

## **Political Elites and democratization: A Case Study of Iran**

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### **Abstract**

This article attempts to explain democratization in Iran through an elite-oriented approach. According to this approach, the success and failure of democratization depends on the political elite strategy. My argument is that the fate of democratization is determined by elite strategies. If their strategy is considered suppressive, an authoritarian cycle will take place in the transition stage, but if the political elite strategy is considered non-suppressive, the index of democratic transition increases. In this study, the political elites are divided into two groups: conservatives and reformists. The analysis method is historical-narrative technique. The empirical findings indicate that whenever the hardliners inside the government are stronger than the opposition groups, they constrain the democratization by suppressing the opposition (moderates and reformists), which leads to a decrease in the index of democratic transition, as exemplified in the 13<sup>th</sup> parliamentary in 1941. Whenever the reformers are stronger than the conservatives and they are allowed to participate in elections, the index of democratic transition tends to increase, as shown in the 17<sup>th</sup> parliament under the rule of Muşaddiq and the 7<sup>th</sup> presidential elections after the 1979 Revolution. The data demonstrates that democratization is still fragile in Iran and it's the fate would be determined by the relative power of reformists and conservatives.

As a result, I argue that Iran's democratic transition is fragile and it's the fate is determined by the relative power of reformists and conservatives.

**Keywords:** Democratization; Authoritarianism; elite-oriented approach; Political Elite Strategy; Historical narrative analysis.

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### 1. Research problem

On 13 August 1906, Mozaffar-ad-din shah issued the Constitutional Royal Declaration (Farmān) and he signed the constitutional law in December 1906, which resulted in a transformation from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. It was the starting point for the first wave of democratization in Iran. The final supplementary fundamental law was signed by Muhammad-ʿalī-shāh, which contained two main principles as follows: The first was related to recognizing the individual rights such as freedom of press, freedom to publish newspapers and to organize associations, guaranteeing each citizen equality before the law, protection of life, property and honor and safeguards from arbitrary arrest. The second was accepting the separation of power in principle (executive, legislative and judiciary) and its concentration on the legislative branch at the expense of the executive (see Abrahamian, 1982:89). However, it did not last long, and the first wave of democratization was interrupted when the national assembly was dissolved and the laws that had been established between the years 1906 to 1908 were abolished by Muhammad-ʿalī-shāh (See: Abrahamian, 2008, 1982; Foran, 1993; Kātouzian, 2009, 1981). On December 11, 1925 Rezā-shāh emerged as a military dictator. Since December 11, 1925 to September 10, 1941, Iran once again experienced despotism. The second wave of democratization, called The Oil Nationalization Movement, which started in 1953, was interrupted by the military coup and the democratization process was reversed for a second time. Mohammad Rezā-shāh returned to absolutist rule for twenty-six years. The circle of the authoritarianism repeated again. This indicates that the democratization process in Iran has often resulted in the creation of a

newly shaped authoritarian structure rather than an institutionalized democratic regime.

My main argument is that the evidences show, for more than a century, Iranian society have constantly attempted to democratize authoritarian regime, but it usually fails in the transition stage. However, the democratization in Iran has not been interrupted and some of the minimum criteria of the transition process, such as the politics of holding of periodic elections, have been realized in Iran.

Additionally, it should be noted that Iran is currently stopped at the transition zone, but democratization is still fragile in the country.

On the basis of the above argument, the central research question is developed as follows: “Why the democratization is fragile in Iran”. I have tried to respond to this question as well as to explain democratization by elite-oriented approach which will be discussed later in this paper.

### 2. The democratization literature

The review of democratization literature indicates that there are a large number of theoretical approaches to explain democratization (see Huntington, 1993; Pother et al. 1997; Rustow, 1970; Gill, 2000; Putnam, 1993; Inglehart et al., 2005). Most of these studies can be classified as one of the two general theoretical approaches: the modernization approach and elite-oriented approach. According to the main purpose of this study, the present study focuses on the elite-oriented approach.

Many scholars have found the causal relation between the changing relationships of elites and democratization. Here, it should refer to some of them, particularly to Rustow and Huntington. These scholars have emphasized the agency of political

elites as an explanatory variable of democratization.

