

Iran's Post 2009 Presidential Election Media Landscape:

Government Censorship to Self-Censorship

and the Way Forward

By

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For my people

**And for Madar-Joon,
Babashi, Mamzi,
Kooler, Koon-e-Bache,
Jigima, Roo-Mokh, and Agha Pirouz**

There are, of course, those who do not want us to speak [...] Because while the truncheon may be used in lieu of conversation, words will always retain their power. Words offer the means to meaning, and, for those who will listen, the enunciation of truth. And the truth is, there is something terribly wrong with this country.

V in "V for Vendetta"

Abstract

Following Iran's 10th Presidential election in June 2009 that gave Mahmoud Ahmadinejad a second term in office, the country fell into chaos and violence. The regime's forces clashed with supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi who were protesting the results. The regime's crackdown extended to the media. Internet and mobile phone services (voice and text) were disrupted. Newspapers were closed, domestic journalists were detained and foreign journalists were expelled. All remaining independent journalists were subjected to heavy censorship, and later resorted to self-censorship to avoid the fate of others. This thesis will focus on how journalists and their work were affected, and asks what might be done to facilitate the free flow of information. To explore the change in media freedom in post-election Iran, and the censorship and self-censorship that overshadowed the independent press, content analysis was conducted on *Farheekhtegan* and *Iran*, two newspapers from opposite ends of the political spectrum. This was supplemented by my personal account as a journalist working with foreign media during the election and its aftermath, as well as the accounts of three other Iranian journalists. The thesis will offer new approaches to maintaining media freedom, such as combining citizen journalism, satellite radio, and a "briefcase Internet" to circumvent regime controls. It concludes that the state is ultimately fighting a losing battle, because while regimes might employ violence instead of conversation, bullets can only silence individuals; their ideas remain bulletproof.

Call out to my Green Light People* (Acknowledgments)

This is a call out to all my Green Light People. In this world of red lights and stop signs, we must cherish all those who cast green lights upon our paths. We must cherish those who share the burden of our futures and illuminate the value of our past. This is a thank you to all those who spoke to the spark in my eyes and held me accountable.

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This thesis is also dedicated to the soul of my Grandmother, Naneh-Khadijeh (Madarjoon) who passed away while I was working on this project. I shall forever regret not having seen her for one last time.

*The beginning section of this note is based on a poem by my very talented friend Brad Morden called "Green Light People" who graciously allowed me to use it and I am thankful to him.

Table of Contents

Title Page i

Abstract iv

Call out to my Green Light People* (Acknowledgments) v

Table of Contents vii

List of Tables x

List of Illustrations xi

I. Introduction 1

II. Background on Iran’s Political System 7

 Regime-Government Symbiosis in Iran 7

 The Executive 8

 The Legislative 9

 The Judiciary 10

 Council of the Guardians of the Constitution 10

 Supreme Cultural Revolution Council 13

 Supreme National Security Council 13

 Basij 14

III. Background on Iranian Media Law 15

Electronic Media.....	15
New Media	16
Print Media.....	17
IV. Events of 2009.....	22
Candidates.....	22
Ahmadinejad	22
Mousavi	24
Karoubi	27
Rezaei	29
Pre-election	30
Election Day.....	31
Post-election.....	34
Monday, 15 June, 2009	38
Monday, 14 February, 2011	44
V. Theory.....	55
Iran and the authoritarian theory	56
VI. Methodology	62
Content Analysis.....	62
The Newspapers	63

The Dates.....	63
Measurement and Coding.....	65
Location Coefficient.....	68
Interviews.....	70
VII. Analysis.....	71
2009.....	76
2011.....	90
VIII. Conclusion.....	100
References.....	108

List of Tables

Table 1 - Official results of 2009 Presidential elections	34
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List of Illustrations

Figure 1 - A complex political system	8
Figure 2 – The President with me after an exclusive interview in September 2008.....	22
Figure 3 – Mousvi at a press conference during the campaign.....	24
Figure 4 – With Karoubi after a secretly-conducted exclusive interview in November 2009	27
Figure 5 – With Rezaei after a cordial off-the-record meeting in January 2007	29
Figure 6 - Ahmadinejad at 14 June press conference.....	37
Figure 7 - Basij bikers in front of University of Tehran	38
Figure 8 – Copy of the letter from Mousavi and Karoubi to the Interior Minister asking for permit for demonstration on 14 February, 2011.....	46
Figure 9 – Picture purportedly taken by Mousavi himself upon leaving his house to attend 14 February demonstration. The picture shows a police van completely blocking the alley.	47
Figure 10 – The black iron gate that blocks off the alley leading to Mousavi's house.....	48
Figure 11 – Directive from Ministry of Guidance to all media to refrain from publishing anything related to Mousavi, Karoubi and Khatami.....	50
Figure 12 – A member of Basij writing profanities on the walls of Karoubi's residence..	53
Figure 13 – Etemad Melli newspaper 14-06-2009	72
Figure 14 – Etemad Melli newspaper 15-06-2009	73

Figure 15 – Official fax from Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to foreign media banning them from work.....	74
Figure 16 – Chart of surface area occupied by each category in <i>Iran</i> (2009 period)	80
Figure 17 - Farheekhtegan 24-06-2009	82
Figure 18 – Chart of surface area occupied by each category in Farheekhtegan (2009 period).....	87
Figure 19 - Directive to broadcast monitors to avoid "Green" insignia or mentions.....	93
Figure 20 – Chart of surface area occupied by each category in <i>Iran</i> (2011 period)	96
Figure 21 – Chart of surface area occupied by each category in Farheekhtegan (2011 period).....	96
Figure 22 - <i>Iran</i> newspaper of 22-11-2011	98

I. Introduction

In June 2009 the Iranian nation flocked to the polls in the country's 10th Presidential election since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Both domestic and foreign media knew it would be an important event. From the foreign media perspective, with no real means of public opinion polling, this was the first chance to see what the Iranian nation thought of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the incumbent president who had captured the world's attention with his aggressive policies. From the domestic media perspective the election was a major event because the "Reformists" once again seemed poised to take over the Executive branch of the regime or at least pose a formidable challenge to the ruling conservatives.

Although four candidates were running in the election, the two main candidates were Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mir Hossein Mousavi. Mousavi had served as Prime Minister while Ayatollah Rohollah Khomeini was still the leader and the current leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei was the then president. The regime's usual vetting system, meaning the 12-member Council of Constitutional Guardians or simply the Guardian Council, could not eliminate Mousavi from the race as they had done with other reformist candidates in all the previous elections since 1997. His track record was so solid and so deeply rooted in the Revolution that any damage to his image would have equalled tainting the Revolution itself. Hence for a brief period it seemed that it was truly left to the people and their votes to decide the fate of the country.

Faced with great international pressure brought on by Ahmadinejad's "active" foreign and nuclear policy, the regime decided to use the excitement created by the presence of a worthy "Reformist" opponent. Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized in his various speeches before the elections that the main concern for the Islamic System or "Nezam," as it is known in the Iranian political jargon, was to ensure high voter turnout, as this would "prove" the popularity of the System (Khamenei). Great freedoms were extended to the public and the media. The regime went as far as staging the first-ever televised debates between candidates and allowing street debates and nightly parades and carnivals.

The extended freedoms, however, were short-lived. The first signs of the regime retracting those freedoms came the night before the elections when all of a sudden Short Message Service (SMS) on mobile telephones was cut off. This was a major setback for the Reformists. Since control of the electronic media is a monopoly of the state, the Reformists had relied extensively on mobile phones (SMS) and the Internet as their preferred means of communication during the election campaign and were now paralyzed (Christensen 2010, 75).

The votes were tallied overnight and shortly after numbers started coming out it was clear that something was amiss (Ansari 2009, 10-11). The incumbent president Ahmadinejad was unofficially declared the winner on semi-official news agencies even before the break of dawn (Mousavi 2009). By midday of the next day after the polls and as journalists including myself emerged from the basement of the Interior Ministry where the election HQ was located, the city had taken on the look of a war zone. Fires

were burning on the streets and anti-riot police was fighting with stone-throwing youth who were clearly infuriated by the results which everyone knew were fraudulent (Ansari 2009, 10-11).

The retraction of freedoms continued immediately after the elections. Special agents from the judiciary and security apparatus were sent out to every single printing house to oversee the content that was to be printed in newspapers there. Papers came out with blank patches of white where controversial articles would have been as per the example of *Etemad Melli* daily of 14 and 15 June 2009 (Figures 13 and 14). Some 25 journalists were arrested in the first week following the election and the number grew over the next few months reaching a peak of 52 (Committee to Protect Journalists 2010, 212-216) and winning Iran the number one spot on the list of countries with most journalists in jail. Today this number stands at 42 (Committee to Protect Journalists). As indicated in the fax from Ministry of Guidance (Figure 15), foreign journalists were quickly banned from working, some were expelled while others were even arrested and held in solitary confinement.

Aside from Mousavi's official newspaper *Kalame Sabz* which stopped printing voluntarily, more than half a dozen papers were closed in the span of only three months. The day after the elections the Iranian regime also slowed the Internet to a crawl. The slow Internet resulted in "request timeout" errors and made the Internet unusable (Sullivan 2011).

While the regime started with a heavy-handed crackdown on traditional media, there was no need to sustain the tactic because soon the handful of

reformist/independent media that had survived retreated and began to implement self-censorship to save themselves. The very limited outlets that still remained for the "other view," such as *Farheekhtegan* went as far as hiring someone specifically tasked with in-house censoring. Personal accounts of photographers and journalists also indicate that they began practicing self-censorship.

Considering this background and the media environment following Iran's 2009 presidential elections this thesis will try to determine how journalists and their work were affected and what could possibly be done to facilitate free flow of information.

In order to answer the main research question, I will address the following subsidiary questions:

1. How does the Iranian political system work?
2. How is the media regulated?
3. What happened in 2009?
4. How did the media environment change as the result of the political developments?
5. How did the media cope with the situation?
6. What role could new media and the Internet play?
7. What are the challenges faced by the new media and what are some of the ways to address those issues?

There were limitations in the way of research for this project. There is a lack of archival material from both the state broadcaster and newspapers in Iran. Online material and archives have also been subject to cyber-attacks, specifically aimed at wiping the memory and narrative of how the events unfolded after the election as told by independent sources. There is literally no sign of the campaign sites that were set up by the Reformists prior to the election, which hosted material from both the campaign period and post-election statements and articles.

There are also great limitations in access to individuals in Iran. Many of the individuals to whom I had originally planned to speak are not accessible from outside the country.

Finally, Iran's freedom of information law is mostly designed to LIMIT access to information rather than facilitate open access. Hence many of the government policies are unobtainable through normal channels. This greatly hinders the assessment of regime's media policy following the 2009 elections.

As will be further explained in the "Methodology" section, I tried to determine change in media freedom and the censorship and self-censorship that overshadowed the independent press through content analysis and comparison of two newspapers, one from each end of the political spectrum. The content analysis will also shed some light on the media policy of the regime as reflected in the pro-regime media. I will supplement the content analysis with my own accounts as well as the accounts of three other Iranian journalists.

My analysis shows that under very specific circumstances silence can be louder than any cry. However, generally speaking traditional media currently cannot fulfill their responsibilities toward society and new media are unable to operate. Who and what has to shoulder such responsibilities and support the needs of Iran's social movement? What is the way to the future? These questions I will address in the conclusion of this thesis.

II. Background on Iran's Political System

In this section I will briefly describe the Iranian political system and its various organs, as required for purposes of this thesis.

Regime-Government Symbiosis in Iran

The political structure of Iran is significantly different than in most countries of the world. The first distinction that must be noted is the regime or the system is totally different than the government. In Iran the system or Nezam - as it is referred to in local political jargon – is an all-encompassing body that holds within its belly the three powers which make up the ruling structure. The branches of the “Nezam” include the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. The Executive power which is more commonly known as the “government” is headed by the President while the system in its entirety is headed by the Supreme Leader, who has an unlimited tenure and according to article 110 of Iran's constitution. One of his responsibilities is “resolving differences and regulating relations between the three powers.”

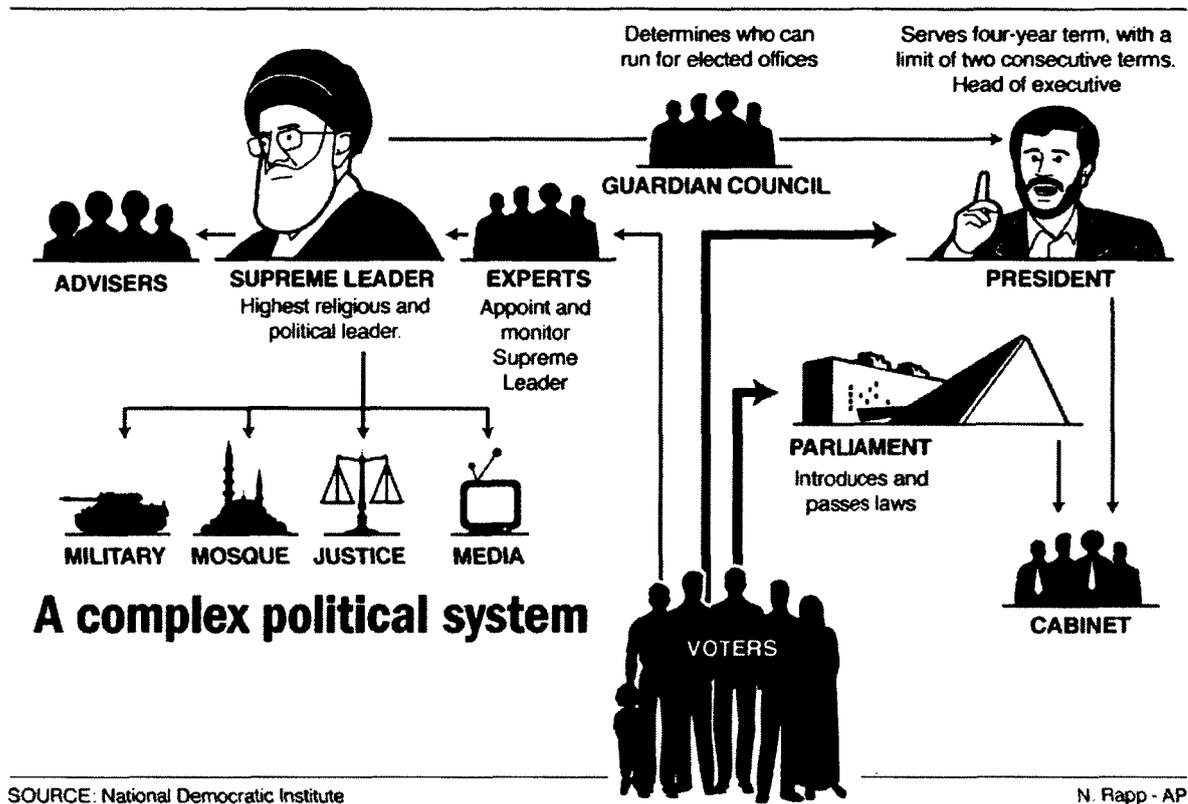


Figure 1 - A complex political system
 (Source: http://nicolasrapp.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/06/iran_power_system.gif)

The Executive

One of the three powers is the Executive which is headed by the President. He is elected through direct vote by the people for a four-year term and can serve only two consecutive terms in the office. All presidential candidates must be vetted before they can stand for election. The vetting process is carried out by the Council of the Guardians of the Constitution or Guardian Council which will be described briefly later. Article 115 of the Iranian constitution lays out the criteria for the presidential candidates. It states:

The President must be elected from among religious and political personalities possessing the following qualifications: Iranian origin; Iranian nationality; administrative capacity and resourcefulness; a good past-

record; trustworthiness and piety; convinced belief in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religious sect of the country.

The Legislative

The second of the three is the Islamic Consultative Assembly or the equivalent of Western parliaments and has the power to make laws. It is referred to as Majlis e Shoraie Islamy meaning “The Islamic Consultative Assembly” or Majlis for short in local political jargon. Majlis is a body of 290 elected individuals from various regions of the country. The candidates running for the parliamentary elections must also be vetted by the Guardian Council. I will explain the Guardian Council’s vetting process in greater detail later in this section. The list of general criteria for the candidates has been laid out by article 28 of the *Islamic Consultative Assembly Election Law*, as follows:

The candidates must possess the following criteria at the time of registration:

- 1 – Believe in and exhibit adherence to Islam and the holy system of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- 2 – Be a citizen of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- 3 – Have loyalty to the constitution and the advanced [sic] principle of “all-encompassing jurisprudential leadership”
- 4 – Have a Master’s degree or equivalent
- 5 – Not be infamous in their respective constituency
- 6 – Be physically healthy limited to ability to see, hear and speak
- 7 – Be between the age of 30 and 75

Article 29 lists the positions that candidates must resign from six months in advance of registration. Article 30 lays out a list of 10 groups of people who are permanently prohibited from running in the elections. The list includes convicted

criminals and individuals who had held positions in the Shah's regime or members of banned parties and groups as well as those who have been convicted of conspiring against the Islamic system (Majlis Election Law 2001).

The Judiciary

The third and last of the powers is the Judiciary which is headed by a cleric who is a direct appointee of the Supreme Leader. The judiciary, as the name implies, runs the legal system in Iran. The general responsibilities of the judicial power are laid out in article 156 of the constitution. The judiciary is mandated by the constitution, through two specialized affiliate institutions called the "Administrative Justice Court" and the "National General Inspection Organization," with the oversight of the conduct of the government and the administrative staff of the country and has to attend to grievances and complaints of the public in that respect. Articles 173 and 174 of the constitution are related to this. The judiciary is also responsible for the administration of specialized courts for political and media related offenses according to article 168.

Council of the Guardians of the Constitution

The Council of the Guardians of the Constitution or the Guardian Council for short is a 12-member council consisting of six clerics and six jurists. The clerics are direct appointees of the Supreme Leader and the jurists are elected by the MPs from among a list of jurists nominated by the head of the judiciary. This in effect makes the entire 12-member council direct or indirect appointees of the Supreme Leader. The council is

mandated by the constitution to make sure that all law passed by the parliament conforms to the Sharia and the constitution.

