

Teaching Notes

Who Minds the Mullahs? Islam, Interests and Institutions In Iran's 2004 Parliamentary Elections

John A. Gould
Rebecca Haimowitz¹
August 2005

This is a document-based case study intended for undergraduate and graduate classrooms in comparative politics and Middle Eastern studies. Students will review the key characteristics of Iranian constitutional design and then read a set of carefully selected documents that refer to the main domestic political events in Iran from July 2003 through Parliamentary elections of 2004. The authors have chosen the types of documents that a typical undergraduate would encounter in the process of doing an extended research paper on the topic. The goal is to build analytical and interpretive skills. To that end, the documents neither pose a single question nor “give” any single answer. Rather, they lead to a variety of possible interpretations and raise avenues for further research.

Part A outlines the basic characteristics of Iran's constitution. Upon review, students should begin to formulate an answer to the framing question of the case: “Who minds the mullahs?” Some will recognize that this question is a variant of the Juvenal's satiric response to Plato's argument that ‘philosopher kings’ should serve as the ultimate guardians of society (“Who Guards the Guardians?”). This should provoke theoretical discussion of the concept of political accountability. There are numerous potential inroads to this discussion, including the enlightenment authors and early American political classics. The authors have used recent works from the field of comparative politics by Guillermo O'Donnell and others with great success. Following Guillermo O'Donnell's recent work, the authors recommend breaking accountability into its three forms -- Horizontal, Vertical and Societal.² They have found this helps students categorize and better understand the various forms of political and economic behavior that appear in the subsequent documents.³

¹ John A. Gould is John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Assistant Professor of Political Science Colorado College. Rebecca Haimowitz works at Mentors, Inc. in Washington DC matching public high school students them with adult volunteer mentors to ensure the students graduate with a plan for life after high school.

² Guillermo O'Donnell, “Why the Rule of Law Matters,” *Journal of Democracy* 15:4 (October 2004): 32-46; but see also Guillermo O'Donnell, “Delegative Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy*, (January 1994); Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13:2 (April 2002): 51-65 Fareed Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, (November/December 1997).

³ Classes that build from a deeper knowledge of Islam and politics can use this section to compare Iran's constitutional arrangement with competing concepts of the relationship between Islam and politics.

Part B then launches students into the complexities of political and economic life in Iran leading up to the February 20, 2004 parliamentary (Majlis) election. The authors have edited most of the documents for brevity and clarity. The documents provide insight into the failure of the *2nd of Khordad* reform movement to accomplish even a small portion of its reform agenda. The movement gets its name from the Islamic calendar date of the election of reform-oriented President Mohammad Khatami (in 1997). Strengthened by the election of a reform-oriented parliamentary majority in 2000 and Khatami's reelection in 2001, *2nd of Khordad* promised to bring greater accountability to the political system. In 2003-4, however, conservative actors culminated their suppression of the reform movement and "liberal" elements in civil society.

While the documents do not question the actors' piety, students should consider whether the "conservative" effort to protect Islam simultaneously reinforced a social, political and economic status quo with clear sets of winners and losers. Discussion should reveal many of the sources of wealth, power and authority in Iran and examine how the diverse groups discussed in the case experienced this authority and tried to cope with it.

The main "controversy" that emerges is the conflict between the "reformist" *majlis* and the "conservative" Guardian's Council over who can stand for election. Exercising its constitutional prerogatives to "screen" candidates for office, the Guardians and their agents systematically exclude reform-oriented candidates. Meanwhile, students and women, previously agents of change, become disillusioned and alienated at the growing impotence and apparent venality of the politicians in the reform movement – particularly the President.

Documents include discussions of Iran's human rights abuses, limitations on press freedoms, student resistance strategies, the social and legal status of women, and the economic interests of the religious establishment. By the end of Part B, students should begin to form opinions on the systemic tensions between conservative clerics' attempt to protect a particular conception of Islamic society and the efforts of civil society and parliament to use the political process to structure social, political and economic affairs differently.

Part C documents the election results and its aftermath. The turnout is actually higher than boycotting reformers would have wished. Still, the official 51 percent turnout contrasts unfavorably with the 75 percent that elected the previous parliament and it is clear that this election was a highly limited contest between circumscribed groupings of political interests in society. There are also some ambiguous reports of electoral abnormalities typical of post-electoral uncertainty in non-transparent societies.

The general response to the election is pragmatism and alienation. Supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini declares a "year of accountability" in Iran while the new majority of "pragmatic conservatives" promises to reduce social repression – particularly of women and students – and to focus on reforming the economy. Given the institutional entrenchment of people who benefit from the current system, however, observers might be cynical about the new government's ability to accomplish either.

Pedagogical Suggestions:

Students who are new to the study of Islam and Iran may fear that they do not have the background to interpret these documents effectively. You may wish to emphasize that the analytical task at hand is to infer a broader picture from the information provided. There is naturally no single “correct” explanation. Rather, students should be challenged to develop persuasive interpretations, arguments and prescriptions given the limited information at hand. Ideally, the case will inspire greater interest in the region and lead to comparative insights about the importance of accountability in politics.

Use of the Case in Class Discussion: We recommend spreading the case over two class days:

Day 1: In preparation, the instructor should assign Part A on the Iranian constitution plus the professor’s choice from the vast body of readings on accountability. Class discussion should then relate to a broad, ranging discussion on accountability. Background readings on Islam, the *Shi’a*, the Iranian Revolution and events since might also be useful but are not necessary.

Day 2: In preparation, the instructor should ask students to analyze the documents in Parts B and C. One possibility might be to break the class up into three groups, examining horizontal, vertical and societal accountability, respectively. Having analyzed the documents as part of a subgroup, the students can then make reports to the class examining the state of accountability in Iran and make suggestions for reform. Discussion might end with a conversation about whether these reforms are likely and whether they would risk compromising the “Islamic values” enshrined in the Constitution.

Use of the case for an in-class simulation: Some teachers might want to assign roles and use the case for an in-class simulation. One possible scenario would be to have students read the case and then hold an open forum to discuss political, social and economic change. Possible roles could include conservative and reformist politicians, politically connected businessmen from the foundations (the *bonyads*), small entrepreneurs, students, women’s rights activists, religious police, independent journalists, human rights observers and members of the international community. Instructors should set up the simulation to meet the time constraints and pedagogical needs of their class.

Use of the case for a take home writing assignment: In addition to (or instead of) class discussion, students might be asked to write an interpretive analysis of the Iran’s political system based on the documents provided here.

Suggestions for additional research: A number of issues of importance have been left out of the case – most notably, the on-going controversy over *Iran’s nuclear development*. With some additional research, students might be able to draw links between the ‘domestic’ political controversy and ambiguity about Iran’s nuclear aspirations. This, in turn, could be used to develop the international context of Iranian politics.

In addition, the case leaves out numerous important high profile human rights cases. These include the controversy of over the death in Iranian custody of Canadian photographer *Zarha Kazemi* and the ongoing legal battle for the life and freedom of dissident professor *Hashem Aghajari*. Also interesting is the work of 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner *Sharon Ebadi*. Finally, one might also investigate Islamic thinkers who challenge the theological rationale for Iran’s

clerical republic. Abdolkarim Sorus or Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari in particular deserve a closer look. Students may be encouraged to research these and/or related issues and place them in the wider context of the case.

General Discussion Questions:

Part A:

- How well do the authors of the Constitution protect “Islamic values?”
- Who determines these values?
- Where does power reside in the Iranian constitution?
- What recourse is there in cases of abuse of power?
- While the review does not cover amendment procedures, how easy do you think it will be to reform this system?
- Who minds the mullahs?

Part B:

- How do Iran’s dominant business interests, political institutions and ‘Islamic’ ideas about legitimacy interact? Who benefits?
- What freedoms are limited? Why?
- Are there *political* implications for “social” restrictions on women?
- What resistance strategies do we witness? Which are the most effective, if any?
- How might we explain the split between the students and the parliamentary reformers?
- What was the impact of this split?
- Is there a connection between judicial supremacy and economic corruption?
- Why might the president finally have agreed to support elections in 2004?

Part C

- Regime opponents expected turnout to be low, but the official figure puts the vote at about 51 percent (versus the 75 percent that elected the previous “reformist” *majlis*). How should this result be interpreted?
- Is this a victory for the reformers or the hard-liners?
- What lessons can reformers, conservatives and reform-oriented students draw from this?
- With hindsight, what advice would you give opponents to the regime? How might things have turned out differently?
- What problems might the “pragmatic conservatives” have in bringing a more pro-business environment to Iran?
- What is your prediction for the success of the conservative mullahs’ program to bring a “Year of Accountability” to Iran?
- Given what we’ve learned about Iran’s alleged “millionaire mullahs,” what implications do limitations on democratic freedoms have for the free market?
- If you could recommend three constitutional reforms for Iran, what would they be? What would be the implication of these reforms for the conservative Mullahs’ vision of Islam?
- What are the future prospects for political accountability in Iran?