Rustow (1970) studies the dynamic process of democratization in five countries, namely Japan, Turkey, France, India and Sweden, and argues that such process contains the following four phases: Background condition (National unity)→

Preparatory → Decision → Habituation

In model of Rustow, the national unity indicates that “the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental reservations as to which political community they belong to. It means that the aim is to democratize the existing political regime rather than the creation of a new political system. The preparatory phase begins with a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle. In this phase individuals, groups, and classes challenge the nondemocratic rulers. The decision phase is a historical moment in which there is “a deliberate decision on behalf of political leaders to accept the existence of diversity in unity, to that end, to institutionalize some crucial aspect of democratic procedure. In this process, the leaders of groups and parties decide to compromise and adopt democratic rules with their own contribution. Finally, in the habituation phase, most significant leaders believe in the legitimacy of democracy. All major leaders of government and politically significant parties believe that democracy is the best form of government. Leaders of government, state institutions, and significant political parties and interest groups respect each other’s right to compete peacefully for power (see Sørensen, 2008).

Huntington (1993), emphasized the role of political elites in the process of democratization. He argues that the transition waves are complex political

processes in which a variety of groups attempt for and against democracy. According to Samuel P. Huntington (1993), there are three different types of transition: Transformation, replacement, and transplacement. He states that transformation is possible when the elites in power take the lead and decisive role in ending that regime and changing it into a democratic system. The authoritarian regime itself plays a major role in making transformation. The process of transformation starts with the emergence of reformers within the authoritarian regime who believe that making democratization is necessary. Huntington claims that transformation transition occurred in well-established military regimes, such as Spain, Brazil, Taiwan and Hungary. Replacement involves a very different process from transformations. In the process of replacement, reformers within a regime are weak or nonexistent, while the standpatters are the dominant groups in regime which are opposed to the regime change<sup>1</sup>. The replacement occurs when opposition takes the lead in bringing about democracy, and the authoritarian regime collapses. An authoritarian system is replaced when the government becomes weaker than the opposition. The replacement requires the opposition and can shift the balance of power in its favor. Some countries, such as Portugal, Philippine, Iran, Greece, Argentina and Romania, have experienced the replacement.

Lastly, in the transplacement, democratization is produced by the combined action of government and the

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<sup>1</sup>. Democratization consequently results from the opposition gaining strength and the government losing strength until the government collapses or is overthrown (Huntington, 1993: 142).

opposition. Transplacement is a type of transition in which the opposition and the reformers in the authoritarian regime adopt a strategy of negotiation. The major actors in transplacement are the democratic reformers in the authoritarian regime and the democratic moderates in the opposition group. The success of transplacement depends on the capability of the reformers to control both the hardliners in the authoritarian regime and the radicals in the opposition. Huntington states that the transplacement process occurred in some countries such as Poland, Korea, Uruguay, Salvador, and Nicaragua.

Theoretically, the agency of political elites is the core element in the elite - oriented approach. The success of democracy depends on the actions of political elites. At the center of this approach, there is the rational calculation of political actors instead of structures. The certain action (innovative action, elections and strategies) of political elites is a causal condition for democracy. Strategies of political leaders can be classified as follows: 1) Negotiation, 2) Democratic compromise, 3) Concession, 4) Elections, 5) Harshness (Suppression), and 6) Pact-making (Huntington, 1995; Pother, 2001; Gill, 2000). According to Huntington (1995), Negotiation and compromise among political elites are at the heart of the democratization process.

There are four major actors in the transition game<sup>2</sup>. These political actors can have different relationship<sup>3</sup>. The certain relationship between soft-liners and

moderates is more favorable to move towards democracy than others. The transition can be successful if they are controlled by a coalition of soft-liners and moderates, with radicals being kept out. This kind of coalition occurred in the event of 23th May, 1997 i.e., election of President Khātamī. Generally, the success of democratization, based on this theory, depends upon strategies of political actors and elites' choices; not on changing structures.

