

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN IRAN'S POLITY

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■ Abstract

Higher status of women can be achieved through their share in education, economic life and political participation. At the level of political behavior, it has been focused on participation within formal, constitutional and governmental institutions or procedures. This includes a wide range of political behavior, which influences the decision-making process in society. The status of women and gender equality is one of the main socio-political issues of Iran, especially in the last three decades after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Based on Iranian Constitution, citizens of Iran from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, regardless of their gender are entitled to all individual, economic, political, social and cultural rights. While the Iranian political decision-making process is still male-dominated, women's presence in the socio-political arena has increased since the Revolution and the Iranian government has tried to promote increased participation of women, even though a continuous shortage of female professionals and women's representation in key posts in Iran is evident where macro politics and planning are decided.

Nonetheless, since the establishment of the new government of president Ahmadinejad (August 2005), the previous policy of emphasizing on improving women's status in the society has more shifted towards the family role of women. In this paper, the participation of Iranian women in the socio-political arena is going to be examined. Also the impediments and solutions will also be acknowledged.

I . Introduction

Statistics from "Post-Beijing Conference on Women" in 2005 shows that women's representation in the world at the highest level of national and international decision-making remains almost unchanged. Around the world, women constitute about 15% of parliament members in 2002, which

remain a small minority in parliamentary elections.¹ Women have therefore, not yet achieved an effective role at the political and managerial levels. This is ironic, as they constitute the largest voting constituency in some countries (including Iran) that recognize female suffrage. During the Beijing

Conference in 1995, only 21 out of 189 countries made commitments to improve the status of women and gave their highest priority to the issue of increasing women's participation at all levels of decision-making.

Of all aspects of the relationship between women and politics, it is women's political participation that has received the most sustained attention from political science but evaluating women's situation in a country requires the knowledge of culture, customs and traditions of the country we are studying. Nonetheless, there are some common socio-human values that should be respected worldwide. This set of worldwide and domestic values should be used to evaluate women's position in a society. Thus, to speak on women's status in Muslim countries, one should not take 'the western values' as the sole judgment criteria. Furthermore, such evaluation is a relative issue and should not be considered as an isolated case. Contrary, it may be regarded in time and space, i.e., to evaluate the role of women in a

country, it may be projected in comparison with its past or with another country in the region with a similar cultural background.

Women in Iran, like men, have shared the sense of power, dignity, and awakened pride in their culture, and the very controversy over women's roles has highlighted the importance of women. In Iran today, women are found in schools, universities, government offices, factories, and the parliament. The emergence of women in the film industry in which few of the most famous filmmakers are women, their strong presence in art and music, the success and fame of female writers, and the impressive academic success of female high school girls at the university entrance exams compared to males (based on official statistics about 65% of accepted students at the universities were female compared to 35% male in fall 2010), demonstrate the contemporary women's quest for identity, self-determined subjectivity and space in social and cultural life in Iran.

II. Theoretical Approach

Political participation is a complicated process with many dimensions and thus can be defined in different ways. According to the definition of Abercrumby et al.², participation in political processes which lead to the selection of political leaders and determines public policy is called political participation. In other words, social voluntary activity in which people feel direct or indirect participation in public policy settings or the election of political leaders is called political participation. The level of democracy in a political system is measured with indicators such as suffrage rights, providing an atmosphere for candidacy and civil rights for the people. Women's participation in all social activities like politics

is necessary. It can be said that having a minor participation in political affairs by women will result in an unaccomplished democracy.

Empirical studies on political behavior have generally reported a gender gap in political participation in nations with vastly different political regimes and social mores, as well as varying levels of economic development. The gender gap appears to pervade various types of participatory activities, including voting and campaigning, communal activities, particularized contacting, as well as unconventional forms like boycotts, strikes and demonstrations.³

Efforts to account for the gender differences in political participation can be grouped into

three sets of explanations.⁴ Socialization theory attributes the gender gap to the difference in early social learning, where women are culturally conditioned as children to accept a more passive political role than men. In contrast to the focus on childhood experiences, situation theory attempts to explain the gender gap in terms of adult socialization, arguing that women's social role as the primary caretaker of children and household chores deters them from engaging in more political activities than men. Finally, structural theory contends that the gender gap can be explained by

the fact that fewer women than men are in socio-economic groups that are more participatory in politics, viz, those in professional occupations, with higher education, and having higher personal income. These three sets of explanations need not be mutually exclusive and the direction of all three putative explanations is convergent. Many women could have been socialized into passive political roles when they were young, assuming the domestic role of primary care-provider for children, and are less likely than men to make it to higher socio-economic and education strata.

