electoral Authoritarianism in the Third Wave of Democratization” pp. 1

<sup>53</sup> Tlemcani, Rachid; “Electoral Authoritarianism” pp. 1

<sup>54</sup> Rahimi, Babak; “Iran: the 2006 Elections and the Making of Authoritarian Democracy” pp. 289

in his comparative study of Egypt, Iran, Malaysia and Philippines, he concludes that only when parties were abandoned, as happened in Iran, autocratic regimes were weakened and opened up for the opposition.<sup>55</sup>

Political parties are thought to exert critical influence on elite behavior and function as an instrument of mediating in conflicts between elites and rulers and facilitate mutual acceptable solutions. Brownlee points to Egypt as an example of well-institutionalized power with party participation where power has been in the hands of President Hosni Mubarak since 1981<sup>56</sup>. During these soon to be 30 years of rule, several elections have been held with party participation, however, Mubarak has succeeded in maintaining power throughout his presidency and avoiding major opposition gathering or factionalism that could constitute a threat to his stronghold of power. This is not the case in Iran, which, according to Brownlee, stands in contrast to the Egyptian case and, thereby, represents the example of the weakness of an authoritarian rule without party institutions and participations.

In the wake of Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989 with the new supreme leader Khamene'i and president Rafsanjani, parties were abandoned and the few parties still existing at that time were dissolved. Rafsanjani held the seat as president for two periods from 1989 to 1997 when the reformist Khatami won a landslide victory and then held the seat for two contiguous periods. Khatami is a clergy and a supporter of the revolution, but due to lack of political parties and their mediating role, elite fraction spurred within the ruling elite in Iran and made room for the opposition to take power.

The opposition then was the reformist fraction with Khatami as leading figure. Possibility of change in the regime on social and democratic matters was on the agenda of the reformists. However, the reformists did not manage to stand strong against the conservatives and by avoiding a confrontation with the conservative clergy and elites, the opportunity for change and power withhold passed and the reformists suffered severe losses. First they lost the majority in the Majlis in 2004 and then the presidency in 2005 when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won his first presidential victory. Still, today, there are apparent fractions within the Iranian political elite both

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<sup>55</sup>In his book "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization" Jason Brownlee performs a comparative study of four authoritarian regimes and compare features and political structures of each of the four regimes thereby searching to divide them into groups of degree of authoritarianism. pp. 221

<sup>56</sup> Brownlee, Jason; Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization" pp. 122

between the reformists and the conservatives, but increasingly also within the conservative camp<sup>57</sup>.

The key challenger to Ahmadinejad in the 2009 presidential election was Mir Hossein Mousavi, a reformist backed by former president Khatami and Rafsanjani. Despite the title as reformist, once again I point to the fact, that Mousavi still represents the Iranian regime and is far from a reformist as the concept suggests to western on-lookers.

Brownlee points out that the lack of political parties enables the opposition to grow stronger as it results in lack of organization of the political sphere and this weakens the regime's control of opposition groups. The presence of parties, according to Brownlee, enables mediating between fractions and this can avoid factionalism and thereby stabilize and strengthen the resilience of the authoritarian rule<sup>58</sup>. The lack of party politics enables individuals to move around and form new coalitions challenging those in power and, as a consequence, this opens a door for the opposition. Rafsanjani is a good example hereof. A former member of the conservatives, a business man and a clergy, he moved from being a president and ally of the conservatives and supreme leader Khamene'i to a strong supporter of Mousavi. Brownlee, thereby, draws attention to the importance of parties and not only elections in the surge for maintaining authoritarianism.

Babak backs this point by stating in his main argument that: "party institutions provide a mechanism for mediating elite differences within the regime and thus prevent the splits and defections that weaken electoral control and enables opposition to stage comeback."<sup>59</sup> In connection to Brownlee's exposition of the importance of political parties and elections, Snyder agrees on the analysis of electoral authoritarian regimes, and believes that too much emphasis has been placed on the electoral process, thereby, overlooking other fundamental dimensions critical in analyzing regimes. In this perspective he highlights two important shortcomings when the focus is mainly on election results:

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<sup>57</sup> An account for fractions in the political structure of Iran has already been thoroughly presented in chapter 3. The conservatives today are said to be divided into at least two major fractions, one of the old conservatives that are more pragmatic and one of the neo-conservatives that take a harder stance on several ideological points. The neo-democratic fraction has successfully led Ahmadinejad to presidency.

<sup>58</sup> For a further discussion of the importance of parties in authoritarian regimes, see Jason Brownlee; "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization"

<sup>59</sup> Rahimi, Babak; "Iran: the 2006 Elections and the Making of Authoritarian Democracy" pp. 36

- “Neglect of how political consequences of elections depend on their interaction with key extra-electoral factors. Snyder mentions four extra-electoral factors: who rules? How do rulers rule? Why do rulers rule? How much do rulers rule?”<sup>60</sup>
- “The heavy emphasis on electoral competition in research on non-democratic countries leads to severe underappreciation of the wide range of regimes in the world today that lack even the trappings of democracy.”<sup>61</sup>

The problems presented in the first point will be discussed further in the section on groups of authoritarianism and ruling characteristics. The second point will be partially discussed in this section and partially in the section about the study of electoral authoritarianism. Following Snyder’s statements it is obvious that he finds electoral factors as being far from the key issue of understanding authoritarian rules and regime stability. According to Snyder, attention should be placed on how elections interact with a further extra-electoral factor; the degree of rule – “electoral processes are influenced in crucial ways by how much the ruler rules”<sup>62</sup>. This seems to follow the thought of Brownlee and a general consensus that elections are not necessarily the primary factor of understanding an electoral authoritarian regime. Rahimi, however, maintains that elections play a crucial role in an authoritarian state, seeing that elections function as a blue print of the government; “people cast their votes as means to participating in a democratic process, but unwittingly also to solidify a political system that advances the electoral process to maintain an authoritarian regime.”<sup>63</sup>

In this section I have sought to account for and discuss the importance of political parties in an authoritarian regime and the theories hereof. Through the work of the scholars Brownlee, Snyder, Rahimi and Tlemcani, I have presented and discussed different perspectives of the proposed theoretical standpoints and underlined the general theories regarding these matters. It is apparent that party institutions play a significant role in an authoritarian regime and the lack of parties can negatively affect the regime’s stability. I now wish to introduce and discuss the theories of the different groupings of authoritarianism and the ruling characters within a non-democratic regime.

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<sup>60</sup> Snyder, Richard: “Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes” pp. 1

<sup>61</sup> Snyder, Richard: “Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes” pp. 1

<sup>62</sup> Snyder, Richard: “Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes” pp. 3

<sup>63</sup> Rahimi, Babak; “Iran: the 2006 Elections and the Making of Authoritarian Democracy” pp. 290



### 4.3. Groups of Authoritarianism and Ruling Characteristics

In this section my purpose is to discuss and analyze the importance of characterizing an authoritarian regime and the characteristics of the power holders. Several features are ascribed varying forms of authoritarian rule, pointing out that the characteristics of the person/people in power are important for the nature of the state. Hence, it is stated that the fortune of the non-democratic regimes is affected by who the person in power is.

In an electoral authoritarian regime, several key actors can hold power. Amongst these, Snyder mentions the following examples: Military, personal leader or a political party<sup>64</sup>. In addition to the concept of key actors, an important feature of the person in power is the motivation and motives that drive that person e.g. greed, religion or ideology. Snyder's interpretations state that personalistic regime rulers rarely rule in the name of religion or ideology, but are more often motivated by greed, whereas theocratic and totalitarian rulers rule in the name of a cause for which they may be willing to die for<sup>65</sup>. As regards yet another distinction of personalistic rulers, Snyder points to the fact that most often they rule through patron-client network, resulting in nepotism and favoritism where the top leadership posts are usually filled with cronies, relatives and friends of the personalistic ruler. In comparison, militaristic leaders in non-democratic regimes are not dependent on this sort of network of friends, clients etc. The main reason for this is that compared to the personalistic rulers, "the incumbents have guns, whereas the opposition has not"<sup>66</sup>.

Power, thereby, is not constituted by network only, but by physical evidence of power backed by an army and weapons that demonstrate to the public quite clearly who rules. Brownlee criticizes the point in which scholars place too much importance on the classification of the rulers, especially the concept of "personalistic rule" and thereby questions Snyder's theories. Brownlee says that; "Generally speaking, when we begin to associate a regime with an individual

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<sup>64</sup> The three distinctions of ruling elite/individual form the basis of Snyder's presentation of his criticism of earlier studies on non-democratic regimes. For more in depth information see; Snyder, Richard: "Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes" pp. 2

<sup>65</sup> The characteristics of the regime and the ruler are discussed in depth in Richard Snyder's: "Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes" pp. 3

<sup>66</sup> Snyder, Richard: "Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes" pp. 2

leader's name, this signals the onset of *personalistic rule* ... and a corresponding departure from institutions ... the point is that the label of *personalism* tells us only part of the story".<sup>67</sup>

In his article<sup>68</sup> about authoritarianism and the 2006 election in Iran, Rahimi emphasizes the context of representation of political individuals. Rahimi divides modern political history in Iran into four main stages starting from the revolution. He refers to them as: the constitutional movement from 1979-1989, the post-Khomeini/post war from 1989-1997 including the election of Khamene'i as supreme leader. Third is the Khatami era from 1997-2005 and the last overlapping the third stage is the conservative consolidation's overtaking of the parliament in 2004, consolidated with the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president in 2005 to present. To underline his emphasis on political individuals and their importance in electoral authoritarianism it is important to learn that he determines the years of Ahmadinejad to be the most authoritarian of the republic's existence<sup>69</sup>. However, Rahimi insists that the historical context since 1979 in modern Iran plays a significant role in current affairs and the opportunity for Ahmadinejad to become president. Rahimi underlines that in the process of statization, a process of greater authoritarianism also takes place, which requires a post-revolutionary state to maintain authority by centralizing power and hardening its initial ideological zeal<sup>70</sup>. This is the stage that Ahmadinejad and the conservative coalition represent.