On the basis of this theory, I constructed a suitable apparatus to explain democratization in Iran. The logical structure of this theoretical model has been formulated as follows:

[(Political Elite Strategy  $\supset$  democratization )]  
My argument is that the fate of democratization in Iran would be determined by the relative power of reformists and conservatives. Therefore, I concentrate on the political elite strategies and their choices. Theoretically, there is a relation between democratization and the political elite strategies. If the political elites choose the suppressive strategy against the opposition, then the the cycle of return from democratization to authoritarianism takes place in the transition stage, but if the political elite strategy is considered non-suppressive, the index of democratic transition increases. The political elite strategy can be considered as a sufficient causal condition to make democratization.

### 3. Methodology

To test the hypothesis about democratization, the following operational indicators for the concepts of democratization and elite strategies are defined.

2 . The groups in the processes of transition are the standpatters, reformers within government and revolutionary extremists within opposition or radicals (Huntington,1995).

3. 1) Alliance of democratic reformists inside the government with social democratic forces against hardliners. 2) Alliance of social democratic forces against ruling or dominant forces. 3) Democratic compromise between leaders of social forces. 4) Harshness against the forces opposed to democracy.

**Democratization:** Theoretically, the process of democratization consists of three phases: the breakdown of authoritarian regime, democratic transition and democratic consolidation. The first stage entails the collapse of an authoritarian regime structures, while the second stage includes change and movement from authoritarian structures and processes to new structures and processes. The transition involves two distinct phases: Establishment and realization. The third stage occurs, when the new installed structures and processes have been institutionalized. In this research, I have emphasized the democratic transition, particularly the phase of realization. I use two dimensions to measure the concept of transition: electoral participation and competition. The rate of participation is obtained by calculating the proportion of participants in the elections to the population having the necessary qualification, multiplied by 100. The value of competition is calculated by subtracting the percentage of the votes of the elected person in presidential election and the arithmetic mean of the percentage of the votes of the elected persons in parliamentary election from 100.

In this paper, the index of democratic transition (ID) is constructed through computing arithmetic mean of two variables of electoral participation (EP) and electoral competition (EC).

**Political Elite Strategies:** In this study, the political elites have been categorized into two groups: conservatives (inside the government) and opposition forces (radicals, reformists and moderates). Political elite strategy is operationally defined by suppression and non-suppression. Suppression is evaluated by

harsh suppression and structural suppression. Harsh suppression is measured through the killing and imprisonment of opposition forces and the termination of opposition parties. By structural suppression, I mean putting limitation on political forces through ratifying restrictive laws or restrictive interpretation of the existing laws. Disqualifying candidates in elections and restricting political actors are considered as the indicators of structural suppression. I have studied non-suppressive strategy using the indicators of holding competitive elections and electoral coalition.

**Units of analysis:** This study contains two analysis units: The country (Iran) and historical periods

**Table 1:** The historical periods

First constitutional period	1906 to 1926
Second constitutional period	1926 to 1941
Third constitutional period	1941 to 1953
Four constitutional period	1953 to 1979
First Islamic republic period	1980 to 1996
Second Islamic republic period	1997 to 2013

The historical periods have been defined at the section of empirical analysis in this text.

**Data Collection:** In this research time series data was used and the relevant data for democratic transition was collected by referring to the Document Centre of Parliament library (Iran) and Ministry of Interior (Iran). This data, especially data of 2<sup>th</sup> parliament to 24<sup>th</sup> parliament (parliamentary elections before the 1979 revolution), is very useful to analyze the problem of democracy in Iran. The data of political elite strategies was gathered by

referring to the valid books which are cited at references list. The data were gathered by direct referring to primary documents and the primary data were used.

**Analysis method:** The research hypothesis has been evaluated by historical narrative technique. As for the historical narrative analysis, it can be said that this technique has a nature of genetic explanation by which narrates the sequences of events as a story from the starting point up to end point as an outcome. The narrative historical analysis focuses on the sequences of events and processes at the specific periods of time and also on the nature of the contextual and temporal events. In this study, I investigated the historical sequences of events which led to generation of a historical outcome, i.e., parliamentary/presidential election, by using narrative analysis technique.

#### 4. Empirical analysis

In this section, the research hypothesis is evaluated by empirical evidences and is empirically discussed through narrative analysis.