III. Historical Background

The condition of women in the twentieth century Iran may be studied in three different intervals: pre-Pahlavi regimes era, Pahlavi's perception on the emancipation of Iranian women, and post-Revolutionary era. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, the British and Russian rivalries in Iran on one hand, and the manipulation of Iran's resources on the other hand presented adverse economic effects, leading to western superiority which created an awareness of an alternative model of society to aspire to; a model totally different from the socio-political setting inspired by the despotic and dictatorial Qajar regime of the time. In such era, Iranian women were the victims of a male-dominated society with very limited rights.

The changing position of women during the Pahlavi regimes (1925-1979) should be attributed to the integration of Iran into the world capitalism. The main progress of women's position was made on the social front, and influenced very much by the western capitalist values through decreasing segregation, opening up education and employment to women. It is worth mentioning that these positive developments eroded due to contrasting government policies. Firstly both Reza

Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah (1925-1979), due to their anti-religious approach perceived the emancipation of women as a secular issue. Therefore, they took the forceful unveiling of women, disregarding Islamic social values (in which the role of women has been a fundamental issue) as the emancipator movement for women in Iran. This policy led to further separation of majority of families in urban and rural areas from the un-elected dictator regime and furthermore it caused them to not identify themselves with such pro-women policies. Secondly, the regime's approach was very cosmetic and limited. While the Pahlavi regimes, mainly Mohammad Reza Shah was emphasizing on one or two ministerial posts for women, in 1976 more than 83% of the rural population, which consisted 62% of the overall population, were illiterate.⁵

Under Mohammad Reza Shah, through the military coup and the subsequent suppression of the opposition and from the early 1960s on, through a number of economic and social measures deeply affected the Iranian society in a negative way, thus the Pahlavi state gradually lost all the traditional bases of social support without

acquiring new ones.⁶

The development of the Islamic Revolution in the 1970s, contradicted the expectation that the process of modernization would uproot religion in Iran. It became obvious that understanding Islam, too, was moving ahead with time and was undergoing constant development. Furthermore, Islam was not rejecting modernity with its idealistic implications of economic prosperity, social justice, political freedom and national independence. Higgins argues that as Revolutionary opposition

grew, more and more women, like men, came to see Islam as the alternative to the despotism of the Pahlavi regime and the alienating effects of westernization. Women expressed their opposition to the regime, and to the definition of sex roles it had come to represent.⁷ The emergence of the modernist interpretations of Islam by some religious intellectuals and clerics in 90s found tremendous support among educated Islamists, including gender-conscious women, who rely upon these modernist views to advocate change.

IV. Political Examination

To appraise the role of women in Iran's polity in post-Revolutionary era, four criteria should be examined:

- social participation of women;
- accessibility and presence at all levels of power;
- legal/infrastructural framework on women in society;
- non-governmental institutions for women;

1. Social Participation of Women

During the time of the Revolution, women participated in anti-Shah rallies and demonstrations in large scale. The woman who has been portrayed for so long in her traditional status was coming out of seclusion and on to the streets, not as a sex symbol, but as a political force. Women in towns and cities as well as in rural areas, women of many social classes, those who were newly urbanized as well as those of established urban backgrounds engaged in public political activity during the Revolution.

Women's role in the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 has been significant. Women's

share in this period is characterized by their participation in nationwide demonstrations against the Pahlavi regime. They have also participated substantially in rallies and demonstrations in favor of the Revolution afterwards.

