

Polity IV Country Report 2010: Iran

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Score:</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2009</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2010</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Change</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Polity:</td> <td>-7</td> <td>-7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Democ:</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Autoc:</td> <td>7</td> <td>7</td> <td>0</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Durable:</td> <td></td> <td>6</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tentative:</td> <td></td> <td>No</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	Score:	2009	2010	Change	Polity:	-7	-7	0	Democ:	0	0	0	Autoc:	7	7	0	Durable:		6		Tentative:		No		
Score:	2009	2010	Change																						
Polity:	-7	-7	0																						
Democ:	0	0	0																						
Autoc:	7	7	0																						
Durable:		6																							
Tentative:		No																							
SCODE	IRN	CCODE	630	Date of Report	1 June 2011																				
Polity IV Component Variables																									
XRREG	XRCOMP	XROPEN	XCONST	PARREG	PARCOMP																				
2	1	4	2	4	2																				
Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)																									
End Date	11 January 2004			Begin Date	27 May 2004																				
Polity Fragmentation: No																									
Constitution	1979 (1989)																								
Executive(s)	Leader of the Islamic Revolution and the Nation (Walid Faqih) Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei; recognized by an assembly of Muslim clerics, the Council of Experts, in August 1989 following the death of his predecessor, Ayatollah Khomeini President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; initially directly elected June 16 and 24, 2005, reelected 12 June 2009, 62.6%																								
Legislature	Unicameral: Islamic Consultative Assembly (290 seats; directly elected; most recent elections, 14 March and 25 April 2008): Conservatives: 170 Reformers: 71 Non-partisans: 39 Religious minorities: 5 Unfilled: 5																								
Judiciary	Supreme Court																								

Narrative Description:¹

Executive Recruitment: Designation (3)

The Iranian Islamic revolution, led by exiled spiritual leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, succeeded in ending the 37-year reign of Shah Reza Pahlavi in January 1979. Upon Khomeini's return, Iran was declared an Islamic republic ruled under the theocratic authority of Shia Islam's supreme spiritual leader, the Wali

¹ The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

Faqih, who is believed to be the direct spiritual descendant of the Mahdi. The Wali Faqih is vested with supreme authority for life and over all aspects of earthly life: religious, economic, political, and social. In December 1982, a Council of Experts was elected by the Islamic clergy to designate a successor to Wali Faqih and in late 1985 the council chose Ayatollah Ali Montazeri as Khomeini's successor. Montazeri did not welcome the council's designation as successor and he eventually resigned in March 1989. Following Ayatollah Khomeini's sudden death in June 1989, the Council of Experts elevated then-President Seyyed Ali Khamenei to the status of Ayatollah and recognized him as the next Wali Faqih.

Whereas the Wali Faqih was imbued with supreme authority in the Islamic republic, the authority for the actual administration of the Islamic republic was placed in the office of the president. Candidates for the presidency, however, must be approved by the Wali Faqih and the Council of Guardians before they can stand for election. The Islamic republic's first president, secularist Abolhassan Bani-Sadr was elected in January 1980 but an intensifying dispute with Islamic fundamentalist groups during the early period of the Iran-Iraq war, including the fundamentalist majority in the Majlis, culminated with Ayatollah Khomeini siding with the Majlis, dismissing Bani-Sadr as Commander-in-Chief, and finally dismissing him as president in June 1981. Bani-Sadr's replacement, former-Prime Minister Mohammed Ali Radjai, was assassinated in August 1981. Radjai was replaced by Islamic cleric Sayyed Ali Khamenei, who had been favored by Khomeini's Supreme Defence Council. The Parliamentary speaker, cleric Hashemi Rafsanjani, replaced Khamenei in July 1989 elections that were tightly controlled by the Islamic religious hierarchy. Rafsanjani won a second term in the June 1993 presidential elections which were also tightly controlled by the conservative clergy; however, despite serving eight years as president, his professed "reformist" agenda never seriously challenged the authority of the Shia clerics.

The multi-candidate presidential elections of May 1997 brought a landslide victory for a more activist, moderate cleric, Mohammad Khatami. This popular mandate enabled Khatami to begin to challenge some of the more onerous policies that defined the conservative agenda, particularly in economic policy. While the increasing popular support for a more moderate platform has stimulated a conservative backlash that managed, in large part, to keep the power of the reformers in check, popular support for the moderate reformers also increased, thereby limiting the capabilities of the conservatives to fully suppress the reformers and dictate policy, marking a shift away from strict theocracy to an effective, dual-executive system. Legislative elections in February and May 2000 resulted in a further shift of political forces as the reformist coalition won an overwhelming majority in the Islamic Consultative Assembly. This victory set the stage for the June 2001 presidential elections in which Khatami was reelected with over 78% of the votes from a slate of ten candidates.

