Politics & Gender, 12 (2016), 168–197.

Women and Political Leadership in an Authoritarian Context: A Case Study of the Sixth Parliament in the Islamic Republic of Iran

Valentine M. Moghadam

Northeastern University

Fatemeh Haghighatjoo

Nonviolent Initiative for Democracy, Inc.

When Iran's new president, Hassan Rouhani, presented his proposed Cabinet to the Majles (parliament) in August 2013, one issue brought up in social media was the strange silence of the women members throughout the intensive four-day sessions to assess the ministerial nominees' programs before the vote of confidence. None of the nine women parliamentary members (MPs) used the podium to object that the president had not nominated any woman as minister. Only on social media and Persian language television was there criticism for the absence of women ministers. Eventually, Rouhani promised to include a woman in his Cabinet and to promote women in middle managerial positions. Not only was this tokenism evidence of gender-blindness, but it also evinced historical amnesia, as it overlooked the

We are grateful to the external reviewers for helpful comments on an earlier version of this article. This article began as a series of interviews of Haghighatjoo by Moghadam—in Boston in January 2014—and eventually developed into a coauthored piece. All the quotes attributed to Haghighatjoo come from those interviews; she is also the source of the details on the internal workings of the sixth parliament.

Published by Cambridge University Press 1743-923X/16 $30.00 for The Women and Politics Research Section of the American Political Science Association.

doi:10.1017/S1743923X15000598

intense campaigning for women's greater participation and rights on the part of the 13 women members of Iran's Sixth Majles during the reform era coinciding with President Mohammad Khatami's two terms (1997–2005). That parliament is notable for its commitment to political and cultural reform and for the caucus that agitated for women's greater presence. Among its accomplishments were passage of the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); raising the minimum age of marriage for girls from puberty to 13; and removing the ban on single young women traveling abroad on state scholarships.

Research and advocacy show that in order for historically marginalized groups to be effectively represented in institutions, members of those groups must be present in deliberative or decision-making bodies (Phillips 1995; Weldon 2002), such as political parties, parliaments, and national and local governments. And yet, across history, culture, and societies, women as a group have been marginalized from key decision-making arenas in government and the leadership of political parties, as well as the corporate sector, judiciary, academia, civil society, and media. Feminist social scientists argue that a polity is not fully democratic without adequate representation of women (Eschle 2000; Paxton and Hughes 2007, 2014; Phillips 1991, 1995). The United Nations Beijing Platform for Action (UN 1996, para 181) states: "Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making … is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning." The UN has proposed a 30% benchmark for women's parliamentary participation, and many countries have heeded feminist calls for the adoption of quotas. Enhancing women's descriptive representation is part of what may be termed the global women's rights agenda and is explicitly mentioned in a number of international agreements.[1]

International datasets now include indicators of women's empowerment and gender equality such as parliamentary representation and the proportion of women in senior positions, indicators that feminist social scientists use to track patterns and trends across time and space. Many governments, however, remain oblivious to both international trends and

1. The global women's rights agenda is found in a number of international instruments sponsored by the United Nations, notably CEDAW (adopted in 1979, in force in 1981); the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (September 1995), which calls for women's empowerment and human rights in the family, economy, and polity; and Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (October 2000). Goal 3 of the eight Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015) pertained to ending gender inequalities in literacy, employment, and decision making.

the imperative to compensate for years of women's exclusion from political decision making. Among them are the various governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in place since the 1979 revolution.

The literature on women, gender, and politics focuses on the Global North or on posttransition democracies (see, e.g., Krook and Childs 2010), but many countries remain nondemocratic. This article offers a case study of women's struggles to obtain voice and influence within an authoritarian polity and a male-dominated political body through a detailed look at the workings of a women's caucus within a functioning parliament, albeit one constrained by a particular ideology (political Islam) and a traditional outlook toward women. Drawing on the literature on women's descriptive representation and "the politics of presence," we highlight the potential of a women's parliamentary caucus in the absence of a "critical mass" of women. The experience of one of us, Fatmeh Haghighatjoo, a key member of the women's caucus in the Sixth Majles, confirms findings in the literature about sources of women's access to power, gendered political opportunities available even in an otherwise untoward institutional environment, and the capacity of women political leaders with ties of civil society to effect some change. We end with a number of propositions on women and political power in authoritarian settings.

GENDERED POLITICS: THE LITERATURE AND THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

There is evidence that women's representation in political life — both institutional and noninstitutional — influences policy decisions and agreement among scholars that greater gender equality results in changes in policy choices (Bolzendahl 2011; Kittilson 2005; Randall 1987; Weldon 2002). Htun and Weldon (2012) show in their cross-national analysis that women's autonomous organizing in civil society accounts for progressive social policies, including policies on violence against women. In turn, gender equality is a "rising tide" (Inglehart and Norris 2003) that has resulted from a confluence of "modernization" processes such as growing female educational attainment and labor force participation, the spread of feminist movements, and the global diffusion of the UN's women's rights agenda (Paxton and Hughes 2014; Walby 2009). But what of countries that are laggards in terms of gender equality? In particular, how do women in religiously oriented authoritarian contexts enter the political process to influence policy?

The literature on women, gender, and politics has examined both the gendered nature of political processes and women's participation patterns. Whether cast in terms of a variable or as an integral element of the social structure, gender is seen as pervading the realm of politics in that it reflects the distribution of power and reinforces notions of masculinity and femininity, and it influences patterns of political participation by women and by men. Thus it is the social relations of gender (Kabeer 1994) — and the ways in which gender dynamics operate in the family, the labor market, and the polity — that explain why women have been historically marginalized from the corridors of political power, why feminist scholars refer to "manly states" and "patriarchal politics" (Enloe 1990, 2007; Peterson and Runyan 1993; Tickner 1992), and why an essential policy prescription for enhancing women's political participation at both national and local levels is the electoral quota.

Representation in the legislative branch provides women with general access to political power and decision making, and thus research has explicitly employed women's descriptive representation as a measure of gender equality, which also correlates with broader measures of gender equality in society (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Childs and Krook (2008) and others find that women's impact on domestic politics and their ability to set the agenda in the political domain depends on a "critical mass" of female legislators (see also Jaquette 1997). This implies that women bring different values to political decision making, or at least improve the representation of women's interests. For Phillips (1995), "the politics of presence" makes the more modest claim that gender has an influence on the potential to represent women, a potential that derives from women's life experiences and structural positions in society that differ from those of men. Since women MPs share such experiences with female citizens, their presence increases the likelihood that women's needs, interests, and perspectives will be represented or at least heard (Celis 2006), thus enabling "substantive representation." If descriptive representation requires that women have a legislative presence, substantive representation goes beyond numbers and proportion to refer to a kind of representation that advocates the interests and issues of a group; for women, this means ensuring that politicians speak for and act to support women's issues (Paxton and Hughes 2014, 221).

Current scholarship often groups the factors obstructing or enabling women's descriptive representation and political leadership into three broad categories — structural, institutional, and cultural (Inglehart and Norris 2003; Paxton and Kunovich 2003; Paxton and Hughes 2014).

A country's economic resources and societal structure determine the number of women with the requisite education, work experience, and income to run for office. Institutional factors include the nature of the political system, and studies have found that closed-list proportional representation systems, as well as left-leaning governments or political parties, are most amendable to women's political participation. Cultural factors pertain to gendered beliefs about politics, masculinity, and femininity, and may be captured in responses to questions about attitudes toward women's political leadership in the World Values Survey.