In continuation of Snyder's classification of rulers or "key actors", Rahimi's notion of the conservative consolidation and President Ahmadinejad underpins Snyder's description of personalistic rulers. Ahmadinejad has strong ties to the Basij and the IRGC, and the gaining of power in 2005 has led to favoritism and nepotism with an increasing number of militant leaders given important positions in the government. Further, the Ahmadinejad case supports Rahimi's statement presented above regarding centralizing power and the hardening of initial ideological zeal. However, in critique of Rahimi's findings, Hen-Tov, in his analysis of the 2005 presidential election, states that Iran is undergoing a gradual process of regime change, not moving towards democracy but rather "modifying Iran's brand of authoritarianism"<sup>71</sup> with Iran moving from

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<sup>67</sup> Brownlee, Jason: "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization" pp. 204

<sup>68</sup> Rahimi, Babak: "Iran: the 2006 Election and the Making of Authoritarian Democracy"

<sup>69</sup> Rahimi discusses the political state of modern Iran in the context of Ahmadinejad's presidency: "Iran: the 2006 Election and the Making of Authoritarian Democracy" pp. 286 Whereas Brownlee says the degree of authoritarianism has decreased and opened up for regime change in "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization".

<sup>70</sup> Rahimi, Babak; Iran: the 2006 Election and the Making of Authoritarian Democracy" pp. pp. 287

<sup>71</sup> Hen-To, Elliot; "Understanding Iran's brand of Authoritarianism" pp. 163

clerical theocracy towards conventional authoritarian regime. Further, in relations to his statement above, Hen-Tov says that when the remnant democratic features erode, key decision-making centers and the military and security apparatus enhance.

However, whereas Snyder sees these factors as relevant for the type of rule/leader that represents the regime; Hen-Tov understands this development in a political development context in which the character of the rule has changed more than the ruler. The main reason for this, he says, is firstly the internal threat of the reformists and, secondly, the external threat of a US intervention. However, on the subject of to which extent a political figure can shape the political landscape in Iran, Hen-Tov supports the general notion that an individual can strongly affect the agenda and the perceptions within the rule and, thereby, change the nature of the rule.

As an example he mentions how Ahmadinejad with his populist rhetoric seems appealing to the public and at the same time represents a new group of younger ideologists that are gradually taking over within the conservative establishment. The world view of this new elite implies that Iran's current problems lie in its society's insufficient realization of revolutionary Islamic principles. It is, however, according to Hen-Tov, not necessarily the nature of one leader that determines the nature of the regime, but rather a group of people, elite, that sets the agenda and, thereby, changes the nature of the Islamic republic. In this, president Ahmadinejad is a strong ally of the supreme leader, Khamene'i, who, according to Hen-Tov, is the real holder of power.

Even Khamene'i is affected by the development and changes within the regime and has taken a stand in the rifts and elite fractions within the conservative group, supporting the neo-conservatives with the new elite and the military affiliations instead of the traditional conservatives. Thereby, as Snyder and Rahimi support the idea of political individuals and leaders determining the nature of the rule, Hen-Tov places more importance on the groupings of elites and not the individual political figure.

Brownlee supports Hen-Tov's point of view on the matters of the importance of elite structures and political groupings. Brownlee writes that elite behavior, parties and political coalitions are important in understanding authoritarian regimes<sup>72</sup>. This supports the general concept that one person does not set the agenda in a non-democratic regime whereas groups and political affiliations do. Brownlee stresses that elites represent the countries' diverse social

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<sup>72</sup> For further clarification of elite behavior and parties read Jason Brownlee: "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization" pp. 13

constituencies and that their broader ties influence where they stand on issues and where they clash with another and, in this context, influence the political agenda in the country.

However, despite Brownlee's weighting of elite structures and political groupings, he finds the classification of authoritarian regimes into groupings important. Brownlee points to Barbara Geddes systematic study of authoritarian breakdown. In this study she presented a tripartite typology of military, personal and single-party regimes and through this exposed general patterns of authoritarian regimes and their durability. "Distinguishing between more personalistic regimes and more institutionalized regimes, goes a long way toward explaining some of the most salient trends of the third wave and its undercurrents".<sup>73</sup> Although Brownlee emphasizes the importance of classification of authoritarian rules it is more focused on the durability and stability of the regime than on the way of rule. Brownlee emphasizes the limits of leadership when making a point on political stability as not simply being a result of masterful individual leaders. In his opinion it requires institutions that enable conflict mediation and organizations that set the agenda and can curb the leaders.

Regardless, the scholars mentioned here agree that the understanding of the nature of the regime and the classification hereof are of high importance in the study of non-democratic regimes. It is noteworthy to pay attention to the distinction Snyder makes between the different types of leaders in a non-democratic country. I find that Snyder's characteristics of a personalistic, theocratic or totalitarian leader are questionable. As far as the generalization of regimes, the characteristics are most likely to be true. However, in the case of Iran I find that the situation differs and the motive of rule has mixed with the characteristics of both military and personalistic rule. Incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad rules as elected president in the name of Islam and with a strong belief in the principles of the Islamic Republic and Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary ideology of 1979. At the same time an increasing militarization of the regime has taken place and the Basij and Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) have gained a more important role and the power balance, some fear, is slowly changing in favor of the military. Additionally, the rule of Ahmadinejad inherits some of the typical features Snyder points to as stereotypical for a personalistic leader, such as nepotism. In fact, Ahmadinejad has employed top military men whom he knows from his early days in Basij and IRGC and whom he generally regard as allies.

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<sup>73</sup> Brownlee, Jason: "Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization" pp. 29

Therefore, it is important to notice that although Snyder's theory may work as a generalization and guideline for understanding non-democratic regimes and at the same time outlines the importance of understanding the regime studies, it is just as important not to stare blindly on the stigmatization and stereotyping of specific leaders.

As described above, a critical reading of Snyder's models of rulers is important to avoid the generalization of rulers and non-democratic countries. Snyder starts his article<sup>74</sup> by criticizing the scholarly tradition most students of political science adhere to when working on non-democratic countries. Snyder urges scholars to avoid a general mindset and scholarly tradition when studying these regimes. His critic is mainly focused on the modernization theory and that too much emphasis is put on elections and democratic features. However, he ends up with yet another generalization and grouping of countries into which he wishes us to understand these regimes. Therefore it is my perception that Snyder's articles provide an exhaustive knowledge and understanding of the general study of non-democratic regimes, and elements of his characteristics can with great advantage be implemented in any study of a specific non-democratic country. However, it is important to be aware of and find the specific features of the country in question rather than blindly employing generalizing features.

I have now presented and discussed theories that focus on the importance of characterizing an authoritarian regime and the characteristics of the power holders. Through the work of Brownlee, Snyder, Hen-Tov and Rahimi I have presented a discussion and an analysis of these matters and clarified each scholars' approach to this subject and their theories hereof. Common for all three scholars is that the study of non-democratic regimes must take a new turn and focus on more than just elections and democratic features. Hence, a suggestion to dissociate from modernization theory and focus more on the characteristics of the regime is presented.

#### **4.4. Electoral Authoritarianism in Iran**

Iran is amongst one third of the world's countries that lack basic guarantees of electoral democracy, but yet maintains limited forms of multiparty competition.<sup>75</sup> I find that the people in

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<sup>74</sup> Snyder, Richard: "Beyond Electoral Authoritarianism: The Spectrum of Non-Democratic Regimes" gives an in depth discussion of the study of non-democratic regimes the scholarly tradition.

<sup>75</sup> Brownlee, Jason; "Limited Elections and Enduring Coalitions, Electoral Authoritarianism in the Third Wave of Democratization" pp. 2

Iran, despite the many restrictions of political participators, are very aware of elections and political issues<sup>76</sup>. Despite the lack of belief in major changes people do go to the ballot box on Election Day and cast their vote. Although Hen-Tov argues that *“the Iranian public has abandoned opposition in favor of apathy, and the Iranian regime possesses the financial or coercive means to co-opt or repress any domestic challenge”*<sup>77</sup> supported by a statement by the representative from Ahmadinejad’s campaign office: *“I believe most of the people you see in the streets do not care about politics. They are just out to have fun. To them it will not matter who will win the election, they are just enjoying the little freedom given to them during these election weeks”*<sup>78</sup>, this is not entirely correct in my opinion.

It is true that domestic challenge and opposition are underlying strict and repressive rules by the government. NGOs’ critique of the sitting regime is forbidden; opposition groups and leaders are often harassed, arrested and charged with plotting against the state. Journalists and the media are under strict supervision and regularly closed. So are bloggers, websites and equals a like. These factors do represent a dangerous and extremely limited scene for political opposition, but they continue to exist instead of hiding. Student demonstrations held at Tehran University proved in the autumn of 2008 to be highly critical of Ahmadinejad and the sitting government. Several were arrested but demonstrations like these continue to take place on universities with students of high political consciousness and understanding. Ali Ansari explains how political consciousness and knowledge have increased amongst the youth since the time of the shah. Students are introduced to international and western political scientists and philosophers that are incorporated in their curriculum<sup>79</sup>. Additionally, the increasing availability and access to international media through the Internet and satellite TV (despite being illegal they are still to be found on almost every rooftop in Tehran) present current affairs to the people as opposed to state run TV.

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<sup>76</sup> In the presidential election 2009 high voter turnout characterizes the elections. In the previous presidential election in 2005 it is believed that many voters stayed home, not due to political apathy, but to boycott the election because of unfair election rules and lack of proper candidates to represent the less conservative groups.

<sup>77</sup> Hen-Tov, Elliot; *“Understanding Iran’s New Authoritarianism”* pp. 175

<sup>78</sup> From the interview with the representative of the Ahmadinejad campaign office when commenting on the thousands of people in the streets showing support and campaigning in favor of their favorite candidate.

<sup>79</sup> For more information on growing political consciousness and engagement amongst the youth in Iran, see Ansari, Ali M.: *“Iran, Islam and Democracy, the Politics of Managing Change”*.

Ahmadinejad has slowly replaced professors at the universities with less liberal, more religious educators but this has proven not to limit the awareness of the students. Neither has the strongly represented Basij's obvious presence at the universities. There is no reason to assume that student opposition is not equally limited by the authorities, and the fear of prison and punishment are calculated risks but student opposition does exist. Hen-Tov's assumption of political apathy is thereby questioned by Ansari's statements. Ansari, in contradistinction to Hen-tov, points out that political awareness amongst students has increased while Hen-tov states they live in apathy. In agreement with the work of Ansari I have encountered young women in the streets of Tehran as they battle every day. It might seem petty and trivial in a western context but the daily struggles with pushing the limits for dress codes are in my eyes a constant pressure on the government, and small changes and opposition might in the long run cause major changes. These observations and experiences are underpinned by Ansari's work.