##### The first constitutional period

The first constitutional era started with the issuance of Constitutional Royal Declaration (Farman) and ended with the 5<sup>th</sup> parliament. In the first constitutional period, during which there was not the suppression, the average of democratic transition was equal to 35.41(see Saei, 2007). However, shortly after the first wave of democratization, the first reverse wave was started, when a military monarchy emerged in the country. The following events indicate the process of emergence of the military monarchy of Reza Shah:

C1 → C2 → C3 → E

*C1= the dissolution of first parliament; C2= the military Coup; C3= the extinction of the Qajar dynasty (1925); E= Emergence of the military monarchy*

Mohammad Ali Shah dissolved the first parliament (during May 1908 to September 1910). In February, 1921, the military Coup led by Reza Khan took place. In October 1923, Reza Khan was elected as the prime minister by the Fifth parliament (Kātūzīyān, 1981: 88). On October 30, 1925, the Fifth Parliament voted for the extinction of the Qajar dynasty and adopted the Constituent Assembly to decide the future of the country, during that time the country administration was on the interim government by Reza Khan. Finally, in December 1925 Constituent Assembly declared Reza Pahlavi monarchy, and Ahmad Shah, the last Qajar's King, was formally deposed (See: Kātūzīyān, 2006, 2009; Abrahamian, 2008; Foran, 1993). Rezā-shāh emerged with a military origin.

##### The second constitutional period

Since December 11, 1925 to September 10, 1941, Iran experienced an era of despotism again. In this period, the political actors of liberals and moderates were suppressed by conservatives. The elections of the sixth to thirteen parliaments was manipulated. The independent newspapers were closed. The activities of political parties were banned and the military bureaucracy was reinforced (see: Abrahamian, 2008; Foran, 1993; Kātūzīyān, 2009).

The political actors of the Rezā-shāh period can be categorized into three groups: 1) Liberals, 2) Mediates, 3) Conservatives or Loyalists. In this period, only conservatives were permitted to participate in the electoral competition. The

liberals and moderates were suppressed by conservatives during the reign of Rezā-Shāh. It should be noted that in the 6th parliamentary election, the suppressive strategy was weak. So, the democratic actors, liberals and mediates, could attend in the election (see Mudīr Sanechī, 1996; Saei, 2007; Nuwdharī, 2001). In the first constitutional period, the rate of electoral competition was 51.75, while in the second constitutional period, during which there was the suppression, the rate of electoral competition decreased to 17.28 (see Saei, 2007).

### The third constitutional period

After the fall of Reza Shah, On September 10, 1941, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi came to power. The parties emerged again and the Tūde Party of Iran, the Royalists and the Liberals such as Muṣaddeq could participate in the 14<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election. In the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections, during which there was not the suppression, the rate of democratic transition was 33.57%, 38.58% and 49.5% respectively, while in the 16<sup>th</sup> parliament, political actors were suppressed and the rate of democratic transition decreased to 28.69% ( see Parliament library (Iran), the document Centre).

In the third constitutional period, the following events occurred, which affected the activities of political actors in the process of democratization (see Turbatī Sanjābī, 1997; Abrahamian, 1982; Shajjee, 1993). The events can be narrated as follows:

C1 → C2 → C3 → C4 → C5 →  
C6 → C7 → C8 → C9 → E

C1=Assassination of King; C2=Enforcement of martial law; C3= Closed down the main newspapers; C4=Outlawed Tūde Party; C5= Creation of a Senate Assembly; C6= the right to dissolve the parliament by King; C7= Increasing military salaries; C8= Enforcing stringent press law against anyone criticizing the loyal family; C9= Emerging absolute monarchy; E= Holding the 16<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election.