Indeed, data from the fourth and fifth waves of the World Values Survey (WVS, 1999–2004, 2005–2010) suggest a "rising tide" of gender equality transforming many aspects of men's and women's lives and cultural values. On the basis of their interpretation of the results of the third and fourth waves of the World Values Survey, and in a new version of modernization theory, Inglehart and Norris (2003) have argued that the gender gap in political participation is often greatest in poorer developing nations and diminished or reversed in postindustrial societies. The more developed and postindustrial a country, the more likely that value orientations in general, and gender equality norms in particular, move in an egalitarian direction. By extension, the more developed a country, the greater the likelihood of women's political representation and participation. The social dominance of Islam and individual identification as Muslim weaken emancipative values, they argue. But among young Muslims with high education, and especially among young Muslim women with high education, the Muslim/Non-Muslim gap over emancipative values closes.[2]

Additionally, a country's adherence to "world culture" or the "world polity" (Boli and Thomas 1997) creates a national and policy environment conducive to women's participation and rights (Paxton and Hughes 2014). When governments ratify international treaties and conventions and when international organizations are present in countries, an enabling climate is created that affects an array of outcomes, including women's access to civil society, the public sphere, and leadership roles across domains. In the Middle East and North Africa, where governments may have signed CEDAW but with sweeping reservations that undermine its intent, women's rights groups have called for the removal of reservations or

2. See http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSContents.jsp. But see Wyndow, Li, and Mattes (2013) for an argument linking democratic development to gender equality, thus reversing the causality in the neo-modernization thesis of Inglehart and colleagues.

ratification without reservation, and for the full implementation of its provisions. Such movements and organizations have joined transnational feminist coalitions to launch campaigns for gender parity in the political process globally. At the start of the new century, for example, the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) joined forces with another U.S.-based international network — the Women's Learning Partnership for Development, Rights, and Peace (WLP) — to launch the 50/50 campaign, whose objective was to increase the percentage of women in local and national politics worldwide to 50%. By 2007, the campaign had been adopted by 154 organizations in 45 countries (Paxton and Hughes 2014, 185).[3] By 2014, the "quota revolution" had resulted in 34 countries achieving 30% female parliamentary representation, according to the Interparliamentary Union database.

As predicted by neo-modernization theory, broad structural changes have resulted in a growing population of educated and employed women with the capacity to enter the political process or to organize and mobilize around specific grievances or goals. As documented in an array of feminist studies, women's movements and organizations increasingly lobby governments and advocate publicly for women-friendly policies, more rights, and equitable representation. The confluence of the global women's rights agenda and women's movements has created a global opportunity structure conducive to the adoption of policies, programs, and resources in support of women's participation in decision-making.

Nevertheless, the persistence of obstacles and challenges to women's political leadership and agenda setting is undeniable. Underdevelopment, poverty, and conflict are barriers in many parts of the world, preventing the creation of an adequate supply of women political actors or leaders. Gender-based gaps in educational attainment, employment, and income impede women's access to economic resources and thus to funding for political campaigns. Many authoritarian regimes adopt or tolerate discriminatory laws that prevent women from attaining leadership positions. Social and cultural views about women in society continue to exert a strong influence on women's access to leadership and decision making. The persistence of the sexual division of labor — as both ideology and a form of social organization — is remarkable, given women's increasing educational attainment and social participation. Family responsibilities are consistently cited as major stumbling blocks for women's career advancement in politics and other domains, especially in

3. See also www.wedo.org and www.learningpartnership.org.

the absence of adequate support structures for working mothers. In a mature democracy such as the United States, a combination of the winner-take-all form of political system, the huge financial expense of a political campaign, and the absence of support structures for working mothers often are cited as the chief reasons for the low percentage of women in Congress, though their presence in local government tends to be higher (Paxton and Hughes 2014). Last but not least, risks associated with public and leadership roles — from harassment and loss of privacy to physical attacks, kidnapping, or assassinations — should be noted.

For various reasons — historical, institutional, cultural — the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have had low levels of female participation in formal politics. The average 10% female representation between 2000 and 2010 — that is, prior to the Arab Spring — was evidence of the masculine nature of the region's political processes and institutions. Yet just as there are varieties of capitalist democracies, there are varieties of authoritarian governance. In 2010, Tunisia had the highest female share of parliamentary seats in the region. Indeed, Tunisia's 23% figure was higher than that of Uruguay and Chile (12%), Mexico (16%), the Philippines (18%), and Israel (13%), though lower than Argentina (36%) or South Africa (30%). Enabling factors in Tunisia included a relatively high rate of female labor force participation, the existence of strong women's organizations and networks, and a government that, while authoritarian, presented itself as a champion of women's rights (Charrad 2012, 2013; Moghadam 2013). After the October 2011 elections for Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly, some 27% of members were women from different political parties; the parliamentary election of October 2014 brought a 31% female share. Morocco instituted a quota in 2002 and raised women's descriptive representation first to nearly 11% and more recently to 17%. With the adoption of a quota in Algeria, women won a 31.7% share of seats in the 2012 general elections. In contrast, women in the Islamic Republic of Iran attained a mere 3% of parliamentary seats in the 2009 general elections, ranking close to the bottom of the Interparliamentary Union's database on women in politics (IPU 2014).

In some MENA countries, opportunities exist for women's leadership in political parties, notably left-wing parties. Nouzha Skalli of Morocco's Party of Progress and Socialism has been a cabinet minister and strong advocate of women's rights, while Louisa Hanoune, longstanding leader of the socialist Workers' Party in Algeria, has been her party's presidential candidate. In Tunisia, Maya Jribi cofounded the Progressive Democratic

Party in 1983 and in 2006 was elected its secretary-general; and in 2012, Morocco saw the election of Nabila Mounib as secretary-general of the United Socialist Party. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, although the civil service has about a 35% female share, women's ascension to senior or decision-making positions is rare. No woman has led a political grouping, and there have been no women cabinet ministers.[4] As we will see, the structural conditions for women's political leadership may be present, but the cultural, and especially institutional, conditions are not.

The argument that women need to be at least a large minority to have an impact, and that women's issues receive more support when women attain a critical mass, has been challenged by a number of studies. In their article on the elections of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia and Michelle Bachelet in Chile, Thomas and Adams (2014) note that both political leaders faced the many barriers identified in the literature. Nonetheless, the women candidates were able to take advantage of gendered political opportunities available to them, addressing issues of corruption and conflict (Liberia) and the need to deepen democracy by integrating previously excluded social groups (Chile), thus appealing to men and women voters alike. As the authors note, both political leaders lacked the personal factors and situational contexts, including connections to powerful political families and the presence of proportional representation systems, which the literature cites as enabling factors. They conclude, however, that "[t]heir rise to political prominence depended only upon their political experiences, careers, and leadership" (p. 107). In another study, Celis (2006) argued that over the twentieth century, Belgian women MPs may have constituted a small percentage, but they were the most fervent representatives of women's interests and contributed to how women were represented. Celis found that Belgian women MPs from across the political spectrum — from left to Christian-Democratic and Catholic — were "overactive in taking women's interests to heart" (p. 92). Franceschet (2001) found that during the Chilean democracy transition, a strong women's movement and political presence at the local level resulted in significant social programs for women, although the movement refrained from demanding institutional reforms and more access to power. As we shall see, the links between members of the Iranian

4. The one woman cabinet minister thus far has been Marzieh Vahid Dastgerdi, minister of health in the Ahmadinejad government. Massoumeh Ebtekar was vice president under President Khatami, and as of 2015 President Rouhani has named three women vice presidents, including Shahindokht Molaverdi, vice president for women and family affairs.

women's parliamentary caucus and the women's movement allowed for "overactive" advocacy for women's rights and a degree of substantive representation. In addition, the women's parliamentary caucus of the Sixth Majles demanded institutional change, notably that more women be appointed to senior political positions.