In this context though it is relevant to add a third perspective to the question of political apathy/awareness; which is the aspect of government policy. It can be argued that women can only push the dress code rules so far. The government equally uses this in a political context where certain things are tolerated in order to maintain stable conditions and avoid riots and tumult amongst a discontented youth. There can hardly be any doubt that this is a fine balance for the government between giving too much or too little freedom. It is a thin line, but the government has chosen to walk this line. One example hereof is the presence of the moral police in the streets. The moral police walk the streets of the major cities spotting young boys and girls inappropriately dressed. Yet, the moral police have not been in the streets since two weeks before the 2009 election and have just recently started to reemerge in late April 2010. The reason for the apparent non-presence of the moral police was a political decision made by the government to give the people some "freedom". Although this seems to fit into the discussion of the government using restrictions and easing restrictions to control the youth and opposition, the example in my thesis can further be used understand to the power of the people. It is not only a political decision based on tactics and policies, but the decision to keep the moral police off the streets can also be understood as fear of the opposition. To have enforced the moral police into the streets in the immediate aftermath of the election or during the following riots and dissatisfaction in autumn 2009 could have provided the movement with more to demonstrate against and thereby further

generated power to the opposition. The government fearing for the stability of the regime thereby kept the moral police of the streets. This is yet another example of what the people's power can generate and how it can affect policy decisions.

Regardless of the nature of elections and the sometimes dubious results, the winning candidate is most often the choice of the people. And the participation in elections is often of wide scale, and the decision whether to vote or not to vote is a decision based on politic and not necessarily on apathy. This was apparent with Khatami, who enjoyed great support amongst the general public with his reformist agenda and liberalizing policies. However, the people felt he failed to bring about the changes and reforms he had promised. Further the lack of attention to economic policy spurred unrest amongst large poor population in Iran. Despite increasing oil incomes he suffered the same downfall as Rafsanjani – the incapability to address the failing economy and allocate economic resources to those most in need.

The election of Ahmadinejad in 2005 clearly showed the need to address these problems. He enjoyed great support for his promising words to the poor about “putting the oil money on people's tables”<sup>80</sup>. In the second round of the elections in 2005 Ahmadinejad won a landslide victory. He, just as Khatami had been before, was the choice of the people. Thereby, the strong focus on this change - the praise of Khatami and the fear of Ahmadinejad and Iran's future amongst scholars, politicians and journalists - is highly exaggerated in my opinion. What is important to remember is that regardless of the Majlis and the President seat being dominated by reformists or conservatives, the real power still lies with the Supreme Leader.

Electoral authoritarianism in Iran provides people with the sentiment of participating. Despite accusations of election fraud, casting a vote still offers an opportunity to influence the outcome and choose a leader. Hence, the authoritarian rule can be justified through the proposition that it is democratically elected and that it represents the people.

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<sup>80</sup> ICG: “Iran: What Does Ahmadinejad's Victory Mean?” s. 7



## **5. Discussion and Analysis of Modern Media in Repressive Regimes**

In general, the theories of modern media in repressive regimes touch upon subjects such as the media's role in society, civil society and the media in terms of development and democratization processes and finally, "people's journalism" with the public's use of twitter, YouTube, blogging etc.

The purpose of my thesis is to analyze the candidates' use of media during the presidential elections in Iran. Therefore, a discussion and analysis of modern media theory in repressive regimes is highly relevant and applicable for my studies. It explains the many opportunities and restrictions that follow in the wake of the spread of and access to modern media. Furthermore, it explains the political reality of media and press in Iran in which the presidential elections took place. It thereby adds to the concept of elections in an authoritarian regime that despite the closeness of the regime has implemented and accepted modern media as a necessity.

### **5.1. The Development of the Concept Freedom and the Freedom of the Press**

In the following part the historic and the modern concept of freedom and freedom of the press will be outlined. This is a necessary step in order to fully grasp the idea of press freedom and the tradition of freedom in Iran. The use of the theory as a instrument for analyzing the role modern media plays in societies in general and more particularly, in relation to the Iranian context, is valuable for my further analysis.

The question of freedom and the individual has its roots in the 15<sup>th</sup> century where the French philosopher Descartes (1596-1656)<sup>81</sup> focused extensively on the subject of human freedom in his works. During the next centuries the idea of human freedom and the rights of the individual gradually gained support and followers amongst fellow philosophers and thinkers in Europe. However, it had its hay days in the 18<sup>th</sup> century during the Enlightenment era<sup>82</sup>.

Freedom of press has become a common matter of cause when discussing freedom in general and it is a subject often touched upon when criticizing repressive regimes for the lack of

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<sup>81</sup> Merrill et al; "Twilight of Press Freedom" pp. 3

<sup>82</sup> For a more in depth discussion on the philosophical and theoretical development of freedom and the individual see Merrill et al; "Twilight of Press Freedom" pp. 1 – 32.

freedom, including freedom of speech. In relation to such discussions, it is essential to mention that freedom of press is not something to take for granted and it does not follow in the footsteps of modernization as many had hoped. Khiabany emphasizes the importance of understanding on how we talk about freedom of the press and to which extent this is practiced. Khiabany argues that in the cause of a free press the choice has never been that simple. In general, the separation between public and private, as well as state and market, has never been achieved”<sup>83</sup>. Thus, it will be fair to assume that this is neither the case in relation to the press and the state.

Under such circumstances it will only be accurate to account for the connection between media and the state before assuming that the features and characteristics of freedom of the press is an ideal achievement, Khiabany argues. Raboy supports the criticism of the idea of “*freedom of the press*” and argues that “*media has tended to be seen as value free containers of information, but they are in fact contested spaces, objects of contention in their own right*”<sup>84</sup>. Raboy’s declaration also supports the main discussion of Merrill et al in relation to their analysis of freedom of the press. Merrill et al states that the press has maintained a special role in society where the general belief in freedom of the press has led to an abuse of media to promote individual interests.

The trend of today, however, they argue is moving towards a more “responsible” press authority with focus on speaking in favor of the group and society in promoting common interest instead of an individual account of “truth” and the choice of stories to tell. This leaves behind the emphasis of the right of freedom of the press that for so long has been left uncontested. It is interesting to discover that Merrill et al argues that the unlimited freedom of the press has led to few people in power dictating the agenda without regarding the wishes of the public. Therefore, the libertarian and existential perception of freedom originating from the tradition of philosophers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century must be replaced by a community-oriented order and normative, consensual ethics<sup>85</sup>. They argue that this replacement must take place to avoid pluralism in values, egocentrism and extremism, and that this must be achieved by limiting the freedom of the press and set up certain restrictions.

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<sup>83</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 9

<sup>84</sup> Raboy, Marc; “Media, Democratization and Regulation” pp. 1

<sup>85</sup> For further elaboration of the discussion of the differences between libertarian/exceptionalism and communalism, see Merrill et al pp. 31.

Raboy argues in favor of this and underlines that “a global policy approach along these lines (the terms of media democratization and the democratic role for the media) would help redefine the role of the state with respect to the media”<sup>86</sup>. He continues; *“in the current context of globalization the media can be either a locomotive of human development or an instrument of power and domination”*<sup>87</sup>. Raboy suggests regulations on the press in order to avoid power dominance. However, he also emphasizes the core problem of regulations which is the fact that such regulations can be used as a disguise for state interference with media independence. In other words, they can backlash and result in what is seen in many authoritarian states; a tool for the government to promote their own agenda and oppress any opposition and criticism of the state.

According to Raboy, the key issue is to distinguish between regulation and control. Regulation must aim at providing an enabling framework in which the media can flourish and contribute to democratic, public life and human development<sup>88</sup>. Finally he suggests that this issue should be promoted where it does not exist i.e. in the illiberal countries. Moreover, the success of this does not come from one promoter but through openness and access for all.

In relation to the media and promotion of media regulations, Raboy does not address the issue of how to promote these ideas in countries that have never known press freedom. For both Raboy and Merrill et al it is noticeable that the discussion on the freedom of media takes place in a western framework and tradition. When Merrill et al touch upon subjects such as the concept of media freedom in the developing countries they emphasize that people in developing countries do not give any extra value to the importance of freedom of the press. Their main concerns are food and security, Merrill et al argue. These postulates are used in argumentation to support their theory that the time of individual press freedom has passed and societal responsibility of the press is of highest importance.

However, Merrill et als argument is missing the discussion of the general political and daily situation in which context daily priorities and worries are of obvious relevance and importance. It is not difficult to see how someone who lacks basic commodities has few resources left to worry about freedom of the press. Hence, a comparison between the developed,

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<sup>86</sup> Raboy, Marc; “Media, Democratization and Regulation” pp. 3

<sup>87</sup> Raboy, Marc; “Media, Democratization and Regulation” pp. 3

<sup>88</sup> For more in depth discussion of the problematic between regulations and restrictions turn to Marc Raboy; “Media, Democratization and Regulation” pp. 31-33.

democratic Western countries and the developing countries in Africa or South America is not a well sustained argument that can support their theory. Most important is that one cannot discuss the abolishment of total press freedom when press freedom has never been a tradition in the countries examined.

Concluding, Merrill et al say that in modern times “freedom” has come to the knowledge of journalists in developing countries, and the main obstacles are that they know of freedom while not being able to practice it. However, in which ways Merrill et al wish for the developing countries to practice press freedom is not quite clear. They argue that the press in the developing countries sets group dynamics and common social harmony higher than press freedom<sup>89</sup>. The argument then being that press freedom necessarily fosters individualism which is not good for society. But is press freedom not a necessity to develop a conscious, respectful and responsible press? The press in authoritarian regimes does not, as Merrill et al state, understand these aspects since the mere journalistic field is censored and restricted to the interest of the government. Therefore, it is difficult for the press to create “a feeling of community” and “write in the interest of the people”, if their interests are not the same as the government’s interests. Above I have presented an analysis of the main theories and discussion points of the role of the press and freedom. I have done this to point to the role the press and the media have played and do play in societies. Furthermore, I have given an account of the occurrence of the concept of freedom of speech and freedom of the press. This, I find, is an important subject for my further discussions on modern media and the role it plays in societies in general but more specifically, how to understand the role of modern media in Iran.

In prolongation of the discussion of freedom of the press I will now discuss modern media and its role in modernization theory. I find this a natural leap since much has been written and many texts produced on the nature of modern media in repressive regimes and the role modern media plays in these societies.