Higgins argues that many observers have noted the increased sense of power and self-confidence, the expanded political consciousness, and the perception of greater respect many women experienced as a result of these activities.⁸

After the victory of the Revolution in 1979, it was women's participation in politics which created an image of popular support and stability internally and internationally. Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Revolution considered such participation of women crucial and on many occasions he praised and nominated them "the lion-hearted ones whose great efforts saved Islam from the captivity of the foreigners [and] who alongside men secured the victory of Islam". He had endorsed women's political rights as a religious duty: "women have the right to intervene in politics. It is their duty.....Islam is a political religion. In Islam, everything, even prayer, is political".⁹

2. Accessibility and Presence at All Levels of Power

By law, there is no restriction on accessibility of Iranian women to high positions in the government. However, in reality, this process will take time to change the male-dominated culture in society, which sometimes has ties with religious misunderstandings. The Iraq-Iran War (1980-88) which for eight years mobilized the country's resources was an impediment to the advancement of debate on the condition of women. The plight of Islamist women social activists was overshadowed by the predominant values of self-denial, devotion and sacrifice, rooted in the Shi'a culture and internalized by the young volunteers. The centrality of war issues in the management of the country led to dismiss women's social problems. Hence, the government was devoid of specific economic, social, and cultural policies on women, to the point that "women had no place in the First Plan, implemented during the war."¹⁰

For the first decade after the Revolution, there were only three female deputies out of two hundred and sixty-eight in the parliament. Female parliamentarians occupied 1.5% of the seats in first three parliaments. But their presence doubled to reach a total of nine in the 1992 elections which was 3.3% of the seats, to 13 in 1996 election, and remained 13 in 2000 election and 14 in 2004 election, and reduced to 8 in 2008 election. Nonetheless, the female candidates who could reach the second ballot of parliamentary election in 2000 were about 100, which was very encouraging.¹¹ Although women's presence in parliament has been tokenistic, they have played an important role in initiating progressive legislation on women. Parliamentarian women in the sixth round of the parliament constituted a committee concerning women's problems in Iran. They ratified 35 bills related to women's issues which have been the biggest since the Revolution. (Tables 1 & 2)

Table 1. Proportionate distribution of women candidates in Majlis¹²

Majlis (Parliament)	% of Women Parliamentary Candidates	% of Women elected into the Parliament	No. of Women Deputies
First Majlis	3.02%	1.66%	4
Second Majlis	1.98%	1.66%	4
Third Majlis	1.99%	1.66%	4
Fourth Majlis	3%	3.6%	9
Fifth Majlis	6.43%	5.6%	14
Six Majlis	7.3%	4.4%	13
Seventh Majlis	9.89%	4.4%	13
Eighth Majlis			8

Source: Ministry of Interior, *Gozaresh-e Entekhabat Majlis-e Shoraye Eslami* (Majlis Election Report), 2009.

Table 2. Number of Bills related directly to the status of Women, passed by each Parliament

Majlis	Bills passed by Majlis
First (1980-84)	16
Second (1984-88)	13
Third (1988-92)	6
Fourth (1992-6)	8
Fifth (1996-2000)	21
Six (2000-04)	17
Seven (2004-08)	13

Source: ISNA, *Gozarash Tarh va Lavayeh Marbut be Zanan va Khanevadeh dar Majlis Sheshom* (A Report on Bills Passed by Majlis on Women and Family Issues), Iran-e Emruz newspaper, May 2009, p.6.

3. “Reconstruction Period”

Although Iranian women were the source of aspiration during the Iran-Iraq war from 1980-88, and participated by any means possible to support the government, the condition of women did not constitute a priority for the political and religious elite at that time. The end of the war and the implementation of ‘Reconstruction Policies’ provided a better ground to improve the condition of women in Iran. Kian notes that two periods can be distinguished with regard to the Iranian state’s policies on women: the Revolutionary period, which began after the triumph of the Revolution and lasted until 1988, and the period of ‘Reconstruction’ from 1988 until the present.¹⁴

During the 90s, women’s participation in Iran’s polity focused more on national elections. It is important to mention that not always their vote followed their male relatives, in particular for urban inhabitants. It was actually women votes in presidential elections in both 1997 and 2001 that led to the vital victory of president Khatami. While such a role is crucial, the challenge for Iranian women is to turn it into a daily influence in Iran’s

polity. Also women have been active in par with men in voting for parliament and there is a larger electorate of women than men to that extent that during the last election in 2004, 65% of women (with the right to vote) voted and only 62% of men were among the electorate. This factor specifies that women feel more responsible in determining their political fate than men do.