IRAN: STRUCTURAL, INSTITUTIONAL, AND CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS

A large, urbanized, upper-middle income oil-exporting country, Iran has a population of some 75 million, more than half of which is under age 35. Literacy levels are very high, and women's university enrollments have exceeded those of men since the early years of the new century (Rezai-Rashti and Moghadam 2011). Women comprise about 35% of government employment but are vastly underrepresented in the private sector. Nonetheless, women — and youth — are considered an important electoral constituency. In the 1997 presidential election, the reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami explicitly, and for the first time, appealed to women voters and to young people.

In the 1990s, human rights groups, women's rights groups, an array of independent press outlets, and activist lawyers and journalists began to constitute an emergent civil society and were eager for more of the liberalization that had begun under President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and the Fifth Majles (1996–2000). Voting overwhelmingly for Mohammad Khatami in 1997, they helped build the Mosharekat party, which played a key role in political society. In the 2000 parliamentary elections, the reformist coalition won almost 70% of the seats in the Majles; the 13 women members constituted 4.5% of the total MPs.

In Iran, as in India and certain other countries, women are more active at the municipal than at the national level. The first municipal elections of 1999 saw a huge outpouring of women candidates, winning about 16% of seats across the country. The municipal elections of December 2007 during the conservative Ahmadinejad era (2006–2013) brought more than 5,000 women to local governance in about 3,300 councils across the country. Women did exceptionally well, and better than male candidates, in Shiraz, Arak, Hamedan, Zanjan, and Ardebil; and they won a large number of seats in Urumiyeh and Qazvin (Ghamari-Tabrizi 2013). Still, women constituted just eight out of 286 parliamentary seats, or a mere 2.8% share in the parliament of that era.

Cultural and normative changes certainly have occurred in Iran, and a number of studies have emphasized youth rebelliousness, women's rejection of *hijab* strictures, low mosque attendance, and a general tendency toward a secular and modern outlook.[5] World Values Survey results find Iranians to be more liberal than many of their Arab neighbors but still traditional on measures such as attitudes toward women in politics (Moaddel 2007). A special report on Iran that appeared in *The Economist* boldly declared that "the revolution is over"; the author, Oliver August (2014), wrote that Iran had become a "more mature and modern country" and underscored the gulf between the ruling hardliners and the large population of young Iranians eager for cultural and political change. Indeed, the Green Protests of June 2009 can be seen in part as a reflection of the country's modernization and aspirations as well as the huge gulf that exists between the state and a large segment of the citizenry.

A number of studies on gendered politics in Iran have shown the extent to which the sexual division of labor and the official ideology of political Islam since the 1979 revolution have precluded gender equality. In her analysis of the shifting nature of patriarchy in modern Iran, Hamideh Sedghi (2007) shows how "proponent" and "opponent" women may have differed on the issue of veiling, but in sharing common interests on the basis of their subordinate positions in the political process and the labor market they have been able at times to cooperate toward women's empowerment. This form of cooperation began in the early 1990s with the emergence of "Islamic feminism" as a type of common discursive ground emanating from the women's magazine *Zanan* and the women's studies journal *Farzaneh* (Mir-Hosseini 1996; Najmabadi 2008; Tohidi 1997). By the time the Sixth Majles was formed, an alliance of sorts was established between the 13 women who became members of that parliament and the burgeoning sector of women's nongovernmental organizations, including the small number of self-defined feminist groups such as the Women's Cultural Center and Roshangaran Press.

Iran's institutional setup, however, is not conductive to women's descriptive representation, not to mention political leadership. Although Iran is governed by an elected president and a 290-member parliament, two key institutions are both unelected and very powerful. The supreme

5. See, for example, Mahdavi (2008) on Iran's sexual revolution; Adelkhah (2004) on aspects of modernity in Iran, including taxation, competition, the soccer craze, and citizen use of public spaces; Moaddel 2007 on World Value Survey findings across Muslim-majority countries. Bahman Ghobadi's 2009 film *No One Knows about Persian Cats* is about the underground music scene in Tehran.

leader (*Rahbar*) — originally Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini and after his death, Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i — is meant to be the nation's spiritual guide but in fact is "the country's most powerful political figure" (Boroujerdi 2014, 485). The 12-man Guardian Council is tasked with ensuring that laws, policies, and elections adhere to both the constitution and Islamic norms; it has clashed with parliament over certain legislative bills and its veto of candidates for presidential elections.[6] The Expediency Council was set up to mediate differences between the parliament and the Guardian Council. As Boroujerdi notes, the judiciary can be regarded as a branch of the clerical hierarchy in that the supreme leader appoints its head, who must be a cleric. "Although the Constitution stipulates an independent role for the judiciary, in practice it has tended to be very conservative (much like the Guardian Council itself) and opposed to reform initiatives" (Boroujerdi 2014, 487). The 1987 ban on political parties was lifted in 1998, but Boroujerdi (p. 493) regards many of them as little more than "professional groupings engaged in political ventures rather than full-fledged groups of full-time activities."[7] As such, Iran's political system lacks the features identified in the literature as favorable to women's descriptive representation — a proportional representation system with the presence of left-wing parties, along with quota adoption. Moreover, as a constitutional body that vets candidates and must approve parliamentary bills, the Council of Guardians prevents those who do not accept the premise of an Islamic Republic from accessing political power and often blocks progressive legislation.

THE CASE OF IRAN'S SIXTH PARLIAMENT

When Mohammad Khatami took office as president in 1997, his program to strengthen civil society, accountability, transparency, responsibility, and the rule of law, along with implementation of the constitutional mandate to form city and village councils, resonated with a public that also desired a relaxation of the social and cultural restrictions that had been put in

6. Six of the 12 must be Faqihs — experts in Islamic law — appointed directly by the supreme leader, and six are lawyers nominated by the head of the judiciary for a vote of confidence by the parliament and for a term of six years. The lawyer-member terms are staggered; every three years, three lawyers are selected for nomination by the head of the Judiciary. There are no term limits for the Guardian Council members.

7. The best known is Mosharekat (or the Participation Front), formed in 1998 on a platform of reform. Other political parties include the Agents of the Construction of Iran (associated with former president Ali Akbar Rafsanjani and his technocratic associates), the Assembly of Militant Clerics, and the Assembly of the Followers of the Imam's Line. The Freedom Movement of Iran is barely tolerated.

place in the early 1980s. Thus did the reform movement take shape. The legislative elections of 2000 favored the reformists and their political factions, notably the Islamic Iran Participation Party (Mosharekat), which took 189 of the 290 seats (65%) in the Sixth Majles.

Fatemeh Haghighatjoo was one of those reformist members and one of 13 women members, most of whom, like her, were women's rights advocates. Working her way through university as a math teacher and then a counselor in a local girls' high school, she had obtained a Ph.D. in family counseling and was also active in Iran's main student organization, the Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat. As a leading member of that organization and well known in Iran's emergent civil society, she was able to propose that the influential student group endorse Mohammad Khatami as presidential candidate, over and above several others who were running. As to why she turned to politics, she gives several reasons:

> I was 10 when the Revolution took place, and it was absolutely exhilarating. At home I always wanted to watch the news programs, while my sisters preferred to watch cartoons! At school we had a teacher who analyzed political developments around the world, and I found it very inspiring that an important country such as the United Kingdom had a woman prime minister. At college, I took a course on "roots of revolution" that I loved, and the professor was very good, too. He had access to various government documents, which were not public, and those documents and the course increased my interest in politics. Also, I was active in Daftar-e Tahkim-e Vahdat. Finally, my major in family counseling was another reason for my turn to politics. Immediately after earning my master's degree, I obtained a job as lecturer at Tehran University and Shahid Beheshti University, teaching vocational counseling techniques and methods of counseling. I learned a great deal about social problems, but also about how to approach questions and problems.