The Guardian Council is also charged with vetting candidates who wish to run in various elections, such as parliamentary, presidential and the *Assembly of Experts*¹. To carry out this duty, the council sets up “monitoring delegations” in times of election which act as the local arms of the council. While the delegations are more of a seasonal establishment, there is another organ called the “monitoring offices” which is a permanent edifice located in every electoral region. The exact responsibilities of these “offices” are not known. However, from among the published interviews one can determine that intelligence gathering and training of monitoring personnel is among those responsibilities. According to one such interview which appeared in the *Nazer Amin*, a monthly magazine published by the council itself, the Guardian Council’s deputy for Operational and Elections Affairs stated that prior to the elections of the sixth round of Majlis all the intelligence needs of the monitoring committees were met by the Ministry of Interior and other government organizations and affiliate institutions. There was full cooperation between the Guardian Council and the respective organs and hence there was no need for the council to attempt intelligence gathering independently through its monitoring offices. However, concurrent with the sixth round

¹ The Assembly of Experts also known as “Assembly of Experts of the Leadership of Iran,” is a deliberative body of 86 prominent Islamic scholars that is charged with electing and removing the Supreme Leader of Iran and supervising his activities. Members of the assembly are elected from a list of candidates by direct vote from the populous to eight-year terms.

of the Majlis and due to political tensions this cooperation was reduced and the council members felt the new conditions did not allow for the proper implementation of monitoring duties. Hence the establishment of monitoring offices, as a strong structure that could pave the way for proper monitoring, was approved at a meeting of the Guardian Council (Nazer Amin 2003, 6).

A key point of contention over the past years has been the intuitive nature of some of the candidate disqualifications. This point has been heavily criticized by one of the reformist candidates, Mehdi Karoubi (McDowall). The Guardian Council through an interpretation of the constitution that later found its way into the law books, can disqualify people based solely on “intuition.” If they simply FEEL that a candidate is not a righteous person they can eliminate the person from the race. The interpretation of righteousness is also left to the council and its local monitoring delegations. The council also refrains from stating reasons for eliminating people from the race and only suffices at a one line reply stating “qualification not determined.” Critics argue that the Guardian Council must fully state the reason behind the disqualifications and according to their vetting responsibilities can only determine “disqualification” since everyone is presumably qualified unless otherwise proven. The term “qualification not determined” means that the Council is going about this process with a presumption of disqualification and candidates can only enter the race if proven qualified.

Supreme Cultural Revolution Council

This council was originally set up after the 1979 Islamic Revolution as an office for the Cultural Revolution. The purpose of the office at that time was to purge the universities and other cultural institutions of “Western and Eastern influences.” In 1981 the current leader, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, was appointed as the head of the office. In 1984 and based on an order from the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Seyed Rohollah Khomeini, the office became a “Supreme Council” and its mandate was extended indefinitely. The council has the final say in all cultural matters which extends to the activities of the media (Hamshahri Online).

Supreme National Security Council

The council was formed after the revised version of the constitution came into effect in 1989. The responsibilities of the council as described by the constitution under article 176 include:

1. Drawing up defence and national security policies of the country within the framework of general policies as determined by the Leader;
2. Coordination of activities in areas relating to politics, intelligence, society, culture and economy as pertinent to the general defence and security policies; and
3. Utilization of material and intellectual resources of the country in repelling domestic and foreign threats.

As described above, the Iranian political system is a complex structure of government in which all power flows from the Supreme Leader. Underneath this

umbrella are specific rules and institutions that govern the activities of the media which will be explained in the next chapter.

Basij

In addition to all the political elements, the Basij is a key force that had an important role in the Iran of post-2009 presidential elections. The Basij was initially set up as a volunteer resistance force by the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, to fight in the Iraq-Iran war. The force has changed dramatically since the cessation of hostilities between Iraq and Iran. It was once the source of many courageous sacrifices in the defence of country. It is now composed mostly of young boys and girls who have not even seen the war. Basij members receive preferential treatment in every aspect of their lives from the regime. The Basij resembles an army of child soldiers since recruitment begins in junior high school. After military training, individuals go through a vigorous and continuous ideological training which instils in them a strong sense of loyalty to the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei and the Islamic Revolution. Basij these days is used as law enforcement auxiliary. They receive their marching orders from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards. The Basij is an omnipresent force with a bastion in every school, university and private or government body. It is infamous for its violence against the general public and usually acts above and beyond the law. It is mostly employed where the official uniformed forces are limited by the rules of engagement.

III. Background on Iranian Media Law

Electronic Media

Based on articles 44 and 175 of Iran's constitution, Iran's electronic media (radio and television) are controlled by the state. The director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) - which is the organization in charge of the two media - is a direct appointee of the Supreme Leader.

In reviewing the history of the regulation and laws pertaining to the electronic media, a great change took place following the revision of the constitution in 1989. According to article 175 of the original Islamic Republic Constitution which came into effect on November 15, 1979 "the radio and television [was] operated under the auspices of the three powers." IRIB also has Articles of Association which constituted how it was to operate. The Director was appointed by a supervisory council made up of representatives of the three powers.

On 14 May, 1989 and shortly before succumbing to cancer, Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder and then Supreme Leader of Iran, wrote a letter to President Khamenei asking him, along with a 25-member council, to revise the constitution. The late Ayatollah mentioned eight points which he felt needed revisiting. One of the eight points the Ayatollah mentions is the "centralization of the management of the radio and television." (Imam Khomeini 1990) The Revision Council held 41 sessions and the 1137-page transcript of its deliberations have been compiled by the Majlis library into a three-volume book. The transcript of the 15th and 20th sessions of the council which discussed

the issue of IRIB, suggests that the council wanted the IRIB to be independent from the three powers so that none of them could exert their will on the content of the media (Hoghoogh). The final decision as reflected in the current constitution allows for supervision by a six-member board comprised of two representatives from each power. The responsibilities of the board, however, are not mentioned in the constitution and left to the lawmakers to determine. Further detailed examination reveals that according to a decision by the Expediency Council on October 3, 1991 and not through the Majlis, the board has no say in the content of the productions, and in this manner the people of Iran lost all control over the material and content in their national media.

The IRIB was made into an impenetrable organization in which even if, by some act of God, a government comes to power with reformist ideologies such as that of Seyed Mohammad Khatami back in 1997, it would not have any ability to influence the content of the media.

Furthermore, according to article 7 of IRIB's Articles of Association the sole right to set up and operate broadcast stations lies in the hands of the organization. This effectively prohibits the establishment of any private or independent radio or television networks (IRIB).

New Media

Internet is also solidly in the hands of the regime, controlled by the government. A decision by the cabinet and ratified by the Guardian Council on 17 November, 2008 established the Telecommunication Infrastructure Company which has the monopoly on

all communication infrastructures inside the country as well as all communication with the outside world (Telecom Infrastructure Company).

As became obvious during the 2009 protests, this gives the organization the capability to reduce Internet speed to a crawl - a primary reason for creating the Telecom Infrastructure Company in the first place. The Iranian regime has now even gone further and on 4 May, 2011 Iran's Minister of Telecommunication and Information Technology, Reza Taghipour, announced that the first phase of the national Internet would become operational this year which will effectively cut off Iran from the World Wide Web (Fars News Agency).

In the meantime, the commander of the Iranian police announced on 14 April, 2011, the start of the work of "Cyber Police." According to the commander, fighting "moral, social and economic crimes and even terrorism in the virtual space" are among the responsibilities of this unit (PeykIran 2011).

Print Media

While at first glance the print media might seem to have escaped direct ownership by the government, a deeper look reveals that the regime has put in place measures to control it as well.

Iran is among the few countries in the world where the press is still required to be licensed rather than registered in order to publish.

Generally a licence is a permission from authorities to carry out a specific activity. The right to issue a licence inherently implies the right to deny a licence as well.

Registration on the other hand means that no one can be denied from carrying out their activities. There is only the duty to register, and to keep within relevant legislation.

Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's principal responsibilities state that it is in charge of "[i]ssuing the necessary permit for establishing or dissolving of cultural, press, news, arts, cinema, audio-visual centers or organizations and complexes as well as publication and advertising organizations in the country and monitoring of their activities." (Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance 2010, Principle Responsibilities)

Following the election of the reformist-minded Seyed Mohammad Khatami to the Presidency in 1997, the reformist camp took control of the ministry charged with issuing such licences and began issuing licenses in large numbers. This meant that the media environment was soon flooded by independent newspapers which were expressing views that were critical of the regime.

According to the laws of the time, closing down papers was also a lengthy process and no matter how quickly the judiciary wrapped up cases to close newspapers, it remained far behind the new ones that were emerging.

The regime then realized that it needed a more stringent Press Law that would take the issuing of licences out of the hands of an elected body and would expedite the closure or at least suspension of the activities of the press. The 5th Parliament of Iran which was controlled by the conservatives started amending the Press Law to meet such a need.

While Iran's conservative 5th parliament, in its last days, was still busy making corrections to the Press Law to accommodate the regime's need to fight the new phenomenon of reformist papers, Ayatollah Khamenei's patience ran out and in a devastating speech he gave the cue to the Judiciary to begin its crackdown. In that speech on 21 April, 2000, he said:

The global imperialistic systems, spearheaded by the United States, uses propaganda to topple governments and create chaos. I have told the centres of such propaganda that you should know that your conspiracy through your radios in Islamic Iran, like the plans [being carried out] in Eastern Europe and some other countries, will not work and this is a fruitless wish. Unfortunately today the same enemy that had tried through propaganda to direct the public opinion of a country to a certain path (meaning transition to democracy), instead of radio has come inside our country and has created bases; some of the newspapers that exist today are bastions of the enemy and are doing the same thing that the radio and televisions of BBC (Britain), United States and the Zionist regime wanted to do (Khamenei).

In the span of just 48 hours, twenty-two publications were shut down. Without the newly refurbished Press Law the judiciary had to scramble to find the necessary legal grounds for the mass closures and ended up resorting to a 1959 Security Measures Law which was originally designed to give courts the power of pre-emptive action in order to prevent the repetition of crimes by dangerous criminals (Sadr and Hekmat 1959).

The new Press Law came into effect on 7 May, 2000 and included several major changes including revising the composition of the Press Supervisory Board. The previous composition included:

1. A judge as appointed by the Supreme Judicial Council
2. The Minister of Guidance
3. One MP
4. A university professor as appointed by the Minister of Science
5. A manager for the press as elected by the newspaper managers

The board in its new form now includes a member of the clergy as appointed by the Qom Seminaries and a member of the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council. This was clearly designed to give a majority at the board meetings to the pro-regime elements on the board. This new structure also assures that the board is populated with a majority of “appointed” individuals as oppose to “elected” positions.

An amendment was also made to the previous law which obliged all media to implement the ratifications of the Supreme National Security Council.

Publication of any material against the constitution was added to the list of press violations for which sanctions would be imposed. Approval of the Intelligence Ministry, the Judiciary and the Police are now required for the issuance of licenses. Finally the most devastating of the changes was an amendment to article 12 which now allows the board to suspend the activities of newspapers prior to any court hearings (Mazrooei August 2006).

In the early days of the sixth round of the Majlis, which had a majority Reformist population, some MPs made efforts to overturn the Press Law. As the matter was about to be presented to the floor, the Supreme Leader issued a letter to the parliament on 6 August, 2000. In that letter Ayatollah Khamenei, issued a “prerogative” order and blocked any further discussion on the matter. He wrote:

The country's press is what forms the public opinion and directs the will of the people. If enemies of Islam, the revolution and the Islamic system, take hold of the press or infiltrate them, a great danger will threaten the security, unity and faith of the people and I cannot approve silence on the issue by myself and others in such a vital issue. The current law has been able to prevent such a great pestilence to a degree and changing it to what the parliament's committee has suggested is not permitted and does not serve the expediency of the system and the country (Khamenei).

IV. Events of 2009

Since the Presidential elections of 2009 constitute the main part of this thesis, this chapter is entirely dedicated to an explanation of those events. The chapter begins with an introduction of the candidates who ran then continues to explain the environment prior to the elections, developments on election day, and finally post-election unrest. Special emphasis will be given to two dates – 15 June, 2009 and 14 February, 2011 – which are the two major dates that will be used in the content analysis section of the thesis.

Candidates

Ahmadinejad



Figure 2 – The President with me after an exclusive interview in September 2008

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was the incumbent president seeking a second term in office. He went from Tehran's mayoral office to the Pasteur Square² after winning a runoff against former president and head of Iran's Expediency Council³, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in 2005. Ahmadinejad has developed a populist persona over the years and held true to this role in the 2009 election campaign. On 15 April, 2009 Ahmadinejad announced that he would not be campaigning for re-election and he also would not set up a campaign headquarters (ISNA 2009).

Meanwhile the President's senior advisor and long-time friend, Mojtaba Samareh Hashemi, resigned his post on the same day and started work as the head of what became known as the "Popular Headquarters of Supporters of Dr. Ahmadinejad" (AftabNews 2009).

Ahmadinejad then went on to attend every single event organized by the "popular headquarters." His motto was "Yes We Can" but much like 2005, his main campaign strategy centered on smearing his opponent. In 2005 he had managed to turn the tables and pull himself up from anonymity by focusing on rumours surrounding Hashemi Rafsanjani's wealth. This time he used the same tactic and while Hashemi Rafsanjani

² Pasteur Square is where Iran's Presidential complex including the President's residence is located.

³ The Expediency Discernment Council of the System is an administrative assembly whose members are all appointed by the Supreme Leader. The Council was established after the revision of the Constitution. The main objective behind its establishment was to mediate between the Majlis and the Council of Guardians. The Council also acts as an advisory body to the Supreme Leader.

wasn't in the race, he linked his main opponent, Mir Hossein Mousavi, to Hashemi Rafsanjani and promised to clean house and fight economic corruption, riding the same tide as in 2005. Ahmadinejad's victory in 2005 has also been widely attributed to the support of Basij and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps for his campaign (Karoubi 2005). He paid back this favour in kind many times over following his 2005 victory by ceding the control of multibillion dollar economic megaprojects to the forces (Moaveni 2007).

Mousavi

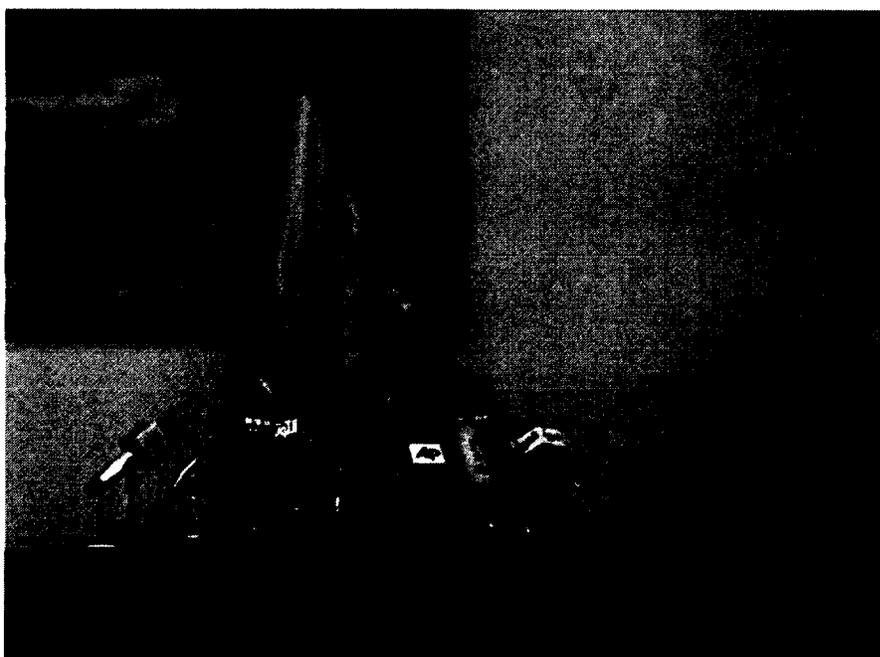


Figure 3 – Mousvi at a press conference during the campaign

Mir Hossein Mousavi was Iran's last prime minister from 1981-1989 and the main Reformist candidate in the 2009 presidential elections. In 1989 a constitutional change abolished the post of prime minister and Mousavi left politics, resisting calls to return

for nearly 20 years. He retreated to academic work and devoted his time to Iran's Academy of Arts which he headed until 23 December 2009, shortly before being put under house arrest for what the regime calls "heading the sedition."

During Mousavi's premiership, Seyed Ali Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader, was President. Disputes and power struggles between the President and Prime Minister in those days are public knowledge and without the support of the then-leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, Mousavi would not have lasted as prime minister. The late Ayatollah supported Mousavi's appointment and later rejected his resignation at the peak of the President-Prime Minister dispute.

Another highlight of Mousavi's term as prime minister was his stewardship of the country's economy during the eight-year war with Iraq, which lasted his entire tenure. Mousavi's left-leaning economic policies were not popular with the revolutionaries of the early days of the Islamic Republic. Those policies, however, are believed to be what saved Iran during the tough economic times of the war with Iraq. People vividly remember the rationing coupons, but they also agree that the system allowed for the equal distribution of the limited resources at the time of war.

Mousavi's historic opposition to Khamenei and his performance as head of the country in the harshest of times made him popular with the public who were unhappy with the radicalization of the political scene and the slowing down of the economy. His popularity spilled over to conservatives; the late Ayatollah Khomeini had been quite vocal in his support. Mousavi was nicknamed "Khomeini's Prime Minister."

Mousavi also enjoyed the support of many of the veterans who had fought in the Iran-Iraq war. They remembered his performance during the war and considered him as one of their own. Some of these veterans were even highly placed in the Basij paramilitary forces and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC). Although exact numbers are not available, my observations indicate that in 2009 Ahmadinejad no longer had the unequivocal support of the entire Basij and IRGC body (Karimi 2009c).