Therefore, the role of women may be examined in two areas of politics: Firstly, presence in major political decision-making processes, and secondly, women’s presence in on-going polity of the country. For the first one, it is argued that even in developed economies, in which women are more present in high positions, the political decision-making process is a male-dominated area. Behind the scenes, party runners (and not necessarily party leaders), influential politicians, key figures in the parliament, key figures in the president offices, multi-billionaire business owners, media tycoons’ and so on are still dominated mainly by men. However, one should bear in mind that success of women in the second presence which is an on-going polity of a country is a pre-condition to successfully being on par with men in major political decision-making processes.

The 1997 presidential elections marked a new era in women's participation in the political arena. Female votes were perhaps the largest single element responsible for the victory of president Khatami which was 69.7% of the votes. This was a direct consequence of Mr. Khatami's gender-sensitive election agenda, for example in medium-ranking managerial position, the presence of women more than doubled during the two periods of Khatami's presidency (1997-2005). The Khatami government has taken the following measures in 1997: there were two female cabinet members; one at the rank of vice-president and the head of "Environmental Protection Department" and the other as a presidential advisor and the head of the "Center for Women's Participation" (which has changed to the "Center for Women's Affairs and Family" after president Ahmadinejad was elected in 2005).

Furthermore a trend of Muslim feminism has developed in Iran mostly in the last two decades, which has sought equal access to opportunity for men and women while also considering her motherhood instincts and her need for active participation in society. This new generation of modernist-Islamist women, feminist in the western sense, has flourished. They are gender-conscious and have discovered politics as an agent for radical change in women's status. They are open to the outside world and share a modern view on Islam, which accounts for necessary social change. These women attempt to adapt or reinterpret Islam to the realities of a society in which women's social, economic and political activities become an integral part.

By the end of the war, the 'High Council of Cultural Revolution', chaired by president Rafsanjani founded the 'Socio-Cultural Council of Women' to promote women's economic and social status. Kian argues that the implementation of 'Reconstruction Policies' provided an opportunity

for a new generation of gender-conscious Islamist women to seek allies among secular women, to present a modern reading of Islam, and make radical demands for change in women's status by using politics as a potent agent.¹⁵

As women were without official representatives at the highest level of government, in 1992 the 'Office of Women's Affairs', an offshoot to the president office, as well as in each ministry, was created to detect problems and shortcomings of women. Another point is that there is a trend towards a greater number of women occupying top-level managerial posts. This includes the appointment of four women as deputy ministers, female advisors to ministers and governors, director generals both in ministries and at the provincial levels, district mayors, judges and provincial deputy governor generals. In addition, in 2004, 630 women were elected in decision-making positions in the "Provincial Planning and Development Councils" as one of the highest decision-making institutions in different provinces of Iran. On the whole, according to existing statistics, the growth of female managers shows a 63% increase from 1989 to 2004.¹⁶ This increase has been mostly in the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, the Ministry of Economics and Finance, and also an increase in the number of provincial female managers.

Another milestone in the female political presence of the country at the policy level has been the nationwide "City and Local Council" elections. Number of female candidates in which most of them are below 40 years of age illustrates their will and commitment to full political participation. In 1999, in Tehran considered as the most significant city in the council elections, two of the top five winners were women. In 2005, 11% of all elected city council representatives were women. In the second round of the local council elections, the number of female candidates was increased, which

is a clear indication of public manifestation of women's potential in this area.

The interesting factor is that there are more rural female candidates than urban ones.¹⁷ Based on Article 62 of the Constitution, the deputies of the parliament as well as the president are elected by people regardless of their gender, so are the representatives of councils of provinces, towns and cities. Women have also been vested with the Constitution of being elected or appointed to the highest political and administrative offices. The only exceptional rule involves the post of presidency which carries an interpretive clause (Article 115 of the Constitution stipulating that the candidate for the office must be among the 'distinguished political and religious personalities' (so far interpreted to be men). In 1997 presidential election, nine women apparently attempted to become presidential candidates and although their candidacy was rejected by the Guardian Council, a debate ensued on whether this ruling was because they were women or not 'distinguished political and religious personalities'. Faizeh Hashemi¹⁸ in a press interview (July 1997) asserts:

“What is the difference between the presidency of the Republic (Iran) and the management of a government service? None. Both positions involve responsibilities in the executive branch. Therefore, why should a woman not lead the country when she can legitimately be at the head of a government service?”