Growing up as an observant Muslim in a family that did not insist on early marriage but rather encouraged her attainment of higher education was certainly an enabling factor in her turn to politics.

> I did not marry until age 31, so I was able to be active in the student organization and then to work for the Khatami presidential campaign. It was such a pleasure to work for him; he was a real gentleman. We were able to have a really modern campaign, with rallies, posters, and even a campaign song. I was able to push through a decision to allow mixed-sex audiences at the rallies we held for him at the Stadium for high school

> students. I had to assure everyone that there would be no problems with this, and thankfully there were none!

Haghighatjoo's work on the Khatami campaign, her activism in the student organization, and the connections that she had made with different political figures drew the attention of the Mosharekat party as well as journalists. This enabled her to run in the parliamentary election of 2000, and she won a seat in Parliament to represent Tehran, Rey, and Shemiran. Iran's hybrid political system includes party lists, and Haghighatjoo's name was placed on a number of lists — including Tahkim-e Vahdat, the Journalists, Teachers, and Physicians — because she was by then a well-known political figure who had come up the ranks not through family connections but through her activism, a rather unusual pathway to political office for a woman. She had also become interested in women's rights issues, mainly through her experience teaching and counseling: "I was an 'insider,' but equality was very important to me, and I had a broad view of social justice."[8]

At the time, the political environment was characterized by both optimism and pessimism. The reformist electoral success was a source of hope, but the crackdown on the student movement the previous year and the continued obduracy of the hardline faction, which dominated key institutions of governance outside of parliament, generated anxiety. Khatami's run for a second term (2001–2005) opened the floodgates to an unprecedented number of women candidates, leading to an intense debate within political circles as to whether Islamic law and Iran's Islamic constitution allowed for a woman president. The 2002 documentary film "Our Times" by Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, one of Iran's leading women filmmakers, is a masterful depiction of the optimistic mood while also casting a more sober lens on women's difficulties and class differences.

The film begins by showing young people engaged in an electoral campaign to promote the reelection of reformist President Mohammad Khatami in the spring of 2001. The young women and men are seen setting up their headquarters, designing campaign posters, distributing leaflets, cracking jokes, discussing strategy, engaging in debates with citizens on the streets, and, in one case, getting roughed up by opponents. The young women supporters, who are in their teens and early twenties, are determined and opinionated, and actively involved in the campaign. The film then cuts to a scene at a large stadium filled

8. "Insider" (*khodmaani*) refers to those citizens deemed sufficiently pious and loyal to the objectives of the Islamic Republic.

with Khatami supporters who are cheering, clapping, hooting, and whistling — decidedly and deliberately non-Islamic expressions — as Khatami smiles and waves from the podium. The massive participation of women in the "youth for Khatami" campaign and in the reform movement that backs Khatami is obvious as the camera scans the crowd. In this part of the documentary, we see the Iran of modernization, democratization, and women's participation. In the second part of the film, Bani-Etemad interviews the women who nominated themselves as presidential candidates only to be immediately disqualified on the basis of sex. In a voice-over, Bani-Etemad explains that several of these women were unavailable or unwilling to be filmed; one said she would think about it, only to inform the filmmaker later that her husband would not allow her to be interviewed. The irony is apparently lost on the would-be presidential candidate, but not to the filmmaker or the viewer.

Bani-Etemad then focuses on the story of Arezoo Bayat, a divorced 28-year-old woman who lives with her small daughter and mother in two rented rooms of a traditional house in the southern and low-income part of Tehran. Initially, the ever-smiling, attractive, and apparently optimistic Arezoo appears to be a symbol of the advancement of women in contemporary Iran. But gradually it becomes clear that Arezoo's reasons for self-nomination have to do with the almost unbearably sad experiences of her young life. She had wanted a platform to share those experiences and to find solutions for women with similar difficulties. Arezoo has been married to and divorced twice from drug-addicted men, one of whom is in prison; in order to provide for herself, her small daughter, and her blind mother, she works long hours at two jobs, both of which offer modest salaries. At her day job in a privately owned insurance company, her boss is an ogre; she is asked by her landlady to move out because the landlady's son and his new wife need to move into the rooms; she spends three days looking for alternative housing, only to find that almost everything is beyond her means; she is also told that landlords are reluctant to rent to a young woman without a husband or father. We see her at home at night, rubbing her aching feet. On two occasions she cries in frustration and anger, and she declares at one point that her life has been ruined by men, adding, "I hate men." The voice-over informs us that the film crew eventually pitched in to donate enough money to allow her to put a down payment on a small house, and we see Arezoo almost deliriously happy. But when she returns to work the next day, she discovers that her boss has fired her for having been absent the previous three days. The documentary ends with the

camera focused on her bewildered face, as she contemplates an awful future without a job or a home.

Bani-Etemad's documentary highlighted contradictions in the status of Iranian women and the salience of social class. To a certain extent, patriarchy was weakening in Iran, the result of increased educational attainment of women, changes in family structure, the proliferation of a lively feminist press, and the emergence of what Shahla Sherkat, editor of the well-known magazine *Zanan*, called an indigenous feminism (*feminizm-e boomi*). At the same time, social and gender injustices were rampant. This was the context in which Haghighatjoo and other women's rights advocates decided to run for parliament: they thought they could make a difference. Haghighatjoo, in particular, was committed "to both social justice and justice for women. I felt very strongly about both." The reform movement, her connections to key networks and organizations, and her position in Mosharekat gave her optimism.

THE WOMEN'S CAUCUS AND ITS STRATEGIES

Among Haghighatjoo's 13 fellow women reformists was Dr. Elaheh Koulaee. An international relations professor at Tehran University, she was a colleague of Dr. Saeed Hajjarian, a former intelligence chief who had eventually become a prominent and influential reformist politician and newspaper editor. Koulaee was known across Tehran and other large cities because of her special television programs on international relations, Russia, and the Caucasus. Other MP colleagues were Dr. Fatemeh Rakei, a poet and literature professor at Al-Zahra University and chair of the women's caucus; Dr. Jamileh Kadivar, a professor at Al-Zahra Women's University and from a prominent political family, who was also known for her work as a journalist with *Kayhan* newspaper; and Soheila Jelowdarzadeh, a representative of worker organizations and a veteran of the previous Majles who sat on the Majles Speaker's Board. The 13 women MPs worked together as a caucus as well as with the women's and human rights NGOs that had formed during the political opening of the 1990s; several of them eschewed the all-encompassing black *chador* in favor of the long coat and headscarf (*roopoosh/roosari*).

Prior to taking office, the women MPs organized a symposium on the importance of legislation on women's issues; they held interviews with the media and asked various civil society groups about their priority

issues. The women's groups asked for repeal of discriminatory laws and ratification of CEDAW, and this became a focus of the women's caucus. A bill for CEDAW ratification was presented and after much debate was approved in 2003. When the Guardian Council rejected the bill, it was sent it to the Expediency Council where it remains at this writing. The Sixth Majles did succeed, however, to raise the minimum age of marriage, permit unmarried women to pursue graduate study abroad on scholarship, and grant more rights to women in divorce and child custody. These changes were accomplished in part through a research group organized by the women's caucus that brought together women's rights activists, university professors, and several Islamic experts. The reformist parliamentary coalition provided the enabling environment, but along the way the caucus faced many hurdles. An example is the length of time it took the caucus to achieve its goal with respect to women's rights in matters of divorce.