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<sup>89</sup> For a further discussion on the comparison between media in the third world, the developing countries and the west see Merrill et al; “Twilight of Press Freedom”. Pp30-35. A discussion on Muslim countries and the media will follow later in this thesis.

## 5.2. Modern Media and Modernization

In this paragraph I wish to discuss and analyze the concept of modern media and modernization. I will do so to elaborate on the subject of modern media in repressive regimes and which capacities and attributions have been given to modern media in the wake of modernization theory. I find this relevant for my thesis as it accounts for the wide representation of the understanding of modern media in the developing world.

Modernization theory in general, as already discussed in chapter 4, states that democratic development paves the road to modernization and a free and fair state. Modernization theorists believe that modern media can play a significant role in democratization of the state. The media, they argue, can work as a loop hole for opposition, civil society and external partners to exchange information, communicate and through this strengthen the common interest for democracy and the farewell to authoritarian rule. Further, this will result in a wider awareness of national and international politics and internal and external political realities. Through this the nature of the state can be discussed and a common demand for more freedom and democratic rule can be founded.

However, modernization theory has been proven faulty in the question of the Middle East where prosperity has increased and society is highly modernized. Despite this, the Middle East regimes have maintained their authoritarian power and little democratic development has occurred. This is true to be said about Iran as well as, for instance, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

In this context, Khiabany argues, that the theory of media and modernization in the Middle East is conceptualized in the terms of “trying to dig into some of the roots of current cultural clashes between the Muslim world and the West<sup>90</sup>” thereby following that the biggest fault researchers on this topic has made is that they are too eager to pay attention to the cultural differences and not focus on the reality and the context of the country within which they study modern media.

In the wake of 9/11 Khiabany argues that a new focus on Islam emerged and with that an emphasis on culture seen as the primary factor behind social existence and political action. It is in the aftermath of this modernization theorists had an impact on several study fields such as

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<sup>90</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 3

economic, political and humanistic studies. What Khiabany argues is that a conception of a unified and ahistorical Middle East in dichotomist relationship to a unified, ahistorical west within which the discussion of freedom, democratization, human rights and media take place, is the core flaw of the analysis of media in the Middle East<sup>91</sup>. And in a more general perspective the flaw when analyzing developing states in the tradition of the modernization theory.

Raboy, however, supports the modernization theory aspect of modern media as a medium in and off democratization in which social change can happen through the use of media tools. He highlights four possible pathways of media development: 1) the liberation approach, 2) the self regulating approach, 3) the closed club, or top down institutional development and 4) the long march through the institutions<sup>92</sup>. Raboy emphasizes that the latter of the four is the only reliable way to ensure democratization of media and a free press with responsibility without manipulation through power figures, and at the same time enhance freedom of expression and the right to communicate.

Additionally, Raboy argues that the strengthening of the abovementioned importance of the role of the media will also be in favor of civil society and thereby the move towards more democratic society.

Khiabany, as already argued, does not agree with the importance of civil society in prolongation of the modernization theory. He points to the fact that often civil society in authoritarian regimes is linked or influenced by the government in power. There can be little doubt that modern media, in specific mobile phones and the Internet, provide the citizens with a freedom to communicate that does not necessarily exist in the written press.

As argued by Jesper Højberg<sup>93</sup> in the report on the findings and discussions from the IMS Conference on ICTs and networked communications environments: "Opportunities and threats for press freedom and democratization", ICTs such as twitter, YouTube, blogging, mobile phones and other social networks provide new opportunities for communication. They can upload

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<sup>91</sup> For a further elaboration on these matters and the discussion of a unified Middle East and thereby ascribing the term "Islamic media" a value that differs from western media, can be found in Gholam Khiabany's analysis in "Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity" chapter 1.

<sup>92</sup> For a more specific discussion on the four pathways and in depth explanation on the aspects of the different points, see Marc Raboy; "Media, Democratization and Regulation" pp. 4

<sup>93</sup> Jesper Højberg is Executive Director of International Media Support, who hosted the conference on Opportunities and threats for press freedom and democratization in Copenhagen 2008. The report used in my thesis is the concluding remarks on the findings of the participants of this conference.

footage and pictures instantly and live stream these on the Internet and as such spread a message worldwide within very few minutes. What Khiabany brings to the table is a discussion of the role and independence of civil society which needs to be thoroughly examined before ascribing civil society the characteristics of “the people’s voice” and in favor of development and as a key element in democratization process<sup>94</sup>. Despite Khiabany’s emphasis on the connection between civil society and the government in authoritarian regimes, much work has been written on the connection between civil society, democratic development and modern media. Often without a critical approach to the function of civil society or an actual clarification on what is meant by civil society, what groups of civil society to engage with and who actually constitute civil society in form of actors, organizations and interests.

Højberg stresses that these modern technologies (ICTs) present civil society with new possibilities and challenges and dramatically change the existing perceptions of democracy, since the internet potentially empowers everyone with a voice. Nevertheless, Højberg accentuates that one key issue is pressing in the debate of the use of modern media; what is real and correct and what is not?<sup>95</sup> To specify this, whether or not the content streamed within these modern media is to be trusted. The accountability and credibility of the user/producer can be questioned when posted anonymously. However, participants in the IMS conference emphasized that citizen journalism does not demand same accountability and many bloggers have to be anonymous for safety reasons and are still considered trust-worthy. In the context of modernization and modern media they conclude that, “the technologies, in and of themselves, will not necessarily bring about changes in the regime, but they may open the minds of the citizens”<sup>96</sup>.

Arguably this conclusion is viable but it brings nothing new to the table. The principle of the points made on the IMS conference is supported by Feldt et al who stress that access to new media such as television, satellite and Internet leads to politicization through more knowledge presenting differing views, alternative aspects on things and more news streams. However, Feldt et al do not leave this notion without problematizing the debate on to which extent modern media in the Middle East is a popular tool for the people and for civil society; “a

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<sup>94</sup> However, this is of little relevance for the focus area of my thesis therefore, I will not engage in a discussion on civil society. A more in depth analysis of civil society and government in repressive regimes is found in Gholam Khiabany “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity”.

<sup>95</sup> Højberg, Jesper; “Opportunities and threats for press freedom and democratization” pp. 6

<sup>96</sup> Højberg, Jesper; “Opportunities and threats for press freedom and democratization” pp. 19

plethora of other satellite channels, local TV-stations, radios and news papers have been established in the region within the last decade<sup>97</sup>”.

Both Feldt et al, the IMS conference paper, and Merrill et al render special attention to the Internet as the tool where most freedom can be obtained, both in expression, news, information and communications. Albeit, Feldt et al direct alertness to a few dilemmas the recent AHDR report pointed to; “the low number of Internet users in Arab countries is due to a number of factors, the most important of which are: computer and Internet illiteracy, the high cost of the lines used and high personal computer prices and access fees”<sup>98</sup>.

Although this comment is on the Arab countries, it is safe to say that the same factors are relevant in the case of Iran. Khiabany elaborates on the question of the Internet lines used, the lack of proper access to high speed Internet and how most Iranians still use dial up modems. Also, in his analysis of the Internet in Iran he points to the cost of Internet and computers in Iran and the strict control by the Intelligence Service of web pages, use of web and content posted on the web<sup>99</sup>.

Concluding, the general perception of modern media, ICTs and specifically the Internet is that these will all play a role in the development and democratization of repressive regimes and that they present new opportunities for the players and civil society to engage in subjects of change and regime critic. The ICT’s allow for easier communication, spread of news and information and conference on subjects not allowed in the press and public sphere in repressive regimes.

However, these ideas have been challenged, first and foremost by Khiabany who demonstrates the problems and/or limitations of civil society and the general understanding of “civil society”. Additionally, we saw Feldt et al pointing to some issues that must be taken into account when examining the use of ICTs in the Middle East.

In this section I have discussed and analyzed the theories of modern media and modernization. I have done so to elaborate on the subject of modern media in repressive regimes and which capacities and attributions have been given to modern media in the wake of modernization theory.

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<sup>97</sup>Feldt, Jakob et al; “New Media in the Middle East” pp. 11

<sup>98</sup> Feldt et al elaborates on this subject in the publication; “New Media in the Middle East” pp. 12

<sup>99</sup> A more in depth discussion and analysis of the Internet in Iran can be found in Gholam Khiabany “Iranian Media- The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 90.



I now wish to present a short presentation of modern media in the Middle East and briefly elaborate on this subject. I wish to do so in order to present the scholarly discussions and theoretical approaches to the Middle East as a “special case” or just “any other region”.

### **5.3. Modern Media in the Middle East; a Special Case?**

Throughout the 1990’s and increasingly in the aftermath of 9/11 much scholarly work on the Middle East has been concentrated around the idea on the Middle East as “a special case” that needed to be understood in a cultural and religio-political context, distinctively different from the West.

I have already discussed modernization theory and the inadequacy of its accuracy in the Middle Eastern countries. It is in this context one should understand the development of the general idea of the Middle East as a special case that needs extra study and elaboration of cultural and religious heritage as explanation of the development in the region.

In continuation hereof each topic examined in the region has been ascribed very telling but also limiting titles, such as “Islamic media”, “Muslim society”, “Islamic and/or Muslim politics” etc. These constructed fields of study all underline that “we” see something in the Middle East that is different from what “we” wish to understand in human and societal development. This differing approach to modernization in the Middle East has been attributed, by many scholars, to one factor that differs “us” from “them”: Islam. Hence, it is argued that the problem the countries in the Middle East do not follow the development argued in the modernization theory can only be explained through the point made above.

Khiabany strongly opposes this and in his book on Iranian Media he continuously presents the reader with examples that undermine the idea that there is something like “Islamic media” that can be explicitly explained as different from the media in the West or other regions of the world. He points out that Iranian media cannot be understood in the terms of “Islamic ideology” or the dichotomy of modernization theory<sup>100</sup>. Khiabany continues with a criticism of the cultural theory stating that; “in “cultural relativism” reality and truth correspond with a particular

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<sup>100</sup> For introductory comments and discussion of the “exceptional case” of the ME and the focus of Islamic features on topics in modernization theory, read Gholam Khiabany; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 1-3

set of belief rather than with the material world that exists independently of our beliefs and values”<sup>101</sup>.