This debate may end in favor of women's participation. In articles 5, 107, 163 of the Constitution, religious and judicial leadership is attributed to men. However, Hashimi asserts that the word *rajul* (literally means men) to define the prerequisite condition for assuming the post of the president of Iran denotes both a man and a well-known personality (which by definition can also

be a woman).¹⁹ Nevertheless, politics is still a male dominated arena and integration of women in this field remains a difficult task. Low self esteem among women, as well as the resistance of male politicians, mostly in the parliament and political parties opposing women's political participation, public mistrust of women's abilities as politicians and decision-makers are among the most significant barriers facing women entering the arena of power and decision-making. However, female candidates for parliament have inadequate access to funds and it is a difficult job for lobbying legislations pertaining to women with their male counterparts. Also, there are not appropriate laws supporting women at the managerial levels in view of their duties in the family and their dual jobs in this respect. Male attitudes, customs and traditions concerning women's position are among the impeding customary clichés regarding women's roles and capacity holding key positions.

Since the establishment of the new government of President Ahmadinejad (since 2005), there has been no drastic change against or in favor of women's status in Iran. However, one can witness a lesser emphasis on women's issues compared to President Khatami (1998-2005) but more emphasis on family issues. One can observe the following remarks regarding the new government:

- 1- “Centre for Participation of Women” which is under supervision of the President of the Republic changed name to the “Center for Women's affairs and Family”.
- 2- A woman is appointed as the Minister of Health. There are two Vice-President women for Legal Affairs and for Women's Affairs who attend the Cabinet of Ministers as well.
- 3- President's first deputy repeatedly announced that the new government has not expressed any commitments towards a new strategy for improving

women's conditions, other than the general trend. Women's status was not on top of President Ahmadinejad agenda during his presidential campaign in 2005, thus the new government feels no commitment towards this matter.

- 4- Educational attainment of women is improving as before.

Despite the claim that women are able to have a substantial share in politics and decision-making, women are still confronted by impeding laws and gender biased attitudes, which prevent women's full participation in these areas. Consequently, in Iran, women's political participation and their presence in power and the decision making process is one of the most important and critical areas of concern.

4. Legal/Infrastructural Framework on Women in Society

Moinifar asserts that Iranian women as highly educated specialists have tried to indicate the possibilities of reforming *shari'at*²⁰ within Islamic jurisprudence through participation in international conferences and events, sponsoring conferences on Islam, and negotiation with *ulama*.²¹ The obstacles towards implementing change in conditions for Iranian women are as much intertwined with traditional impediments as they are with social, cultural and legal ones.²² The major challenge of women in the legal and judicial system is with respect to divorce, issues such as the right for divorce, child custody and division of wealth. The judiciary has been reluctant to accept a major policy shift towards these issues. It has been mainly women's force within the parliament, which has successfully lobbied for the modification of certain family laws and passed new bills in favor of women.²³

In 1986, the parliament passed a 12-article law on marriage and divorce that limited the privileges accorded to men by both custom and traditional interpretations of Islamic law. In respect to women's rights in divorce, by the late 1980s, the law contained some strikingly forward-looking provisions. In a remarkable move, female deputies in parliament managed to change divorce laws to make it more expensive for a man to leave his wife at will. In 1993, as a direct result of having a larger number of women deputies, the parliament passed a bill demanding that if a man 'unjustly' divorces his wife, he should pay 'wages' for the wife's domestic work during their marriage. The husband is even under obligation to pay his wife for breast-feeding her own child. Also, under the new law, the first wife has the right of divorce should the husband take a second wife without her consent. To file for divorce, couples should now refer to civil courts, which have recently been authorized to hire female judicial counselor.²⁴

While the legal framework is changing very slowly in favor of women, the infrastructures for upgrading women's status in society have accelerated in some respects. In this regard, one major criterion is education of women. Education is one of the most objective dimensions of the status of women in any society today. Education services are among the most expensive and scarce resources in most developing countries. Legally, in many of these countries (including Iran), elementary education is compulsory and should be provided free of charge by the government. In Iran, based on the Constitution, education up to the Ph.D. level is free of charge for men and women without any segregation. Of course in reality as government is not able to provide enough seats at governmental universities, many young people in Iran pay a lot of money for entering the open universities.