Iran's Civil Code grants the husband the right to initiate a divorce without cause, but Article 1130 stipulates that if the continuation of a marriage causes "hardship" or "harm" to the wife, she may petition for divorce. In reality, many judges did not grant divorces to women. A bill had been drafted during the Fifth Parliament to identify women's grounds for divorce, but the lengthy legislative process to enact the bill into law could not be completed before the changeover to the Sixth Parliament. Thus it fell to the women's caucus to define "hardship" as grounds for divorce by women. The bill identified such shortcomings as a husband's heroin addiction, inability to produce children, sexually transmitted disease, absence for more than six months, or imprisonment for five years or more. Haghighatjoo says, "Admittedly, this was not a perfect law but we deemed it the most feasible strategy to obtain divorce rights for women." The Guardian Council rejected the bill, but after Parliament emphasized the bill's importance it went to the Expediency Council for arbitration, where it sat for almost two years. The women's caucus met with Hashemi Rafsanjani, who promised to resolve the problem, "and this time a male leader accomplished what he had promised, and in favor of women's rights."

Institutional change was another objective. To accomplish their goal of promoting women's political participation and encouraging their advancement to public offices, the women's caucus used several strategies, including media advocacy, lobbying, and the monitoring of cabinet ministers. Because Iran's parliament invites media observation and MPs are routinely interviewed by the print and electronic press, the women's caucus

had access to newspapers, magazines, and news agencies when they advocated for women's promotion to public office. Women journalists in particular showed much interest in covering women's issues and writing stories about the importance of appointing women ministers. Among them was Zahra Ebrahimi, parliamentary correspondent for *Zanan Magazine*.[9] She regularly covered women's issues and had a column on the female MPs and their efforts. By the time President Khatami was ready to form his second Cabinet, members of the women's incoming parliamentary caucus had given many media interviews advocating the appointment of female ministers. They also boldly criticized male MPs or other political figures who spoke out against senior government positions for women.

Lobbying for Cabinet Posts and other Senior Positions for Women

The lobbying strategy to enhance women's access to public office entailed meetings with the heads of all governmental institutions, including the supreme leader, the president, the head of the judiciary, the speaker of the Sixth Parliament, the secretary of the Guardian Council, the chair of the Expediency Council, and the cabinet ministers. The strategy was both bold and time consuming. At the meeting with the supreme leader, each woman MP spoke, with Haghighatjoo referring to research showing that many girls wished to be boys because of the constraints they faced within families, communities, schools, and beyond. Noting that the law did not give women an equal status, even though they now outnumbered men in university, Haghighatjoo asked how women could continue to aspire to higher education if their ambitions were thwarted afterward. Merit should be the factor that qualifies people for leadership, she concluded; being a particular sex should not exclude someone from pursuing talent and using abilities.

Ayatollah Khamenei's response was to begin debating those points, asserting inaccurately that even in the United States there was no female minister. The irony of his using the USA — his sworn enemy — as an example of why women should not aspire to political office was not lost on the women MPs. Eventually, Khamenei said that he did not object to a woman holding a senior position if she had the ability. After the visit to the supreme leader, Haghighatjoo briefed the media and repeated Khamenei's assertion.

9. *Zanan* [Women] magazine was shut down in 2008 by the Ahmadinejad government. See http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/07/opinion/07thu1.html?_r=0

In preparation for the caucus' meeting with President Khatami, women's rights activists had helped prepare a list of women who were eligible to take senior leadership roles, including ministerial positions. The list included Zahra Rahnavard, the very successful chancellor of Al-Zahra University, as minister of cultural affairs. Zahra Rahnavard was a graduate of the prestigious Art School at Tehran University and had become an artist, painter, author, and university president. As the wife of a former prime minister, Mir Hossein Musavi, she had had exposure to government.[10]

The various nominees were rejected, and Khatami agreed only to consider Faezeh Hashemi as his deputy and head of the Physical Education Organization. A daughter of former president Hashemi Rafsanjani and a longtime advocate of women's participation in sports, Faezeh Hashemi was one of the names on the caucus list.[11] However, her father would not allow her to accept the offer, explaining to Haghighatjoo that he did not think that it was an appropriate position for her. Haghighatjoo, who admires Faezeh Hashemi, feels that Hashemi was protecting his daughter from a likely smear campaign, given that she had already been the target of a vile epithet. In the end, Khatami did not nominate any woman as a minster despite the presence of several qualified women on the list. The caucus was deeply disappointed to learn that the president was under pressure not to appoint women and did "not want to take a risk by choosing a woman as a minister."[12]

Another lobbying effort was to meet with Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, who headed the judiciary, and request that a woman be nominated to hold a position on the Guardian Council. It was time for three new lawyers to be nominated, and the women's parliamentary caucus encouraged Shahroudi to nominate a woman lawyer. He promised to give it some thought, but in effect the idea was dismissed. The caucus tried its luck with Ayatollah Jannati, the very conservative

10. Zahra Rahnavard became prominent internationally as the wife of presidential candidate Mir Hossein Musavi, whose loss to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in an election widely deemed fraudulent led to what came to known as the Green Protests of June 2009. Unlike previous candidates, Musavi was always accompanied by Ms. Rahnavard, signaling a new era of gender relations. (Musavi and the other presidential candidate, the very liberal cleric Mehdi Karroubi, were subsequently placed under house arrest when they dared to demand a transparent accounting of the election results.)

11. Ms. Hashemi's promotion of sports for girls included the right to ride a bicycle in public, which became a source of public debate and the subject of one of the three stories in Marzieh Meshkini's celebrated film *The Day I Became a Woman*, released in 2000.

12. http://www.irinn.ir/news/26618/%D8%B3%D9%87%D9%85-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%84%D8%AA%E2%80%8C-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%8C-%D8%A7%D8%AD%D9%85%D8%AF%DB%8C%E2%80%8C%D9%86%DA%98%D8%A7%D8%AF-%D9%88-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C

chair of the Guardian Council, and several of its members, only to be told that the matter was up to Ayatollah Shahroudi.

Despite their advocacy within parliament and in the media, and their lobbying efforts across government bodies, the caucus failed in its goal of persuading President Khatami to appoint female ministers to his cabinet. Nevertheless, the caucus succeeded in convincing ministers to appoint several deputy ministers.[13] As Haghighatjoo explains, "The leadership positions have been male-streamed for a long time, and Iranian men have not had enough exposure to examples of female leadership. Thus, they are not yet used to the idea, which is another obstacle to progress."

As a product of Iranian culture, Haghighatjoo was well aware of the extent of patriarchal attitudes and did not expect an overnight transformation of women's political participation and rights. She credits the parliament's head of the judiciary committee, Hojatoleslam Ghavami, who used his legitimacy as a cleric to speak up for women's rights bills, and other male MPs for their support. Still, she found that many of her fellow reformists in parliament were at best lukewarm in their attitudes toward women's participation and rights. They frequently expressed the view that women had no experience holding public office, should be barred from senior positions, or should be content with lower- or middle-management positions. Thus were Iranian women prevented from demonstrating their skills in management and decision making and their political acumen.

In fact, there were many women holding lower-level positions throughout the country who were successful, qualified, and ready for promotion to more senior positions. The caucus identified several women with extensive experience working in the Labor Ministry; a legal affairs manager at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs; an acclaimed Social Affairs general manager for the Khuzestan Province; and the mayor of District 7 of Tehran. The purported issue of lack of experience was targeted at women only. Many men were routinely promoted to ministerial positions without merit; a former governor who had performed very poorly in provincial affairs and was slated for dismissal by the Interior Ministry was on the list of ministerial nominees because of

13. Massoumeh Ebtekar had been appointed advisor, and prior to the Sixth Majles she had been a vice president, bringing much attention to environmental issues and lending support to environmental NGOs. The women's caucus of the Sixth Majles pointed to her effective leadership as a reason why more women needed to be appointed to senior positions.

connections within Parliament.[14] One of the figures who supported President Khatami's decision not to nominate any woman to become a minister was the deputy speaker of the Parliament, Mohsen Armin. And yet, he himself had become deputy speaker without having had any previous senior leadership experience; like the members of the women's parliamentary caucus, he had been elected an MP for the first time. In addition to the double standard on ability and experience, the government had no plan or program to prepare women for leadership positions.