In 2009, Mousavi returned to the political spotlight, as he described during his first press conference in response to “the repeated violations of the nation’s laws and regulations,” the dire need for “an overhaul of the decision making structure of the country,” the dangerous rise of “extremism” and the diminishing of “people’s dignity and honour.” (Fars News Agency 2009) Mousavi believed that there had been deviations from the goals and objectives of the revolution and he was stepping into the race to put the revolution back on the tracks. He also focused heavily on “fighting lies,” and on numerous occasions including his live debate with Ahmadinejad, accused the government of lying to people and fabricating numbers and statistics to fool the nation (Personal accounts and (Black 2009)).

Mousavi’s campaign chose the colour green as its symbol. The protests after the elections are now commonly referred to as “the Green Movement.”

Mousavi and his wife are now under house arrest.

Karoubi



Figure 4 – With Karoubi after a secretly-conducted exclusive interview in November 2009

Mehdi Karoubi was speaker of the parliament for two terms, from 1989-1992 and 2000-2004. Karoubi also has his own party, called “Etemad e Melli” or “National Trust,” which he started in 2005 following his defeat in that year’s presidential elections. Before establishing Etemad e Melli, Karoubi was the secretary of the very powerful left-leaning clerical party known as the Association of Combatant Clerics. He left the clerical party after it failed to throw its full political weight behind his bid for the president’s office in 2005.

Karoubi is known as a staunch opponent of the Guardian Council and its vetting process (see previous chapter) (Press TV 2009). He had also pushed for a review of and

changes to the constitution. Although he was also a reformist, he did not heed calls to withdraw from the election in favour of Mousavi. Karoubi's response as echoed by his advisor, Abbas Abdi, was that "if we consider the votes to be the water in a glass and each candidate is like a straw within that glass, it is not only Karoubi and Mousavi running in this race, there is a third party – Ahmadinejad - as well. So it is best for the reformist camp to keep both of its straws in there and draw as much votes as possible." (Karimi 2009d)

Karoubi and his wife are now under house arrest.

Rezaei



Figure 5 – With Rezaei after a cordial off-the-record meeting in January 2007

Mohsen Rezaei Mirgha'ed is the current Secretary General of the Expediency Council chaired by Hashemi Rafsanjani. Rezaei was the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) for 16 years until 1997.

Since IRGC is known for its ties with Ahmadinejad, there was speculation that Rezaei had a base within the forces and was persuaded to enter the race by Hashemi to be the conservative alternative for those who did not wish to vote "reformist" and were reluctant to write "Ahmadinejad" on their ballots.

Unfortunately Rezaei's conservative roots later caused him to break ranks with the other candidates who were complaining the elections were rigged. After submitting a preliminary complaint to the Guardian Council, in a sudden change of heart he swiftly

moved to retract his objection and in a letter on 24 June, 2009 told the Council that he no longer wished to pursue his complaints (Sahar News 2009).

Pre-election

A phone call from a friend on the afternoon of 7 February, 2009 inviting me to Seyed Mohammad Khatami's press conference the next morning at the headquarters of the Association of Combatant Clerics ended months of speculations. On 8 February, 2009, Khatami, the former reformist president implicitly announced that talks with Mousavi to convince him to run in the elections had failed. Khatami would carry the banner for the reformists in the upcoming presidential elections (Karimi 2009b).

Campaigning in the Reformist camp started well before the official campaign period, even before registration of candidates. The first groups were formed one year prior the elections on the pretext of "inviting" Khatami to enter the race. These groups later became the foundation of Mousavi's campaign team.

Almost one month later, on 10 March, 2009, Mousavi changed his mind and announced that he would also be a candidate. This created chaos in the reformist camp which lasted for a few days, but Khatami eventually announced his withdrawal and threw his support behind Mousavi (Karimi 2009a). It is possible that the Reformists expected character attacks on their candidate and introduced Khatami first to soften the potential blows against their "real" candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi.

In a surprising change of events as the election fever took over the nation, the government issued new licenses for Reformist newspapers such as *Farheekhtegan* and

Kalam e Sabz. Some newspapers, such as *Yas e Nou*, an old Reformist paper which had been suspended from publication, were again allowed to print, giving new life to media. The same mood spread over society. The root of this change of heart could be traced to a speech by the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei who emphasized that the main concern for “Nezam,” was to ensure a high voter turnout, because this would “prove” the popularity of the system (Khamenei). The regime went as far as staging the first televised debates between candidates, allowing street debates, nightly parades and street carnivals. All-night street rallies by Mousavi supporters in my part of the town prevented me from getting home before three in the morning every night.

Election Day

As a journalist, my work on 12 June, 2009 started exceptionally early. Polls were to open at 8 o'clock and our team was to be present to set up at “Hoseini e Ershad” polling station well before then. We arrived at 6:30 and although we were anticipating a huge turnout, none of us was prepared for what we saw. A very long queue extending a couple of blocks formed outside the mosque an hour and a half before the beginning of the balloting. I walked for 10 minutes to see the end of the line, before giving up and returning to my television crew. Other journalist friends reported the same at other voting stations across the city.

Over 46 million Iranians were eligible to vote and the Interior Ministry had set up 45,713 polling stations throughout the country and 304 stations abroad. The voting continued until 6 pm, but as is custom in Iran and because of the exceptionally high

turnout polls stayed open with the last extension until midnight. In the likelihood that none of the four candidates received an absolute majority in the first round, a run-off between the top two candidates would be held on 19 June.

The day that had started so well quickly took a turn for the worse. Text services on the mobile phone network had been sporadic from the night before. By mid-day early speculation that the system was simply ill-prepared to handle the volume of text messages being sent between subscribers turned to suspicions of a regime blockade on communication. I had received word from inside the conservative camp that their opponent, Mousavi's camp, had plans to distribute messages of "fraud in the elections" and in this way disrupt peace in the society. This sounded like a propaganda ploy aimed at justifying the blockade and the crackdowns that soon followed.

Word started coming in that the nonstop influx of voters had shocked the authorities. Sources called to say that some voting stations had run out of ballots and the government was refusing or dragging its feet in providing more. Other sources stated that voting stations were being illegally shut down earlier than the official extended deadline. At about 11 pm, one hour before the midnight deadline, the door at our voting station closed and all people including those still in line were kicked out. My phone rang and a fellow journalist informed me of an impromptu press conference by Mousavi not far from our location. We shot some footage of people being kicked out of the polling station and drove to the press conference.

Upon arrival I could sense the tense atmosphere that prevailed in the building. There were a number of suspicious bearded individuals at the door, who closely

resembled my mental image of the “agents provocateurs” from the Basij. Journalists were led to a very small and cramped conference room and in the time before Mousavi appeared there was a chance to exchange notes and stories about the day. Word in the room was that “there had been a coup d’état.” During that press conference, Mousavi told reporters that his monitors at the balloting stations had reported that according to their observations he was indeed the next president of Iran, but they had also reported widespread irregularities and discrepancies. He confirmed that many of the incidents we had witnessed during the day at the polls were not isolated but occurring across the country. He reported problems such as shortages of ballots, early closure of polling stations and the expulsion of his monitors from the polling stations.

Mousavi also asserted that shutting down text services was a premeditated action by the regime aimed specifically at disrupting communications (Arash 2009). As journalists exited the building word emerged that many of the pro-Ahmadinejad news agencies such as *Fars* and even the government-run official news agency *IRNA*, had run stories declaring the victory of their candidate. Friends from reformist newspapers called to say that they had received warnings from the judiciary either to change certain headlines or face closures of their papers. They were also specifically warned about reporting any of Mousavi’s comments delivered during the press conference.

There were also reports of a raid on Mousavi’s campaign headquarters in the Qeitarieh region in northern Tehran earlier that night. Conservative blogs later quoted an anonymous “informed security official” as saying that the Qeitarieh Headquarters was the tactical centre behind the organization of the protests and demonstrations

(Teribon 2009). In the most optimistic scenario it seems the regime was trying to decapitate the Green Movement prior to the tallying of the votes, as it somehow knew the results would stir unrests. People inside Mousavi's headquarters videoed this attack by plainclothes paramilitary forces as well as attacks on bystanders outside. It was perhaps the first footage out of Iran recorded by citizens in what became the greatest uprising against Iran's Islamic regime.

Post-election

Following Mousavi's news conference many journalists headed to the Interior Ministry which housed the elections headquarters in its basement. The results started trickling in soon after midnight and Ahmadinejad kept a steady lead all through the night with more than 60 per cent of votes. The brigade of journalists at the elections headquarters was visibly disappointed by the numbers read out every hour by an official of the Interior Ministry. The hourly event was broadcast live on Iran's News Network all through the night. Official announcement of the final results traditionally followed by the message of the Supreme Leader was read at 2 pm the next day. They reflected a landslide for the incumbent president with 62.63 per cent of the votes. Mousavi was in second place with 33.75 per cent of the total votes cast.

Candidate	Votes	Percentage
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	24,527,516	62.63%
Mir Hossein Mousavi	13,216,411	33.75%
Mohsen Rezaei	678,240	1.73%
Mehdi Karoubi	333,635	0.85%
Invalid Votes	409,389	1.05%
Total	39,165,191	100%

Table 1 - Official results of 2009 Presidential elections

We had no business at the Interior Ministry after the 2 pm news conference by the Interior Minister. As we ascended from the basement, it was as though we were teleported into a war zone. A few blocks from the Interior Ministry we were caught in a fight between stone-wielding youth and the police. In the rush to escape a sudden assault by the police, I was grabbed and dragged into a shop by the owner who probably saved my life. In addition to the owner and myself, there were about a dozen people in the store, male and female, young and old. My few hours in hiding were spent talking to my fellow captives. They were called to the blitz protests through phone calls by their friends. This was the first of many protests that I witnessed. At this time while there was violence in the streets, journalists could still work. I was receiving reports of clashes from all over the city and even from other major cities.

To get reactions from the two camps I went to their campaign headquarters. The headquarters of Ahmadinejad's popular campaign was deserted and everything had been cleared out. Next stop was Mousavi's headquarters in central Tehran. When we arrived the doorman told us that the place had just been attacked by plainclothes security forces. The crew of a Dutch television network who arrived a little later than we did were arrested on the spot. I had to hide my Japanese cameraman who was carrying a large camera in one of the nearby buildings and smuggle him out a little later to avoid the same fate.

The day had been eventful and at about midnight I decided to call it quits. As I stepped out of the office to head home, all avenues leading to Vali-asr street, Tehran's

main street that runs through the city, were cordoned off by the police. No one was allowed onto the main street. I had to hide in a shopping mall where I ran into Roshanak Taghavi, a female journalist friend who worked for the American news agency, Dow Jones. We managed to talk our way through one of the barricades pretending to be a couple and to further tug at the guard's heartstrings, I added that she was pregnant and we lived just around the corner. Walking alongside the walls, as we were instructed by the officer who let us through, we took in all the images and sounds that we could, until we reached the main intersection where a street battle raged between the Basij and riot police on one side and the people on the other. The entire area was filled with tear gas and heavy smoke from the fires that people had lit to fight the tear gas. The major difference between the conflicts of the day and what I was witnessing then, was the heavy presence of plainclothes security forces. This was the beginning of the presence of "thugs of war;" organized groups of individuals who were clearly operating with a free hand and did not have to conform to the "rules of engagement" governing the conduct of police and other official security forces. That same night all mobile phone communication was cut off.

In an internal memo two days after the elections I wrote to my colleague:

Date: Sunday, June 14, 2009
Subject: Memo: Update
To: [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX]

MEMO:

Many streets of Tehran were blocked yesterday especially those leading to the conflict areas. There are also reports of protests in several other cities around the country such as Kermanshah, Mashad, Hamedan and Babol.

However, things have been rather normalized in the capital city of Tehran this morning. This is while Ahmadinejad is going to have a press conference today before another speech scheduled for his fans. Mousavi has also asked his supporters to gather at his campaign HQ to listen to his speech.

The text messaging system has been down since the night before the elections. The mobile phones were also down last night (June 13), but they were back to normal again this morning.

The telecommunication center confirmed earlier that there have been technical problems with the SMS, but never admitted it has been intentionally cut off. There have been no official comments on the mobile phone malfunctioning so far by the authorities. End of message.

The presidential press conference of 14 June, 2009 was Ahmadinejad's first appearance since the election. Many times during the press conference I heard from colleagues working for domestic media that they were tempted to pelt their shoes at him much like Muntadhar al-Zaidi did to George Bush in Iraq. Throughout the news conference Ahmadinejad appeared to be in a trance.



Figure 6 - Ahmadinejad at 14 June press conference

Following the press conference the staff of the presidential press office herded journalists on to the back of two trucks and took us to Vali-asr Square, the site of yesterday's protests and one of Tehran's main squares. On the way to the presidential celebration ceremony, I had an unhindered view of the brutality that was used to deal with the protesters. Swarm of Basij bikers, two per bike, were riding up and down the street which stretches the length of University of Tehran. The pillion rider of each bike was wielding a baton or a Taser and attacking people on the streets. All of this, only ONE block away from the square. It seemed like the president was giving us a tour of his "doings."



Figure 7 - Basij bikers in front of University of Tehran

Monday, 15 June, 2009

In part of another internal memo on 20 June, 2009 I wrote:

[Sunday] belonged to the President elect as he rallied his supporters in one of Tehran's main squares. The emotional high drove the President to utter words that would taunt him in later days. In one instance he called the protesters "specks of dust." Mousavi and Karoubi requested permission for a counter rally on Monday from the Interior Ministry which was turned down. Overnight as the Basij paramilitary

group was busy storming the dorms of University of Tehran, the government rounded up many of the reformist figures.

The opposition leaders knew that if they did not organize a counter-demonstration, it would mean that they had conceded to Ahmadinejad, and all would be lost. The President's remarks had also clearly enraged Mousavi's supporters.

"In the protests following the elections, when the media were restricted, mobiles and text services were down, it was the citizens who were reporting on the protests and were informing each other of the time and location of demonstrations when riding shared taxis or the subway or the bus." (Interview with Mylo⁴)

Based on the word that was going around, people were looking for a way to vent their anger and protest the outcome of the elections. People had shown in the previous days that they were not going to wait for a "permit."

In light of the restrictions that had been imposed on the media and the limitations on communication, the best tactic according to the opposition leaders was to apply officially for a permit to hold a gathering. The news of them asking for a permit could be used by the independent newspapers as the conduit to spread the word about a coming demonstration.

This was the first real instance where the opposition leadership made a concerted effort to rally people and hold an organized demonstration. The attempt made at communicating with the Iranian public is important and pertinent to the topic of this

⁴ Mylo is the pseudonym for one of the journalists I have interviewed for this thesis. I will explain more in the "Methodology" section.

thesis and hence the date was chosen as one of the pivotal dates for the textual analysis that will follow in chapter 7.

When the permit was refused, the opposition leaders then issued statements at around noon on the day of the demonstration asking people not to attend. Then in a couple of hours came the news that because there was no proper means of communicating with the people, the leaders would go to the location of the demonstration “to invite people to be calm and prevent any deviations.” This was in effect a call to ignore the regime’s ban on public gatherings and its rejection of the permit and gather as previously planned (H 2010).

I recounted the events of 15 June, 2009 in another section of the 20 June memo to my colleague:

Despite the state clampdown on all means of communication, the news that Mousavi and Karoubi would be attending the rally “to persuade the protesters to disperse” quickly circulated among the people and helped create the largest rally Tehran had ever seen in the 30 years since the revolution, stretching all the way from Enghelab Sq. to Azadi Sq. Estimates by sceptics put the figure at over 1.5 million. The main rally was a silent and peaceful show of defiance, but Monday will be remembered by the blood that was shed as the sun went down. Toward the end of the rally a conflict broke out between the protesters and Basijis in a base on the northern edge of Azadi Sq. and up to 100 shots were fired by the Basij on the people. The next morning the government officially confirmed 7 deaths while eye witness accounts have put the number at over 30.

While there had been previous reports of individuals being gunned down by security forces, 15 June marks the first massacre of protestors.

“They shot three people in front of my eyes, while everything was going quietly and nicely,” I told a journalist friend later about the developments of that day. Each

individual was shot above the waistline, meaning the gunmen were shooting to kill. The shots were coming from the rooftop of the Basij building. What was most shocking to me was the calm with which the gunmen were shooting at people, their faces devoid of any feeling and completely blank. The sound of gunfire and shouts for help, images of the dying protestors only a few steps in front of me and later their bloody corpses being carried away by people, have been permanently etched in my brain. I was overwhelmed and the rush of hormones had changed the taste in my mouth. My human instincts were telling me to run for safety, but I had lost my cameraman in the midst of the chaos and I also felt that I had a responsibility to the fallen to witness the moment and tell the story. A few hours later when we returned to our office and my nerves had calmed, I told the story to an American journalist friend who printed the story with me as an anonymous eyewitness. I was afraid to tell the story myself; I was self-censoring.

The rest of the June 20 memo describes my account of the remainder of the events of the week following the elections:

Memo:

Mousavi supporters had organized another rally for Tuesday at Valiasr Sq. but the government supporters quickly stole the venue and staged a rally of their own which received huge coverage by the state television. The opposition group then swiftly switched to a different location and gathered in front of the state television headquarters in northern Tehran. Despite communication problems again the protester managed to gather quite a force for another march marked by silence and the famous V sign.

The government which had about enough of the reports on the daily tug of war between pro and anti-government forces revoked all press credentials for foreign journalists and practically put them under "office arrest." An official letter warned foreign media that the risks and consequences of covering any illegal gathering lay directly on their own

shoulders. Interestingly enough state TV started showing selected images of the demonstrations.

On Wednesday another of Tehran's major squares was scene of mass peaceful protests. Mousavi had earlier issued a statement declaring Thursday as a day of mourning for those killed in the clashes and called on people to show up to mosques and hold peaceful demonstrations wearing mourning insignia promising to do the same himself. This announcement fuelled speculation that people on Wednesday would be few and scattered and with the media banned from attending there was no way to confirm, until footage shot on cell phones poured into the cyberspace showing people's determination.

The Thursday march, as with all the other previous ones, was carried out in silence and only when Mousavi showed up to Imam Khomeini sq. did they break their silence and chanted in support of their candidate.