On 4 February 1949, Muhammad Rezā-Shāh attended an annual ceremony to commemorate the founding of Tehran University and at the ceremony, Nāṣer Fakhr-ʿĀrāy shoots him that one of the bullets hit the king. After the failed assassination attempt against him in 1949, Shāh attempted to crush all opposition. He declared the martial law throughout the country, closed down all the main newspapers which were criticizing the court and outlawed Tūde Party, Shah convened a constituent assembly, elected under martial law, the assembly unanimously voted to create a Senate (Shajjee, 1993: 226). Half of the Senate's members were nominated by the monarch. Shah was also granted the right to dissolve the parliament whenever he wished, provided that he simultaneously decreed new election and convened the new parliament within three months( see Abrahamian, 1982). The Saʿīd's government promised to strengthen the armed forces, raise military salaries, the press law was made more stringent against anyone criticizing the government and members of the loyal family. The monarchy appeared to have almost as much as power in the era before August 1941 (see Abrahamian, 1982: 263-4). In such a situation, Manūcher ʿEqbāl became minister of interior to prepare the 17<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election. Muṣaddeq formed a committee to negotiate with Hazhīr, the

court minister, about the lack of free elections. The members of the committee were students, politicians and traders. This committee became the nucleus of Muşaddeq's National front. The court promised to end electoral irregularities. After the promise, National front was formed by a broad coalition and in its first declaration, National front put forward three demands: 1) free elections; 2) lifting of the martial law; 3) Freedom of the press. Subsequently, the following parties joined the National Front and formed a powerful coalition: Iran party, Toiler party (Hezb Zahmat-keshān), the society of Muslim Warriors (Jāme'e-ye Mujāhedīn-e 'Eslām) and the National Iran party (Abrahamian, 1982: 265-266). In the 16<sup>th</sup> election, the electoral struggle took place between the National Front, Royalists, local leaders and politicians of pro-British.

Generally, there is a relation between the political elite strategies and the rate of democratization, where political elite strategies are suppressive, the rate of democratic transition is low.

#### The fourth constitutional period

The fourth constitutional era started in 1953 and ended in 1979. It began with the termination of Muşaddeq and ended with the revolution of 1979. In the social context of the fourth constitutional period, the following events occurred which influenced the relations between political actors in the process of democratization.

$C1 \rightarrow C2 \rightarrow C3 \rightarrow C4 \rightarrow C5 \rightarrow C6 \rightarrow C7 \rightarrow C8 \rightarrow C9 \rightarrow C10 \rightarrow C11 \rightarrow E$

C1. Muşaddeq resigned for rejecting his legal right to determine the war minister by Muhammad Rezā-shāh; C2. Muşaddeq returns to power on Monday, July 20, 1952 due to people uprising; C3. National Consultative Assembly authorized the Prime Minister (Muşaddeq) that he can be approved the

laws that are good for the country<sup>4</sup>; C4. Muşaddeq fired the royalists from cabinet and accepted the responsibility of the war minister; C5. Senate Assembly was resolved by Muşaddeq; C6. Muşaddeq held a referendum on the dissolution of the Parliament of the seventeenth and dissolved it on Sunday, August 15th, 1953; C7. Muşaddeq's political measures led to escape Mohammad Reza Shah; C8. The successful coup of August 18, 1953 occurred against Muşaddeq; C9. Muşaddeq's National government was overthrown; C10. Dissolution of 17th parliament was announced by the King on 18 November, 1953; C11. The political parties, except for the 20th parliamentary election, were suppressed (see Abrahamian, 1982; Foran, 1993); E. Finally, the rise of Muhammad Rezā-Shāh as a military monarchy.

In such a situation, 18<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election took place, in which Muhammad Rezā-Shāh had suppressed his organized opposition and dissolved the following parties: 1) Independence Party; 2) Brothers party; 3) Aria party; 4) First National Front; 5) Iran party; 6) Union Party (Coalition of people party, Unity of Iran and Farzandān of Iran); 7) Toiler party(Hezb Zahmat-keshān); 8) The society of Muslim Warriors (Jāme'e-ye Mujāhedīn 'Eslām); 9) Nation Iran Party; 9) people's party of Iran; 10) The Society of Rahā'ī-ye Kār va 'Andīshe.

In this election, four parties attended in political sphere, but there was not any the competition among the various political groups. The parties were: 1) Devotees of Islam; 2) National Socialist Workers Party of Iran; 3) National Resistance Movement; 4) Pan Iran party. The 18<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election was held after the fall of Muşaddeq. It was like Rezā-shāh period (see Şāremī, 1999: 91).