Challenging Nominated Ministers

After President Khatami nominated Mr. Jahangard as minister of information and communication technology (ICT) and sought parliamentary approval, Haghighatjoo became alarmed when she learned from ICT employees that Jahangard had dismissed the advisor on women's affairs and shut down the office. She questioned him about the matter and asked him to reverse his decision, pledge to promote women in the ministry, and provide an action plan to the caucus. When he did not do so, Haghighatjoo reached out to the deputy secretary general of Mosharekat and asked that he try to reason with Jahangard, as they were both members of the party's central committee, and she felt that the matter could be resolved internally. The response, however, was that party members were not to question a cabinet nominee. Frustrated, Haghighatjoo decided to register an objection to the nomination on the grounds of the nominee's lack of support for women's rights, and the result was that Jahangard did not receive the necessary vote of confidence, an unprecedented turn of events.

Assertive and outspoken women such as Haghighatjoo can pay a price in a male-dominated political environment. Her political career was put in jeopardy when she defied her party's favored nominee for the ICT Ministry and was summoned to the disciplinary committee. She announced that she would leave Mosharekat, but the party had underestimated her popularity among her constituency and the women's caucus, and after a year she was asked to return and rejoin Mosharekat. That event was a turning point in support for women's issues; subsequently, the women's parliamentary caucus decided to initiate a pledge process during the formation of Khatami's second cabinet.

14. Governors are not directly elected by the people. The president and his cabinet select governors, who assume office once the interior minister nominates them.

The Pledge and Parliamentary Rules of Order

The next strategy on the part of the women's caucus in 2001 was to lobby for female deputy ministers and request the president's support for that objective. Haghighatjoo initiated a pledge process and asked the caucus to invite each ministerial nominee to explain plans to promote women's status in his ministry and, in his statement to the parliament, pledge to promote women to senior positions, including that of deputy minister. In exchange, the women's caucus would agree to provide a vote of confidence. With the exception of the nominee to head the Agriculture Ministry, the rest agreed to make the pledge, as the men were aware of the caucus' persistence and ability to undermine the vote of confidence.

One victory was to have the nominee for minister of foreign affairs discuss the need to promote women in his address to the Parliament. In his August 2001 ministerial address to gain a vote of confidence, Syed Kamal Kharazi explained his plan to promote women in the ministry: "Active and effective participation of women within diplomacy and increasing the number of women in managerial positions in the Foreign Affairs Ministry is one of the ministry's priorities and we will follow it up with much seriousness. Deploying female experts to permanent missions began four years ago and it will be expanded in term of quantity and quality."[15] The nominee for minister of Housing and Urban Development stated that he had already promoted four women to middle managerial positions and that part of his administrative reform would be special attention to the promotion of women to managerial positions.[16]

Haghighatjoo took the ministers' pledge seriously and wanted each minister to be accountable. To the ministers of Foreign Affairs, Industry, and Science Research and Technology, she posed questions on women's affairs and on their promise to promote women to senior positions. Nominees and ministers knew that if they were not committed to promoting women, they would have to explain their reasons to the relevant parliamentary committee, to the parliamentary general assembly, and to the nation directly. The live radio broadcast of the parliamentary sessions was thus used as both a way to apply pressure on nominees and ministers and a means to educate and inform the public

15. *Roznameh Rasmi*, N.16462, the136th session of the Sixth Parliament, August 20, 2001 (1380.5.29 Persian calendar).

16. *Roznameh Rasmi*, N. 16468, the 138th session of the Parliament's assembly on August 22, 2001 (1380.5.31 Persian calendar).

about women's affairs and advocate for women to be placed in leadership positions.

The procedure for questioning a minister is that a member of parliament submits questions, which are then sent to each minister by the parliament's presiding board, and the minister subsequently appears before the relevant committee to answer the questions. If the MP accepts the answers, the matter is done with; if the answers are not satisfactory, the question goes on the assembly agenda. At that point, the minister has to answer before the entire Parliament, and that discussion is broadcast to the nation via radio. Because Haghighatjoo had a tendency to find most responses unsatisfactory, questions inevitably went to the Parliamentary Assembly. For example, the minister of science, research, and technology, Mostafa Moein, came to the education and research committee, of which Haghighatjoo was a permanent member. As she deemed the minister's answer unsatisfactory, the question was placed on the assembly's agenda. Dr. Moein came to the assembly on June 12, 2002 (22 Khordad 1381 on the Persian calendar) to answer her question.

The assembly running procedure is that if an MP observes a violation of the parliamentary internal rules, she or he can warn the session's chair (the speaker or a deputy speaker). It is up to the chair to judge whether or not a violation occurred; if the chair rejects the warning, no further action is required, but if the chair agrees that a violation occurred, he has to take action. Several MPs, including two reformists, objected to Haghighatjoo's questioning of ministers and raised procedural points, asking the deputy speaker to remove the question from the assembly agenda. In response, the deputy speaker joked, "I am afraid that the women MPs might kick me off the podium!" In the end, the minister was allowed to provide evasive or misleading answers to Haghighatjoo's questions about the number of women appointed to senior positions in his ministry.

The women MPs' persistence led to the issuance of statements by President Khatami paying lip service to women's participation and rights. Addressing the Parliament for a vote of confidence for his nominated ministers, Khatami said,

> Women have demonstrated their merits and effectiveness despite all restrictions and deprivation. ... We should pay attention and take women's affairs seriously. We do not want to use women as window dressing and decoration. Women do not need this. We should provide infrastructure in order to demonstrate their abilities. We should solve double deprivation with double attempts to women's affairs. We need

> effective, modest, scientific, deft, and skilled women. Our women have such competency. If we take it seriously, we will be able to use it. Otherwise, it will lead to crises.[17]

Ultimately, the ministers of labor and social affairs, education, cultural affairs, and the interior appointed women deputies and advisors on women's affairs. As Haghighatjoo explains, "Our initiative was the first in the history of the Iranian Parliament and a unique development for women's participation."

And yet, no infrastructure was developed to enhance women's political representation or ensure gender justice. The foreign minister's promise to appoint a woman ambassador was nixed by the president, who explained that the supreme leader was opposed to the idea. It should be noted that in 1997, President Khatami had appointed the first ever female vice president, Massoumeh Ebtekar, charged with leading the Environmental Protection Organization. The choice had been judicious, as under her leadership environmental issues received significant attention; Dr. Ebtekar's work received acclaim in Iran and outside, and she received an award from the UN for her work on environmental protection. This should have signaled the justification for more women in political leadership.

Voting for a Female Governor of Tehran

Within the Parliament, there are many caucuses, including a provincial caucus for each province. It is standard practice that each provincial caucus nominates someone as their governor, and it devolves upon the minister of the interior to consider appointing those individuals to those posts. A few months after President Khatami's cabinet was formed in 2001, the 38-member Tehran Province Caucus had a meeting about the appointment of its new governor. Haghighatjoo proposed Ashraf Boroujerdi as the first woman candidate for governor of Tehran, and she was unanimously approved by the Tehran Provincial Caucus. The caucus then wrote to the interior minister, Mousavi Lari, but he declared that he would not appoint a female governor. The only position he would give to a woman was manager of a small city, such as Shemiran, an area north of Tehran where a city manager would have few duties. Haghighatjoo said she would launch an impeachment

17. *Roznameh Rasmi*, N. 16468, the 138th session of the Parliament's assembly on August 22, 2001 (1380.5.31 Persian calendar).

against the interior minister unless he relented and respected the vote of the Tehran caucus, and she appealed to Deputy Speaker Nabavi, a fellow reformist. Nabavi's response, however, was, "Let's focus our efforts on promoting the reform movement for now; after the reform movement has won, we will take care of women's issues." When Haghighatjoo pointed out that "reform" should be inclusive of the rights of women and minorities, Nabavi said that he would follow up with the minister and President Khatami.