Among possible additional reading, we recommend:

- Abdo, Geneive. "Rethinking the Islamic Republic: A 'Conversation' with Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri." *The Middle East Journal* 55, no 1 (Winter 2001): 9-24.
- _____ and Johnathan Lyons. *Answering only to God: Faith and Freedom in Twenty-First Century Iran*. (New York: Henry Holt, 2003).
- Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, (New York: Columbia U., 2000).
- Amuzegar, Jahangir, "Iran's Crumbling Revolution." *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 1 (January/February 2003): 44-57
- Buchta, Wilfried. *Who Rules Iran? The Structure of Power in the Islamic Republic*. (Washington: Washington Institute/Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2000).
- Jahanbegloo, Ramin. "Pressures from Below ." *Journal of Democracy*.14, No 1, (January 2003): pp. 126-131.
- Kazemi, Farhad. "The Precarious Revolutions: Unchanging Institutions and the Fate of Reform in Iran," *Journal of International Affairs* 57, no 1 (Fall 2003): 81-95
- Kar, Mihrangiz. "Constitutional Constraints." *Journal of Democracy* 14, No 1 (January 2003): 132-136.
- Nafisi, Azar. *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 27.
- Scirazi, Asghar. *The Constitution of Iran: Politics and the State in the Islamic Republic* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).
- Wright, Robin. *The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000.

Case Study in Comparative Politics

Who Minds the Mullahs? Islam, Interests and Institutions in Iran's 2004 Parliamentary Elections

John A. Gould
Rebecca Haimowitz⁴
August 2005

"I don't have any need for the law. I am the law."
-Tehran Public Prosecutor Said Mortazavi⁵

"There is freedom of expression, but there is no freedom after expression."...
- Iranian opposition saying⁶

The Task: This is a document-based case study of the 2004 parliamentary election in Iran. Rather than a coherent narrative, it presents a series of chronologically ordered documents that are typical of the sort of information you would encounter in the process of doing an extended research paper on this period in Iranian politics. At first reading, the story will be ambiguous. The documents neither raise a single question nor "give" any single answer. Nor will the information you can gain from these documents tell the full story. You may even have to logically infer some of the details left out. However, through careful reading and analysis, you should be able to begin to put together an interpretation of political, social and economic life in Iran leading up to and following the 2004 elections. Your task is to develop and defend a convincing argument supporting this interpretation.

Introduction:⁷ In one of the great surprises of the twentieth century, a relatively unknown cleric, the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, led a revolution against Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi and founded a new kind of government in Iran – a regime that called itself the Islamic Republic of Iran. Khomeini became its first leader. No one expected a revolution led by clerics in the name of religion; no one was sure what an "Islamic state" might look like.

The constitution prepared under Khomeini's supervision honored a principle he had first articulated in a book published less than a decade earlier: *velayat-e faqih*, the rule of the jurist. The majority of Iranians consider themselves Shi'i Muslims. Most Shi'i believe that the right to

⁴ John A. Gould is John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Assistant Professor of Political Science Colorado College. Rebecca Haimowitz works at Mentors, Inc. in Washington DC matching public high school students them with adult volunteer mentors to ensure the students graduate with a plan for life after high school. The authors would like to thank Ahmad Ashraf, Hilary Appel, William E. Gould, Kevin Deegan Krause, Robert Lee, Paul Mandelson and Gul Aldikacti Marshall for their critical comments. They also would like to thank the Social Science Executive Committee of Colorado College for a grant to develop this project.

⁵ Human Rights Watch, "*Like the Dead in Their Coffins: Torture, Detention, and the Crushing of Dissent in Iran*" (June 2004) <<http://hrw.org/reports/2004/iran0604/>> (7 June 2004).

⁶ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 5 April 2004, Volume 7, Number 13. <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/04/13-050404.asp>>

⁷ Special thanks to Robert Lee for helping draft this introduction.

rule belonged to a line of 12 *imams*, who were rightful successors to the Prophet Muhammad. However, the 12th imam is thought to have gone into hiding in the world in the year 874.

Traditionally, Shi'i have believed they could do little for themselves politically until the hidden imam reappears. Khomeini disagreed. In the absence of the hidden imam, he argued, the leadership of the community should fall to the greatest legal scholar of each generation. Khomeini could plausibly claim to be that legal scholar in Iran. His teachings and subsequent ascension to power portended a significant change in the Shi'i political tradition.

The new Iranian constitution provided for an office of Supreme Leader corresponding to Khomeini's notion of the *faqih*. It also created several institutions based on the principle of popular sovereignty. A president and parliament were to be chosen by universal suffrage.⁸ Where did final authority lie? With the *faqih*, legitimated by Khomeini's vision of Shi'ite thinking, or with the people? The Constitution attempted to embrace both principles. Yet, since Khomeini himself was the arbiter, the weight of power lay with the *faqih*.

Two developments intensified this implicit conflict. First, after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leadership of the country passed to another cleric, Ali Khamenei, who could not claim to be the most distinguished jurist of his generation. He could not wield authority of the sort Khomeini had enjoyed; yet once in power, he clung tenaciously to the office of the Supreme Leader.

Second, in 1997 the Iranian people elected the reform-minded Mohammad Khatami as President. Victory in supporting parliamentary elections in 2000 provided him with a supporting majority. Known as the 2nd of *Khordad* movement after the Islamic date of the new president's election, the reformers challenged the power of Khamenei and questioned the legitimacy of his constitutional sources of power.

Conservative forces rallied to the defense of the Supreme Leader. Intensifying after 2000, they cracked down on reformist media, intellectuals, women and students. They used media closures, arbitrary imprisonment, torture and forced confessions to dampen dissent. Meanwhile, intellectuals continued to debate the founding principles of the regime: *velayat-e faqih* versus popular consent.

Against this background, Iranians went to the polls on February 4, 2004. The context of this election is the immediate topic of this case study.

The case is structured as follows:

Part A - Iran's constitutional structure

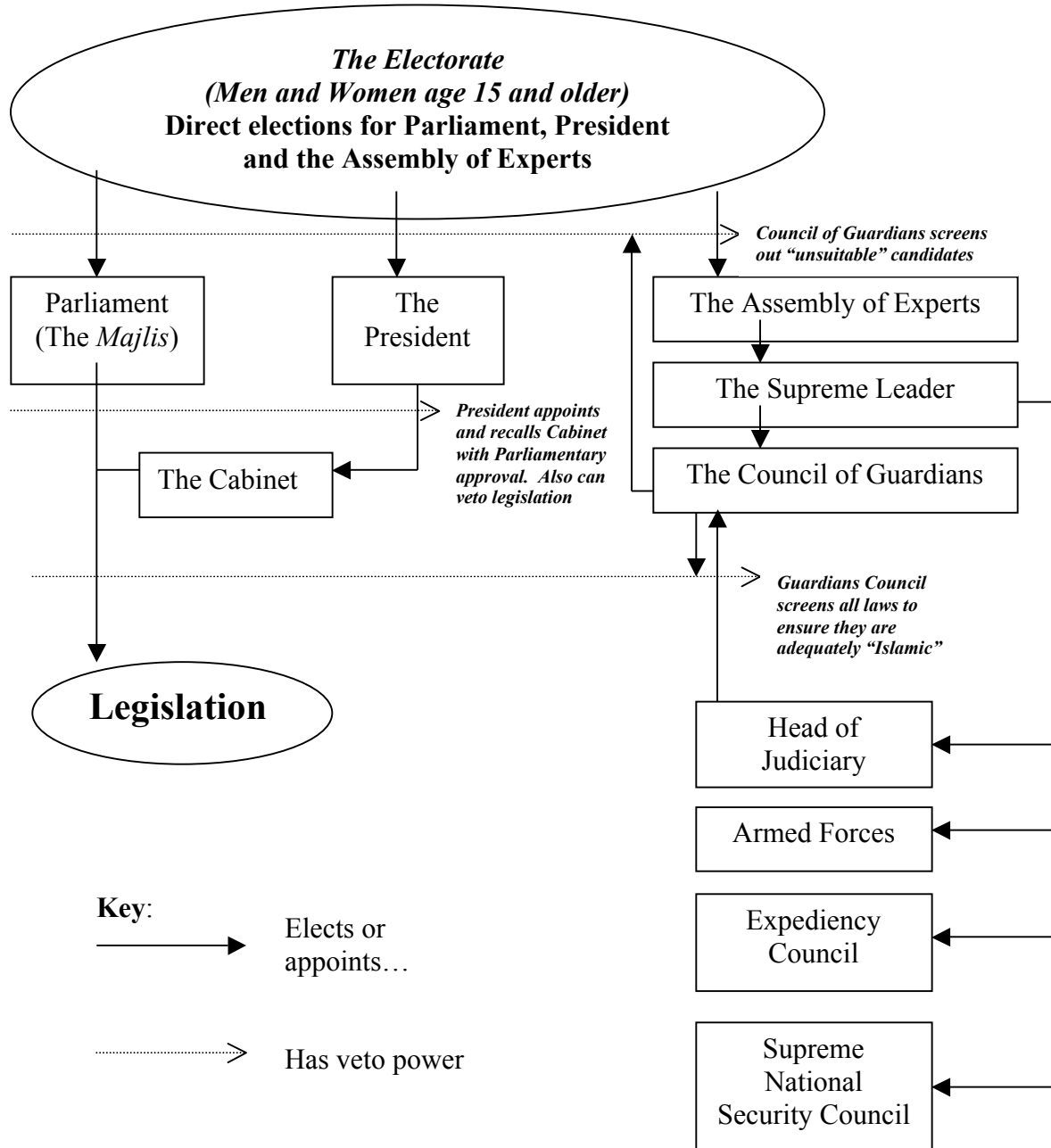
Part B – Reports, statistics and foreign domestic news reports from the period leading up to parliamentary elections on February 2004.