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4 . Time of the law was six months and extended for one year.



In the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections, the relationship among political actors was influenced by the events which occurred in the social context of the 18th parliament. Therefore the previous authoritarian election here also is true. In the 20<sup>th</sup> parliament, the average of democratic transition is 19.45 percent that indicates a decrease of 10.14 in comparison with the average of democratic transition in the 18th parliament, which was 29.59 (see Saei, 2007). Why is it so? In the social context of the 20th parliamentary, the following events occurred, which influenced the result of the election:

$C1 \rightarrow C2 \rightarrow C3 \rightarrow 4 \rightarrow E$

C1=Economic crisis (1960 -1961); C2=Pressure of world system (America pressures for liberal reforms); C3= Domestic dissatisfaction (Domestic Pressure); C4=Liberalization=the 20th parliamentary election.

In the social context of the 20th parliamentary election occurred two main events: economic crisis coincided with pressure of America for reform. Those events led to increasing pressure on the King and opening of the political atmosphere. But the political elites of opposition could not take advantage from this political opportunity. Since, 28 August 1953 coup had weakened their organizations, they had been suppressed. So, there was not a power balance between hardliners and opposition forces. Economic grievances of the people in the Prime Minister 'Eqbāl make a significant decrease in participation. In this period, the electoral struggle took place between loyalist parties (Nationalists party and People party), National Front, Pan Iran and the figures such as 'Alī 'Amīnī, S. J. Behbahānī (Shajiee, 1993: 233) and the members of Toiler party (Hezb Zahmat-

keshān) under the leadership of Muzaffar Baqā'ī (Şāremī Shahāb, 1999: 92).

In the 21st parliamentary election, the rate of democratic transition from 19.45 in the 19<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election, increased to 35.14. The following parties exist in the period: 1) Second National Front; 2) The National Socialists Movement of Iran; 3) The Islamic Coalition Party (Jameiyat-e Mu'talefe Islami) ; 4) Tūde Party; 5) Pan Iran (official); 6) People's Party; 7) Nuvīn Iran Party; 8) Freedom Movement of Iran; 9) Islamic Nations Party. However, the political elites of opposition had not any activities in the election and only Nuvīn Iran Party (Modern Iran party) and people party competed together. Those parties were authoritarian and dependent on government. In this period, electoral participation has an increase of 38.28 in comparison with the previous period. The fact is inconsistent with the theory; it may be related to the arrangement of government parties. The Nuvīn Iran party as major and people party as minor party attended in the election. Perhaps the parties were successful in political mobilization.<sup>5</sup>

The 22th parliament inaugurated on Thursday, October 5, 1967. In the social context of the 22th parliament, the White Revolution (see Kātūzīyān, 1981:225) occurred which influenced the process of the 22th parliamentary election. (Kātūzīyān, 1981: 225). In response to this event, the social forces (religious and political) protested against the Shah and the massacre of people happened on Wednesday, June 5, 1963. This case as a starting point led to end the legal activities of political groups.

Basically, political stability can be realized by flexibility and tolerance of

11 . The parties play the important role on political mobilizing of people in the democratic countries.

elites for political participation of different groups or by repression. The King chose the procedure of repression and began to suppress his oppositions as his father had done between 1924 and 1941. Mehdi Bāzargān, Ṭāleqānī, Sahābī and others from the Freedom Movement, and Khalīl Malekī, Shāyeqān and others from socialist League and Frūhar as a leader of the Iran National Party and Kāẓem Sāmī from People Party of Iran had been tried and imprisoned (Kātūzīyān, 1981: 238-9). In this social context, the 22<sup>nd</sup> parliamentary election was held in which the main parties and organized opposition had been suppressed by Muhammad Rezā-shāh state. In this period, loyalist parties, the Modern Iran party, People Party and Pan Iran party were active in the election.