Eventually Interior Minister Lari agreed to a compromise: he would appoint Ashraf Boroujerdi as his social affairs deputy. As Haghighatjoo explains,

> This decision had advantages and disadvantages. He had now agreed to appoint a female deputy, something we had never had in post-revolutionary Iran, and in a position that would oversee all municipality councils around the country. She would have country-wide influence. The disadvantage was that we lost the chance to appoint the first ever woman governor in Iran.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As Celis found for Belgian women MPs in an earlier period in the twentieth century, the women MPs in Iran's Sixth Majles of the early twenty-first century were "overactive" in taking women's interests to heart and working to legislate reforms for women's rights. The caucus also sought institutional change, such as guarantees of greater involvement of women in senior posts. This interest in women's rights was a matter both of connections to women's rights groups and other civil society associations and of individual interest emanating from their own structural positions and standpoint. As such, and in the absence of a critical mass of women in political leadership, the women's parliamentary caucus offered a degree of substantive representation and was able to influence policy to some extent. The broader, reform-oriented political environment was also conducive to their efforts.

Although one may argue that every country case study is *sui generis*, each case does add to our cumulative knowledge of the opportunities and constraints that women face in political participation and power. Our analysis of that episode in Iran's recent parliamentary history allows us to offer a number of propositions pertaining to women and politics in an authoritarian polity, as well as in other systems where the presence of

strong religious institutions or norms, or a tradition of masculine political power, may hinder progress in women's equality, participation, and rights.

First, the capacity to form alliances or draw on political connections enables women's rights advocates to enter the corridors of power. Feminists have long argued about the ethics and efficacy of working within the state as opposed to remaining outside of it and within civil society, but research shows that women's institutional political participation can make a difference and that elite allies are important to that goal. Haghighatjoo did not rely on family ties or personal connections to influence political figures; rather, she came up through the ranks as an activist within key networks and organizations. Others within the women's caucus did have more direct links to male elites within the reform movement (for example, Jamileh Kadivar), and most were involved in academia. Situated within and relying on the reform movement, Haghighatjoo and other women's rights advocates were able to be elected to parliament and to introduce bills for the advancement of women.

Second, the formation of a caucus enhances the influence of women MPs committed to women's rights and could enable substantive representation even in the absence of a critical mass. The 13 women of the Sixth Majles formed a caucus that was devoted to women's rights and specifically to the ratification of CEDAW. Haghighatjoo saw herself as a representative of two constituencies: the many university students (male and female) and the many women who had voted for her and whose aspirations for legal reform she shared. The caucus, while small, took advantage of the domestic political opportunity and the global women's rights agenda to push for legal and policy changes.[18]

Third, and as Htun and Weldon have noted, a strong connection to civil society and particularly to women's rights activists is critical to bringing about the expected change when women enter institutional politics. Two related facets of this connection to civil society might be highlighted. One is that it can act as pressure from below and a source of leverage and political capital when negotiating with power holders. Haghighatjoo, for example, consistently cited her own constituency as a source of legitimacy while she was in parliament, pushing her male reformist colleagues to advance women's rights because it was demanded by so many Iranian women and university students. The second facet of connection to civil society and

18. In a review essay, Hellwege (2014) makes a similar point regarding the efficacy of caucuses in the United States that are formed by minorities and women.

women's rights activism is its impact on the purpose and motivation of the women in parliament. There is a vast ideological and political gulf separating the background and motivations of the women MPs of the Sixth Majles with those of the subsequent (and very conservative) parliaments, some of whom favored polygamy and the stoning of prostitutes. The Sixth Majles women's caucus was rooted in Iran's burgeoning civil society, notably the activist student organization, women's rights groups, and activist media.

Fourth, a religiously oriented authoritarian polity poses fundamental obstacles to women's participation, rights, and leadership. Women throughout the world face constraints in accessing political power and challenges once in power, and gender bias exists across political systems, but some polities are more amenable to women's participation and rights than are others. To be sure, not all secular regimes advance women's rights or political leadership but religiously oriented ones arguably are less inclined; the same may be said of secular versus religiously oriented political parties.[19] As was observed with the intense debates of 2012–2013 within Tunisia's Constituent Assembly over inclusion of reference to the Islamic Sharia and to women's "complementarity" versus "equality," religiously based movements, parties, and governments are less likely to adhere to the global women's rights agenda. In Tunisia's case, the power and influence of left-wing and feminist political and social forces and the institutional legacy of postcolonial secular republicanism compelled the Islamists to drop their opposition to male-female equality. In Iran's case, however, the power of the religious conservatives and their control over key institutions has thus far precluded such an outcome. Iran's institutional setup, which is codified in the 1980 Islamic Constitution, is an obstacle to both political liberalization and women's equality. The work of the women's caucus was stymied by both the institutional setup in the Islamic Republic of Iran (which also thwarted many other reform initiatives) and by lingering patriarchal attitudes within the parliament.[20]

19. By secular we do not mean atheist or even irreligious; rather, we understand secular politics to be based on the principle of separation of religion from the state and legal frameworks, and we would note the diversity of models and historical examples of secularism (e.g., the former Soviet Union, India, Mexico, the USA, the UK, France, etc.).

20. Critics have noted that Khatami's leadership was limited to symbolic gestures and that he had neither the temperament nor the inclination to oppose the hardliners and advance his stated reform agenda (see Alamdari 2008; Mashayekhi 2001). Moreover, in October 2002, Haghighatjoo was summoned by the judiciary for "insulting Islamic Republic officials" (see Haghighatjoo 2002).

As noted, Iran has never had anything near a critical mass of women in decision-making positions. One can only speculate that more women in government may have been able not only to pass legislation to reform discriminatory laws but also to weigh in on decisions pertaining to foreign policy, investments in the nuclear sector, job creation, and social policy. But if current sociological research in human development and modernization is reliable, value orientations should be changing in a more egalitarian direction in Iran, which has seen considerable modernization in the past three decades. At present there are some 3.5 million university students in Iran, of which more than half are women. This growing population of educated, middle-class Iranian women will be a formidable social force for political as well as cultural modernization. Challenges to male domination of the political process are bound to expand in the years ahead. Thus, our fifth proposition — here focused on Iran but also applicable to countries at similar levels of sociopolitical development — is that as the population becomes ever more educated, globally connected, and middle class; as women's educational attainment increases and even exceeds that of men; and as a larger number of women become available for political participation, one can expect pressure to transform entrenched institutional barriers to greater political inclusion. In turn, cultural attitudes and gender equality norms could move in an egalitarian direction and could help to shift the gendered balance of power, which thus far has been highly masculine.[21]

The 13 women of the Sixth Majles constituted a 4.48 % female parliamentary share that has not been replicated since.[22] They came to power during a political opening and sought to create a more favorable climate for Iranian women's political participation, but they faced challenges and constraints from the conservative religious forces and underwhelming support from their political allies within the reform movement. It should be noted that the Seventh Majles (2004–2008) was extremely conservative. When the Fourth Economic, Social and Cultural Plan — which contained the reformists' policies for the next five years and had been approved by the Sixth Majles — was recalled by the Seventh, among the revisions was elimination of the pledge to maintain gender justice.

21. Indeed, some survey findings for Iran have been promising, demonstrating societal support for women in education and employment and strong opposition to polygamy.