Feldt et al reinforce the point made by Khiabany in their analysis of modern media in the Middle East when they state that the theory of media and modernization and the expectations of development “clashed against the structures of authoritarian states”<sup>102</sup>, hence the failure of the theories lies in the assumption that scholars stipulated rather than examined the material base and practices of the Internet. In prolongation hereof, Feldt et al point to three important factors to examine when studying modern media in countries or regions: 1) cultural practices, 2) material practices and 3) social-political practices<sup>103</sup>.

Although Khiabany and Feldt et al agree that modernization and media theory has its limitations and there is a need to elaborate further on this subject and distance the work from the traditions of modernization theory, Khiabany draws attention to additional measurements to take into account when studying the field of media in the Middle East and in Iran. Khiabany argues that is it important to look to the historic aspect of the role of the media in the county examined to reach an understanding of its role in modern society.

Further, he argues that one must not understand the Middle East case as an exceptional one, different from any other, since this is far from realities. Thereby he concludes that there is no such thing as “Islamic media” that can generalize the role and the purpose of media the entire Middle East. Neither can it distinguish media in the Muslim countries from media in any region since they all share similarities as well as differences, nor can the characteristics of media in Iran and in the Middle East solely be ascribed religious and Islamic commonalities. Nor is it fair to assume that because countries share the same religious belief they automatically share the same societal, political and economic features that affect the media realm, amongst others.

What can be said, though, which both Khiabany and Feldt et al agree on is that in the Middle East media is strongly affected and/or owned by the state and that activities with regard to the internet and the access and development centered around the state telephone companies.

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<sup>101</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 6

<sup>102</sup> Anderson, Jon: “New Media Infrastructures, Tools & Shaping the Public Sphere” in Feldt et al: “New Media in The Middle East” pp. 26

<sup>103</sup> A more thorough explanation of this is presented in Anderson, Jon: “New Media Infrastructures, Tools & Shaping the Public Sphere” in Feldt et al; “New Media in the Middle East” pp. 27

They provide access, lines; they participate actively in the censorship of and blocking of websites and content and thereby help the state monitoring activity and content online<sup>104</sup>.

In opposition to the points made by both Feldt et al and Khiabany, Merrill et al present media in Muslim countries as a case to examine separately from that of media in the West. They use the work of Hamid Mowlana<sup>105</sup> to ratify the idea of exceptionalism in modern media in the Middle East. Merrill et al argue that the purpose of journalism in the Islamic world is to work within the limits of tawhid, which means “implying the unity, coherence and harmony of all parts of the universe”<sup>106</sup>.

To a large extent they draw upon the work of Mowlana and he is widely quoted in their analysis of media in the Middle East, arguing that the notion of Umma, (the common Islamic society) is characteristic for all media in the Middle East region and the media works within this aspect and with purpose of the Umma. Thereby, Merrill et al generalize and marginalize media in the Middle East to a media of the common Muslim interest of Umma. Further, they argue, media and the right to freedom of speech are not contested since Allah is the one to respond to and his words are the law, including limitations of freedom. Concluding they say that all Muslim societies are the same and that they have an inherent deep respect for a leader and for autonomy<sup>107</sup>. This, Merrill et al based on the work of Mowlana, postulate, results in an “apathy” towards freedom and freedom of the press since the people do not question the power of God and the laws put out by him.

It is interesting that Merrill et al have a total lack of discussion on the differences within Islam most noteworthy the internal fight between Sunni and Shia Islam. Neither do they comment on geo-political realities, differences between the Middle Eastern countries, the struggle of power within the region and of most relevance to my thesis, they do not mention the rifts between the Arab Muslim world and Iran, who fight over regional dominance, for instance Iran and Saudi Arabia.

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<sup>104</sup> Anderson, Jon; “New Media Infrastructures, Tools & Shaping the Public Sphere” pp. 39 + Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 148-156.

<sup>105</sup> Hamid Mowlana is an Iranian professor of International Relations International Communications at SIS, American University, Washington.

<sup>106</sup> Merrill et al; “Twilight of Press Freedom” pp. 35.

<sup>107</sup> For a more specific discussion of this approach to the Muslim countries and the idea of Muslim countries having something in common that separates them and distinguish them from any other region or group of countries, read chapter 2 “Freedom From Freedom” in “Twilight of Press Freedom” by Merrill et al and more specifically pp. 35 to 27 which is about Islam and the religious perspective on media and freedom.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that while Merrill et al hail Mowlana's findings, Khiabany bases his critic of cultural exceptionalism and modernization theory on the work of Mowlana, and Khiabany is a strong critic of Mowlana's findings all together<sup>108</sup>.

Concluding on this section presenting the theory of the study of modern media in the Middle East, it is safe to say that no coherent or corresponding approach exists when dealing with the case of media in the Middle East. However, based on the argumentation and findings, I find that in accordance with both Feldt et al and Khiabany, a mere cultural approach to explain Islamic societies lack both accuracy and perspective.

I have now elaborated on the theory of modern media in the Middle East and briefly discussed the subject. I have done so in order to present the scholarly discussions and theoretical approaches to the Middle East as a "special case" or just "any other region". I find this relevant for my thesis as it explains the thoughts and analysis of modern media in the Middle East as well as in Iran and thereby introduces aspects of the media's role in the Middle East and in which way to understand its features and its placement within society.

Finally, based on the theories discussed and analyzed in the above three sections regarding modern media in repressive regimes, I will end my chapter on modern media theory with an account of modern media in Iran.

#### **5.4. Modern Media in Iran**

Modern media in Iran is arguably a subject of intense study and various theories ranging from that of Mowlana and Merrill et al of "the exceptional case" based on cultural and religious foundation and Khiabany, who advocates that Iranian media or Islamic media should not be studied as something out of the ordinary. Regardless, I find it important to present a short account of modern media in Iran in order to identify certain characteristics of the media and the traditional media usage.

As already argued, Merrill et al strongly favor the concept of cultural explanation of the phenomena within the different regions of the world. However, due to their analysis that only

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<sup>108</sup> A more in depth discussion and clarification of Khiabany's critic of Mowlana and the faults of cultural exceptionalism is apparent in Gholam Khiabany's book; "Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity" in which he uses the work of Mowlana to underline the faults and failures of scholarly work that focuses solely on cultural aspects and neglect other aspects of the country or region which are studied.

touches upon the religious perspective of media in Islam, it is safer to say that they see the Muslim countries as an exceptional case to be studied alongside or parallel to the study of other regions.

Khiabany argues that the cultural analysis of special features of a country or a region is limited to gaining correct information and understanding of the topic studied. As Khiabany says; “the Middle East cannot claim to have monopoly on exceptionalism. Many of the features are also seen in other developing regions”<sup>109</sup>. Further, Khiabany questions the concept of Islamic media: What does this actually mean? Does the ownership have to be Muslim? Is it the suppression of violent scenes and sexual nature? Or is it the consumption of a channel by Muslims? Neither of these features can distinctively be representatives of “Islamic Media”<sup>110</sup>.

However, despite the lack of coherence on this field, it is not merely enough to leave the study of modern media in Iran at this breaking point. Without a doubt, special features in the tradition of Iranian media can be traced and I wish to present these here while keeping in mind that although these features might be of value to the understanding of Iranian media altogether, this does not mean that they are exceptional features only accountable for in Iran, nor does it mean that these features are traceable only through the face of Islam or culture.

Khiabany strongly encourages the aspect of a historic analysis of the development of modern media in Iran. He points to the fact that the nature of the media’s role in the Islamic Republic has not changed drastically from that of the Shah’s regime nor from the role the media played during the Qajar dynasty.

In the case of Iran, Khiabany argues, the state has always been and is the biggest media proprietor. Khiabany describes the development of media in Iran as one where freedom of expression has been apparent in the states of revolution. During and in the immediate aftermath of revolutions the tendency in Iran has been that the media has enjoyed more freedom and has flourished. Iran has a tradition of a strong and viable press, and this has fully surfaced during these times. Newspapers supporting different ideas, political fractions, individual opinions and groupings have always existed in Iran. What is notable is that when the first wave of revolutionary excitement cooled off, the people assuming power soon started to limit press freedom and suppress the media.

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<sup>109</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 26

<sup>110</sup> There is a in depth discussions of the conception of “Islamic media” and the critic of the case of the exceptional in Gholam Khiabany: Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp . 54-59

Khiabany argues that this pattern in Iranian media can be portrayed throughout the history of media and press in Iran, stating that; “there is a correlation between the circulation of newspapers and the degree of political openness”<sup>111</sup>.

Modern media in Iran has increased by a magnitude and speed difficult to conceive. Since 1993, when private use of modems for internet connections were permitted, Internet connections went from 5000 in 1997 to 1.326.000 in 2002<sup>112</sup>. Additionally, in 2000, there were no Internet cafés in Iran, but in 2002 the number exploded to between 7000-8000 in Tehran alone<sup>113</sup>, and this is despite the fact that the government continuously closed down Internet cafés accused of providing access to websites otherwise banned or blocked in Iran.

Iranian Television has seen a similar development, although state controlled and owned, the expansion of TV channels has blossomed. The National Television Broadcasting (IRIB) has increased from 2 to 7 channels<sup>114</sup>.

The expansion is, according to Khiabany, mostly related to the “threat” of the many satellite channels the citizens in Iran receive. Although satellites are illegal in the Islamic Republic, they are to find on any roof top in the major cities and provide access to entertainment and news channels from both the surrounding Arab countries, as well as other international channels, such as BBC and CNN. IRIB has tried to meet the demand for more TV through building up their own Production Company as well as importing TV shows from unlike sources such as Eastern Europe, Latin America and Asia. National television in Iran originally spoke in favor of the leader (and still does) but since the early days of the revolution, TV shows have changed from messages from the Ulema and the leader, public hangings and strong revolutionary messages to lighter entertainment<sup>115</sup>.

The press in Iran is rather differently regulated and slightly freer. Thousands of publications are published in Iran representing various views. Despite this news papers and publications are often closed or banned. Since 1979 there has been a massive increase in

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<sup>111</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 78

<sup>112</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 148

<sup>113</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 150

<sup>114</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 173

<sup>115</sup> A more thorough discussion of Television in Iran and the development of IRIB in a modern, but restricted society can be read in Gholam Khiabany: *Iranian Media*” pp. 146-173 in which he examines the entire development of TV since first arrival in Iran, but also more specific in the past 31 years, from the origin of The Islamic Republic of Iran until today as well as pp. 68-71

publications and during the period between 1979 and 1993, 2253 titles were published<sup>116</sup>. The publications vary between national news papers that come out every day and publications from different cities and regions. Additionally there are dailies, weeklies, and monthlies as well as publications that are only published four or two times a year. The content ranges from news to women issues, from health to science and cover almost every aspect of society.