Part C – The aftermath of the election.

⁸ The original framework also included a prime minister but was later eliminated.

PART A: THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN

“...The Islamic Republic is a system based on belief in: 1. the One God (as stated in the phrase ‘There is no god except Allah’), His exclusive sovereignty and the right to legislate, and the necessity of submission to His commands; 2. Divine revelation and its fundamental role in setting forth the laws.... All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political, and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution as well as to all other laws and regulations, and the wise persons of the **Guardians Council** are judges in this matter....”



Explanatory Notes on the Constitution:

- The people elect the *Assembly of (Islamic) Experts*. The *Assembly* appoints the *Supreme Leader*. The *Supreme Leader* then appoints six of the 12 members of the *Council of Guardians* and the *Judiciary*. The *Judiciary* appoints the remaining six *Guardians* subject to parliamentary approval. The *Guardians Council* “screens” candidates for the *Assembly of Experts*.
- The *Supreme Leader* controls the ministries of Culture, Defense, and Security. He also commands the armed forces, and appoints the heads of the state-owned media and the *Judiciary*. Finally, he is responsible for the "general direction" of legislation.
- The *Council of Guardians* screens candidates for all nationally held elective offices. It can veto legislation passed by the *Majlis* (parliament) that it considers to be against the spirit of Islam.
- The *President* can veto legislation. Responsibility for national security resides with the *Supreme Leader*, but the *President* chairs the *Supreme National Security Council*, which coordinates all security-related offices.
- The Constitution reserves 5 seats in the *Majlis* for ethnic and religious minorities, including Jews, Zoroastrians and Christians. Women are regularly elected to parliament.
- The *Majlis* (parliament) is elected every four years. The *President* is elected every four years and can serve two terms. The *Assembly of Experts* is elected every 8 years.
- The *Supreme Leader* controls the morals police, which enforces strict Islamic interpretations of codes of dress (i.e. veiling women) and other forms of behavior (interaction between the sexes, alcohol, etc.)
- The *Expediency Council* arbitrates disputes between the *Majlis*, the *Guardians Council*, and the judiciary. It also advises the *Supreme Leader* on national issues, particularly on the passage of emergency laws.

PART B: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE BEFORE THE 2004 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS – A DOCUMENTARY SNAPSHOT

Excerpt from *READING LOLITA IN TEHRAN*:⁹ In the course of nearly two decades, the streets have been turned into a war zone, where young women who disobey the rules are hurled into patrol cars, taken to jail, flogged, fined, forced to wash the toilets and humiliated, and as soon as they leave, they go back and do the same thing. Is she aware, Sanaz, of her own power? Does she realize how dangerous she can be when her every stray gesture is a disturbance to public safety? Does she think how vulnerable the Revolutionary Guards are who for over eighteen years have patrolled the streets of Tehran and have had to endure young women like herself, and those of other generations, walking, talking, showing a strand of hair just to remind them that they have not converted?

19 FEBRUARY 2000 – IRANIAN REFORMISTS SCENT VICTORY:¹⁰ Within minutes of polls closing, the interior ministry announced that more than 75% of the electorate had cast their ballots - the highest turn-out in the 21 years of the Islamic Republic.

3 April 2003 - IRAN'S GUARDIANS COUNCIL REJECTS KHATAMI'S ELECTION LAW:¹¹ The Guardians Council rejected an amendment to the election law on the grounds that it violates the constitution and Islamic law, [Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA)] reported. The bill to reform the election law was introduced with the objective of eliminating or at least reducing the Guardians Council's power of "approbatory supervision" through which the council rejects candidates for elected office. The legislation had widespread support among reformist parliamentarians.

26 June 2003 - IRAN: PROTEST'S LIMITATIONS:¹² The following assessment is unlikely to please President George W. Bush or those, within his government and the US Congress, who believe that they can perceive the emergence of the beginning of the end of the Iranian regime. The student demonstrations that have caused disruptions in Tehran and several major Iranian cities during the past week do not -- for the present -- seem likely cause the regime to collapse or even to force it to make any fundamental changes.

Despite the regime's "crisis of legitimacy," experts point out, there is, on the contrary, a major risk of a further stiffening on the part of the hardliners, to the detriment of those, such as President Mohammed Khatami, who would have liked to make the Islamic Republic an easier place for its citizens to live.

By its 10th day, the student movement was starting to die down and seemed to have reached its limit. The students received satisfaction for the demand that seemed to have acted as the catalyst for their protest -- the rejection of universities' privatization, which, if it had been decided on,

⁹ Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, (New York: Random House, 2004), p. 27.

¹⁰ "Iranian Reformists Scent Victory," *BBC News* (19 February 2000), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/647261.stm (11 August 2004).

¹¹ Adapted from Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 6, no, 15 (7 April 2004), <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/04/15-070403.asp> (10 August 2004).

¹² Mouna Naim: "Iran: Protest's Limitations" *Le Monde* (Jun 26, 2003). FBIS Translated Text.

would have deprived many youngsters of the opportunity to pursue higher education, for lack of money to pay for it.

“The government, by backtracking on the privatization of universities, is basically not conceding much,” according to Iranian philosopher and political scientist Ramine Jahanbegloo. No more is to be expected, Ramine Jahanbegloo added, “and certainly not, in any case, an abandonment of the Islamic Republic such as they -- Iran's leaders -- conceive it and from which they derive their power, in favor of a nonconfessional republic”.

Farhad Khosrokhavar, director of studies at the School of Senior Social Science Studies notes that the student movement has prompted no active solidarity either at the local or the national level, despite the sympathy that it might elicit among a disenchanted population. They are disenchanted first and foremost with the ineffectiveness of the government's pro-reform wing, which is now regarded as a mere veneer for the regime's hardliners, Mr Khosrokhavar said, adding that “nobody now believes in Mohammed Khatami, who is regarded, at best, as an ineffectual king and, at worst, as a traitor.”

Declining living conditions are another source of dissatisfaction: “the price of housing, for instance, has more than doubled within the space of a year, and the cost of living has become intolerable for the middle classes.” Mr Khosrokhavar added: “the Iranians do not want another revolution, since they are still paying for that of 1979; the protest movements have grown weary; the population fear an even greater stiffening on the part of the regime and prefer to safeguard their gains, however slight they may be; they can see that the “liberation” of Iraq by the United States is far from corresponding to any kind of democratic ideal or economic prosperity. They harbor grave doubts about the United States' desire really to help to achieve changes.”

Even the student unrest, however spectacular it may be, mobilizes only a tiny minority of the approximately 1.6 million students and suffers from a lack of organization and political representation among the rest of the population. Not only is the regime not in jeopardy at present, but the unrest could “strengthen the hard line wing,” Mr Khosrokhavar forecasts. This camp regards the protest movement has an opportunity to step up the repression and to eliminate their reformist brother adversaries.

Excerpt from *HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH TESTIMONY– 2004*:¹³ *Hossein T., a student protester, ...was kidnapped and severely beaten by members of Ansar-e Hizbollah [Party of God] and later released, only to be arrested on May 23, 2000, and taken to Evin prison. He was taken to Section 209 of the prison, and kept there in solitary confinement...*

He remarked on the difficulty that faces many who attempt to document the crackdown by the “parallel institutions” on the students: How can you prove that you were in the hands of the judiciary’s intelligence services? How can you prove that you were in the hands of the IRGC? You have no documentation. They can deny the entire thing, and the only thing you can say is that your life was taken away from you.

¹³ Human Rights Watch, “*Like the Dead in Their Coffins:*” *Torture, Detention, and the Crushing of Dissent in Iran* , (June 2004), <<http://hrw.org/reports/2004/iran0604/>> (7 June 2004).

Hossein T. fled the country in the summer of 2003.

26 June 2003 - KHATAMI WARNS AGAINST EXECUTING LEADERS OF STUDENT PROTESTS:¹⁴ London -- In a step that reformists in Iran view as the most serious among his previous hints at handing in his resignation, Iranian President Mohamed Khatami warned that he would resign if any of the 8,000 people who were recently arrested -- against the background of the students protests which erupted two weeks ago -- were to be executed.