The 23<sup>th</sup> parliament had 268 representatives from whom 221 persons were the members of Nuvīn Iran party and 37 persons were from the people party (Şāremī, 1999: 97). The 24<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election was under the control of Resurrection Party, which was led by the King. In this election, Resurrection Party entered the political competition with 900 candidates. Government initiated new policies for acceleration of voting and compulsory registration in the party. The King said all Iranians should either join the Party, or become silent, or get a passport to leave Iran, because the country does not need traitors (See Abrahamian, 1982). Therefore, the prerequisites of a democratic election had been manipulated in the 24<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election.

As a result, the cycle of despotism started in 1953 for a second time and Ended in 1979.

[After the 1981, the suppression has structurally been applied by Council of Guardians of the constitution. The evidence

### The First Islamic Republic

The First Islamic Republic started with collapse of Pahlavi dynasty, on 11 February 1979 and ended with 5<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election on March 8, 1996. The first parliamentary election and the first presidential election were the freest elections. The three main political groups including national like the National Front and the Freedom Movement, the Marxists such as the Fadā'ī guerrillas and the Mujāhedīn-e Khalq (Holy-Warriors of the people), and religious groups like the Islamic Republic Party, the Organization of the Holy-Warriors of the Islamic Revolution and the Islamic Coalition Party (Hey'at-hā-ye Mu'talefe-ye 'Eslāmī), were allowed to participate in the process of democratization. In 1981, the opposition groups were violently suppressed and the rate of democratic transition changed as follows:

**Table2.** Empirical data of democratic transition

Elections	Years	Electoral Competition	Democratic Transition
1 <sup>st</sup> presidential election	1980	24.02	45.94
2 <sup>nd</sup> presidential election	1981	12.38	38.66
3 <sup>th</sup> presidential election	1981	5.59	40.33
4 <sup>th</sup> presidential election	1985	14.28	34.59
5 <sup>th</sup> presidential election	1989	5.48	30.03
6 <sup>th</sup> presidential election	1993	37.09	43.87

of structural suppression in the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> parliament is given in the following table

Table3. Empirical data of Structural suppression

	2 <sup>nd</sup> parliament		3 <sup>rd</sup> parliament		4 <sup>th</sup> parliament		5 <sup>th</sup> parliament	
The number of candidates	1592		1999		3233		5366	
The number of disqualified candid	266	16.7	333	16.6	827	25.6	1858	34.62

Source: Ministry of Interior (Iran), the Official document Centre ; <http://www.moi.ir>

During the 2<sup>nd</sup> till the 5<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections, the Islamic Left and Right Groups were active in the electoral competitions. In the 4<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election, 25.6% candidates were rejected, those who their Islamic commitment was disqualified by Council of Guardians of the constitution. In the 5<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections, 34.62 candidates were rejected. During the 3<sup>rd</sup> till the 6<sup>th</sup> presidential elections, all candidates were the Islamic Right Groups and the rate of competition decreased to 5.48% in the 5<sup>th</sup> presidential elections (see Table 2). Meanwhile, the rate of competition increased in the 6<sup>th</sup> presidential election. The author supposes that a possible cause of explaining the increase of competition in the 6<sup>th</sup> presidential election is the critical comments of Ahmad Tavakkul<sup>6</sup> regarding the economic politics of the government at the time.

### The second Islamic republic period

The second Islamic republic period started with elected President Khatami and continued up until today in Iran. In 1997, the Fourth wave of democratization, called the reform movement (May 23, 1997), occurred in the presidential election of 1997. In this election, Mohammad

Khatami, as a moderate and reformist candidate, defeated his conservative opponent, Ali Akbar Nategh-Noori. In the second Islamic republic period, the Political actors are the reformists and conservatives<sup>7</sup>. On 18 February 2000, the 6<sup>th</sup> parliament election was held. In this election, 571 out of 6853 candidates were disqualified, while in the 5<sup>th</sup> parliament, there were 1858 disqualified candidates. In this period, the reformist candidates compete with conservative candidates.