In Iran, a steady improvement in women's

literacy rate is evident from the Censuses. In the decade 1956-1966, the literacy rate improved from 8 percent to 17.9 percent for women, and 22.4 percent to 40.1 percent for men. According to the 1976 Census, 55 percent of urban women were literate while the figure was just 17.3 percent for rural women. Almost a decade after the Islamic Revolution (1979), in 1986, 65 percent of urban women (and 80 percent of urban men) were literate, while 36 percent of rural women (and 60 percent of rural men) were literate. A decade later, in 1996, 84 percent of urban women were literate while the figure for rural women was 60 percent.²⁵

The 110% increase in the literacy rate of rural women in 1976-86 (as compared with a mere 37.5% gain for men), as well as its 71% rise between 1986 and 1996 for rural women, (as compared with a gain of 28% for rural men) are impressive. While the total number of students attending high school and university had increased 4.45 times between 1976 and 1996, those from rural areas had risen by a factor of 9.4. The number of university students from rural areas (93,000) revealed by the 1996 Census equals 23.25 times and 7.75 times of those registered in 1976 and 1986 Censuses, respectively.²⁶ Last year, based on the statistics, the number of students who entered the universities were 60% females compared to 40% males. Youth literacy rate (aged 15-24) increased from 92% in 1997 to 96% in 2003 for females and from 96% to 98% for males in the same years, in which it shows 4% increase for girls and 2% increase for boys.²⁷ Despite considerable achievements in education, the participation of women in the labor force is only 13 percent which is very low compared to other countries and has been almost constant from the beginning of the Revolution up to now.

There are only a few legal barriers towards women's economic participation. Taking into account the population growth in the last two and

half decades and the challenges faced by women in the employment market, women's increased economic activity has been given special attention in the 3rd development plan (1998-2002). The main objectives of the plan was to increase employment opportunities and decrease national unemployment rates and to improve women's economic activity and implementing policy for suitable conditions and mechanisms for increased women's economic participation. Nevertheless their continued economic empowerment is conditional on the support they receive in all areas, and particularly to legal reforms.

5. Women NGOs

Another sphere of influence is the existence of NGOs which might be regarded as a sign of prosperity of a genuine movement. Although the establishment of such institutions has been a new phenomenon in Iran, by 1999, over 150 NGOs had been registered on women issues and by women from different walks of life. Many of them have been active in increasing awareness among the public as well as changes on women's conditions. Based on national report on women's status, there are presently 9 out of 326 registered women NGOs in which they have ECOSOC Consultative Status with the United Nations.²⁸

V. Conclusion

Women comprise half of Iran's population. Thus, they are asking for more opportunities to have a voice and to be heard. In Iran, the ideologies and practice of gender difference and gender inequality exist, but these conditions are subject to the challenge of economic development and demographic change, such as the growth of the educated women population which is now a happening in Iran. The obstacles to women's advancement could be defined as traditional, social, cultural and legal. It is worth noting that gender relations are determined and affected by such factors as state ideology, level of economic progress, women's consciousness and struggle for better positions, legal/infrastructural elements such as the percentage and quality of women's education and professionalism, the extent of industrialization and urbanization, and global integration. Nevertheless, one can argue based on the above reasoning, the situation of women in Iran is still inferior to that of men's, but gradually improving and accelerating.

The political status of women in Iran is improving, though behind their status in education, labor force, and social arena. An increase of 53.81% in female candidates during the 2000 parliamentary elections demonstrates women's interest in political participation. Despite this trend, the number of female parliamentarians decreased from 14 in year 2004 to 8 in 2008. In provincial politics, however, women have been more successful. This is apparent from the second round of the rural and urban council elections in 2005, in which the number of female members increased by 154.87%.