The sources added that Khatami strongly attacked Tehran Prosecutor-General Sa'id Mortazavi -- known as the "butcher of the press" -- when the revolution's guide tasked him with suspending the reformist and independent newspapers. He is currently in charge of prosecuting the students, the intellectuals, and the people who hold different views, after Mahmud Hashemi-Shahrudi, the head of the judiciary, appointed him Tehran Prosecutor-General on the guide's orders and granted him emergency powers to arrest people and jail them for indefinite periods.

The director of Evin jail warned Prosecutor-General Mortazavi against sending new inmates to the Evin jail where the number of inmates reached 4,000 after single cells were turned into cells holding between five and eight inmates.

President Khatami and his reformist allies -- including Parliament Speaker Mehdi Karrubi -- are concerned about the fate of some detainees, particularly those who were forced by Mortazavi's office to "confess" through the official television that they have links to the opposition abroad and that they were encouraged by what the Iranian opposition satellite radio and television stations broadcasting from Los Angeles to take part in the recent protests.

[S]ome clerics close to Khamene'i have called for to the execution of some jailed students and other protesters to prevent similar protests from taking place on 9 July on the anniversary of the students' uprising in 1999. The security authorities announced a ban on students meetings and marches. However, the Office for Strengthening Unity -- the largest student organization in Iran - - stressed its intention to organize huge rallies.

21 July 2003 - MILLIONAIRE MULLAHS:¹⁵ ... [Much] of Iran's economy belongs to the Islamic foundations, which account for 10% to 20% of the nation's GDP--\$115 billion. Known as *bonyads*, the best known of these outfits were established from seized property and enterprises by order of Ayatollah Khomeini in the first weeks of his regime. Their mission was to redistribute to the impoverished masses the "illegitimate" wealth accumulated before the revolution by "apostates" and "blood-sucking capitalists." And, for a decade or so, the foundations shelled out money to build low-income housing and health clinics. But since Khomeini's death in 1989 they have increasingly forsaken their social welfare functions for straightforward commercial activities.

Until recently they were exempt from taxes, import duties and most government regulation. They had access to subsidized foreign currency and low-interest loans from state-owned banks.

¹⁴ Ali Nuri Zadeh, "Khatami Warns Against Executing Leaders of Student Protests" *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, (June 26, 2003), FBIS Translated Text.

¹⁵ Paul Klebnikov, "Millionaire Mullahs," *Forbes* (21 July 2003).

Formally, they are under the jurisdiction of the Supreme Leader; effectively, they operate without any oversight at all, answerable only to Allah...

Other charities resemble multinational conglomerates. The Mostazafan & Jambazan Foundation (Foundation for the Oppressed and War Invalids) is the second-largest commercial enterprise in the country, behind the state-owned National Iranian Oil Co. Until recently it was run by Mohsen Rafiqdoost. ...Rafiqdoost got his big break in 1979, when he was chosen to drive Ayatollah Khomeini from the airport after his triumphal return from exile in Paris.

Khomeini made him Minister of the Revolutionary Guards to quash internal dissent and smuggle in weapons for the Iran-Iraq war. In 1989, Rafiqdoost gained control of the Mostazafan Foundation, which employs up to 400,000 workers and has assets that in all probability exceed \$10 billion. Among its holdings: the former Hyatt and Hilton hotels in Tehran; the highly successful Zam-Zam soft drink company (once Pepsi); an international shipping line; companies producing oil products and cement; swaths of farmland and urban real estate.

Theoretically the Mostazafan Foundation is a social welfare organization. Soon it plans to spin off its social responsibilities altogether, leaving behind a purely commercial conglomerate owned by--whom? That is not clear.

A picture emerges from one Iranian businessman who used to handle the foreign trade deals for one of the big foundations. Organizations like the Mostazafan serve as giant cash boxes, he says, to pay off supporters of the mullahs, whether they're thousands of peasants bused in to attend religious demonstrations in Tehran or Hezbollah thugs who beat up students. And, not least, the foundations serve as cash cows for their managers.

The largest "charity" (at least in terms of real estate holdings) is the centuries-old Razavi Foundation, charged with caring for Iran's most revered shrine--the tomb of Reza, the Eighth Shiite Imam... It is run by one of Iran's leading hard-line *mullahs*, Ayatollah Vaez-Tabasi, who emerges occasionally to urge death to apostates and other opponents of the clerical regime.... Iranian economists speak of a net asset value of \$15 billion or more...

What happens to annual revenues estimated in the hundreds of millions--perhaps billions--of dollars? Over the past decade the foundation has bought new businesses and properties, established investment banks, funded real estate projects and financed big foreign trade deals.

15 September 2003 - RELEASE OF HARD-LINE ACTIVIST RENEWS FOCUS ON VIGILANTES:¹⁶ Iranian journalists, student activists, and political dissidents are routinely jailed and held incommunicado for extended periods. While in prison, they are subject to physical and mental torture and forced to participate in televised confessions. Hard-line activists, however, seem to be able to come and go as they please, killing and beating their fellow citizens without penalty. Recent developments in the case of Said Asqar, a leader in the *Ansar-i Hizbullah*, shed some light on this situation.

¹⁶ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 6, no. 37 (15 September 2003), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/09/37-150903.asp>> (2 June 2004).

Asqar was released from Evin prison and seen shopping with his wife...Fars News Agency reported. Asqar received a 15-year prison sentence for shooting reformist ideologue Said Hajjarian in March 2000, but was out on bail when he played a role in suppressing the June 2003 unrest. He subsequently turned himself in when he heard that Prosecutor-General Said Mortazavi wanted to have him arrested... But certain irregularities came to light after Asqar's trial got under way. The indictment against him described Asqar as a man without a criminal record and disregarded his conviction in the Hajjarian case. Moreover, there was no follow-up on the complaints against him by the police intelligence unit or the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps.

13 October 2003 - INTELLIGENCE MINISTER SAYS OPPOSITION UNDER SURVEILLANCE AND STUDENTS UNDER CONTROL:¹⁷ Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) chief Hojatolislam Ali Yunesi told a gathering of Iran's Friday prayer leaders that the opposition is being watched and anything it does to threaten Iran's national security will fail... Yunesi claimed that Iran is the target of a "heavy psychological war" and the opposition is part of this. "The United States needs to heighten the level of that cold war against Iran currently in order to justify its broad presence in this part of the world," he added...

13 October 2003 - SURVEY FINDS HIGH RATE OF CORRUPTION IN IRAN:¹⁸ Iran placed poorly in Transparency International's "Corruption Perceptions Index 2003". Iran was listed in 78th place, along with Armenia, Lebanon, Mali, and Palestine, out of 133. Iran had a score of 3.0 on a scale of 10 (highly clean) to 0 (highly corrupt).

17 November 2003 - GUARDIANS COUNCIL REJECTS PRESS LAW AMENDMENT:¹⁹ The Guardians Council has rejected an amended Press Law that would allow jury trials in an open court for journalists. Khamenei said in his letter that the Press Law protects the system from infiltration by "the enemies of Islam, the revolution, and the Islamic system."

17 November 2003 - LEGISLATURE REJECTS HARD-LINE CANDIDATES FOR GUARDIANS COUNCIL:²⁰ The legislature rejected the judiciary's candidates for membership on the Guardians Council, "Iran Daily" reported... The council is made up of six clerics appointed by the Supreme Leader, along with six jurists selected by the judiciary chief who must be confirmed by the legislature. The legislators said afterwards that if the judiciary had consulted with them it would have known that [judiciary spokesman and former Guardians Council Research Center chief Gholamhusein] Elham would never win approval, especially since he was rejected twice before.

¹⁷ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 6, no. 41 (13 October 2003), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/10/41-131003.asp>> (2 June 2004).

¹⁸Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 6, no. 41 (13 October 2003), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/10/41-131003.asp>> (2 June 2004). Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions index is available at:

http://www.transparency.org/pressreleases_archive/2003/2003.10.07.cpi.en.html.

¹⁹ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 6, no. 46 (17 November 2003), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/11/46-171103.asp>> (6 June 2004).

²⁰ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 6, no. 46 (17 November 2003), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/11/46-171103.asp>> (6 June 2004).

2 December 2003 - ISLAMIC STUDENT MOVEMENT MOVES AWAY FROM THE REGIME:²¹ After the authorities banned off-campus student marches in commemoration of the Student Day on December 7, the association of the Islamic student councils - Dafter-e Tahkim-e Vahdat (Office of Reinforcing Unity) -- agreed to hold a ceremony in the halls of the Hosseineh Ershad mosque, but the interior ministry rejected the embattled student organization's application.

An interesting game is being played by the government's reformist faction; the interior ministry banned off-campus demonstrations and ceremonies, and the higher education ministry said for security reasons no on-campus gathering can be allowed. The reformists within the Majles and the government are pushing out those student activists who called for separating the Islamic student movement from the government, he added. His comments indicate that barriers for the student movement are no longer put up by the judiciary alone; the reformist faction has joined in the attempts to distance the students from the regime.