In the 7<sup>th</sup>, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary elections, most reformist candidates were disqualified by the Council of Guardian of the Constitution, while the conservatives were permitted to attend in the elections. In this period, the electoral restrictions were imposed and structural suppression was increased. In 9<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election, 58.98 out of 1960 candidates were disqualified, while in the 6<sup>th</sup> parliament election, there were .08 disqualified

7. The most important groups in the reformist front are Islamic Iran Participation Party, Organization of the Holy-Warriors of the Islamic Revolution, Islamic labour Party and Association of Militant Clerics. The most important groups of conservatives consist of Society of Militant Clergy (Ruhaniyat-e Mobarez), Islamic Coalition party (Heyat-ha-ye Motalefeh-ye Eslami), Islamic Society of Engineers, and Society of Iran's Physicians .

6 . Ahmad Tavakkulī was one of the conservative candidates.

candidates (see the Official Documents Centre of Iranian Ministry of Interior).

In the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> presidential elections, main competition took place between the reformists and conservatives. The candidates of the Reformist Parties were 'Akbar Hāshemī Rafsanjānī, Mehdī Karrūbī, Mustafā Mu'īn in the 9<sup>th</sup> presidential election, Mehdī Karrūbī, Mīr-Huseyn Mūsavī in the 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election and Hasan Rūhānī in the 11<sup>th</sup> presidential election.

The electoral restrictions and structural suppression show that the conservatives have tried to produce a new authoritarian cycle. However, Iranian society has resisted against authoritarianism. The protests against the results of the 10<sup>th</sup> presidential election and the citizens' participation in the 11<sup>th</sup> presidential election to elect president Rūhānī are the implications of the resistant actions against the cycle of authoritarianism. Additionally, it should be noted that the rate of democratic transition was 46.17 in the first Islamic republic period, while in the second Islamic republic period, it increased to 56.92.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, the findings show that if the hardliners inside the government are stronger than the opposition groups, they constrain the process of democratization by suppressing the moderates and reformists. According to the empirical data, whenever the parties and associations are active and the reformists are stronger than conservatives, the society is more likely to proceed to democratization, as exemplified in the 17<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election and 6<sup>th</sup> parliamentary election after the 1979 revolution, the rate of democratic transition

was 43.89 and 64.63 respectively (see saei, 2007).

My argument is that the solution is to strengthen civil society in Iran, which provides a channel for people's participation and the fulfillment of democratic values in the political life. Essentially, the social foundation of democracy lays in a powerful civil society. In this approach, democratic state is based on democratic society. If the civil society is weak, the state becomes stronger and the government may be able to influence the private and public sphere without the participation of the civil society. The civil society in Iran is weak, while the State is powerful. However, there is a suitable structural condition for a stabilization of democracy. For instance, in Iran, the rate of literacy is 84.7% (Statistical Year Books, 2011), and the number of intellectuals i.e., writers, academicians, journalists, lawyers and teachers, university graduates, and middle class has increased significantly in recent years (see Statistical Year Book, 2011; 2013). The intellectuals and the middle class play an important role in the stabilization of democracy. They can usually obtain or consolidate their political rights by organizing civic institutions and in turn challenge the authoritarian regimes.

As for the practical implications of this research, it should be noted that among three types of transition processes to democracy, i.e., transformation, replacement, and transplacement, perhaps the most suitable transition for Iran would be transformation. Countries which have been democratized during the third wave of democratization can probably confirm this proposition. Moreover, transformation is preferable for Iran, since replacement is based on a situation in which conservatives

are dominant in comparison to reformists and the oppositions of the regime are more powerful than the government. Here, the activists are the opposition members. Today, oppositions are not more powerful than the government in Iran. Also, violence is the strategy of replacement. In such a replacement, neo-authoritarianism could be reproduced. Whereas the transplacement could take place in a situation in which there is a power equality and balance between governmental elites and opposition (civil society activists).<sup>8</sup> In such condition, both sides face crises and prefer compromise and negotiation. Here, the activists are governmental elites and their opposition; however, is not the case in Iran. The necessary condition for transformation is the rise of reformists. In this transition, the main actors are governmental reformists. The governmental reformists have been raised in Iran. Hence, in the Iranian case, it seems that the most suitable transition would be transformation, in which the transition is based on election, negotiation and democratic compromise.

Finally, it must be considered that scientific research is based on trial and error. Hopefully, other scholars will continue researching on democratization in Iran in the light of the critics which have been raised in the present paper.

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