22. The Ninth Majles, in parliament since 2012, has 9 female representatives out of 290, or a 3.1% share. Only the Fifth Majles (1996–2000) had 14 women.

The women of the Sixth Majles did, however, leave a legacy. The caucus succeeded in diffusing the importance of women's representation in senior leadership positions within society and creating a culture of accountability toward women within government.[23] During the Sixth Majles, then Foreign Minister Kharazi promised to appoint a woman to a senior position, and he named Marizeh Afkham as the ministry's general manager of public relations, although he later removed her from public speaking duties. It took Afkham eleven years — and the new Rouhani presidency — to become the first female spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some of the female MPs of the Sixth Majles now head the Reformist Women's Assembly, which works with President Rouhani's vice president for women and family affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, and Massoumeh Ebtekar, once again vice president for environmental affairs. It remains to be seen if Afkham, Molaverdi, the Reformist Women's Assembly, and allies within the Rouhani government — not to mention future women MPs and government officials — will complete the work of the women's parliamentary caucus of the Sixth Majles and see through the ratification of the CEDAW bill.

Valentine M. Modgadam is Professor of Sociology and International Affairs, Director of the International Affairs Program, and Director of the Middle East Studies Program at Northeastern University, Boston, MA: v.moghadam@neu.edu; Fatemeh Haghighatjoo is an independent scholar, CEO of the Nonviolent Initiative for Democracy, Inc., and former member of the Iranian parliament (Sixth Majles): fatemeh_haghighatjoo@yahoo.com

REFERENCES

Adelkhah, Fariba. 2004. *Being Modern in Iran*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Alamdari, Kazem. 2008. "*Chera Eslahat Shekast Khord?*" [Why was reform defeated?] Woodland Hills, CA: Sayeh Publishers.

August, Oliver. 2014. "The Revolution is Over: Special Report Iran." *The Economist* (November 1):3–16.

Boli, John, and George M. Thomas. 1997. "World Culture in the World Polity: A Century of International Non-Governmental Organization." *American Sociological Review* 62 (2): 171–90.

23. Even Mahmoud Ahmadinejad appointed the first female minister of health in postrevolutionary Iran, although the government promoted very traditional gender ideologies and introduced antiwomen's rights bills.

Bolzendahl, Catherine. 2011. "Beyond the Big Picture: Gender Influences on Disaggregated and Domain–Specific Measures of Social Spending, 1980–1999." *Politics & Gender* 7 (1): 35–70.
Boroujerdi, Mehrzad. 2014. "Iran." In *The Middle* East, 13th ed., ed. Ellen Luist. Los Angeles and London: Sage, 487–506.
Celis, Karen. 2006. "Substantive Representation of Women: The Representation of Women's Interests and the Impact of Descriptive Representation in the Belgian Parliament (1900–1979)." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 28 (2): 85–114.
Charrad, Mounira. 2012. "Family Law Reforms in the Arab World: Tunisia and Morocco." *International Year of the Family*. http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/family/docs/egm12/PAPER-CHARRAD.pdf (accessed January 10, 2016).
Charrad, Mounira, and Amina Zarrugh. 2013. "The Arab Spring and Women's Rights in Tunisia." *E-International Relations* (September 4). http://www.e-ir.info/2013/09/04/the-arab-spring-and-womens-rights-in-tunisia (accessed January 10, 2016).
Childs, Sarah, and Mona Lena Krook. 2008. "Critical Mass Theory and Women's Political Representation." *Political Studies* 56 (3): 725–36.
Enloe, Cynthia. 1990. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
——. 2007. *Globalization and Militarism: Feminists Make the Link*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
Eschle, Catherine. 2000. *Global Democracy, Social Movements and Feminism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Franceschet, Susan. 2001. "Women in Politics in Post-Transitional Democracies: The Chilean Case." *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 3 (2): 207–36.
Ghamari-Tabrizi, Behrooz. 2013. "Women's Rights, Shari'a Law, and the Secularization of Islam in Iran." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society* vol. 26 (3): 237–53.
Hellewege, Julia Marin. 2014. "Review Essay: Women's Legislative Representation." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 2 (4): 689–97.
Htun, Mala, and Laurel Weldon. 2012. "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective 1975–2005." *American Political Science Review* 106 (3): 548–69.
Inglehart, Ronald, and Pippa Norris. 2003. *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Interparliamentary Union. 2014. *Women in National Parliaments Database*. http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm (accessed March 2014).
Jaquette, Jane. 1997. "Women in Power: From Tokenism to Critical Mass." *Foreign Policy* 108 (4): 23–46.
Kabeer, Naila. 1994. *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*. London: Verso.
Kittilson, Miki Caul. 2005. "In Support of Gender Quotas: Setting New Standards, Bringing Visible Gains." *Politics & Gender*, 1 (4): 638–45.
Krook, Mona Lena, and Sarah Childs, eds. 2010. *Women, Gender, and Politics: A Reader*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
Mahdavi, Pardis. 2008. *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press.
Mashayekhi, Mehrdad. 2001. "The Revival of the Student Movement in Post-Revolutionary Iran." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 15 (2): 283–313.
Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. 1996. "Women and Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran: Divorce, Veiling, and Emerging Feminist Voices." In *Women and Politics in the Third World*, ed. Haleh Afshar. London and New York: Routledge, 142–69.

Moaddel, Mansoor. 2007. "The Saudi Public Speaks: Religion, Gender, and Politics." In *Values and Perceptions of the Islamic and Middle Eastern Publics*, ed. Mansoor Moaddel. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 209–47.
Moghadam, Valentine M. 2013. *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, 3rd ed. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 1998. "Feminism in an Islamic Republic: 'Years of Hardship, Years of Growth.'" In *Women, Gender, and Social Change in the Muslim World*, ed. Yvonne Y. Haddad and John Esposito. New York: Oxford University Press, 59–84.
Paxton, Pamela, and Melanie Hughes. 2007. *Women, Politics and Power: A Global Perspective*. Los Angeles and London: Pine Forge Press.
——. 2014. *Women, Politics, and Power*, 2nd ed. Los Angles: Sage.
Paxton, Pamela, and Sheri Kunovich. 2003. "Women's Political Representation: The Importance of Ideology." *Social Forces* 82 (1): 87–114.
Peterson, Spike V., and Anne Sisson Runyan. 1993. *Global Gender Issues*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Phillips, Anne. 1991. *Engendering Democracy*. University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press.
——. 1995. *The Politics of Presence: The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity and Race*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press.
Randall, Vicki. 1987. *Women in Politics: An International Perspective*. London: Macmillan.
Rezai-Rashti, Goli, and Valentine M. Moghadam. 2011. "Women and Higher Education in Iran: What are the Implications for Employment and the 'Marriage Market'?" *International Review of Education* 57 (3): 419–41.
Sedghi, Hamideh. 2007. *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Tickner, Ann. 1992. *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving Global Security*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Tohidi, Nayereh. 1997. "'Islamic Feminism': A Democratic Challenge or a Theocratic Reaction?" *Kankash* 13: 106 (in Persian).
Thomas, Gwynn, and Melinda Adams. 2014. "Breaking the Final Glass Ceiling: The Influence of Gender in the Elections of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Michelle Bachelet." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 31 (2): 105–31.
United Nations. 1996. *The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. New York: United Nations.
Walby, Sylvia. 2009. *Globalization and Inequalities: Complexity and Contested Modernities*. London: Sage.
Weldon, S. Laurel. 2002. *Protest, Policy and the Problems of Violence against Women: A Cross-National Comparison*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
Wyndow, Paula, Jianchong Li, and Eugen Mattes. 2013. "Female Empowerment as a Core Driver of Democratic Development: A Dynamic Panel Model from 1980 to 2005." *World Development* 52: 34–52.
World Values Survey. http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org