Meanwhile, the Islamic student council of the Shahid Beheshti University issued the outcome of an opinion survey that showed 40 percent of the students will boycott the upcoming Majles elections.

Furthermore, judiciary's actions further separated the students from the pro-reform government. Several student activists, editors of student journals and Islamic student council members have been disciplined either by the courts or by the universities' disciplinary committees. Twenty-one students of the Razi University were expelled from the school and banned from higher education, and all members of the social sciences school of the Alameh Tabataba'i University were banned from political activity. Sabzebar University's Islamic student council members were sentenced to 19 months in jail. Many students arrested after the July 1999 student uprising are still languishing in jail. The committee to defend jailed student Ahmad Batebi said in a statement signed by 130 that Batebi and many other jailed students are not associated with any of the regime's factions, and receive little attention and support because of that.

15 December 2003 - POLITICAL VIOLENCE ON THE INCREASE:²² Unidentified "rogue elements" attacked the meeting of Kurdistan Province parliamentarians in the town of Gharaveh. Local authorities reportedly arrested five of the attackers...

Police arrested the "main suspects" in the previous day's attack on a visiting parliamentarian, IRNA reported. The victim in that attack told ISNA that... [s]hortly after he started his speech about 100 slogan-chanting people entered the auditorium and then 40 of them attacked Mirdamadi. Mirdamadi linked the incident with the forthcoming parliamentary election, saying that "Such events will continue to occur as we approach the elections [on 20 February 2004]. The political situation is heating up and electoral rivalries are emerging," he added.

29 December 2003 - THE IRANIAN MEDIA IN 2003:²³ The print media in Iran are subject to a harsh yet vague press law, and selective enforcement of that law by conservative courts over

²¹ Bahman Bastani, 'Islamic student movement moves away from the regime,' *Radio Farda*, (December 2, 2003).

²² Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 6, no. 48 (15 December 2003), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/12/48-151203.asp>. (6 June 2004).

the past 3 1/2 years has resulted in the closure of approximately 100 publications and the prosecution of dozens of journalists. Moreover, state decrees on what and how to cover events (e.g. Operation Iraqi Freedom and the June student protests) amount to a form of censorship. The Internet, therefore, is becoming an increasingly important news source -- and in 2003 the government took measures to control Iranians' access to websites. The state monopolizes broadcast media: the news provided by state television and radio is biased and inaccurate and the entertainment available there is not appealing. As a result, satellite television programming is popular, although owning satellite equipment is illegal. For the same reasons, Iranians listen to Persian-language radio broadcasts from other countries.

5 January 2004 - PARLIAMENT REJECTS MORE GUARDIANS COUNCIL NOMINEES:²⁴ The parliament rejected two more judiciary nominees for seats on the Guardians Council, IRNA reported. Hussein Shariatmadari, the supreme leader's representative at the Kayhan Institute, wrote in the 28 December issue of "Kayhan" that as long as the Guardians Council does not have 12 members, neither of the two legislative institutions is legal. Until this situation is resolved, Shariatmadari continued, any parliamentary legislation or Guardians Council decrees would be "illegal and illegitimate."

.... [Conservative] Ayatollah Ali Meshkini urged the Guardians Council to be firm on candidates' qualifications [for parliament], illustrating his appeal with an anecdote from his youth: "I remember from our life in the village when I was small. Ladies poured the flour into a sieve to stop rubbish -- something, rat excrement -- from going through. Sometimes the sieve was damaged and had holes in it. The rat excrement would go through and spoil the dough. I ask the Guardian Council to sieve properly and purify things."

12 January 2004 - GUARDIANS COUNCIL VETTING SETS OFF STORM OF PROTEST:²⁵ Although the official list of candidates for the 20 February parliamentary election has not been posted yet, the Guardians Council has disqualified about 25 percent of the applicants. Mohammad Jahromi, who is in charge of election affairs at the Guardians Council, said that 2,033 out of 8,145 candidates were disqualified. He told IRNA that the rejections were made on the basis of "data collected from reliable sources and the investigations conducted in [applicants'] neighborhoods."

Most of the rejected individuals are connected with the reformist 2nd of Khordad coalition, which is named after the date of President Khatami's election on 23 May 1997, although that is not the stated reason for disqualifying them. The Guardians Council's reasons for the rejections include applicants' alleged drug abuse, links with banned groups, or lack of Iranian nationality... 80 members of the legislature had their candidacy rejected, ISNA reported...

²³ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 6, no. 50 (29 December 2003), <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2003/12/50-291203.asp>> (7 June 2004).

²⁴ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 1 (5 January 2004), <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/01/1-050104.asp>> (8 June 2004).

²⁵ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 2 (12 January 2004), <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/01/2-120104.asp>> (8 June 2004).

12 January 2004 - REFORMIST PARTIES RESUME THREAT OF ELECTION BOYCOTT:²⁶ Hojatoleslam Rasul Montajabnia is a member of the central council of the reformist Militant Clerics Association and on 11 January, Montajabnia's candidacy was disallowed. Montajabnia referred to the Guardians Council's rejection of such a large number of potential candidates as a "tragedy" that has no legal or religious standing, ILNA reported. Montajabnia called on Supreme Leader Khamenei to take action by punishing the individuals who have "questioned the honor of these respected individuals." He went on to say "This is not something that can be left quiet. We shall show an appropriate action to this great tragedy." A possible course of action is an election boycott, which is what the reformists had threatened to do in case of massive disqualifications.

[Also disqualified] Deputy Speaker of Parliament Mohammad Reza Khatami [the President's brother and secretary-general of the reformist Islamic Iran Participation Party (IIPP)] has been talking about a possible boycott for almost a year. [He] added that the IIPP would do such a thing with the greatest reluctance. Khatami observed, "The idea that several dignitaries come together and decide what attitudes should be confirmed and what should not will damage the status of the constitutional body rather than the dignitaries themselves and will damage the legitimacy of the system as well," IRNA reported...

2 February 2004 - KHATAMI WILL HOLD ELECTIONS -- REGARDLESS...²⁷ As Iran marks the 25th anniversary of its Islamic Revolution, the country is caught in one of the greatest political crises in its history. Iran's Interior Ministry -- which is responsible for holding elections -- has called for their postponement in light of the current dispute over candidates' eligibility. Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, however, has vowed that the elections will take place as scheduled, on 20 February, and the Guardians Council, which is responsible for supervising elections, has said the same.

Provincial governors-general met for four hours at the Interior Ministry on the evening of 28 January and subsequently announced that organizing a "free and fair election" for 20 February is "impossible," IRNA reported. However, President Khatami ended speculation that the government might not hold the elections. "The government's plan is to hold healthy, free, and competitive elections and we will definitely hold such an election," Khatami said, according to IRNA. "To shut down the elections means to shut down democracy, and God does not want such a thing for our people."

...BUT WILL ANYBODY COME? As it now seems that parliamentary elections will take place as scheduled, two crucial and outstanding issues remain: party participation and voter turnout... The 2nd of Khordad Front Coordination Council -- which heads the 18-organization reformist grouping -- announced with regret on 31 January that it would not participate in the parliamentary elections, IRNA and ISNA reported. The reformist Militant Clerics Association announced that if the current trend in the election process continues, then it will "officially withdraw from participating" in the elections, "Entekhab" reported on 25 January.

²⁶ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 2 (12 January 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/01/2-120104.asp> > (8 June 2004).

²⁷ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 5 (2 February 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/02/5-020204.asp> > (8 June 2004).

The conservatives will not have any rivals for 202 legislative seats, according to the 24 January "Mardom Salari." Mustafa Tajzadeh, a leading figure in the Islamic Iran Participation Party put that figure at 180. Tajzadeh said the best-known reformists have been disqualified from competing for the other 110 seats...

2 February 2004 - KHATAMI REJECTS OFFICIALS' RESIGNATIONS:²⁸ President Khatami on 26 January rejected the mass resignation of his top officials, IRNA reported. In his reply to the officials, Khatami said: "It is our definite duty to continue to serve the Islamic Republic and the noble nation." He went on to insist on holding a free and sound election.

9 February 2004 - THE SHOW MUST GO ON -- MORE CANDIDATES GRUDGINGLY REINSTATED:²⁹ "The elections must be held on time, that is on the day of 1 Esfand [20 February]," Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a 4 February speech.

President Mohammad Khatami and [the] parliament speaker met with Khamenei on 3 February and urged him to delay the parliamentary elections so the Guardians Council can reinstate more disqualified candidates. The Guardians Council initially rejected the candidacy of 3,533 out of 8,144 candidates, and the candidacy of 1,160 was reinstated later. Khamenei met with council members on 14 January and urged them to reinstate incumbent parliamentarians' right to run in the forthcoming election, but only three incumbents were reinstated.

Khamenei said Iran's foreign enemies are happy to see the dispute between state entities -- "the enemies are baring their teeth and claws" -- and are exaggerating its importance. These foreign enemies, he said, want to prevent the election. "They want to make sure that elections will not be held. They are very angry and deeply dissatisfied with the elections. They know that elections will foil their plots."