One of the major impediments is that despite the significant presence of women in various professions, there is a lack of women's

representation in key posts where macro politics and planning are decided. By appointing women specialists to relevant key posts, they can better defend women's rights; however, this approach which was promised under President Khatami's government was not fully realized. With the government of President Ahmadinejad now in place, hopes for the implementation of this approach is even dimmer, and his government has mainly emphasized on the role of women in the family. Nevertheless, there are two female ministers and two female vice-presidents in his cabinet, which is an increase in key political posts than before. The actions of government still fall short of international standards and require the serious willingness of statesmen. Generally speaking, despite claims and efforts made by the Islamic Republic of Iran in promoting women's participation in Iranian politics and decision making, there are impeding laws, gender clichés and social obstacles which have effectively closed the doors to Iranian women in the area of power and decision making.

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- 1 Center for Women's Participation, *National Report on Women's Status in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2003, p. 29.
 - 2 Nicholas Abercromby et al., *The Culture of Sociology*, 1999, pp.54-64.
 - 3 See further Scholzman et al., 1994.
 - 4 For summary of the three approaches and empirical studies, see Clark and Clark, 1986; Scholzman et al., 1994 and Welch, 1997.
 - 5 Statistical Centre of Iran, *Yearbook of Iran*, 1986, p.81.
 - 6 Afsane Najmabadi, *Iran's turn to Islam*, 1987, p.320.
 - 7 Patricia. J. Higgins, *Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal, Social, and Ideological changes*, 1985, p.490.
 - 8 *ibid.*, p.486.
 - 9 Rohollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-e Nur*, 1992, pp.136-152.
 - 10 M. Siddiqi's interview, *Reyhaneh*, 2nd September 1996, p.11
 - 11 In Iran by law, for a seat at parliamentary election, if one candidate can get one third of the caste vote, the first two runners will compete in a second ballot.
 - 12 Parliament.
 - 13 Another 18 bills were elaborated in the "Women Special Commission" but never sent to "Majlis Forum".
 - 14 Azadeh Kian, *Gendered Occupation and Women's status in Iran*, 1995, p.408.
 - 15 Azadeh Kian, *Women and Politics in Post- Islamist Iran: the Gender Conscious drive to change*, 1997, p.75.
 - 16 Center for Women's Participation, *National Report on Women's Status in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2005, p.76.
 - 17 *ibid.*, p.78.
 - 18 She is the President of the 'Islamic Countries Sports Solidarity Council', and younger daughter of the President Hashemi Rafsanjani (1993-1997), who gained the second highest number of Tehran votes in the March-April 1996 Parliament election.
 - 19 Sayyid Mihdi Hashimi, *Huquq- I Asasi-I Jumhuri Islam 'I* (The constitutional law of the Islamic Republic of Iran), 1993, p.363.
 - 20 Islamic teachings.
 - 21 Religious leaders.
 - 22 Heshmat Sadat Moinifar, *Family Planning Programs and Population Growth in Post Revolutionary Iran*, PhD. Thesis, 1999, p.229.
 - 23 By the law, at the time of marriage, the bride can impose the right of ownership of half the wealth and property of the groom at the time of divorce. Furthermore, the bride can initiate the right to education, the right of divorce, the right of holding a job and the right of employment, choice of residence and divorce at the time of marriage contract.
 - 24 In 1996, the Ministry of Justice appointed 200 female judicial counselors to preserve more satisfactorily women's rights in courts and the number has being increased up to now. In an interview on 28 Jan. 2007, the judiciary system announced that there are 420 female judges in the courts in Iran (a TV interview in night news).
 - 25 Statistical Centre of Iran, *Yearbook of Iran*, 1997, p.18.
 - 26 Heshmat Sadat Moinifar, *Family Planning Programs and Population Growth in Post Revolutionary Iran*, PhD Thesis, 1999, pp.86-87.
 - 27 Centre for Women's Participation, *National Report on Women's Status in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 2005, p.27.
 - 28 *ibid.*, p.83.