Following the events of that week, Iran's Supreme Leader, Seyed Ali Khamenei decided to attend the Friday prayers himself and try to put an end to the "street battles." The first draft of my script for that day's newscast describes his sermon and some of the reactions:

Script:

The announcement of the election results by the Interior Ministry a week ago giving Ahmadinejad another term in office sparked sporadic outbursts of public anger much of which turned violent. The week long demonstrations and protests attracted huge number of people and were not only limited to the capital. One week after the vote, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, came to Tehran Friday Prayers and in his sermons clearly indicated that the Iranian electoral law was fraudproof and fraud as large as the 11 million difference was unthinkable. He also fully backed Ahmadinejad and announced that President's views were very close to his. The leader, baffled by the people's determination and numbers, denounced the street tug of war between the two camps and said they had to be stopped or the responsibility of the subsequent violence and blood lay on the shoulders of the person who calls the people to the streets. Mousavi spent the Friday afternoon and much of Saturday trying to digest the leader's comments and come up with his next strategy and finally posted a statement by the Association of Combatant Clerics on his official website practically calling on people to stay off of the streets while holding the government responsible for any bloodshed. Despite the call by Mousavi, angry people poured to the

streets and as promised by the Police commander, were severely and brutally dealt with. Number of casualties cannot be independently confirmed as the media are still confined to their offices, but citizen accounts put the number of casualties at over three hundred. While Saturday's demonstration by itself is a sign of defiance against the leader, the Guardian Council tried to show a good will gesture and announced that it was prepared to randomly recount ten percent of the 46 thousand ballot boxes. Mousavi had refused to show up at the hearing by the Guardian Council on the elections, perhaps as a sign of protest, since the Leader's comments had already determined the outcome. Mousavi, in another act of defiance wrote an open letter to the council outlining the main points of his complaint which according to him justify a re-election and not just a recount of a limited number of ballot boxes. Khamenei's strong and uncompromising comments were at first thought to quell the street protests but Mousavi's unexpected resilience seems to increase and expand the protests and the subsequent violence.

END

In the afternoon of 20 June, I received news of a brutal crackdown by the security forces in central Tehran, close to the dormitories of University of Tehran. Later that day footage appeared on YouTube of the last living moments of a girl, named Neda Aghasoltan, who was shot in cold blood by security forces. Her name and image became iconic in the Iranian struggle against the regime. In a memo on 22 June, I wrote about her death to my colleague:

Date: Monday, June 22, 2009
Subject: Memo: Neda Aghasoltan
To: [XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX]

Memo:

UNCONFIRMED and CITIZEN ACCOUNTS:

Neda Aghasoltan is the name of the girl who was killed in cold blood on Saturday, June 20th 2009. She was born in 1982. On Saturday she along with her university professor of philosophy along with a number of other classmates took part in the demonstrations. She falls behind the crowd for some minutes, some say she was speaking on her cell phone but since cell phones on that day were disconnected I think it was for another reason, perhaps taking pictures with her cell phone. 2 bikers (Basijis) shoot her in the chest and she dies in her professor's arms. Apparently the bikers were captured by the people and unconfirmed reports indicate that the shooter has been killed.

At noon on June 21st 2009 on the condition of a speedy

burial at Beheshte Zahra (Tehran's main cemetery) her body was handed over to her family. Her burial took place under heavy security measures and very quickly. Neda's funeral was to take place on Monday at 5 PM at Niloofar Mosque of Tehran's Abbasabad neighborhood, but the mosque contacted the family and cancelled the event. All mosques have been notified to turn down any ceremony for her.

END

Neda's death is important on many different levels. Following Neda's death, any lingering affection for the regime died. Up until that day, "the sharp end of the protests prior to 29th of Khordad (19 June 2009) were directed at the government and at Mahmoud Ahmadinejad personally," but then following the Leader's sermons and Neda's death, "these protests targeted the System and the slogans changed toward the leadership." Neda's death also struck a chord with the global community and international protests against the Iranian regime increased (Interview with Mylo).

The protests continued for "nine months" and the peak of these protests was 27 December, 2009 (Interview with Mylo). Beyond 27 December there are no major protests or rallies, while opposition is still evident among the public, as expressed in the form of "private conversations" and online forums (Interview with Nanuk⁵).

Monday, 14 February, 2011

Although the title of this chapter is "Events of 2009" and while there were other protests and demonstrations after the 15 June, 2009 rally at Azadi Sq. the next important date for the purpose of this thesis is more than a year and half later, 14 February, 2011. Three days after Mubarak was ousted in Egypt and three days after the

⁵ Nanuk is the pseudonym for another journalist I have interviewed for this thesis. I will explain more in the "Methodology" section.

major regime-orchestrated event to celebrate the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the Greens took to the streets for one last time. The pretext for this demonstration was to express support for the Tunisian and Egyptian people who had recently liberated themselves from the clutches of dictators. The important characteristics of this demonstration were that the opposition leaders had once again submitted an official request for permission for a demonstration to the Interior Ministry and the venue for the demonstration was also the same as 15 June, 2009.

On 5 February, 2011 the leaders of the opposition movement wrote a joint letter to the Interior Ministry (Figure 8) asking for a permit (Saham News 2011b). While this was meant to allow the few remaining independent media to publicize the event, it also served as a warning for the regime.

بسمه تعالی

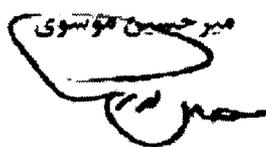
۱۳۸۹/۱۱/۱۶ {05-02-2011}

{[...] we ask for permit to invite people to a demonstration, in accordance with article 27 of the constitution, in support of the popular uprising of these two Muslim countries, to be held on Monday 14 February, 2011 at 3 PM from Imam Hussein Sq. to Azadi Sq.}

جناب آقای نجار
وزیر محترم کشور
سلام علیکم

بدینوسیله به اطلاع می رساند که به منظور اعلام همبستگی با حرکت های مردمی در منطقه بویژه قیام آزادیخواهانه مردم تونس و مصر بر علیه حکومت استبدادی در کشور، درخواست صدور مجوز برای دعوت به راهپیمایی مردمی طبق اصل بیست و هفت قانون اساسی در جهت حمایت از قیام مردم این دو کشور مسلمان را در روز دوشنبه ۲۵ بهمن ساعت ۳ بعدازظهر از میدان امام حسین تا میدان آزادی را داریم.

{Mir Hossein Mousavi}



{Mehdi Karoubi}

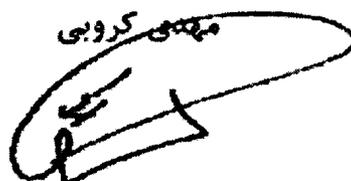


Figure 8 – Copy of the letter from Mousavi and Karoubi to the Interior Minister asking for permit for demonstration on 14 February, 2011

(Source: <http://aftabnews.ir/vgldkf0f5yt0xs6..yy-lmz2l2sya.h.html>)

According to the accounts of those days by Karoubi's son, all land and mobile phone lines of the Karoubi family, including their children, were cut off on 12 February, 2011 and his means of communication were severely limited (Karoubi 2011). By 14 February Karoubi and Mousavi were already under de facto house arrest. Mousavi's government-appointed body guards informed him that according to an order from their superiors, the security team was not allowed to leave the house. Mousavi then asked for the keys to his personal car and the guards told him that the keys were confiscated earlier. Mousavi and his wife then decided to leave on foot, but were faced with a police van that has totally blocked the narrow alley which was their only way to out. Mousavi snapped a picture of the police blockade (Kalame 2011).



Figure 9 – Picture purportedly taken by Mousavi himself upon leaving his house to attend 14 February demonstration. The picture shows a police van completely blocking the alley.
(Source: <http://www.kalame.com/1389/11/25/klm-47633/>)

The van and the guard's booth were quickly replaced with an iron gate (Green Freedom Movement 2011). Mousavi and his wife were cut off from the outside world from this moment on.



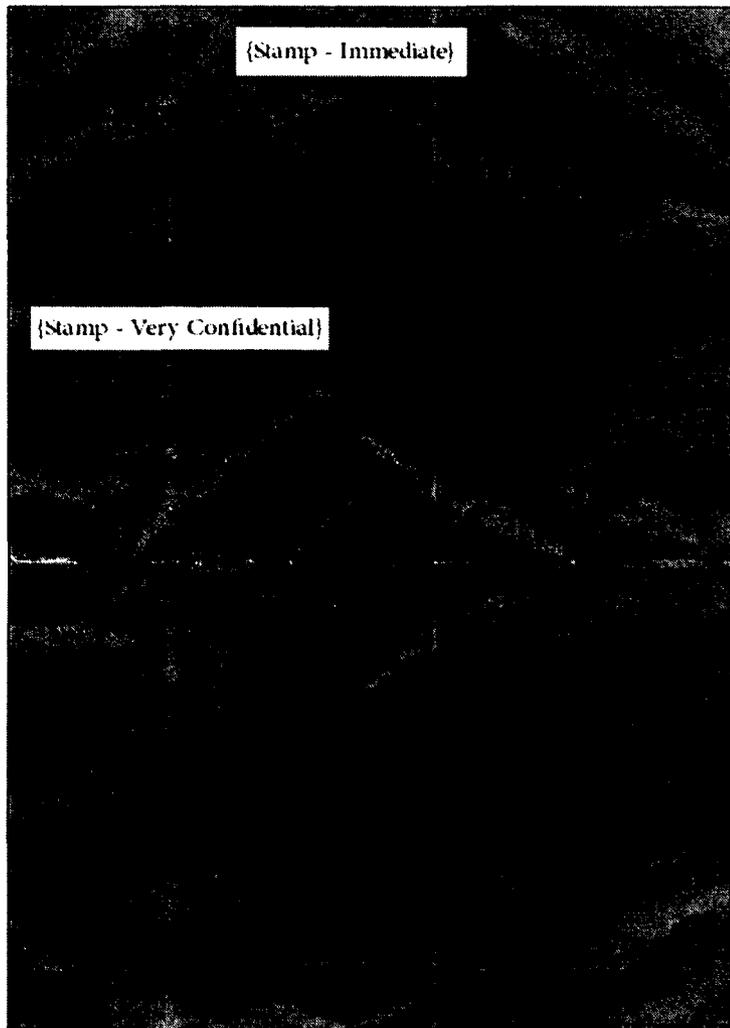
**Figure 10 – The black iron gate that blocks off the alley leading to Mousavi's house.
(Source: The picture was posted on the Internet on February 20, 2011 by an unknown person)**

The planned demonstration brought out a considerable number of people. According to Karoubi's son, word from inside official circles put the number between 800,000 and one million people, but this of course was never officially reported (Karoubi 2011).

The regime had ample time before the demonstration to prepare. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter it seems it had instructed its media to try and dissuade people from participation. The pro-regime media were also instructed to prepare public opinion for any upcoming heavy handed and bloody crackdown that might be in store. Even before the demonstration, the regime had begun to see the writing on the wall. Reinvigorated by the recent successful uprisings in the region, people were out to change the regime and if the regime did not stop them one last time, it would crumble. This quickly turned into a day of destiny for the regime and an opportunity as well.

The dissuasion campaign included publishing articles with threatening tones, particularly threats of arrest of the leaders of the movement, discrediting the movement through linking it to foreign elements and the enemy as well as chipping away at the hope of the people for any success by publishing disappointing news particularly portraying an erosion in the popular support from the movement (Iran newspaper 13 and 14 February).

Media from across the political spectrum had also earlier received a blunt directive from the Ministry of Guidance to refrain from even mentioning the names of the leaders of the movement and former Iranian president Seyed Mohammad Khatami or reporting on their activities and comments (Figure 11) (Kamali Dehghan 2011).



{Logo - Ministry of Culture
and Islamic Guidance
Press Department}

{To all National Newspapers,
News agencies,
Provincial directorates of Culture and Islamic Guidance,

[...] Since creating a tranquil environment for the society and the public opinion is an inherent responsibility of the media and since security officials have expressed concern regarding the possible negative impact of publishing news, pictures or comments from Mir Hossein Mousavi, Mehdi Karoubi and Seyed Mohammad Khatami, in accordance with the second amendment of Article 5 of the Press Law, refrain from publishing news, pictures or reports about the aforementioned individuals.

Seyed Ehsan Ghazizadeh Hashemi
Director General of Domestic Press and News agencies

Carbon Copy: Deputy for Media Affairs, Secretariat of the Supreme
National Security Council}

Figure 1 – Directive from Ministry of Guidance to all media to refrain from publishing anything related to Mousavi, Karoubi and Khatami.
(Source: <http://irangreenvoice.com/article/2010/aug/22/6595>)

In the days leading up to 14 February the regime once again carried out a series of its infamous midnight raids and arrested a number of political activists and journalists. One day before the demonstration at a ceremony to mark the start of work at a special media court, Tehran's prosecutor while mentioning the recent arrests told reporters that the media court would allow the judiciary to better support the media. He went on to explain that the arrests were made on "security grounds," and since the "leaders of sedition had been acting in the past few days" the security apparatus had to act on its responsibility. He also said that the police will be acting on its responsibilities in the next days, hinting that the regime would be dealing harshly with those who attempt anything for 14 February (Farheekhtegan newspaper 14 February).

On the day of the demonstration things quickly turned violent. By the end of the day there was chatter on the Internet that a number of people had been gunned down. At first the regime tried to keep a lid on the bloodshed. Various people were quoted in *Iran* stating how the streets were calm and the "sedition" had failed. However, due to the extent of the event the regime quickly realized that it could not contain the news and hence it staged a very dirty, yet impressive campaign.

Just like "Neda," the Valentine's Day demonstration found itself an icon. Sanea Jaleh and Mohammad Mokhtari, both university students, were killed in cold blood and although their deaths were never captured on video, their life and death stories quickly captivated the public and spread like wildfire through the city (Asgari 2011). Word of mouth, the Internet and the Persian language services of various foreign television

networks played a major role in spreading the news (Interviews with Mylo and Itzel⁶). The regime then announced that during the clashes of that day two Basij members had been martyred by rioters and foreign elements. Sanea Jaleh's Basij membership card was soon put on the wire by Fars news agency (Fars News Agency 2011). Sanea's brother was later arrested for having been interviewed by VOA-Farsi in which he had denied his brother's Basij membership (Saham News 2011a).

The day after the demonstration, there was a sudden rise in threats and pressures in the media. While it was expected *Iran* would be filled with threats and disappointing news for the movement, the disappointing news that appeared in *Farheekhtegan* was the more important phenomenon. *Farheekhtegan* began with a reserved expression of regime's threats on 16 February but by 17 February it is filled with news of various political figures distancing themselves from the movement and the events of Valentine's Day. Mylo says "while we had received some directives, the regime had mostly left it upon our own discretion to judge what could be considered a red line and a provocation of public opinion and in doing so we had ended up drawing those red lines much closer than any government censor would have. The memory of massive closures and unemployment of our fellow journalists in other newspapers was still fresh in our minds. We were self-censoring."

⁶ Itzel is the pseudonym for another journalist I have interviewed for this thesis. I will explain more in the "Methodology" section.

Also on 15 February, the MPs in the Majlis staged an indoor demonstration against “the leaders of sedition” and chanted “Death to Mousavi” and “Death to Karoubi” from the tribune of the nation’s parliament.

From this day forth, Karoubi’s residence went under siege by plainclothes forces and nightly attacks on the building became a routine event.



Figure 12 – A member of Basij writing profanities on the walls of Karoubi's residence.
(Source: <http://karoubi.org/?p=199>)

The head of the Guardian Council who was leading the Friday Prayers of 18 February in Tehran became the first person to call officially for the house arrest of the leaders of the movement. While cutting off Mousavi from the outside world had proved a simple task due to the location of his house, the government waited until 21 February, a midweek national holiday when papers don’t print, to occupy Karoubi’s residence.

In an interview in 2010 Karoubi had told me he was ready for anything, including arrest. He believed that the only thing that was holding back the regime from making an arrest was the unpredictability of the aftermath of the arrest.

The leaders of the movement were trying to capitalize on the Arab Spring and revitalize the social movement in Iran which had so far failed to bear any real fruit. The Valentine's Day protest was their last hope and a last attempt at bringing change to Iran. Meanwhile the regime in Iran had clearly learned over the past year that violence against the protestors would increase the cost of participation and keep some people off the streets. While in Egypt armed thugs were sent to hunt people on the ninth day of the movement, the Iranian regime had dispatched its army of thugs beginning the first day. Unlike Egypt there was no greater military might to protect the people. Hence violence was more brutal and continuous.

As in the case of Egypt, Tunisia and all other popular uprisings, change must ultimately be carried out not on the Internet and not with virtual identities but on the streets with real people. Egypt proved that new media can only work in collaboration with traditional media for mobilization. Now at this stage, with the media securely cornered into a state of self-censorship, the Iranian regime had reached a point where the aftermath of Karoubi's doomsday had become predictable and the unthinkable happened. The regime lived on, the streets were quiet and the movement's leaders were under house arrest.

V. Theory

With what has been described of Iran's political structure and the media environment in the previous chapters, it is safe to say that Iran is an authoritarian regime which follows the authoritarian model of the press. The arguments in this thesis are mainly based on the authoritarian theory of the press as described by Siebert et al. in the book "Four Theories of the Press." Although the four theories of the press have been critiqued and challenged, the main points as relevant to the "Authoritarianism" have escaped unscathed and remain mostly untouched. The book "Last Rights" while is "not in agreement about the intellectual merits of the Four Theories," when it comes to talking about "Authoritarianism" only makes the argument that "it is better thought of as a set of practices than as a theory."⁷ (Nerone 1995)

⁷ There is also a half-hearted attempt to invent a new "Islamic Revolution" model or theory for the press by Seyed Mohammad Mehdi Sadeghi working in collaboration with the Research Centre of Imam Sadiq University. Sadeghi's work is for the most part based on the Islamic theory of communication that is offered by Hamid Mowlana. Sadeghi's work in and of itself lacks enough substance to be considered or even critiqued. Mowlana's work, however, has been very influential and has attracted much attention. Mowlana's views and conceptualization of an authentic Islamic Culture, what he has called the Islamic Communication Paradigm, as stated by Gholam Khiabany, forms the basis of his theory. Khiabany in his recent book "Iranian Media: The Paradox of Modernity" has set to challenge Mowlana's Islamic Theory of Communication. Khiabany writes that "There exist a variety of different projects—undoubtedly all of them political—with different aims and concerns. One such political reaction, mirroring the official views and policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is the so-called Islamic theory of communication that is offered by Hamid Mowlana." Khiabany dismisses Mowlana's theory stating that "the *absolutism* of cultural

Hence by treating authoritarianism as a set of practices rather than a theory, we can examine and study the Iranian media environment under such light.