9 February 2004 - QUITTERS THREATENED WITH PROSECUTION -- OR WORSE:³⁰ Late on 2 February, IRNA published a list of 125 members of parliament who have offered their resignations as a protest against the disqualification of prospective candidates. Moreover, all 27 provincial governors-general, the presidential cabinet, and many other officials have submitted their resignations.

Supreme Leader Khamenei said in his 4 February speech, "Refusing to shoulder the burden of responsibility by threatening to resign or by any other means, is contrary to the law and forbidden by Sharia [religious law]," state radio reported...

²⁸ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 5 (2 February 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/02/5-020204.asp>> (8 June 2004).

²⁹ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 6 (9 February 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/02/6-090204.asp>> (8 June 2004).

³⁰ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 6 (9 February 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/02/6-090204.asp>> (8 June 2004).

9 February 2004 - LEGAL SYSTEM CONTINUES TO TARGET PRESS:³¹ The editor in chief of the "Asia" newspaper, Iraj Jamshidi was arrested on 6 July, and he has been imprisoned ever since. Jamshidi was being held on a temporary detention order, his confinement continues even though the original order expired on 6 December.

*Excerpt from HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH TESTIMONY– 2004:*³² [from Hossein T.] *The interrogations started again. They would take me into the same room, but there were new interrogators who had clearly looked at everything [I had published]...One day when we were going into interrogation, they told me to put on my normal clothes. A new man came into my interrogation room and he said, “we want to make a film.” I said, “Oh, like Kianuri’s confession.”³³ I could tell that [Tehran Public Prosecutor] Mortazavi and several others were behind the door. I couldn’t see him, but I could hear his voice... He would pass notes to the man who was interrogating me....Then they started asking questions in front of the camera.*

Before they began recording, the interrogator said: “Say the reformist papers are controlled by the west and other powers.”

I said: “I am just a writer.”...

Him: “Mr. S [a fellow reformist writer] has told us what you did. So, say what we tell you on the video.”

Me: “I refuse.”

Him: “We have a tape of you saying that you got involved in [pro-reformist] newspapers through secrets and secret payments.”

Me: “This is not true.”

Him: “We have the video.”

Me: “Show me.”

Him: “That would take months. We want to let you go. If you want to be free, just do what we say on the tape. Don’t you respect the law?”

Me: “Yes.”

³¹ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 6 (9 February 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/02/6-090204.asp>> (8 June 2004).

³² Human Rights Watch, “*Like the Dead in Their Coffins:*” *Torture, Detention, and the Crushing of Dissent in Iran* , (June 2004), <<http://hrw.org/reports/2004/iran0604/>> (7 June 2004).

³³ Nureddin Kianuri was the head of the Irans’ communist Tudeh Party. In 1983, he made a televised confession that the party had engaged in espionage and treason by sending political and military reports to the Soviet Union. The government then banned the Tudeh and expelled Soviet diplomats.

Him: "They law says you have to respect Mr. Khamenei. And Mr. Khamenei said in a speech that these newspapers [reformist papers] are the platform of the enemy. Don't you agree?"

13 February 2004 - POSTCARDS FROM IRAN: TEHRAN PARTY:³⁴ On a recent trip home to Tehran I was invited to a birthday party. When I arrived I found the 70 or so guests wearing fancy dress and dancing to the latest Western pop music. The party goers were all young and from well-to-do families. One was dressed as Tarzan, another as a pilot from the film "Top Gun". Assorted "ayatollahs" and "mullahs" were whirling drunkenly under the strobe lights. A girl in a black chador, flung it off to reveal a skin-tight Cat Woman costume underneath.

In the middle of the fray, a waiter with a bow tie was trying to manoeuvre through the crowd, balancing a tray filled with glasses of wine, gin, vodka and whisky. The partygoers seemed not just to be defying the authorities, but actively poking fun at them.

Iran is a young country. Sixty per cent of the population are under 35. Most can barely remember the revolution, yet alone what life was like under the Shah. They've grown up in a country full of oppressive laws governing every aspect of life. But as I saw at the fancy dress party, they've become experts at finding ways to subvert and push back the rules.

Under Islamic law, it's forbidden for people of the opposite sex to be seen together either in public or at parties, unless they are related. In the early days after the revolution this was strictly enforced by the revolutionary guards. But not anymore. Boys and girls now openly walk hand in hand through the streets.

Dress codes are also no longer rigorously enforced. Young girls have exchanged their shapeless black chadors, for short, tight coats with jeans and platform shoes. Despite the ban on alcohol, homemade wine, smuggled beer and spirits are now widely available. So are drugs. Not just heroin smuggled in from neighbouring Afghanistan, but designer drugs like ecstasy and cocaine.

If you have money in Tehran these days, it seems that anything is possible.

Six years ago, when President Khatami swept to power in a landslide victory, it was thanks largely to the support of the nation's youth. But their hopes for reform have been dashed and there's now a widespread feeling of disillusionment. Young Iranians no longer believe in politics. In fact you sometimes get the feeling they no longer believe in anything except having fun and trying not to think about tomorrow.

The Tehran fancy dress party was taking place against a background of one of the worst political crises in Iran in the past 20 years. The hardliners had just banned hundreds of reformist MPs from taking part in the forthcoming parliamentary election. I asked one party-goer what he thought about it all.

"Actually I'm more interested in trying to remember the words to Eminem's latest song," he said, and launched into an impromptu version of "Lose Yourself".

³⁴ Pooneh Ghoddoosi, "Postcards from Iran: Tehran party," *BBC News* (13 February 2004), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/3486779.stm> (10 August 2004).

At that moment there was a knock on the door. It was the Revolutionary Guards, wanting to know why there were so many cars in the street. I was terrified, but needn't have worried. One of the party guests, dressed as a mullah, told them it was a religious gathering and slipped them some money to leave us alone. They did, but as the party continued I wondered what it said about the state of the revolution. Who was the more cynical - the Islamic vigilantes who took the money, or the fancy dress cleric who offered it?

15 February 2004 - STUDENTS DENOUNCE IRANIAN PRESIDENT FOR HOLDING 'SHAM ELECTION':³⁵ Tehran - Iran's largest student movement denounced the nation's reformist president Sunday for relenting to hard-line demands and scheduling legislative elections even though he said they will be unfair. Students from The Office for Fostering Unity called on Iranians to boycott Friday's elections.

"Through accepting to hold this sham election ... (President Mohammad) Khatami effectively gives priority to implementing illegal demands of unelected conservatives at the cost of slaughtering justice, freedom and people's rights," the student group said in a statement.

A reluctant Khatami gave in to an order from Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to hold the vote but said it would be unfair and would give little motivation for people to participate. "Dialogue to reform the establishment in the way Khatami has defined has reached a dead end," the students' statement said. "The absolute power of appointed institutions and their resistance against the voted reform movement has revealed the inefficiency of reforms under the existing structure of the establishment."

February 17 2004, "OPEN LETTER FROM MAJLES DEPUTY ADDRESSED TO THE PEOPLE: "WE REFUSE TO ACCEPT THIS CHARITY":³⁶ Tehran - To the honorable and aware people of Iran! In the process of the widespread rejection of candidates for the seventh Majles, both the Guardian Council accused me of not having practical belief in Islam or allegiance to the Constitution and my credentials were therefore rejected. But recently in the final stages of the tug of war between the government and the Council, I was informed that I had been honored by the Council, which had approved my credentials!

[W]hat happened that I was suddenly qualified - after the passing of the deadline for the vetting process? If your first of set of documents were so fool-proof and undeniable, what happened so suddenly to make you put them aside? How is it that I and people like me, who are wallowing in the mire of corruption and deviation and heresy, have suddenly become devout Muslims?

[W]e and most of the people believe that the truth is something else. The truth of the matter is that the Guardian Council ... rejected these candidates not from a position of neutrality, but from a political and factional position. The aim was to open up the way for an un-obstructed and certain victory for the faction that is against reforms, in order to realize a pre-designed rubber-stamp parliament. This way, this authoritarian faction, which has lost hope in any sort of

³⁵ Ali Akbar Dareini, 'Students denounce Iranian president for holding 'sham election''. *Associated Press* (February 15, 2004).

³⁶ "Open letter from Majles deputy addressed to the people: "We Refuse to Accept This Charity" *Yas-e Now* (February 17, 2004). FBIS Translated Text.

welcome from the public, would get what it wanted, which was to capture the Majles. But along this process there was pressure... This forced the authoritarian elements to give some concessions - even though these were few.

Honorable people of Iran! The widespread protests of experts, students and government officials, the 26-day sit-in by the Majles deputies, the protest resignation of 126 deputies were not enough to halt the project to create a rubber-stamp parliament. This parliament is targeting the republicanism in the regime and aims to install a religious dictatorship in the country and destroy all the achievements of the Revolution and the reform movement. I am hereby announcing my extreme concern for the future of the country and the republican and Islamic nature of the regime. I regard the charity that is approval of my credentials as illegal. As it stands, I am proud of my disqualification and rejection.