However, it is worth noticing that despite this seemingly viable press, harsh restrictions are still imposed by the government and content that can insult religion or is found immoral can easily result in a closure of the publications. Additionally, political propaganda against the state is not permitted and this can be punished severely through imprisonment etc.

The press however, does enjoy some sort of “freedom” compared to the Internet, mobile phones and Television, since it is not in fully control by the government apparatus following that harsh critic of the government or the sitting president and political feud has often taken place in the written press.

Additional measurements of communications in Iran are mobile phones as the major tool for the youth and opposition. During the presidential campaigns in Iran in 2009<sup>117</sup> mobile phones were increasingly used to spread messages and slogans concerning the candidates. It was the main tool used to arrange meetings and rallies. Further, knowing that mobile phone access is controlled by the government and is widely tapped by the Intelligence Service, alternative ways of communications were also implemented. Bank notes were used to write messages on and then passed on to the people through normal money exchange. Thereby the message came out but the messenger was untraceable.

In the above section I have presented a short explanation of the characteristics of modern media in Iran. Further, I have presented some numbers and facts about the presence and development of media in Iran. This section is mainly based on Khiabany’s work as well as my own accounts from my four week stay in Iran during the presidential election in Iran in 2009.

I have now presented discussions and analysis of both theories of electoral authoritarianism and theirs of modern media in repressive regimes. With starting point in this I now wish to proceed with my analysis and conclusion of the subject of my thesis.

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<sup>116</sup> Khiabany, Gholam; “Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity” pp. 74

<sup>117</sup> Christensen, Stine Nordbjærg: Journal accounts from fieldwork in Iran before and after the elections. These can be obtained through request directed to the author.

## 6. The Use of Modern Media in the 2009 Presidential Campaign

*“The dignified and great nation, with the passage of three decades since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, every day adds a golden page to its glories record. The perseverant and diligent nation, on the threshold of the fourth decade of the revolution, is moving forward rapidly and skillfully to help ensure progress, pursuit of justice and fortification of religious and spiritual values”<sup>118</sup>*

### - The presidential office communiqué on election ethics

After having processed, discussed and analyzed the main theories relevant for the purpose of my thesis, I now wish to continue with the key analysis. This part of my thesis will consist of a thorough and in depth analysis of how the candidates for the presidential election in Iran in June 2009 employed modern media in their election campaign. Following my analysis I wish to conclude on the questions; to which extend did the candidates apply modern media in their campaigning? How did the use of modern media affect the campaigning and the election? Was the access to modern media equal, considering the incumbent president might have better access to media seeing that both radio and TV is state owned? Last, I will collect all my findings from my analysis of both scholarly work and from my field work in Iran to conclude my final thesis statement: *“With starting point in an account of the characteristics of the Iranian political system and the Iranian media structure I wish to discuss the use of media by the Iranian presidential candidates in the 2009 election in Iran”*

The 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election on June 12 2009 caught the attention of the international society in the wake of election results. Immediately, when the initial reports of large crowds of people protesting in the streets against the disputed reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the focus turned to the internet and the opportunities this offered the people of Iran. When election results were announced it did not take long before Iranian authorities expelled all international journalists from Iran to prevent news about the state or the country to leave Iran.

The people retorted the government’s strict and harsh crack downs on any criticism of the election and the election aftermath. Mobile phones were used to take photos and record

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<sup>118</sup> Iran Daily, March 4, 2009



videos of the riots in the streets and people posted them online through YouTube and live updates on twitter. These people became the “people’s journalists” in Iran and known as digital heroes<sup>119</sup>. The west embraced this way of reporting and praised the opportunities that modern media combined with brave people could result in within a closed regime.

In this welter of excitement about the favorable circumstances the Internet, mobile phones and social networking provided the citizens it was forgotten that the government had the same or better access to these media. Further, no reporting on the use of modern media by the government neither before nor in the aftermath of the election was investigated in depth. Few announcements and articles about the blocking of Facebook and similar websites made its way to western media, but this did not dominate the general reporting on Iran.

It is in this context it is relevant to analyze and discuss the use of media by the presidential candidates during the election campaigning.

## **6.1. The Challengers and the Rules of Election**

In the early wake of the autumn in 2008 the speculations and unofficial campaigning started in the national news papers. Guesswork on who would announce candidacy, calls for Khatami to run from the reformist wing<sup>120</sup>, harsh criticism of incumbent president Ahmadinejad and his economic policies<sup>121</sup> were amongst the most common topics. Ahmadinejad and the government soon responded to this criticism and banned a reformist newspaper that had been amongst the most consistent critics<sup>122</sup>. Furthermore, Ahmadinejad himself responded to the questioning of his economic policies defending the budgetary administration and distribution<sup>123</sup>.

Khatami announced his candidacy on February 8<sup>124</sup> after expectations from the reformist wing. However, he later withdrew when Mousavi announced his candidacy. Instead

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<sup>119</sup> Brighel, Jesper: “Irans digitale helte”, K Magasin fra kommunikationsforum.dk

<sup>120</sup> Hindustan Times, October 11, 2008: “Iran opposition to challenge Ahmadinejad in polls

<sup>121</sup> Iranvajahan, November 11, 2008: “Iranian Economists: Ahmadinejad Has Failed”

<sup>122</sup> Iran Focus, 10 November 2008: “Iran bans weekly critical of President Ahmadinejad”

<sup>123</sup> Press TV, 12 November 2008: “Ahmadinejad defends economic plans”

<sup>124</sup> Press TV, 19 January 2009: “Iran braces for Khatami return” said that Khatami was running. Although this article official states that Khatami has announced his candidacy contradictory information was posted in the news papers throughout February. For instances on Feb 2, 2009 an article in the daily Iran Daily; “Preperations for Presidential Elections” read that “Khatami has not yet formally announced whether or not he will run”. Finally, an article in BBC on Feb 9 2009 stated that on Feb 8 Khatami ended all speculations when telling supporters in Tehran; I strongly announce my candidacy”.

Khatami turned his full support to the former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi. With the support of Khatami followed the backing from the largest groups of reformists and supporters of softer policy. Additionally, Rafsanjani announced his official backing of Mousavi. With Rafsanjani, who is considered amongst one of the most influential individuals in Iran<sup>125</sup>, came not only heavy influence, religious support but he also provided a strong financial support.

Mehdi Karroubi was the first to announce his candidacy also representing the more reformist front, whereas Rezaei, who later announced his candidacy, was an alternative to Ahmadinejad on the conservative front. Mousavi announced his candidacy in early spring starting with speculations and official statements on February 17 2009<sup>126</sup>, and Ahmadinejad announced his participation in the election as an independent candidate on April 14 2009<sup>127</sup>. Mousavi finally officially announced his candidacy in March<sup>128</sup>.

Out of 475<sup>129</sup> hopeful candidates only four were approved by the Guardian council and the final field consisted of incumbent president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former speaker of parliament Mehdi Karroubi, former Revolutionary Guard commander Mohsen Rezaei and former prime minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi<sup>130</sup>. Throughout the election campaign Mousavi was considered the strongest challenger to Ahmadinejad and this proved to be true in the final weeks before Election Day on June 12 2009. Out of the 475 applicants, 40 were women and despite an official announcement in Iran Daily on April 12 2009 underlining that women can run for presidency, no woman in the IRI has yet been approved by the Guardian Council for the final list of candidates.

Already on November 9 2008 the first official announcements on the elections appeared in the media, and one of the first statements was the tightening of the rules for presidential candidates who decided on an age limit as well as an educational criteria. The new amendment to the election law stated that a candidate had to be between 40 and 75<sup>131</sup> years of

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<sup>125</sup> Newsweek in an article on May 23, 2009 had Rafsanjani as the Iran's second most powerful man only to be exceeded by Khamene'i. Newsweek: "Iran's top 20".

<sup>126</sup> Mehrnews.com: "Mousavi candidacy is certain, reformist party official claims"

<sup>127</sup> Tehran Times, April 14 2009: "Ahmadinejad will contest polls as an independent candidate"

<sup>128</sup> Reuters March 17, 2009: "Iran's Khatami says out of presidential race"

<sup>129</sup> Iran News, IRNA May 11, 2009

<sup>130</sup> Sadjadpour, Karim, Carnegie Endowment: "Setting the Scene: Iran's Presidential (S)elections"

<sup>131</sup> The article on May 7, 2009 in Iran Daily: "History of Elections After 1979" contested this statement lowering the minimum age from 40 to 30 years of age.

age and hold a Master's degree. Additionally, applicants must be Iranian citizens loyal to the IRI and Shiite Muslim<sup>132</sup> faith.

Despite the intentions of the new rules to deter frivolous candidacies it did not help and the youngest signing up for presidency in the 2009 election was 19 while the oldest candidate was 86<sup>133</sup>. It is obvious to see from the presentation of the coverage by the media that the contest for voters and an "unofficial" campaigning started months before the official campaign which is allowed 20 days prior to Election Day and has to end on the day before the election.

Political fronts as well as the administration and interest groups started rumors and debates, and criticism of potential candidates gained space in national media, specifically in the newspapers that enjoy slightly more freedom than state run TV and radio. However, on May 7 2009 one key change to elections held prior to this one was announced; TV was to broadcast live debates between the candidates<sup>134</sup>. Never before in the history of IRI had this happened and it opened up an opportunity for the candidates to reach further out to the people than presented to them in earlier elections.

This announcement not only stripped the incumbent president of the one of the major advantages he had by being the only candidate displayed on national TV, but it opened the door to a more vibrant and "democratic" election campaign<sup>135</sup>. It is arguable how much this step affected the final election results, but it did show that even the repressive regime of Iran saw the importance and opportunities modern media offers.

This was not only visible from the inclusion of TV debates, but also through digital media such as social networking and the incorporation of Internet services like Facebook where Mousavi was the first to create an account and a platform where his supporters could befriend him. Additionally, news on meetings, rallies, statements and political agendas were posted on his wall.