Iran and the authoritarian theory

Remembering the importance of the role of the Supreme Leader in Iran's political structure, his comments are very important to any study as they form the oral canon by which the society is run. It is not without precedent that his comments are made into law.

Iran's incumbent leader, Seyed Ali Khamenei, echoing the teachings of his predecessor and founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ayatollah Rohollah Khomeini, has on numerous occasions emphasized "the preservation of Islamic Republic as more important than any other religious obligation." (Khamenei) These words resemble those of Machiavelli in his authoritarian theory which "subordinate[s] all other considerations to the principle aim [of] the security of the state." (Siebert 1956)

Furthermore "under such a doctrine, public discussion must necessarily be confined whenever the ruler thought that it threatened the security of his principality" and "patriotic grounds justify strict control of the methods of discussion and of mass dissemination of information as the basis for political action." (Siebert 1956) This can be

relativism in Iran illustrates, the emphasis on differences and references to an ahistorical essence cannot provide us with proper questions that are central to research, let alone answers. 'Islamic culture', for the repressive regimes of the region and their official spokesmen, is what 'Asian values' have meant and have been for the repressive regimes of Asia." (Khiabany 2010)

clearly seen, as stated in the background section, in blatant efforts by the Iranian regime to tighten further the controls on the printed press, which was the only form of media not inherently under direct government control.

Siebert et al. mention that in an authoritarian system “the units of communication should support and advance the policies of the government in power so that this government can achieve its objectives.” A look at the Iranian constitution shows that it too states the same principle, almost word for word:

[M]edia of mass communication (Radio-Television) must be in service of spreading the Islamic culture and used toward the completion of the Islamic revolution and to this end must [...] seriously refrain from the propagation and promotion of destructive and anti-Islamic.

A further look at the constitution reveals another aspect of Iranian policy which adheres to the key characteristics of authoritarianism, which is the “nationalization or socialization of the media, particularly the more recent units in the electronic field.” (Siebert 1956) As explained in the Background section of this thesis radio and television are controlled by the state and the director is an appointee of the leader.

Iran’s Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance’s principal responsibilities state that it is in charge of “[i]ssuing the necessary permit for establishing or dissolving” of basically any form of cultural or media organization (Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance 2010, Principle Responsibilities). The “Press Law” of 2000 also sets out stringent conditions governing the issuing of licenses and the qualifications of license holders and managing directors. Such “granting of special ‘permits’ to selected

individuals” is “one of the earliest methods of assuring favourable treatment for government policies.” (Siebert 1956)

Following the 2009 presidential election some 100 journalists were rounded up by the regime (Reporters Sans Frontieres 2010). As in the example of the editor-in-chief of the *Etemad-Melli* daily, Mohammad Ghouchani, the charge against arrested journalists was “disturbing the security of the country through participation in gatherings and writing articles.” (Behzadi Oct 11, 2009) Such measures by the regime are classic methods used by authoritarians to reign in people who are “disseminating information or opinions inimical to the authorities.” (Siebert 1956)

In authoritarian systems “to threaten the position of the monarch [is] to threaten the stability of the state and [is] therefore treason.” (Siebert 1956) In Iran according to article 609 of the Islamic Penal Code, “anyone who insults one of the officials of the three powers of the system or other officials of the system named in this article, during their service or in relation to their services, will be sentenced to three to six months in jail or 74 lashes or fifty thousand to one million Rials in financial penalty.” (Islamic Penal Code 1983) An example of this is the incarceration of Mohammad Nourizad, a conservative journalist who had a change of heart after the events of 2009. His official charge is “insulting the head of the judiciary” in an open letter he posted on his blog, but the popular belief is that he is being punished for his open letters to the leader published on the same blog (Nourizad).

Another indirect method of control by authoritarian regimes is “a system of special taxes designed to limit both the circulation and the profit in printed matter,

especially newspapers seeking a mass audience.” (Siebert 1956) The same technique was used in September of 2002 against the very popular and widely circulated *Hamshahri* newspaper, owned and operated by the Tehran Municipality. Those limitations were later lifted when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took over as Tehran’s mayor (Hamshahri 2008).

In Iran, very few newspapers can sustain themselves financially and this weakness is used by the regime very efficiently as a lever to pressure them into compliance. Press receive funds from the state either in the form of direct subsidies or as indirect subsidies through preferential pricing on paper and government advertisements (Fars News Agency 2007), and their adherence to government objectives greatly determines the level of support they receive. This again is a typical characteristic of authoritarian systems where “instead of official journals managed by government appointees, privately owned newspapers [are] purchased or subsidized with state funds.” (Siebert 1956)

With regards to broadcast media, as noted previously just as “[m]ost authoritarian states have established complete state monopolies of broadcasting” Iran’s radio and television firmly reside in the sole hands of the regime (Siebert 1956). However, since media ignore national borders, those foreign broadcasts into Iran from Western countries “present an irritating problem.” (Siebert 1956) Two methods have been proposed by Siebert et al for resolving this problem: “to ‘jam’ the wavelengths” against international agreements and “to establish rigid controls over the possession and use of receiving sets.” (Siebert 1956)

Both of these strategies are in effect in Iran today. Iran's parliament ratified a bill in 1994 that clearly prohibits the "import, distribution and use of satellite reception equipment" and tasks the Interior Ministry "to use police and Basij [paramilitary forces] to quickly confiscate all satellite reception equipment." (Satellite Prohibition 1994) With regards to "jamming" signals, although Iran has never officially confirmed any such move, its attempts are clear as daylight. In March 2010 "European Union foreign ministers urged Iran to stop jamming European satellite transmissions and said they were prepared to take action to end the interference." (Baker 2010)

The first point where the Iranian system differs from the traditional authoritarian model is on the lack of tolerance for divergence from political principles. In authoritarian systems as long as "the media avoided direct criticism of current political leaders and their projects there would be no objection to a discussion of political systems." (Siebert 1956) The Iranian system, especially in the aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections, demonstrated that it has no tolerance for any criticism of the political structure and principles of the revolution.

Some characteristics also exist in Iran that could be linked with the "Soviet communist theory of the press." There are two major differences between the Soviet system and other authoritarian systems. One is that "Communists place a greater emphasis on the positive use of the mass media as part of the agitation for the accomplishment of a world revolution," which Iranian policies seem to match perfectly (Siebert 1956). According to one of the studies carried out by the official Center for Islamic Revolution Documents in Tehran:

Today mass media are the most important tool for informing and shaping the public opinion. Governments through the media try to influence the public opinion in their own countries as well as others and prepare the ground for the acceptance of their policies and rallying the support of nations behind themselves. Imam [Khomeini] also emphasized the use of this tool for the export of the revolution. Through [production of] radio programs in various languages, strengthening of the television signals for neighbouring countries, publication of magazines and newspapers and printing of brochures the content of the revolution was advertised and people were introduced to the goals and nature of the revolution (Mohammadi 2010).

However, the second aspect which is also the most important “is that under Communism the state holds a monopoly over all avenues of reaching the masses,” and despite the extensive controls mentioned previously this is not completely true in Iran. Hence Iran cannot be classified as a Soviet system. There have even been attempts, perhaps due to pressure of world opinion “to give at least lip service to the principles of libertarianism.” (Siebert 1956) Article 175 of the constitution and articles three and four of the “Press Law” emphasize that media should not be “censored” and should be free to express different views and opinions.

VI. Methodology

Part of this study involves the investigation of the changes in the media environment following Iran's 2009 presidential elections, and how journalists and their work were affected. Iran's freedom of information law is mostly designed to LIMIT access to information rather than facilitate open access. Hence many of the government policies are unobtainable through normal channels. This greatly hinders any assessment of regime's media policy following the 2009 elections. To overcome this limitation, I resorted to content analysis in the hope of shedding light on those policies based on the output of two newspapers chosen from the opposite ends of the political spectrum. The two papers chosen for this purpose are *Iran* and *Farheekhtegan*.

Content Analysis

Kalus Krippendorff in "Content Analysis" defines it as "a research technique for making replicable and valid inference from data to their context." It is a method of inquiry into "symbolic meaning of messages." Content analysis is also famously used in extrapolation of trends as well as differences which is the purpose of this study. In any content analysis it must be clear which data are analysed, how they are defined, and from which population they are drawn. The context relative to which data are analysed must also be made explicit. The aim or target of the inferences must be clearly stated. In content analysis, we must also define the units that are to be counted and measured. In this case I will be measuring the surface area of pertinent articles that appear in eleven issues of the two newspapers.

The Newspapers

Iran is a government-owned and operated newspaper that is considered as the official mouthpiece of the government. *Farheekhtegan* is a reformist newspaper.

Farheekhtegan started publishing just before the elections in April of 2009. It is affiliated with Azad University which is the largest non-governmental university in Iran and enjoys a sound financial status. This basically means that *Farheekhtegan* has the financial backing that is most closely comparable to *Iran* with its government support. *Farheekhtegan* also works in cooperation with Azad University's news agency (once called ISCA and now called Azad News Agency or ANA), which again closely resembles the symbiosis between Iran newspaper and IRNA (Islamic Republic News Agency) which is the official government news agency. No official readership is given for either newspaper but unofficial estimates put circulation of *Iran* at around one hundred thousand copies daily and that of *Farheekhtegan* at around eighty thousand. *Farheekhtegan* is also the only reformist newspaper that has been in continuous print since the elections.

The Dates

The universe of possible data for this study covers from 14 June, 2009 until today but limited resources mean sampling will be used for content analysis. The sample comes from the population of raw material that would best represent what is to be inferred.

The two dates that have been selected as pivotal for the purposes of this study are 15 June, 2009 and 14 February, 2011. The sampling period covers the continuous days of the week surrounding each event.

Sampling for the first event extends from one day before the major demonstration of 15 June to 25 June, 2009. Since none of the papers in Iran publish on Fridays, this covers a total of eleven issues of both newspapers. This range allowed for the coverage of such important events as Mousavi and Karoubi asking for permits for the demonstration, the demonstration itself, the killing of Neda Aghasultan and the first appearance of the news of her killing in one of the newspapers.

Sampling for the second event covers from two days prior to the actual demonstration, 12 February to 24 February, 2011, which includes eleven issues of both newspapers. 21 February, 2011 was an official holiday in Iran and papers were not published. This period includes the first appearance of the news of the leaders asking for permission for the demonstration, the actual demonstration itself, the house arrest of the leaders and a few days afterwards.

The importance of the two dates lies in the demonstrations that were held on those days. The demonstration on 25 June, 2009 marked the first major street protest and the second event on 25 February, 2011 - a year and eight months later - is the last major demonstration held by the reformist movement. The leaders of the opposition movement had asked the government officials for permits on both occasions. The venue for the demonstrations was also the same. Looking back, both demonstrations were followed by the two most important milestones in the history of the movement.

In the case of the first demonstration, five days after the event Neda Aghasultan was killed and less than a week after the second demonstration the leaders of the movement are put under house arrest.

The first demonstration occurred almost immediately after the elections which started the whole movement. The reaction of the regime to the movement and subsequently the media had to be quick and perhaps crude. By the time of the second demonstration the regime had installed all the necessary means and measures to control the flow of information and the new media environment had completely set in. The analysis of the two newspapers within these two sample periods can provide a clear idea as to how the media environment changed in Iran. Three journalists have also been interviewed for the purpose of this thesis, whose insight helps explain the situation and the circumstances of the days.

Measurement and Coding

In this study, the manifest content refers to those elements that are physically present and countable. This means the surface area that each pertinent article covers in a page, the location of the article and the newspaper that it appears in.

The latent content extends to an interpretative reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data and includes subjects and themes. In this study all articles in the newspapers were looked at and their pertinence was determined based on their subject and theme and its relevance to what was to be inferred.

For this purpose a set of instructions on how to systematically observe and record content from text was developed. This basically meant that a set of questions were in mind when reading each article. These questions were developed based on an “analytical construct.” (Krippendorff 1980) As Krippendorff puts it analytical construct acts as “a bridge between available data and the uncertain targets in their context.” For example, while mass media do play a role in the political process, it is important to look at the “elements, assertions, or arguments” that influence the process in one or in the other direction.

As discussed in the “Theory” section, the Iranian regime is an authoritarian system and as described by Charles Tilly in “From Mobilization to Revolution” the 2009 movement following the election was a “collective action” to promote change. Common sense and Charles Tilly tell us that any “power” that is challenged would of course put up resistance. Tilly describes “repression” as “any action by another group which raises the contender’s cost of collective action [...] Government can raise a group’s mobilizations costs (and thereby raise its costs of collective action) by disrupting its organization, by making communications difficult or inaccessible, by freezing necessary resources such as [...] manpower [...] Standard repressive measures such as suspending newspapers, drafting strikers, forbidding assemblies, and arresting leaders illustrate the anti-mobilization avenue [...] From a government’s point of view, raising the costs of mobilization is a more reliable repressive strategy than raising the costs of collective action alone.” (Tilly 1978)

Hence looking for the level of repression or dissuasion in its various forms can identify the level of regime involvement and interference in the media. Each article in the sample period was then classified under one or more of the four categories to identify whether the article dissuades, persuades or gives direct or indirect news.

To identify “dissuasion” other subthemes were considered and the following questions acted as guide posts during the reading of each article:

1 – Does the article criticize any of the high profile (political/social) supporters of the movement?

2 – Does the article link the movement to foreign or enemy elements?

3 – Does the article pose any threats?

4 – Does the article try to disappoint the supporters of the movement?

5 – Does the article try to discredit the movement?

6 – Does the article mention individuals or organizations distancing themselves from the movement?

To identify “persuasion” the following questions were considered during the reading of each article:

1 – Does the article try to justify the movement?

2 – Does the article carry expression of support for the people and the movement by high-profile individuals or organizations?

The inference to be derived from this study can be boiled down to identifying any trend in the media that has arisen from the Iranian regime's repressive policies.

The analysis was done in two runs. In the first run tables were populated with articles that fell under one of the subcategories as identified by the sub-theme questions. The page where the article appeared, the surface area that it covered, along with a brief description of the content of the article were recorded in different columns of the tables. In recording the page number of the article, except for the front page where a distinction was made between above and below the folds, only the page number was recorded. In the second run, using a "Location Coefficient" the numerical value of the location of the article was incorporated into the value for area and the thematic category of the article was simplified to the four main categories.

Location Coefficient

For the purpose of this study, a "location coefficient" was developed. This coefficient helps combine the values in the "area" and "location" columns. Combining these two columns in the tables yields a simplified yet meaningful column that when shown as a chart can illustrate the trend in the two newspapers.

To develop the "location coefficient" I assumed that the viewing probability of an article above the fold of the newspaper while the newspaper is sitting on the news stand and folded in half is 50 per cent. The probability of the reader then unfolding the newspaper to view the bottom fold is again 50 per cent, provided that the reader picks up the newspaper and views above the fold first. This means that the probability of a

reader viewing an article below the fold is 50 per cent on the condition that the reader has viewed above the fold first. Based on the same logic, the viewing probability for articles inside the paper is 50 per cent provided that the newspaper is picked up and unfolded first.

Using “conditional probability” and the calculations demonstrated below, the coefficients work out to be 4 for the articles above the fold of the first page, 2 for the articles below the fold of the first page and 1 for articles elsewhere in the paper (Devore 2012, 74-76).

P_A = Probability of article above the fold being viewed

$$= \%50 = \frac{1}{2}$$

$P_{(B|A)}$

= Probability of article below the fold being viewed after the area above the fold has been viewed

$$= \%50 = \frac{1}{2}$$

$P_{(C|A \text{ and } B)}$ = Probability of inside articles being viewed after the first page has been viewed

$$= \%50 = \frac{1}{2}$$

$$P_{(A \text{ and } B)} = P_{B|A} \times P_A = \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4} = \%25$$

$$P_{(A \text{ and } B \text{ and } C)} = P_A \times P_{B|A} \times P_{(C|A \text{ and } B)} = \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{8} = \%12.5$$

Interviews

The content analysis in this thesis is supplemented with my own accounts as well as three interviews. The interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms for their protection, as per an agreement with them and as envisaged in the Carleton University Ethics Board approval for this project.

Mylo, is a journalist from the reformist camp who can comment on details of the censorship and self-censorship in the newspaper focusing on how it was done, when the shift was made and what measures they used to cope with the situation.

Itzel, a former journalist of Iran's Press TV (Iran's 24-hour English news channel) is currently employed by a major foreign network and will discuss the regime's media policy during those times as related to the regime's image in the global arena.

Nanuk, is a former journalist at the IRIB (Iran's state broadcaster) who is now residing outside of Iran but still has connections with the state broadcaster and will explain the editorial policies and decrees that came down from high positions, describing the regime's media policies pertaining to domestic audience.

VII. Analysis

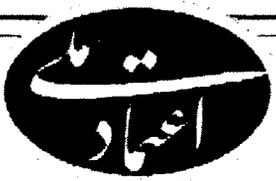
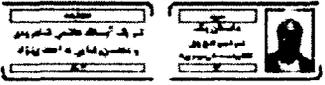
One day after the election the retraction of freedoms began that were extended prior to the vote. The government started with the arrest of journalists and media activists. The regime believed that the domestic newspapers and websites could play a pivotal role in mobilizing the people. At the beginning, miscalculating the scale of protests, the regime's action against the media was confined to the dispatch of special agents from the judiciary and the security apparatus to print houses. As the agents reviewed the lithographic versions of the newspapers and censored problematic and controversial items, papers were being printed with patches of white spots like *Etemad Melli* newspaper of 14 and 15 June 2009 (Figures 13 and 14). This trend continued until late July 2009 and was then followed by a massive wave of closures and suspensions for the newspapers. More than half a dozen papers were closed in the span of only three months. As Mylo puts it, this was the juncture in time when the Iranian media moved into self-censorship.