I hereby announce that I will not be running as candidate in these illegal elections for the seventh Majles, as a protest. I am certain that with God's special kindness, you great people will not allow the confused dreams of the enemies of religious democracy, which has risen from our great Islamic Revolution, to come true and the light that is freedom, mixed with spirituality in Islamic Iran, to be extinguished.

(Signed) The deputy for the people of Kashan, Aran and Bidgel

19 February 2004 - IRAN'S DISAPPOINTED WOMEN:³⁷ Women played a huge role in bringing reformist President Mohammad Khatami to power in 1997. They were also instrumental in the parliamentary election in 2000, which gave the reformists a sweeping majority in parliament.

Elaheh Koulaie is a busy woman. She has four children, teaches politics at Tehran University, and is a member of the Iranian parliament - the Majlis. Or was. Earlier this month she, along with more than 120 other MPs, handed in her resignation in protest at the hardline Guardian Council's ban on more than 2000 pro-reform candidates, herself included, from standing in the next parliamentary elections.

"I wanted to serve my people and country as a university teacher and to use my theoretical knowledge for improving the situation of our country and to play a very sensitive and critical role in peace, stability and growth of the region. I wanted to do this and they prevented me."

Ms Koulaie, one of 13 female MPs in the current Majlis, is a member of the largest reform party, the Islamic Iran Participation Front. The Participation Front, with most of its members on the black list, is boycotting the poll, claiming it will not take part in an election which is not free and fair. Many women had pinned their hopes on people like Ms Koulaie, believing that the reformists could improve their position in a society where equality between the sexes is somewhat lacking.

³⁷ Miranda Eeles, "Iran's Disappointed Women," *BBC NEWS*, (19 February 2004), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/middle_east/3500565.stm> (10 August 2004).

Women still have fewer rights in divorce, inheritance and child custody cases and are worth half the value of men in a court of law. But many of the bills passed to end discrimination against women were vetoed by the conservative dominated Guardian Council... Ms Koulaie believes the changes they managed to make, however small they might seem, are significant.

"Parliament is like society. It has all the peculiarities of society. So like women outside in society, we have confronted ordinary obstacles. This behaviour was normal because of the culture, the historical perceptions, about women's role, about the abilities and capacities of women. We try to change this perception. We have been victorious, I think in many things."

As evidence that women have profited from the reformists in power, some cite the fact that there were 60% more female candidates in the 2003 local council elections. Before, politics was seen as an exclusively male domain. Fakhrolsadat Mohtashamipour, who used to run women's affairs at the Interior Ministry, says women have responded massively to the reform movement.

"In the local elections, the number of seats for women has doubled. And day by day, the number of women NGOs is increasing. This is not a sign of hopelessness. This is a sign of hope."

Both Ms Koulaie and Ms Mohtashamipour believe progress can be achieved within the system through a slow process of reform. But such optimism is losing supporters in their thousands. The problem [Businesswoman Nazila Noebashari] says is the system.

"Whoever is there, with the best of intentions, they will get nowhere because of the way the system works. When you have 12 unknown people in the Guardian Council vetoing everything the parliament passes, you realise it's the system itself that is failing. It's a mockery of a parliamentary system."

[W]ith so many reformists banned from standing, and with their inability to achieve anything in the face of entrenched conservative power, she is debating whether to vote at all.

PART C: THE END OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT? POLITICAL LIFE AFTER THE 2004 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

22 February 2004 - PRO-DEMOCRACY STUDENTS SAY IRAN'S REFORM MOVEMENT "DEAD":³⁸ Tehran - Iranian students, many of whom boycotted controversial parliamentary elections, appeared Sunday to agree that the Islamic republic's reform movement was dead and discredited. "I did not participate as I did not know any of the candidates," said Shohreh, a 22-year-old female student of chemical engineering at Tehran University.

But while unwilling to sift through the long list of names of mostly conservative candidates who were approved to stand, the student – wearing make-up, tight jeans and a long coat -- said she had little more time for reformists either. "Even if the reformists were approved I would not have participated," she said bluntly.

Since winning the parliament in 2000, reformists legislation has been blocked at almost every turn by powerful hardliners who screen all laws. And when student activists, one of the main driving forces for change and whose votes helped put President Mohammad Khatami and his allies into office, also have bitter memories of when in 1999, 2002 and last year they took to the streets to protest crackdowns on dissent by the courts and security forces. Khatami was powerless to stop heavy handed police tactics, and reformists in parliament could only mutter some complaints.

"The reformists are dead. They were dead already, but now they are deader," said Reza, 23 and a medical student from the northeast of Iran. [H]e added, looking ahead to a conservative-controlled assembly, "I hope that they can do something about the economy and live up to their promises," he said.

Aside from failing to assert themselves, the reformists have also come under fire for failing to address pressing concerns over inflation and unemployment -- especially among the thousands of students who graduate from universities every year but have few job prospects. "The reforms have been dead for years and they were finished by these kind of elections," said Saeed, a 23-year-old civil engineering student and a member of the pro-reform Student Islamic Association.

"For the next six to seven years political reforms will be out, but the economy will get better. Khatami at least has managed to lay the foundations for more deals, more investment."

Few students were predicting a crackdown on their pro-democracy activities either, but did say their room to manoeuvre would be more limited. "I don't think the conservatives will restrict us, since they do not want another June 1999 and another June 2003," said Saeed, referring to the dates when thousands demonstrated against the regime and bloody clashes ensued.

"On the surface things will become better: they would not stop us in the street for things like the way we dress, because they want to win the presidential elections" next year, said Shokofeh as

³⁸ Farhad Pouladi, 'Pro-democracy students say Iran's reform movement "dead,"' *Agence France Press* (February 22, 2004). FBIS Translated Text.

she strolled across the campus in her figure-hugging clothes. "But they will surely close down more newspapers," she said.

Abolfazl, 28 and a student of drama, was one of the few people on the campus who said he had voted -- he is a member of the Basij, a hardline volunteer militia attached to the Revolutionary Guards. "I voted to raise the participation and show that the fundamentalists can do things in an orderly fashion and answer the US threats," he asserted.

But even he agreed that with even with the reformists gone, a puritanical crackdown would not follow. "The reforms will continue and even the atmosphere will be more liberal, since the fundamentalists have learned how to deal with people over time. They have learned their lesson," he said. "There will be less tension."

23 February 2004 - TEHRAN RAMPS UP VOTER PARTICIPATION:³⁹ The election headquarters kept polling places open until 22:00 local time, a full four hours after the originally announced closing time. According to state television on 20 February, Interior Minister Abdolvahed Musavi-Lari allowed this on the basis of requests from polling stations. And [the official media source] IRNA said, "Earlier commentaries by certain Western media that the turnout would be low now seem totally unrealistic with reports that several constituencies have run out of ballots and that some provincial governors have asked the polling closing hour to be extended." The state news agency referred to requests for more ballots and polling hour extensions from election officials in East Azerbaijan, Khuzestan, Kurdistan, Semnan, Tehran, and Yazd Provinces.

"Few polling stations in Tehran, the capital city of 12 million people, attracted more than a steady trickle," the London-based "Financial Times" reported on 21 February, "though turnout was reportedly better in some smaller towns and in the countryside." Voters queued outside a mosque in east Tehran's Nabavat Square for film crews, but the daily cited locals as saying that the "voters" were not locals and were brought in for the cameras. "Some government employees said they had been ordered to vote and needed their identity cards stamped," the British daily added...

Minister of Intelligence and Security Hojatoleslam Ali Yunesi on 18 February dismissed reports about the existence of 2 million extra [identification] cards, IRNA reported, and he added that disseminating such rumors is a prosecutable crime. State Registry official Abdullah Ansari denied in the 17 February "Iran" that a large number of new cards were issued recently.

1 March 2004 - TEHRAN ANNOUNCES FINAL ELECTION RESULTS:⁴⁰ The State Election Headquarters announced on 28 February that counting of votes for the 20 February parliamentary elections has concluded, state radio reported. Out of a total of 46,351,032 eligible voters, 23,725,724 voters cast their ballots. This puts overall voter turnout at 51 percent...

³⁹ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 8 (23 February 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/02/8-230204.asp>> (8 June 2004).

⁴⁰ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 9 (1 March 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/03/9-010304.asp>> (9 June 2004) *italics added*.

Overall, 156 conservative candidates were elected in the first round of the parliamentary elections, the legislature's website (<http://mellat.majlis.ir>) reported on 25 February. Reformists hold 39 seats, independents hold 31 seats, and five went to the religious minorities...

Iranians who are compelled to vote sometimes register their disapproval of the electoral system and candidates by casting blank or voided ballots. The State Election Headquarters did not provide any information on the number of such ballots. Gholamreza Gudini, the head of the Tehran, Shemiranat, Islamshahr, and Rey election headquarters, in his constituencies 188,468 ballots out of 1,971,748 [9%] were voided or blank, IRNA reported. Gudini said turnout in the capital was about 30 percent...