Mobile phones were used as one of the main tools of communications due to the easy and fast ways of spreading news and messages through text messaging. This statement is backed by the representative from Karroubi saying that; "our only opportunity really is to use

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<sup>132</sup> Iran Focus, November 9, 2008: "Iran tightens rules for presidential candidates".

<sup>133</sup> The New York Times, May 10, 2009: "Many try to Run for President in Iran, but Few Will Be Allowed".

<sup>134</sup> Tehran Times International Daily, May 7, 2009: "TV to hold live debates between candidates"

<sup>135</sup> A volunteer at the Mousavi campaign office believed this to be the most free elections so far, partially due to the live TV debates, but also the topics up for discussion including women's rights.

internet and text messages as state owned TV, radio and newspapers are the tools of Ahmadinejad. Therefore our cell phones have become the most important weapon against the opposition in this election".<sup>136</sup> However, the representative from the Mousavi camp saw this as the freest election held in Iran<sup>137</sup> while the representative from Ahmadinejad's camp said that "we have to remember that it is not true that Ahmadinejad has the only access to the media. An example of this is the live TV debates"<sup>138</sup>. From the Mousavi campaign both the statement made by the Karroubi representative as well as the Ahmadinejad representative was backed. The interviewee underlined that the Internet is the most powerful means they had for campaigning, since TV and radio are state owned. Mobile phones were heavily used. Approximately 14 million people were engaged in text messaging in favor of Mousavi and app. 90 million text messages were sent every day during the campaign weeks. On Monday June 8 more than 110 million text messages were sent<sup>139</sup>.

Alternative tools to the more common campaigning with flyers; posters etc. were the making of cds and campaign songs. The candidates each had a national known Iranian pop singer sing and write a song in favor of his candidate as the representative from Karroubi's campaign office said. The cds were handed out in the streets along with the flyers<sup>140</sup>. Further, Karroubi had two websites and a newspaper supporting him<sup>141</sup>.

As it is already known Mousavi also adopted a color to represent his campaign. His color was green which for many represents hope but is the color of Islam as well. This was an enormous success and scarves and silk bracelets were handed out in the streets<sup>142</sup> to Mousavi supporters. As the representative from the Mousavi camp said: "When people see green in the streets they will think of Mousavi and they will be curious, this way we try to work outside the frame and attract attention without using media"<sup>143</sup>. Soon, the remaining candidates followed

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with representative from Karroubi campaign office in Tehran.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with representative from Mousavi campaign office

<sup>138</sup> Interview with representative from the Ahmadinejad campaign office in Tehran.

<sup>139</sup> Information from interview with Mousavi representative at office in Tehran.

<sup>140</sup> The author holds a copy of the official c.d's from Ahmadinejad and Mousavi received from campaign workers in the streets.

<sup>141</sup> Information from the representative from the Karroubi campaign office. The news paper is the reformist paper Etemad Melli and the websites [www.etamadmelli.ir](http://www.etamadmelli.ir) and [www.campaign88.com](http://www.campaign88.com)

<sup>142</sup> Interview with representative from Mousavi campaign office as well as own accounts of campaigning in the streets of Tehran.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with representative from Mousavi campaign office when elaborating on their campaign initiatives and the possibilities of campaigning in Iran.

with their version of color representation. Ahmadinejad chose the colors and the pattern of the Iranian flag whereas Karroubi chose the color white. It is not known whether Rezai employed a color in his campaigning, what was striking was the lack of appearance in the streets of Rezai campaigners compared to the strong appearance of Ahmadinejad, Karroubi and Mousavi supporters.

In the Mousavi headquarters alone some 400 volunteers worked during the 20 days of campaigning plus they had campaign offices in all parts of Tehran and other major cities employing up to 40 volunteers<sup>144</sup> mostly consisting of university students. A volunteer from the Karroubi campaign supports this statement by stating that whereas the office he worked in employed around 20 people, thousands of volunteers worked for Karroubi, mostly students<sup>145</sup>.

Historically, students on the universities across Iran have been amongst the key forces in the political sphere. Often dissents have had their origination in the environment around the universities and especially Tehran University has a long history of political engagement and opposition. Student demonstrations against the government are not rare and on red letter days, such as the anniversary of the student protests in July 1999, the death of Khomeini as well as other important days is earmarked for protests. The content of these protests are most often fairly critical of the ruling elite and government and with calls for more freedom, human rights and the annulment of the supreme leader. During the revolution, university students constituted a key actor. Education was abandoned in favor of meetings, rallies and demonstrations. Even before the revolution took form, the secret and forbidden writings by Khomeini were smuggled in from his refugee in Iraq and distributed on universities.

The student's role has been crucial in spreading different ideologies and courses of action in the country. After the failure of the reformists ending with the conservatives' takeover of the parliament and later presidency, he argues that students entered a status quo mood of despair and left party politics in favor of the civil society arena. Undisputedly, this certainly proved to be wrong during the weeks of election campaigning and in the aftermath hereof.

In this section I have accounted for the use of new campaigning methods were employed in the presidential election through the use and reliance on modern and digital media. These media opened a door for the opposition to distribute election material and information as

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<sup>144</sup> Information from an interview with a volunteer at the Mousavi campaign office.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with representative from the Karroubi campaign office in Tehran.

well as spread their message and agenda. It is, however, also interesting to analyze to which extent these new ways of campaigning affected the final results. In the next section I wish to compare all data and my findings from my analysis of modern media in the election in order to discuss and analyze how and if this affected the outcome of the election.

## **6.2. Modern Media and Election in Iran**

The presidential election in Iran in June 2009 was not outstanding or unique in any sense compared to elections elsewhere. However, the use of modern media and the extent to which this was used was certainly outstanding in Iranian terms.

In an electoral authoritarian regime, as discussed in chapter 4, elections are used to manipulate the system to the extent where democratic features and held elections are part of securing the resilience of the regime. In my analysis of the election campaign and media in section 6.1 I argue that the unofficial election campaign was sparked already in autumn 2008. In this initial phase of the election the written media such as newspapers and dailies were the key tools of the politicians to state their opinions and further to spread rumors about the candidates and the two main political wings.

The use of newspapers in Iranian media sphere, as Khiabani argues, is the most traditional form of media in Iran, however, mass media is part of the general development of modern societies<sup>146</sup>. During this development TV, Mobile phones and Internet are amongst the fastest growing media. Although they, alongside with national radio, are state owned and controlled they still played a significant role in the 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election in Iran and helped shape the sphere in which the election took place.

Although my initial prediction stated that Ahmadinejad would be able to benefit from modern media in Iran due to government control, this proved to be only partially true. It can be argued that Ahmadinejad had the foremost advantage of state owned TV and radio but he did not entirely use it for his own benefit. The live debates allowed some time for the opponents to discuss his visions and presidency and they provided the candidates with an opportunity to present their own views on national TV.

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<sup>146</sup> Khiabany, Gholam: "Iranian Media, The Paradox of Modernity" pp. 3

How Ahmadinejad hereafter used national TV is not as relevant as the use of mobile phones and internet by Mousavi and Karroubi. They certainly enjoyed some freedom to campaign on the internet and it was only when the opposition became too strong that the government interfered and slowed down access to the internet and removed the signal to mobile phones.

Modern media, thereby, was an effective tool for both the incumbent president as well as the contesters during their campaigning and Ahmadinejad did not enjoy sovereignty in the media sphere. Albeit, in this context, one must remember that despite the opportunities of modern media, mobile phones as well as internet are closely monitored by the intelligence service and uncontested access thereby is still limited through the underlying notion that every move made online will be recorded by the intelligence service, which can lead to arrests of political activists etc.

In the final days before the elections, the mobile phone connection and signal would be completely gone. This restrained the communication between the supporters of the opposition but also had an impact on the everyday life of citizens in Tehran<sup>147</sup>.

However, in the light of the discussion and analysis of electoral authoritarianism and modern media in repressive regimes, it is important not to forget that initiatives taken in a repressive regime are often meant to secure the rule. In the perspective of the discussion of electoral authoritarianism and the work by Brownlee, these TV debates are assumedly means to underpin the “democraticness” of Iran by the regime.

Jesper Højbjerg argues: “technology is a tool that can be made useful by political, economic and social actors”<sup>148</sup> thereby underlining that all actors have equal access to the Internet and that the Internet can be used for many different purposes and by many different parts of society. The citizens might enjoy some freedom of speech due to technologic development and increased access to modern means of communication. However, they act within a limited sphere and with the constant awareness that their identity might be unraveled and the intelligence service will arrest them.

What is left to ask is how did the use of modern media affect the election?

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<sup>147</sup>Information on the closing down of the mobile network are from my own accounts during my stay in Iran in June 2009, both through letters home and through my diary and notes from my field work.

<sup>148</sup> Højbjerg, Jesper: “Opportunities and Threats for Press Freedom and Democratization” pp. 1

Without doubt, the new use of modern digital media resulted in increased and easier communication between the candidate, his campaign workers and his supporters. However, as soon as the government realized the opportunities these medias provided the opposition with and the immense backing Mousavi enjoyed, they reacted by limiting access to Internet and closing down the mobile phone network.

Furthermore, the use of modern media helped the candidates to reach a wider audience, though, as already argued, this is mostly limited to wealthier families and the major cities due to the costs of Internet in Iran. The representative from the Mousavi camp underlined this problem when he said that they did not even bother campaigning in the rural areas and on the country side. He said they focused on the major cities as Ahmadinejad held all the advantages in other areas of the country. He was able to travel and spend government money on handing out food and cash checks to the poor. The Mousavi camp would never have a budget or the opportunity to meet these measurements made by Ahmadinejad<sup>149</sup>.

One example of Ahmadinejad's means of campaigning was the handing out of pre-paid mobile phone cards with 500.000 rials (500DKr) to female students on universities<sup>150</sup>. He also removed all moral police from the streets. This allowed the youngsters to enjoy a sense of freedom in the last month before election. Additionally, the water in the traditional river of Esfahan was said to have "dried out" but rumors dictate that in reality the water was dammed further up to create enough electricity to avoid power cuts right before the election<sup>151</sup>. Another rumor that emerged before the election said that five million votes in favor of Ahmadinejad had been printed and that around two million Afghan ID cards had been collected which stripped them of the opportunity to vote themselves. This would give Ahmadinejad an advance of seven million votes even before the election was held if these were used in the final counting<sup>152</sup>.