As for the foreign media, a fax from the Ministry of Guidance banned foreign journalists from working (Figure 15). *Farheekhtegan* of 22 June writes about the expulsion of BBC's Tehran bureau chief, Jon Leyne. The next day, on 23 June, we read about the arrest of Maziar Bahari of *Newsweek*, who was held in solitary confinement for 118 days. On 24 June the paper writes about the arrest of the Washington Times' correspondent in Tehran.

منارکت ۸۵ درصدی در انتخابات



تیریک چلوزیه احمدی خزاد



پس از سه نامزد و مجموع آرای باطله

وزارت کشور کثور کروبى را پنجم اعلام کرد

کروبى در دوره گذشته بیش از ۵۱۳ میلیون رأی مردم را کسب کرد

شهرت روزی وزیر کشور اعلام کرد از مجموع ۳۹ میلیون رأی در انتخابات دوره پنجم مجلس شورای اسلامی، کسب ۳۴ میلیون رأی و ۸۷ درصد آرا را داشته است.

نام نامزد	تعداد آرا	درصد آرا
کروبی	۳۴,۰۰۰,۰۰۰	۸۷٪
نامزد دیگر	۳,۰۰۰,۰۰۰	۷٪
نامزد دیگر	۲,۰۰۰,۰۰۰	۵٪
نامزد دیگر	۱,۰۰۰,۰۰۰	۲٪
آرای باطله	۳,۰۰۰,۰۰۰	۷٪

در این انتخابات، ۳۹ میلیون رأی در مجموع اعلام شد که ۳۴ میلیون آن به نامزد کروبى رسید.



وزیر کشور اعلام کرد که در این انتخابات، ۳۹ میلیون رأی در مجموع اعلام شد که ۳۴ میلیون آن به نامزد کروبى رسید. این نتیجه را پس از سه نامزد و مجموع آرای باطله اعلام کرد.

کروبى در دوره گذشته بیش از ۵۱۳ میلیون رأی مردم را کسب کرد. این نتیجه را پس از سه نامزد و مجموع آرای باطله اعلام کرد.

در این انتخابات، ۳۹ میلیون رأی در مجموع اعلام شد که ۳۴ میلیون آن به نامزد کروبى رسید. این نتیجه را پس از سه نامزد و مجموع آرای باطله اعلام کرد.

وزیر کشور اعلام کرد که در این انتخابات، ۳۹ میلیون رأی در مجموع اعلام شد که ۳۴ میلیون آن به نامزد کروبى رسید. این نتیجه را پس از سه نامزد و مجموع آرای باطله اعلام کرد.

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کروبى در دوره گذشته بیش از ۵۱۳ میلیون رأی مردم را کسب کرد. این نتیجه را پس از سه نامزد و مجموع آرای باطله اعلام کرد.



Figure 13 – Etemad Melli newspaper 14-06-2009

در خواست ستاد موسوی از وزارت کشور برای مجوز رهنمایی



حمله حسین بن هاشمی رفسنجانی



کتاب پنهانی

در سده سالها و ...
کتاب پنهانی ...
در سده سالها و ...
کتاب پنهانی ...
در سده سالها و ...



شال سبز بر گردن احمدی نژاد
احمدی نژاد فرزند پیاپی م

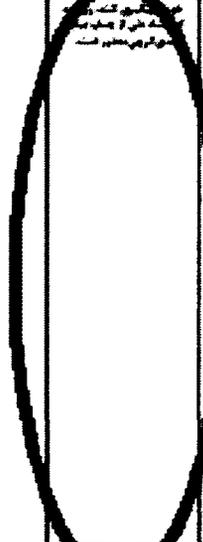
سردار رادان: ۱۷۰ نفر در تهران بازداشت شدند

کمیته امنیتی ...
سردار رادان ...
۱۷۰ نفر در تهران ...
بازداشت شدند ...
کمیته امنیتی ...
سردار رادان ...
۱۷۰ نفر در تهران ...
بازداشت شدند ...

بازدید محمود گروسی در طرح پروژه انتخابات

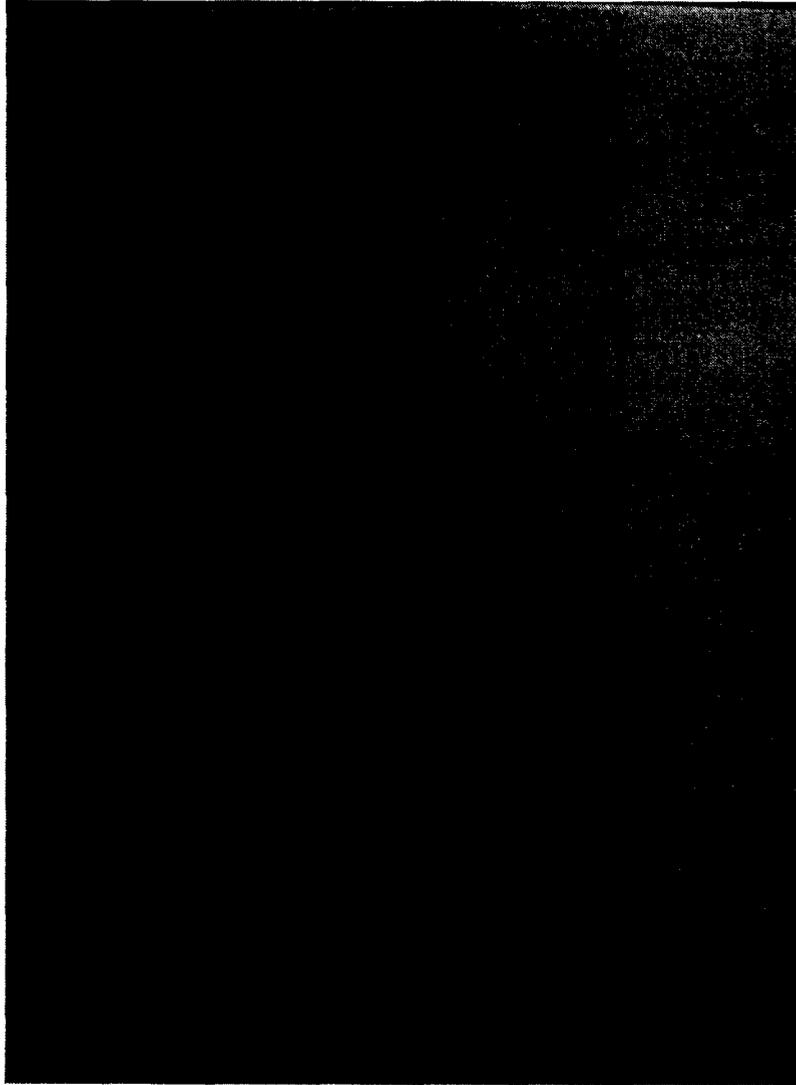


بازدید محمود گروسی ...
در طرح پروژه انتخابات ...
بازدید محمود گروسی ...
در طرح پروژه انتخابات ...



Advertisement for TISSOT watches, featuring the brand name and a watch image.

Figure 14 – Etemad Melli newspaper 15-06-2009



{16 June 2009}

{Logo - Ministry of Culture
and Islamic Guidance
Press Department}

{ Honourable [sic] representatives of foreign media,
[...]

We hereby inform all foreign media representatives that they should refrain from any uncoordinated journalistic activity that has not received permission from this department and not to attend news events except those announced by this office.

Should you need to carry out journalistic activity on the streets, coordination with this department is a must and you should refrain from attending or covering gatherings that have not received a permit from the Interior Ministry.

Mohsen Moghadaszadeh
Director General, Foreign Media [Department] }

Figure 3 – Official fax from Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to foreign media banning them from work

Filtering of the websites of newspapers began on the day following the elections. Almost ALL of the websites supporting Mir Hossein Mousavi were filtered by the regime. Internet speed in general was slowed to a crawl. The slow Internet through filtering resulted in “request timeout” errors, hindering their efforts for communication which ultimately acted as a deterrent to dissident behaviour (Sullivan 2011).

According to Mylo reformist media divided into two groups. Group one decided to keep informing the public at any cost, including closure of their establishment, while group two preferred to be cautious until the prevailing situation would pass. The first group of newspapers were of course taken to the gallows very quickly. The second group, inevitably had to draw their red lines much closer to avoid the same fate. To achieve that, newspaper managers increased the number of their advisors. These new advisors were not really there to advise anyone, but rather they had the task of acting as in-house censors – reformist-minded individuals paid by the newspapers to think like regime’s censors. Armed with a highlighter pen, they would strike out any material that they deemed was walking close to the red lines. These red lines covered a wide range, from criticism of the regime to publicity for the opposition. This self-censorship trend continued and escalated to such a degree that all in-house production including interviews, editorials, reportage etc. was completely abandoned and in their stead material from government run news agencies was copied onto the pages. This started following the Friday prayers of 19 June and has continued since. Self-censorship proved to be a much more effective tool as indirectly managed by the regime to control the message. The papers were censoring more on their own and at a lesser political and

financial cost to the regime. The only catch was that the Damocles' sword of closures and arrests would always hang over the head of the independent media.

In *Farheekhtegan*, for the first sample period, there should be signs of censorship and repression and signs of self-censorship for the second sample period, while in *Iran* there should be evidence of the regime's message. While the two might seem incomparable, it is the combination of the two findings that will show the true media policy of the regime. As Charles Tilly says actions could be classified as "repression" or "facilitation" and in the realm of communication and information flow, the regime would obviously subject *Farheekhtegan* to repression in order to muffle the voice of the opposition while it would use *Iran* to facilitate the delivery of its own message and advancing its own objectives.

2009

The chart for *Iran* of 2009 shows a trend. Up until the day after the demonstration there is not much material with a threatening tone in the newspaper. There is obviously a general tone of dissuasion, but more in the form of discrediting the motives behind the protests. In each of the three days the volume of threats is below 50 cm² which is negligible. On the day of the demonstration there is considerable material in *Iran* aimed at discrediting the movement. It carries articles that portray the protests up to that point as non-organic "riots" and demonstrators as "a few rioters (thugs)" who were being organized by a "central command." As was demonstrated that afternoon, this strategy back fired.

As for the news of the million-strong demonstration itself, which included fatalities, the extent of the coverage was a single item that covered 0.66 per cent of the third page and read:

Illegal demonstration by Mousavi supporters

- Following a call by Mousavi for his supporters to gather at Azadi Sq., this gathering took place without permit from the Interior ministry. Mousavi attended this gathering and delivered a speech!!

IRIB and Press TV also display the same behaviour. Nanuk's story from inside IRIB says that with regards to the hugely popular and crowded demonstration by Mousavi supporters, "the directive was to cover the demonstration itself in a very small and limited fashion but at the same time focus extensively on the conflicts and violence that was shaping on the sidelines." While the demonstrations in support of the regime, "were covered extensively", the violence in the streets and the conflicts that were taking place would be covered "wherever they could be used to condemn the other side [and the opposition movement]."

At Press TV coverage of protests, such as the 15 June 2009 event were "very brief" or more commonly loaded with words and adjectives that were "not objective." Itzel had noticed a clear contrast between the coverage of opposition demonstrations and that of Khamenei's sermon. She told me she could "clearly remember the Press TV correspondent saying things like 'people have come out to show their love and support for the system and to show that those who were out a few days ago are nothing compared to us in numbers' or 'you can see millions of Iranians here in Tehran today'

and basically saying that people were pledging allegiance again to the leader and the Islamic Republic.”

Two days after the demonstration we see a massive jump in the volume of reporting with an underlying message of threats toward the opposition movement and protestors in *Iran*. This is clearly when the regime has realized that the cost of dissent or in other words the risks involved in taking part in the opposition movement, must be increased in order to reduce the power of the street protests.

The talk of threats continues until the 20 June issue, the day Neda was killed, but then we witness a drop in mentions of threats and simultaneously a spike in the volume of material linking the movement to foreign elements and highlighting the role of an “external enemy.”

This can be attributed to two things. One is that the paper is taking its cue from the Leader who emphasized in his sermons on 19 June that enemy elements and terrorists can infiltrate the ranks of protestors and use the protests and the chaos to deliver damaging blows to the Islamic System (Khamenei 2009). The other reason for the tone down is Neda’s death. As Neda’s death gained greater attention domestically and internationally, the regime knew that people would put two and two together and link the killings to the source of the threats and perhaps become more infuriated. We see that to divert the blame, the focus on threats was reduced and the emphasis on the role of the external enemy was increased. It is also within this period that Iran expels two British diplomats. Neda’s death itself does not get reported until 25 June in *Iran* and when it does, it is only news about the aftermath of her death and how the regime

is hunting for the perpetrators of the crime. The item covers only three per cent of the space devoted to total pertinent items in that day's edition.

At IRIB, Nanuk tells me that if you look at news bulletins broadcast prior to Ayatollah's Friday prayers, all the events were covered "in a very general way." Although the items did not have any teeth and there was no mention of "fraud," the events were covered never the less. After Khamenei's sermon however, things change and IRIB "stopped mentioning the name of the Green candidates (meaning Karoubi and Mousavi) and [in the news terminology] they [were now referred to] as the leaders of sedition."

Towards the end of the sample period and as the regime feels confident that it has managed to establish the important role of foreign elements in triggering and sustaining the uprising, we see the threats picking up again in *Iran* and the campaign continues by targeting people's hope for change and trying to dissuade people from uprising.

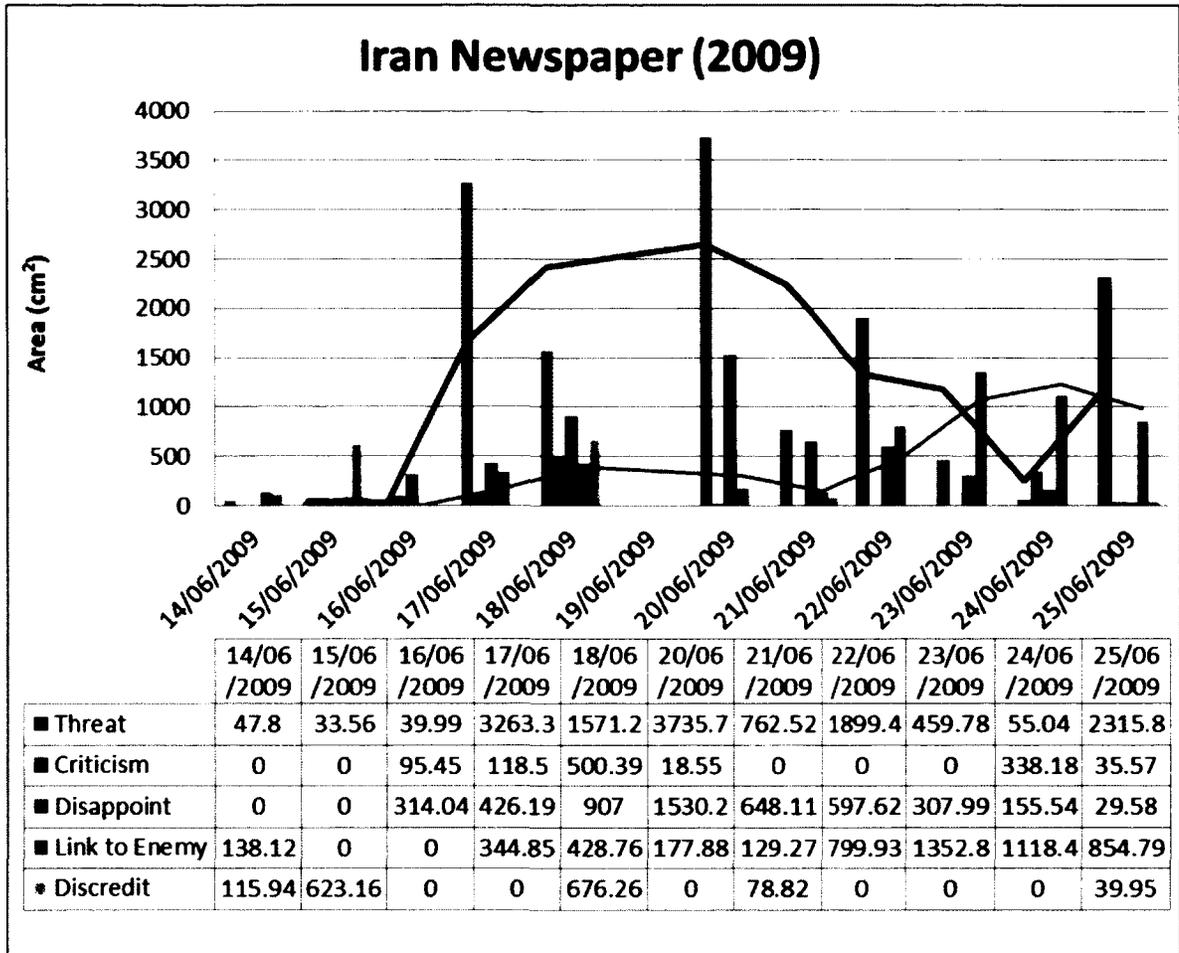


Figure 16 – Chart of surface area occupied by each category in Iran (2009 period)

Neda's death and its coverage in the media was itself a very interesting issue which merits a more detailed examination. While she was gunned down on 20 June and while the heart-aching footage of her death was going viral on the World Wide Web, the two papers were completely silent about the issue until 24 June. *Farheekhtegan* which is under careful watch of government censors devises a clever method of getting around the heavy censorship and in a bold move, that carried the risk of heavy punishment for the paper, its staff and journalists, publishes Neda's picture on the first page of the 24 June edition. To get around the censors the paper used the "Kiosk" section of the paper

and the picture of the front page of the British daily *The Guardian* to print Neda's photo. "Kiosk" is a small section of *Farheekhtegan* which shows a thumbnail of the front page of three foreign papers and their main headline each day. To avoid attracting unwanted attention from regime censors the title chosen from *The Guardian* reads: "New Speaker of Britain's Parliament Promises Reform." The deliberate attempt at publishing Neda's picture is obvious from the blurring of the OTHER art appearing on the front pages. The item is 36.85 cm² before the application of the location coefficient, and while it only covers 2.33 per cent of the front page, it is quite significant as it shows the resistance of the paper to attempts at censorship and repression. It also shows that there is still no sign of self-censorship, because what has made it past the censors or escaped their eyes is fair game. Mylo says that during the first few days after the election, reformist media were generally in uncharted territory. "Some of us tried [a] method [of bypassing the restrictions]; reliance on divine mercy," he said jokingly, "hoping that no one with a highlighter or a more powerful tool would read or notice the piece."