Hashem Hashemzadeh-Harisi, who serves on the *presidentially appointed* Committee for the Implementation and Supervision of the Constitution, said on 28 February that its report on the elections would not be released, ISNA reported. He explained, "The required specialist investigations were undertaken in this respect, but in order to prevent tension and to safeguard society's atmosphere, it was decided *not* to present a report."

15 March 2004 - ELECTED INSTITUTION WON'T INFORM PUBLIC:⁴¹ Assembly [of Experts] member Ayatollah Mohammad Ali Movahedi-Kermani told ISNA on 7 March that... "There is no need to tell the people about the findings of the probes [into the supreme leader's performance]." He continued: "In my opinion, there is no need to provide people with a report because we have numerous domestic and foreign enemies and to openly provide people with reports will not have good consequences. They [enemies] will not be fair in their judgment and look for ways to achieve their own objectives."

22 March 2004 - CHANGES IN ELECTION RESULTS CAUSE UNREST:⁴² The Guardians Council announced on 13 March that it has changed the election results in the Babolsar, Darab, Zanjan, and Tarom constituencies, state radio reported. In Babolsar, all the ballots in three boxes were canceled because the votes were purportedly solicited through "threats and coercion," while the ballots in two other boxes were canceled because the seals on the boxes showed signs of tampering. Ballots in two boxes in Darab were canceled because the votes were found to have been solicited through "threats and coercion." After recounts in Tarom and Zanjan, the overall results were altered, leading to a new winner and two people advancing to a second round.

Provincial and national officials confirmed on 15 March that violent unrest in Babolsar constituency, Mazandaran Province, was a result of the Guardians Council's changing of parliamentary election results there. Riots occurred in Fereidunkenar after the Guardians Council canceled all the votes in two ballot boxes used by residents. Locals reportedly suspected that the move changed the results in favor of [a] conservative over [a] reformist.

Residents of the Badrud district of the Natanz and Qamsar constituency in Isfahan Province responded to rumors about the annulment of election results in their constituency by staging a

⁴¹ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 10 (15 March 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/03/10-150304.asp>> (9 June 2004).

⁴² Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 11 (22 March 2004), <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/03/11-220304.asp>> (9 June 2004).

demonstration on 18 March...The sit-in concluded with a resolution calling on the Guardians Council not to undermine people's rights.

29 March 2004 - 'YEAR OF ACCOUNTABILITY' BEGINS IN IRAN:⁴³ Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in his 20 March Norouz message to the Iranian people that the new year -- 1383 -- will be a "year of accountability" for the government, state television reported. He said the executive, legislative, and judicial branches must inform the public on "what they have done with regard to rendering services to the entire nation, creating science, establishing justice, and alleviating poverty and discrimination in society." He added that they should provide information on "their contribution toward the movement for seeking justice and the movement for combating corruption."

04 April 2004 - DEFENDING THE INDEFENSIBLE: TEHRAN ON HUMAN RIGHTS:⁴⁴ [According to a report by] Ambeyi Ligabo, the UN's special rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression ... student Ahmad Batebi, while on a prison furlough, gave Ligabo a list of ... about 50 political prisoners in various prisons in Iran, as well as their personal identification and the crimes they are accused of.... Batebi disappeared soon thereafter...

3 May 2004 - CHIEF JUSTICE DISAGREES:⁴⁵ Judiciary chief Ayatollah Mahmud Hashemi-Shahrudi apparently contradicted Khatami's admission at a Tehran press conference on 29 April and said that "we have no political prisoners in Iran" because Iranian law does not mention such offenses, IRNA reported.

24 May 2004 - THE MIDEAST'S MODEL ECONOMY?⁴⁶ Not long ago, Iran was a basket case. But now growth is strong as oil prices soar and Tehran eases restrictions

The Tehran Stock Exchange rewarded investors with 130% gains for the year ended in March, and businesses ranging from autos to information technology are booming. "You can double [your business] here every year," says Mojdeh Abedi, a 32-year-old Iranian woman who five years ago abandoned a legal career in Paris to manage a budding food additives business in Tehran.

The country has racked up growth in the 5% range for four years running, thanks to high oil revenues, abundant rainfall, and a gradual easing of the choking economic restrictions ushered in by the 1979 revolution. Its external accounts are under control, with the trade balance in surplus and hard currency reserves of \$35 billion. The government is raising money internally by privatizing shipping, autos, and other assets.

⁴³ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 12 (29 March 2004), <<http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/03/12-290304.asp>> (9 June 2004).

⁴⁴ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 13 (5 April 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/04/13-050404.asp>> (9 June 2004).

⁴⁵ Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, *Iran Report* 7, no. 16 (3 May 2004), < <http://www.rferl.org/reports/iran-report/2004/05/16-030504.asp>> (9 June 2004).

⁴⁶ Stanley Reed and Babak Pirouz, "The Mideast's Model Economy?" *Business Week* (24 May 2004) <<http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?an=13157232&db=aph>> (2 June 2004)

It's true that democracy took a beating in the February Parliamentary elections, thanks to the disqualification of reformist candidates and other strong-arm tactics. But the business community is pleased that a new group of *pragmatic conservatives* won control of the *Majlis*. These conservatives include a number of business types and entrepreneurs who are far more focused on economic issues than the clerics, and they want to hold on to power by delivering on the economy.

The focus on economics by these politicians comes as a surprise and a relief to many Iranians, who feared a curtailment of social liberties. Women in North Tehran, where the elite live and work, are still walking around with their hair poking out from under scarves, and single men say they can take their girlfriends out riding in the moonlight without fear of being pulled over for a grilling by the police. "Unlike what most people expected, there have been no major changes on social issues," says Amir Mohebian, a member of the board of editors of *Resalat*, the leading conservative newspaper. "Those who won a majority in Parliament are moderate conservatives."

Business leaders think a conservative majority in Parliament and the likely election of a conservative President next year could end the gridlock between the *Majlis* and the conservative-dominated Guardian Council, which has blocked much reformist legislation. Business also figures that the conservatives will be under pressure to improve living standards.

The economy needs more reform. Billions go each year to subsidies on everything from wheat to imported gasoline. Exports of non-oil products are anemic, and trade barriers allow money-losing plants to remain in operation. Government ministries and religious charities called *bonyads* control an estimated 50% or more of economic activity. Even when the government turns business units over to private hands -- as in last year's sale of \$1.3 billion in state assets -- it often retains big stakes.

Private investors, while officially welcome, face a daunting series of hurdles. The foreign business community in Tehran is fond of saying that "the ink on the contract never dries." Nowhere is that expression more true than in the oil industry, where Iran has been driving such tough bargains that few international companies want to sign up.

Iran is paying a price for these policies. It has barely found enough investment to stem the long decline in oil production that began after the 1979 revolution. There have been no major discoveries since the late 1970s, industry sources say. Still, the lure of Iran's fields, which produce close to 4 million barrels a day and have the world's second-largest natural gas reserves, remains.

The government's pervasive role in the economy also provides numerous opportunities for corruption -- from tax assessors accepting the common gift of gold coins to insiders taking payoffs on big contracts. Entrepreneurs say that, if anything, the demands for *baksheesh* are becoming more endemic. "There is no way we could smoothly run our business without paying bribes," says Nazila Noebashari, chief executive of *Traf Co.*, a freight-forwarding firm.

The drive to privatize provides fodder for the Iranian stock exchange, as initial public offerings like auto maker *Saipa* come to market. The galleries of the Tehran Stock Exchange are packed

with investors every day. [Hussein Abdoh Tabrizi, Secretary General of the exchange,] concedes that privatizations are incomplete, since government or religious entities often keep stakes. "But as long as we can separate government managers from these assets, it doesn't matter," Tabrizi says. If you take the long view, he's probably right.

12 July 2004 - IRAN POLICE IN FASHION CRACKDOWN:⁴⁷ Iran's morality police have made several raids in Tehran, in an apparent crackdown on women who flout the strict Islamic dress code. Witnesses said dozens of young women were held in the raids on shopping centres and shops in the capital. Police also confiscated several items of clothing deemed to be too revealing.

After winning parliamentary elections in February, hardliners warned they would not tolerate what they described as social corruption... Iran's laws say all young women must wear the veil and a long coat that conceals their figures, or face fines or even imprisonment. Witnesses said scores of police - including female officers in chadors - raided the Milad commercial centres in western Tehran and took away dozens of young women in special minibuses.

Shops selling fashion clothing for women - especially bright figure-hugging coats - were also targeted. The police chief in Tehran recently warned that anybody caught involved in what he called social corruption would be punished. But many observers believe that the crackdown will be counter-productive in a country with a young, educated and increasingly rebellious population, our analyst adds.

⁴⁷ "Iran Police in Fashion Crackdown" *BBC News* (12 July 2004), http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3887311.stm (10 August 2004).