I would argue that the use of modern media did not create a greater support base for the reformists compared to previous elections. Khatami enjoyed overwhelmingly support in both the 1997 and the 2001 elections. He did not have the possibility of implementing modern media in the way the candidates of the 2009 election did. Furthermore, by analyzing the ways these

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with representative from Mousavi campaign office

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Tehran based western diplomat

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Tehran based western diplomat on the advantages of Ahmadinejad in the presidential election and rumors of his "campaign methods".

<sup>152</sup> Information from representative from the Mousavi campaign office.



modern media were used and the government's access to these, one could argue that by relying on the Internet and mobile phones for communication the reformist candidates created "self limitations" that could have been foreseen such as the closing of mobile network and blocking of Internet and certain websites. As they pointed out themselves: "It is difficult to campaign. We never really know who will talk at various occasions. The venues keep getting removed and since Mousavi has no access to official media where announcements could take place, everything has to go through text messaging. This is quick and the only way for us to communicate"<sup>153</sup>. Hence, when so much emphasis is put on mobile phones and the information flow is dependent on mobile network it is obvious that closing the mobile network is the fastest and easiest way of paralyzing the opposition.

Despite prove of tampering with Internet and mobile phone connections and the many rumors of election fraud it is hard to say whether someone other than Ahmadinejad would have won the election. I will argue, based on my findings during the election in Iran and in agreement with Brownlee, that Ahmadinejad would have won the election with or without election fraud<sup>154</sup>. In the interview Brownlee presents several arguments for the reasoning of Ahmadinejad's victory.

First, he points out that no president in the history of IRI has ever lost a reelection. Secondly, Brownlee argues that he is not convinced that the election was rigged. He underlines that Ahmadinejad won with the same percentage of the votes as he did in the second round of the 2005 election. He then points to yet another fact that would support the victory of Ahmadinejad when he says that it was a very good tactic by Ahmadinejad and Khamene'i to remove moral police from the streets and grant more freedom in the major cities. This way the opponents would concentrate on campaigning in the major cities while Ahmadinejad was able to campaign by himself in the rural areas. This statement is in line with the Mousavi campaigner's admitting they only campaigned in the major cities.

Finally, in agreement with my findings, Brownlee argues that there seems to be a strange correlation in the enthusiasm in the Mousavi camp before the election and the indifference towards the importance of the rural areas and the disappointment of the final

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<sup>153</sup> Interview with representative from the Mousavi campaign office.

<sup>154</sup> Interview with Mr. Jason Brownlee

election results. It seems they would not accept the loss even though they actually did not campaign in the rural areas.

I believe modern media will be a more and more common method of communication used by civil society groups, politicians, the opposition and the government. However, neither the increased use of modern digital media by the presidential candidates nor the crack downs and limitations of these by the government did in any significant way affect the election results, I find. What was important was the reformists' neglect of the poor people and the rural areas as well as the supreme leader's support for Ahmadinejad.

Even though the outcome of the election was not altered by the use of modern media in Iran it is an interesting topic because young Iranians suddenly were provided with the opportunity to tell their story on Facebook, Twitter etc. and send pictures from their camera phones. The rule was no longer able to control which information was sent from Iran and the focus on Iran during the election became enormous in world media. One cannot win an election in Iran without the backing (official or unofficial) of the supreme leader, as the representative from the Karroubi campaign put it: "I think that people's vote count for around 10%, the rest is political game and the decision of Khamene'i"<sup>155</sup>. In electoral authoritarian regime elections are not about the will of the people, equal access to media or governmental funding. Elections are a way of ensuring the survival of the regime but this election was different because the use of media made the rule unable to control all voices in Iran and thus displayed a small sign of weakness for the first time although no political change, of course, was ever introduced.

In the analysis of the presidential candidates' use of media in the election in June 2009 I have proven how the reformist candidates used modern media in their campaign and implemented these as the most important means of communication between the candidate and his supporters. Additionally, I have argued that the use of modern media and the equal restriction hereof by the government did not necessarily affect the outcome of the election.

I have analyzed the different campaign tactics and presented my findings from my own experience, which have been backed by interviews with representatives from the different campaign offices as well as with a Tehran based western diplomat and an American assistant

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<sup>155</sup> Information from interview with representative from the Karroubi campaign office.

professor, Jason Bronwlee, and of course, the scholars employed in the analysis of electoral authoritarianism and modern media in repressive regimes.

The conclusion of my thesis statement *“With starting point in an account of the characteristics of the Iranian political system and the Iranian media structure I wish to discuss the use of media by the Iranian presidential candidates in the 2009 election in Iran.”* is highly complex because although Ahmadinejad won the election as most people foresaw, the presidential candidates’ use of media changed the political game in Iran in that the media provided people with the opportunity or organize and to share their stories with the world and fellow citizens. The Iranian rule did not crumble during the election but the candidates’ use of media in the bigger cities developed into a tool that had the potential of threatening the rule’s absolute control with all written words and statements. The media thus provided the world with an insight into everyday and political life in Iran and turned the 2009 presidential election into one of the freest elections ever seen in the country although nothing changed on the political scene in the aftermath of the election.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this thesis I discussed and analyzed features of electoral authoritarianism and modern media in repressive regimes. I did this to create a base for an in depth discussion and analysis of the characteristics of the Iranian political system and the Iranian media structure so I could further discuss and analyze the use of media by the presidential candidates in the 2009 election in Iran.

The first chapters analyze the concepts of electoral authoritarianism and electoral authoritarianism in Iran. Through a discussion of the means of elections in repressive regimes I found that elections in Iran historically have been a part of the political structure since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Elections in Iran serve pragmatic means such as the continuation of the regime and the favored interpretation of Khomeini’s legacy.

I then further discussed and analyzed modern media in repressive regimes and used my findings in this section to analyze modern media in Iran. Through my discussion I found that heavy emphasis has been placed on the use of modern media by the opposition in repressive regimes, such as critics of the regime, NGO’s and civil society. However, little emphasis has been placed on the government’s use of modern media in repressive regimes. Modernization theory

argue that modern digital media has entered as a key tool to paving the way for democratization. However, modernization theory in general, as discussed, is questionable and has been proven inadequate in understanding electoral authoritarian regimes and the countries in the Middle East.

I found that modern media is widely used in Iran and despite restrictions and state control many Iranians enjoy access to these new tools of communications. Whereas TV and radio are strictly controlled and broadcasting is regulated, internet and mobile phones enjoy relatively more freedom due to the difficulties of controlling these media's information flow. Therefore, these means of communications quickly became the preferred tools for the opposition during the election campaign.

Finally, I found that the use of modern media in the presidential election campaign in Iran did not affect the outcome of the election. The candidates, especially the ones representing the reformist wing, Karroubi and Mousavi, employed modern media in their campaign to a wide extent but it was not the restriction of modern media or the lack of access that depicted the outcome of the election. It was rather the lack of campaigning by these two candidates outside the major cities. Ahmadinejad, on the contrary, campaigned intensively here.

Furthermore, the opposition became paralyzed when the regime switched off all mobile phone and internet signals as it became clear that modern media was beginning to constitute a powerful tool for the reformists.

Lastly, one last important fact is believed to have an impact on the final election results, regardless of the use of media, namely the fact that Ahmadinejad was supported by the supreme leader, Khamene'i.

Modern media was without any doubt a major part of the election campaign in 2009. Especially the candidates representing the reformist wing used modern media in many areas of their campaigning, ranging from advertising through social networks such as Facebook and their own websites, to controlling and distributing messages through the Internet and mobile phones. Although the election result was not affected by the use of modern media it is certain that media did play a significant role in the 2009 election because it turned the election into one of the freest in Iran to this date and provided the world with an insight into Iranian politics and life.

## Danish Resume

I denne opgave vil jeg diskutere og analysere aspekter af konceptet "electoral authoritarianism", som behandler spørgsmålet om valg i repressive regimer, samt spørgsmålet om moderne media i repressive regimer. Baggrunden for dette er at skabe en dybdegående diskussion og analyse af karakteristika ved det iranske politiske system og mediestrukturen i Iran med henblik på en analyse af præsidentkandidaternes brug af medier ved valget i Iran i juni 2009.

Formålet med opgaven er at analysere, hvordan præsidentkandidaterne gjorde brug af moderne medier i deres valgkampagner og analysere i hvor vid udstrækning moderne medier blev implementeret og påvirkede valgkampagnerne og i sidste ende resultatet.

Jeg starter med en analyse af electoral authoritarianism hvori jeg diskuterer hvilket formål valg har i et repressivt regime, og hvorfor disse valg bliver afholdt. For målet med dette er at skabe en forståelse for den rolle, valg spiller i Iran og på hvilken baggrund og med hvilket formål, folket stemmer. Derefter analyserer jeg omfanget og brugen af moderne medier i repressive regimer generelt og i Iran mere specifikt. Deraf danner jeg et billede af hvorledes moderne medier og teknologi i stigende grad har indflydelse på det iranske samfund, og hvordan dette bliver implementeret af regeringen, men også stiller nye muligheder til rådighed for oppositionen, NGO'er og civilsamfundet. Jeg sætter fokus på studiet af moderne medier i repressive regimer og i Iran for at klargøre, hvorledes både individer og grupper såvel som regeringen kan gøre brug af disse til egen fordel.

Sidst analyserer og diskuterer jeg hvordan kandidaterne i deres valgkampagner i præsidentvalget 12. juni 2009 gjorde brug af moderne medier. Med udgangspunkt i mine resultater fra de to ovennævnte analyser og suppleret med mine egen observationer fra min studietur til Iran i maj og juni 2009 samt interviews med repræsentanter fra de forskellige kampagner og interviews med to andre eksperter, ønsker jeg at redegøre for følgende: "Med udgangspunkt i en redegørelse af karakteristika ved det iranske politiske system og medie struktur vil jeg diskutere brugen af medier af præsidentkandidaterne ved valget i Iran i 2009".

Afslutningsvis præsenterer jeg mine resultater og konkluderer, at kandidaternes brug af medier ikke påvirkede valgresultatet i Iran, men gjorde valget til det hidtil frieste i Irans historie.

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### **Interviews:**

- Representative from a Mousavi campaign office
- Representative from a Karroubi campaign office
- Representative from an Ahamdinejad campaign office
- Tehran based western diplomat
- Jason Brownlee, American political scientist, The University of Texas at Austin
- Own accounts and diary from my field work trip in Iran in May/June 2009 during the weeks before and after the election.