Neda's death does not appear in *Farheekhtegan* in its actual sense until thirteen days after her death. This is well past the two traditional remembrances, the third and the seventh day after passing, which Iranians hold for their deceased.

Looking at *Farheekhtegan* the subcategories did not stay the same all through the sample period of 2009. With the changing circumstances I had to change what I was looking for. In order to understand fully the situation in the newsroom of the paper, I had to look for any news on the upcoming protest and how that was portrayed in the paper.

One thing that is clearly visible one day before the demonstration is that the paper is scared and under pressure. The main story on the front page, covering 15.23 per cent of the page, is a threat by the Interior Minister that “any illegal gathering will be dealt with.” This is while *Iran* on the same day only allocated a small 23.9 cm² space or 1.51 per cent of the front page to any threat. *Farheekhtegan* does give news of “a gathering at Azadi Sq.” but only very vaguely. This vague invitation occupies 1.37 per cent of page three.

On the day of the demonstration the paper had already found a way to deliver the news of the event to people. By now the staff had learned that due to the heavy load of material to be checked, the censors only had time to read the headline and the lede of articles. “There were and still are ways around the limits,” Mylo told me in our interview. “One such method was to change how we wrote the reports, interviews etc. We kept the message alive within a new and changed SAFE shell.” Hence starting with a “safe” headline and lede the paper then delivers the main message which actually has little or nothing to do with the title.

Acting Chief of Police: Mir Hossein Not Under House Arrest

Political Desk – In response to recent rumours about the house arrest of some of the candidates, acting chief of police specifically speaking about Mir Hossein Mousavi's house arrest said: such a thing has not happened and I strongly deny this.

Meanwhile, Islameil Geramimoghadam, the spokesman for Etemad Melli party denied foreign media reports of the house arrest of Mehdi Karoubi, Secretary General of the party and a candidate in the 10th Presidential elections. In the meantime, Mir Hossein Mousavi has issued various statements expressing his objection to the election process and the results [...] I repeat and emphasize that you should peacefully and without violence continue to express your legal and civil objection. We have asked the officials for a permit for a large demonstration to be held in every city across the nation [...].

In this piece which covers 19.71 per cent of the front page, only three lines in the lede are related to the headline and the police official and the rest of the piece is about Mousavi's statements and his invitation to the public to attend that day's "peaceful" demonstration.

After the demonstration the paper becomes visibly bolder. One day after the demonstration 15 per cent of the front page is dedicated to the news of the demonstration. However, it is still careful and quotes other news outlets like *Jam e Jam Online* (a conservative website) or ILNA (a reformist news agency) which according to Mylo is another measure used by reformist journalists and media to avoid the closure of their papers. The "Kiosk" technique is again used here and this time to show the beating of people by Basij forces.

From this moment forth and for a brief two day period until the fateful Tehran Friday prayers of 19 June, led by Ayatollah Khamenei, the paper seems more

courageous in its reporting. There is a huge jump in the reflection of people's grievances in the paper. The paper highlights the demands of the opposition for the annulment of the elections and the support of the various groups for the public in their uprising. The paper also uses the momentum that has been gained from the massive turnout at the demonstration to push for relaxing the pressure on media. On 18 June the paper publishes an article giving a roundup of the media environment of the week after the elections. The article titled "Media Situation During the Stormy Days" starts by giving an account of how the government curtailed personal communications, cutting off text services and later the entire mobile phone network. It then talks about the problems that were faced by mass media during the week. Three reformist newspapers had major issues at the print house. Websites were filtered and Internet speed was generally reduced to a crawl. *Etemad Melli* published blank patches and the offices of Mousavi's newspaper were physically attacked. The article concludes "All mass communication experts believe that during times of social crisis, mass communication media should be controlled. However, if the control that is exerted is too great, it would lead to the spread of rumours and hurt the psychological security of the society in general. It is quite possible that dissemination of wrong and incorrect information could end up costing people's lives."

According to Mylo this visible boldness is by no means an indication of the end of censorship. In fact he says the censors were very much still at work. "[They] had warned us and were particularly mindful of any mention of the killings" and especially the numbers. Comparatively speaking, while *Iran* mentions the killings, and the official

count of seven, two days after the demonstration, there is nothing in *Farheekhtegan* until three days after the demonstration and even then only a very small mention. The paper runs a brief of a statement by Mousavi, only 6 lines long and taking up 3.89 per cent on page two, which merely expresses sympathy with the families of the fallen without mentioning any numbers. On page ten and under a “safe” headline and lede of a police official denying any traffic restrictions, the paper talks about the casualties of the demonstration putting the number at 35.

The sharp end of the protests prior to 19 June, 2009 was directed at the government and at Mahmoud Ahmadinejad personally. However following the Ayatollah’s angry sermon, these protests shifted their focus and targeted the system and the slogans changed toward the leader. This meant that protests and the slogans were now strictly off limits. *Farheekhtegan* shifts to reporting the politicking in the corridors of power. The paper now focuses on the restrictions on holding demonstrations and the activities of the media and delivers the message entirely through quotations from MPs or other political figures.

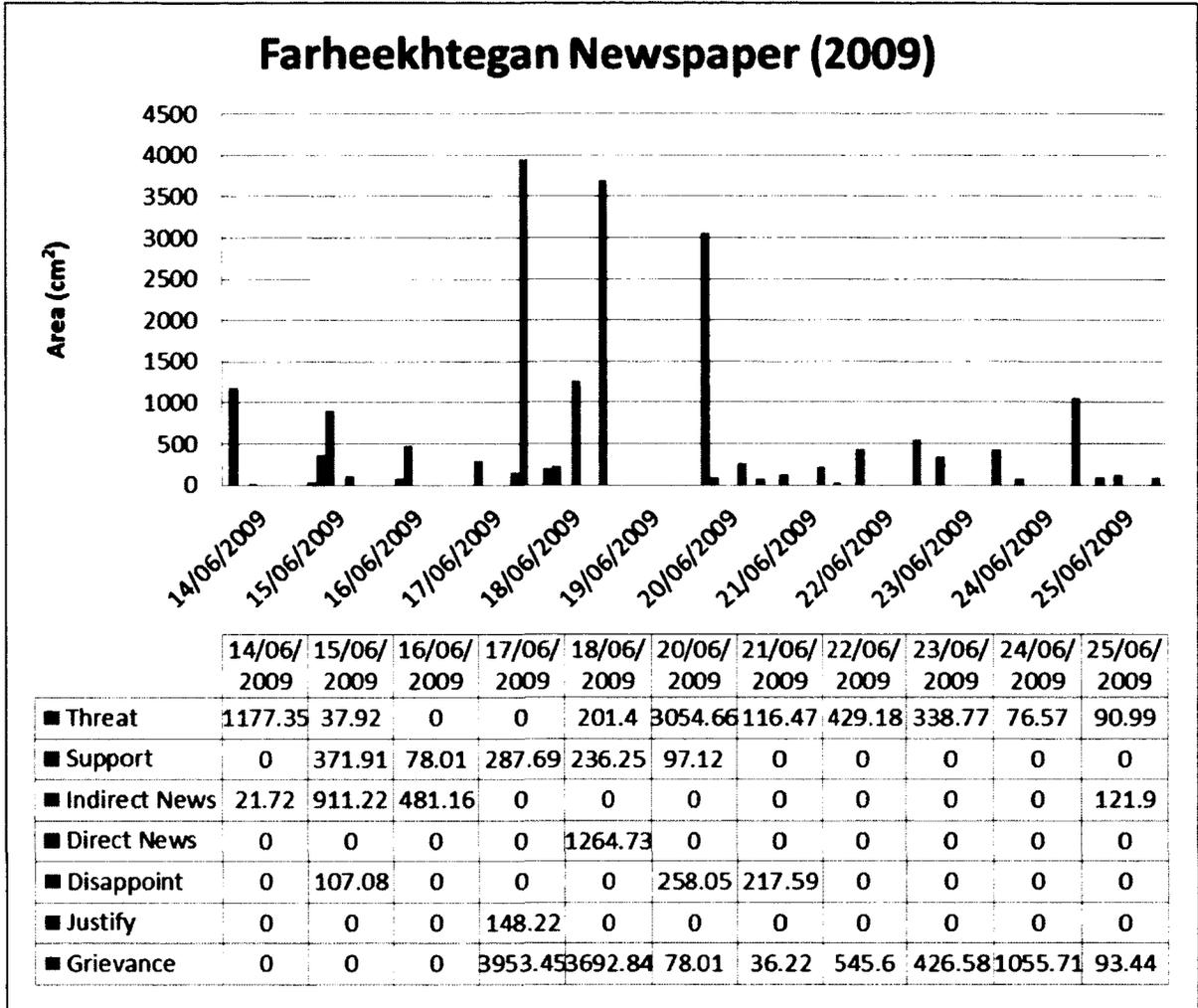


Figure 18 – Chart of surface area occupied by each category in Farheekhtegan (2009 period)

One exception was an article that appeared on the front page of the 24 June edition of *Farheekhtegan* covering more than 22 per cent of the page. It is a harshly critical article that stems from clear frustration by the independent media.

Double-Standard Policy of Post-Election Reporting

Political Desk – Ehsan Mazandarani: The Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) as the responsible body for the country's security, issues directives with regard to the publication of news and reports in situations where the daily running of the country is disturbed [...] SNSC which is headed by the president, sent out a directive a while ago to

the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance calling on the Press Department to be more vigilant regarding news and reports that are being published about the riots following the presidential elections. This directive covered statements by Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karoubi and effectively prevented Karoubi, Secretary General of Etemad Melli party, from publishing his statement regarding the elections in the mouthpiece of the party, Etemad Melli newspaper.

These limitations exist while the affiliated to or supportive of the government, not only ignore the directive, but rather help spin the rumour mill through publication of photos, news items and reports of the recent events [...] such media seem to be exempt from the SNSC directive [...] levelling accusations and spreading rumours about [Hashemi Rafsanjani] and all those arrested, who have not yet been before the court and printing photos of the street clashes are among the violations committed by the pro-government newspapers to which the monitoring apparatus has turned a blind eye [...].

Mazandarani quotes two experts in his article, a media law professor and a fellow journalist, who both deplore the double-standard media policy of the regime. His article criticizes the “national media” which is another name for the national broadcaster IRIB and concludes that the pressure on professional media would drive the news-thirsty public toward unofficial and nonprofessional news sources and foreign media. The articles states that both could have adverse effects for the regime, as the first would help the spread of rumours and the second would “transfer the management of information flow to outside of the country.”

The very final paragraph of the article quotes Badrossadat Mofidi, the secretary of the Newspaper Journalists’ Guild. Mofidi indicates that the country is indeed in a critical situation and “covering the developments is a natural professional duty [for the

journalists], however, independent newspapers are being pressed for [carrying out] this duty but pro-government media are carrying out security duties under the cover of professional [media] duties.”

Mofidi’s concern about the involvement of pro-regime journalists in security and intelligence activities was echoed by Nanuk. Nanuk who has many years of experience working for the state-broadcaster says that IRIB reporters and journalists are present at every single event in the country, irrespective of the nature or content, even if they are certain that their material won’t air for political reasons. There are various reasons for this presence. One reason is that the footage and reports are not merely used for broadcast; they are all available as archival material for future productions. Another reason is that “there have been other uses for the footage, mainly by the security and intelligence services.”

Nanuk explained that “occasionally we would send a complete tape to the other side [...] We would come back from a demonstration or a gathering and instead of using the tape for broadcast, our entire tape would get sent off [to the Ministry of Intelligence and other security apparatus].” He did clarify that IRIB footage is only supplementary material as “the security apparatus has its own camera crew [...] A journalist, even from IRIB, never attends a demonstration or an event with the sole aim of recording material for the intelligence and security apparatus.”

While the presence of intelligence agents and security forces in domestic media is easy to comprehend, their presence in the international branch of the state-broadcaster was more difficult to believe, but Itzel told of the same situation at Press TV. She told

me that “there are individuals from the Revolutionary Guards and the Intelligence [Ministry] who have infiltrated the media in Iran, especially Press TV” and their intricate knowledge of regime’s policies help guide the editorial line. She told me that in fact the presence of such forces at places like Press TV is even more vital since these people come with an inherent knowledge of what the red lines are and can impose them on their subordinates. This method, she told me jokingly, has eliminated the need for paper or electronic memos. Itzel believes that in a place like Press TV where you naturally need “foreign” and “alien” staff, or people who have lived abroad and have come into contact with foreign and specifically Western culture, “it is this combination and mix that makes the outcome desirable for the regime.”

According to her, when Press TV wanted to interview the detained *Newsweek* journalist, Maziar Bahari, the most senior editor-in-chief of the newsroom was sent and according to Itzel “in that interview you can clearly see [the interviewer] and Press TV taking on the role of the regime’s interrogators.” Press TV was later fined £100,000 by British regulators on the ground that the interview had been conducted under duress. More recently the broadcaster was forced off the air in the UK after Ofcom revoked its licence for breaching the UK Communications Act (Sweeney 2012).

2011

More than a year and half later on 14 February, 2011 and only three days after Mubarak was ousted in Egypt and three days after the major regime-orchestrated event to celebrate the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, the Greens took to the streets in

Iran for one last time. The new media environment that was beginning to take shape following the elections had by now taken its full form and set in completely.

On 6 February, 2011 the leaders of the opposition movement wrote a joint letter to the Interior Ministry asking for a permit hoping to allow the few remaining independent media to publicize the event. However, the in-house censors refused to allow the letter to go to print as Iran's Supreme National Security Council had banned the publication of any news or comment by the two leaders. Journalists had to find another way to inform the public about the upcoming demonstration. Their solution was that since there is nothing wrong with quoting regime's own officials, the issue had to be raised during scrums or they had to wait for a statement. On 12 February *Farheekhtegan* delivers the news quoting the Secretary General of the Guardian Council, Ayatollah Jannati. Speaking in Isfahan, Jannati said "the sedition of 2009 is gone, but the leaders of the sedition, while they have been shamed, sitting in their homes, still think that they have a place among people and based on this have made plans for 14th of February." *Iran* of the same day, while covering Jannati's comments, does not reflect a single word about the Valentine's Day demonstration.

While the "request for permit" was intended mainly to act as a conduit for Reformist media to publicize the event, it also gave the regime a heads-up and ample time before the demonstration to prepare. The regime's response was to instruct its media to try and dissuade people from participation. The dissuasion campaign included publishing articles with threatening tones, particularly threats of arrest of the leaders of the movement, discrediting the movement through linking it to foreign elements and

the enemy as well as chipping away at the hope of the people for any success by publishing disappointing news particularly portraying erosion in the popular support for the movement (*Iran* newspaper 13 and 14 February). The last item was specially highlighted by emphasizing the size of the gathering on the regime-organized rally of 11 February.

Media from across the political spectrum had also earlier received a blunt directive from the Ministry of Guidance to refrain from even mentioning the names of the leaders of the movement and former Iranian president Seyed Mohammad Khatami or reporting on their activities and comments (Kamali Dehghan 2011). Nanuk says he had heard of a memo that was issued by the director of IRIB instructing all departments that the “names of the Green candidates should not be mentioned.” Although he had not seen this memo, because mostly they are addressed to the heads of departments and passed down to the editor-in-chiefs in private meetings, I managed to get a copy from another source inside IRIB (Figure 19).

شماره:
تاریخ:
پست:



{LOGO}
{Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting}

[1 - Broadcast monitors should be aware of not using insignia of any kind associated with the Green Sedition and other hostile groups ... they should also eliminate and quickly report any suspicious items.

2 - The background of all guests for live shows should be taken into consideration]

[6 - All activities of hostile networks and Internet websites should be constantly monitored and their items and positions should be quickly reported [to the management].]

- ۱- ناظرین پخش نسبت به استفاده از نمادهای گروه های معاند، فتنه سبز و ... با حمله، توجیه و موارد مشکوک را حذف و مراتب سرپا گزارش گردد.
- ۲- سوابق مهمانان برنامه های زنده مدنظر قرار گیرد.
- ۳- عوامل سازمانی در زمان حضور در مراکز حفاظتی، راهپیمایی و ... از ارائه هرگونه خدمات و تجهیزات (دوربین، قلم و ...) به سایر خبرنگاران جوایز و سازمان های دیگر جدا خودداری نمایند.
- ۴- اسناد و مدارک معرفی افراد به مجموعه های امنیتی جهت تهیه برنامه دقیقاً برابر ضوابط ثبت و ضبط گردد.
- ۵- از انتقال تجهیزاتی که امکان جاسازی تجهیزات نظامی یا وسایل اختراقی وجود دارد قبل از کنترل حفاظتی، خودداری نمایند.
- ۶- تحرکات شبکه های معاند و سایت های اینترنتی مورد بررسی پیاپی قرار گرفته و موارد و مواضع سرپا گزارش گردد.

حجت اطلاع در سایت وزارت

{Redacted}

{Monitoring Colleagues
[Redacted]
Be informed and oblige.
[Redacted]
09-02-2011}

Figure 29 –Directive to broadcast monitors to avoid "Green" insignia or mentions. (Source: Confidential)

In the days leading up to 14 February the regime had once again carried out a number of its infamous midnight raids and arrested number of political activists and journalists. Tehran's prosecutor, a day before the demonstration and at a ceremony to mark the start of work at a special media court, made sure to mention the recent arrests and explained that the they were made on "security grounds," and since the "leaders of sedition had been acting in the past few days" the security apparatus had to act on its responsibility. Both *Farheekhtegan* and *Iran* highlight his warning that the police will be acting on its responsibilities in the next few days. What is interesting is the EXACT wording of the two items as though they were copied from the same press release.

By the end of the day of 14 February, there was chatter on the Internet that a number of people had been gunned down. At first the regime tried to keep a lid on the news about the bloodshed. *Iran* ran a story on the front page on the day after the event stating that the streets were calm and the "sedition" had failed. However, due to the extent of the demonstration, it quickly realized that the news could not be contained and hence it staged a very dirty, yet impressive campaign. Just like "Neda," the Valentine's Day demonstration had found itself an icon. Sane Jaleh and Mohammad Mokhtari, both university students, were killed in cold blood and although their deaths were never captured on video, their life and death stories quickly captivated the public and spread like wildfire through the nation. Word of mouth and foreign media played a major role in the spread of the news. The regime then announced that during the clashes of that day two Basij members had been martyred by rioters and foreign elements. Iran's chief of police was quoted in *Iran* on 19 February saying that Jaleh's

death was orchestrated by the enemy to coincide with the anniversary of the arrest of Abdullah Ocalan (founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party) in order to entice social uprising in Kurdistan.

The day after the demonstration, we see a sudden increase in threats and pressures in the pro-regime media. While it was expected to see *Iran* filled with threats and disappointing news for the movement, the disappointing news that appeared in *Farheekhtegan* was the more important phenomenon. Except Jannati's comments in Isfahan and a few threats, *Farheekhtegan* is almost void of any items related to the demonstration or its aftermath up until 16 June. On 16 February we see the paper peddling some of the regime's threats but on 17 February it is filled with news of various political figures distancing themselves from the movement and the events of Valentine's Day, dedicating a significant area of 1802.905 cm² to such items.

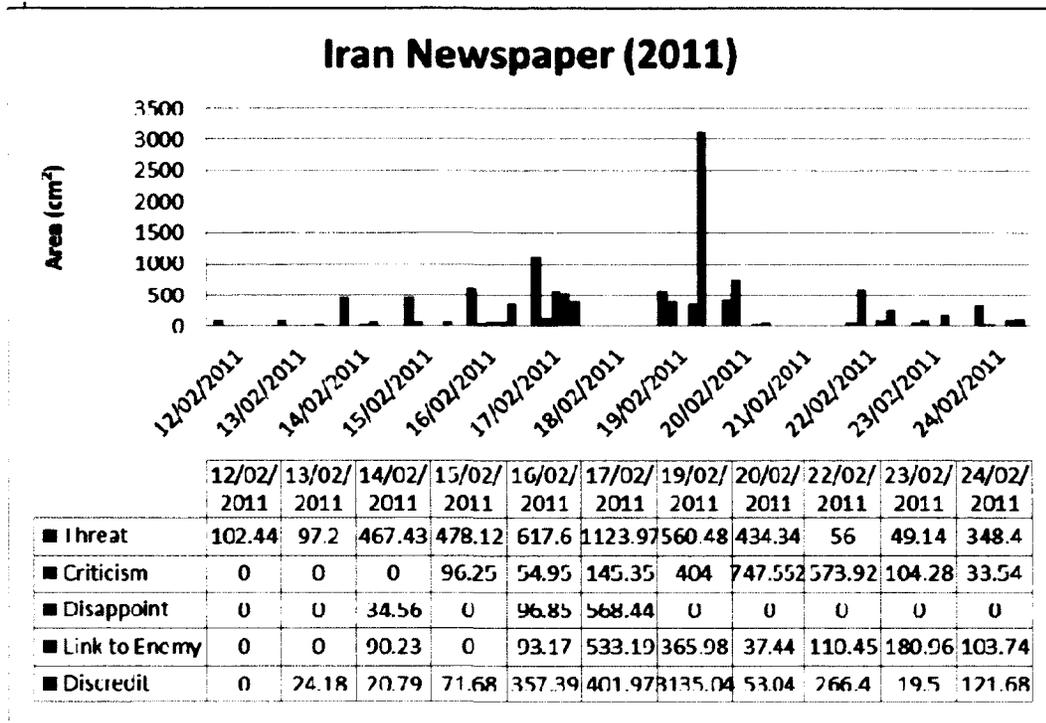


Figure 20 – Chart of surface area occupied by each category in Iran (2011 period)

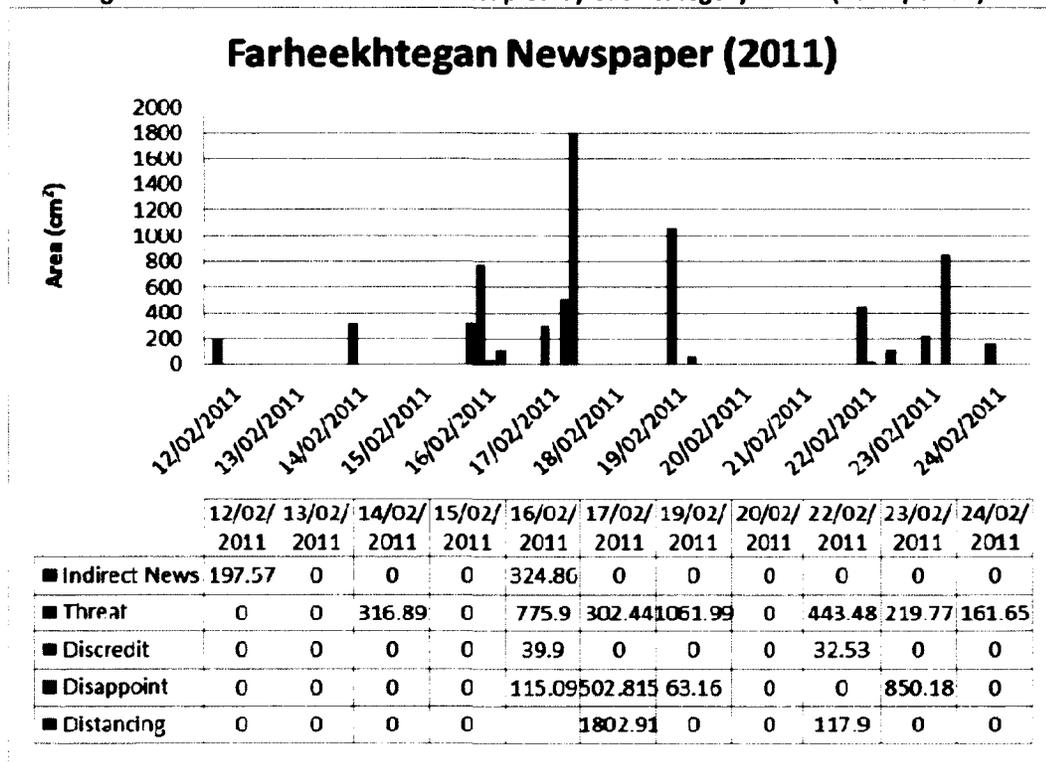


Figure 21 – Chart of surface area occupied by each category in Farheekhtegan (2011 period)

With respect to the deafening silence, Mylo tells me that “while we had received some directives, the regime had mostly left it upon our own discretion to judge what could be considered a red line and a provocation of public opinion and in doing so we had ended up drawing those red lines much closer than any government censor would have. The memory of massive closures and unemployment of our fellow journalists in other newspapers was still fresh in our minds. We were self-censoring.”

By this time the paper is clearly in hibernation, having halted all in-house production and only running copy from news agencies and third-party sources. However not all silence is bad. The non-reporting of an event, especially of such a scale, meant that while people knew something had happened, they could not see it in their morning paper, which to them signified the importance of the event. Government restriction was multiplying the importance of the censored events. Silence had become louder than any cry. But that is only one side of the coin. The other side to the same coin as Mylo puts it is silence as resistance. He told me “while the censors could prevent us from printing certain material, we quickly learned that they could not force us to print ALL of their propaganda. We had turned the tables and reversed the fight. We were now challenging them with what we didn't print. Occasionally we did get a slap on the wrist but we had to be different from regime media. If not in what we printed, then certainly in what we did not print.”

The precedents for this go back to 11 December, 2009 when the government organized an anti-Green demonstration following the Friday prayers. The pretext for the demonstration was the alleged defamation and burning of the portrait of Ayatollah

Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, a few days earlier by the opposition protesters. The Greens, however, believed that the whole story was fabricated by the regime to create an excuse for further crackdowns, and hence the papers did not run the story. On 19 December the Ministry of Guidance issued a warning to four reformist papers deploring their poor coverage of the demonstration (ILNA 2009).

The technique of silent resistance or blank headline has been so effective that even the government newspaper, *Iran*, resorted to using it.



Figure 22 - Iran newspaper of 22-11-2011

Following the publication of material by *Iran* that was deemed offensive to Islamic values by the judiciary, head of the paper, Aliakbar Javanfekr - also the Press Advisor to the president- was convicted in the press court of publishing material against Islamic

values. He then condemned the court's ruling in an interview with a reformist newspaper. He was to hold a press conference at the offices of *Iran* newspaper the following day to address the same issue when judiciary and security agents stormed the building, confiscating all computers and equipment and arresting 30 of the staff. In a sign of protest, *Iran* printed a blank headline the following day. A paragraph in the middle of the blank patch reads:

The incident of 21 November, where judiciary and police forces entered *Iran* and led to the arrest of the manager and 39 of the journalists and staff of the newspaper, prevented the operations of the newsroom. Since *Iran* does not wish to provoke and disturb the public opinion and also feels obligated by its social responsibility toward the people, hence the blank-reading of today's paper is dedicated to the memory of the incident. We hope such a deplorable incident will never happen again.

VIII. Conclusion

The findings in this study indicate that shortly before polls closed in the 2009 presidential elections, the regime immediately got involved in controlling the media. This was a media campaign that had two edges. On the one edge the pro-regime media across the board were receiving instructions and editorial directions from a "source." The same "source" was also monitoring and censoring the opposition media and preventing them from publishing certain material. The "source" was Iran's Supreme National Security Council.

At the opposition newspapers, the regime's media campaign started with censorship but then as the situation on the streets escalated and the regime felt more threatened, a wave of closures began. This combination of censorship and closures suddenly changed the atmosphere in which media were operating. Intentional or not, the regime had forced the few remaining independent/opposition media into self-censorship. The self-censorship meant that the regime was controlling the flow of information at a fraction of the political and financial cost. The reformist media who had hired its own censors started drawing the red lines much closer than any government censor would ever have. One of the main reasons was they preferred to stay on the safe side and live to fight another day. Another reason was their inherent knowledge of the tactics used by their fellow journalists. Being insiders they knew the underlying message in some of the material and knew what to look for in articles.

The research also shows that despite the repression and crackdowns the media maintained its resilience. At every stage, censorship or self-censorship, devoted and courageous journalists found a way to deliver a broader message to the public about what was taking place. In times of censorship, methods such as “safe headline and lede” or the “Kiosk” technique allowed the message to seep through the filters of the censors. In the self-censorship stage, while much of the content in the newspapers was “copy” material from government or third-party sources, the journalists still found ways of saying what they wanted through the words of regime officials.

The reformist media also refused to be part of the regime’s propaganda machine and while there were some repercussions for this resistance, they knew that their paper could be closed only for what appears in its paper and NOT for what is absent from those pages.

The reformist media used “silence” as a double-edged sword. Silence was a tool for resistance to avoid taking part in regime’s propaganda. Silence was also a cry: printing blank headlines or not reporting on a major event, telling the public about what was happening in the newsroom. The experience in Iran shows that not printing news and information could be “as effective” and at times even “more effective” than actual publication. The regime’s repression of media magnified the importance of events. No matter what the level of repression, the scale of events was such that the public knew at least “something” was happening. Not seeing it in their morning paper or the evening’s newscast meant, to them that whatever was taking place was very important. Even limited reporting of the deaths of Neda, Jaleh and Mokhtari proved that the message

did find a way to emerge and while details might be murky, news of bloodshed could not be suppressed.

All of these events, however, followed an already-organized mobilization and collective action. To cover the mobilizations on both occasions the independent papers had to resort to somehow reporting that the leaders were organizing an event. With the two reformist leaders now under house arrest and all other prominent figures of the opposition movement in jail or in exile, the regime thought the source of the message had been plugged.

With professional journalists and traditional media in hibernation, under threat, for a while it seemed the only viable option was to use new media to facilitate debate and exchange of ideas in the society. The pre-election reliance of the reformists on the Internet and mobile phones as tools of campaigning and the post-election de facto state of emergency, led the Western media and scholars to believe that the new media “played a powerful role in Iran's 2009 presidential election.” (Kamalipour 2010, 68) The fact of the matter is that although according to official statistics Iran has 32 million Internet users, only 2.1% of those users are on high-speed connections and the remainder effectively suffer with speeds of below 56k (ADSL-PAP 2011). Regulation pertaining to communication infrastructure in Iran also delegates the control of the Internet to the sole hands of the regime (Telecom Infrastructure Company). These factors when combined with restrictions on SMS messaging at key points in time suggest that new media did not and cannot play as big a role in encouraging dissent and protest as portrayed by Western media.

It is also a fact that grievances would ultimately have to be addressed in the real world and not just in cyberspace. Occupation of public space is what brings about change and the role of media, new or traditional, in addition to facilitating the insider-to-outsider communication (or PR for a movement) has to also include facilitating the insider-to-insider communication for mobilization and coordination at the street level. As in the case of Serbia in 1996 it was the will to walk through the city, even when facing police violence, that “proved to be a crucial element in the *mobilisation* of support.” (Spasic and Pavicevic 1997, 21-28)

So what is the way forward in a state like Iran? If traditional media cannot fulfill their responsibilities and if new media are severely constrained, who and what has to shoulder such responsibilities and support the needs of Iran’s movement for social and political change?

Breaking down the problem into its component parts makes it possible to consider and test potential answers. There are communications problem in Iran on three different levels: insider-to-insider, insider-to-outsider and outsider-to-insider. This means people in the reformist movement cannot communicate with one another either to disseminate information or engage in a debate or dialogue over an issue. The people of Iran also cannot communicate easily with the outside world, which means that global public opinion is at best only vaguely informed of the events that are unfolding inside the country. Since the government filters the Internet and jams satellite signals, another huge problem faced by the Iranian public is regular and timely access to information and news from the outside world.

To address the problem of insider-to-insider communication, it is perhaps best to resort to methods which have been used effectively in the past in Iran. During the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the nation did not have access to mass digital media as might occur today. As an alternative people resorted to the use of “small media” which included pamphlets, cassette tapes and sermons by the clergy (Sreberny and Mohammadi 1994). Identifying the current use of and development of possible “small media” in the Iran of today could be a topic for a further study to test its suitability for the dissemination of political messages.

For the insider-to-outsider communication, the combination of citizen journalism, new media and the Internet seems to be the solution. It is necessary however to overcome the problem of reliance on regime-owned communication infrastructure and the various pitfalls inherent with citizen journalism, such as low quality and the unverifiable credibility of the citizen journalists produce.

There have recently been technical advances in the needed infrastructure for such communication with the introduction of “briefcase Internet” systems. This is “a case filled with enough equipment to set up an autonomous, metropolitan WiFi network.” (GLANZ and MARKOFF 2011) The New America Foundation has recently developed “a portable, WiFi-based network that could be carried into contested regions and allow dissident groups to set up networks independent of a government-controlled network.” (GLANZ and MARKOFF 2011) This technology could also be used by dissident groups in the contested region to coordinate themselves for collective action.

My experience and the testimony of the Iranian journalists interviewed for this thesis all highlight the role of citizen journalism following the rigged elections. Mylo says when the media were restricted and the regime had clamped down on journalists, when mobile communication was cut and text messaging was no longer available, “it was the citizens who were reporting on the protests, it was the people who spread the word and the message, the date and time of the next demonstration and protest rally; person to person, while riding in shared cabs or the bus or the subway.”

Word of mouth and citizens’ reporting on events played an important role in the flow of information. However, as Quinn et al state in “Online Newsgathering: Research and Reporting for Journalism,” the biggest issue with citizen journalism is “gaining the trust of audiences and maintaining credibility.” The fact that corroboration of citizens’ reports is difficult means it is also very susceptible to disinformation campaigns from an authoritarian regime.

One such disinformation campaign was the story of the rape and murder of Ms. Saeedeh Pouraghaei. While the study of this case is beyond the scope of this thesis, the tale itself can be a testament to how far the Iranian regime was willing to go in its propaganda campaign. Saeedeh’s story surfaced shortly after Karoubi compiled a report (based on first hand testimonies) about how detainees of post-election protests were violated and sodomized in prisons. In a fake report by Saeedeh’s mother to Karoubi she claimed that her daughter was arrested by Basij and her half burnt body was later delivered to the family. Subsequently a funeral was held which was attended by prominent Green figures. A short while later, Saeedeh appeared on national television

and spoke of her “shock” when she heard the news of her own death and funeral. The regime then capitalized on this story to challenge and try to undermine every case Karoubi had revealed.

While various organizations have dedicated resources to both training citizen journalists - to improve the quality of material collected from the scene - and addressing credibility issues, these efforts are still at an early stage and could be another subject for further study.

Finally, while utilization of the “briefcase Internet” might address the problem of the outsider-to-insider communication to a degree, the need to reach a broader audience could be achieved through the use of satellite radios. Although this is a costly media to set up on the broadcast end, it has relatively easy for an audience to receive, and since the receiver is the one who is logistically challenged anyway, this system suits the situation. The content of the broadcast programs could very well come from the citizen journalists on the ground in Iran.

The events in Iran demonstrated that even an authoritarian regime can only have limited control over information flow. Information will get out and overt censorship and self-censorship can't stop that happening. As technology advances and as new techniques in journalism are developed it will only become harder to muzzle the media. This research only emphasizes how difficult it will be for the state to continue to exercise control. The state is ultimately fighting a losing battle, because while violence is used instead of conversation, bullets can only silence individuals and ideas are

bulletproof. The question is how long will it take for change to come and how many people will be killed or imprisoned in the process? I hope soon and I hope few.

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