Beginning with the US-led ouster of the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban regime in neighboring Afghanistan in late 2001, the independence of the executive office of the President has been increasingly challenged by a resurgent conservative reaction. The tightening of fundamentalist control over the government became an imperative for conservatives following the US invasion of neighboring Iraq in March 2003. June 2003 student demonstrations against Islamic restrictions, openly supported and encouraged by the US government, triggered a closing of ranks between reformers and conservatives and resulted in a further consolidation of power by forces loyal to the Wali Faqih, limiting the support available to and undermining the effectiveness and independence of the presidency.

Following the Council of Guardians' refusal to allow most reformist candidates to stand in 2004 legislative elections, the Council again acted to severely restrict the list of candidates allowed to stand in subsequent 2005 presidential elections. The Council disqualified all but six of the 1,014 candidates standing for the June 2005 presidential elections; two reform candidates were later allowed to stand after Ayatollah Khamenei's intercession. No candidate gained the required majority in the first round of presidential elections held on June 19 and a second round was held on June 24 between the two top vote-getters: former-President Rafsanjani and the Mayor of Tehran Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad was elected in the second round with nearly 62% of the vote, amid allegations that the elections had been "guided" by Revolutionary Guards and other fundamentalist forces. After his inauguration on 6 August 2005, President Ahmadinejad proceeded to stack his cabinet with religious/political hardliners thus officially bringing to a close the phase of political liberalization in Iran that had begun in the mid-1990s.

Despite the consolidation of political control by religious/political hardliners in recent years, the political power of President Ahmadinejad remains tenuous. By early 2007, Ahmadinejad's support within the Guardian Council and the National Assembly had begun to weaken. President Ahmadinejad's main political rival, former President Rafsanjani, won election to Iran's powerful clerical body, the Assembly of Experts. The reemergence of Rafsanjani as an opposition voice to the President indicates that a green light has been

given from the Wali Faqih to open debate on the record of Ahmadinejad. While there is no indication that Ahmadinejad will be removed from power, there is definitely a sense that the clerics desire to restrain his actions. While religious/political hardliners continue to dominate Iranian politics, nonetheless, liberal and moderate forces inside government have regained some influence. The presidential election held on 12 June 2009 resulted in a victory for the incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who enjoys the backing of the conservative clerics, although that relationship has become more strained in recent years. The opposition rejected the results and claimed massive fraud, triggering mass demonstrations. The opposition in Iran has been systematically suppressed since these demonstrations, although it has been allowed to remain organized.

Executive Constraints: Slight Limitations (2)

The Wali Faqih (Supreme Leader) commands the Iranian theocracy and stands as the ultimate decision maker in the country; he also has direct control of the armed forces, internal security forces, and the judiciary. The religious leader is assisted by a Council of Guardians, which consists of six clerical members, who are appointed by the Supreme Leader, and six lay jurists, who are appointed by the head of the judiciary and approved by the legislature. The Council of Guardians oversees all elections and reviews all legislation to ensure its compliance with the principals of Islamic law. An elected Council of Experts, comprising 83 clerics, holds broad powers of legal interpretation and is empowered to identify a successor in the event of the Wali Faqih's death. However, with the July 1989 amendments to the constitution, the office of the president has been strengthened, particularly with the abolition of the office of prime minister and the consolidation of administrative powers in the presidency.

In recent years the office of the president has been split between hardline and moderate forces. Beginning with his election as a reformist in 1997, former-President Khatami enjoyed broad popular support, and, with the 2000 legislative elections, garnered a strong backing in a reformist-dominated legislature; however, the reformists lost control of both the legislature and the presidency in 2004. In response to the rising influence reformers in government, the Council of Guardians sought to limit their power by intimidating, undermining, and, even, selectively removing its leaders and bases of popular support. While the reformers sought to liberalize the political system, they did not attempt to directly challenge the power of the Supreme Leader or the Council of Guardians. By 2004 an emerging "siege mentality" among the conservative factions took hold in reaction to encroachments by US military forces along two of Iran's borders (Afghanistan and Iraq) leaving the Khatami presidency almost powerless. The Council of Guardians then used their authority to oversee elections to severely restrict the number and competence of reformist candidates allowed to stand in legislative elections in 2004. The Council also restricted reformist candidates from standing in 2005 presidential elections, leading to the election of a hardline conservative candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Under the leadership of President Ahmadinejad, the ideologically-devout Revolutionary Guards gained significant clout within government. The rise of the military in the political sphere in recent years has been encouraged by Ayatollah Khamenei. Some analysts have suggested that the new political role of the military may have been his way of consolidating his political control by building a new power base independent of the senior clergy (who have sometimes questioned his religious credentials). As a result of the enhanced political power by the Revolutionary Guard under the Ahmadinejad regime, the country has become increasingly authoritarian in recent years.

In the March 2008 parliament elections, conservatives won four times as many seats as the reformers, further consolidating the political power of the Supreme Leader and President Ahmadinejad. In these elections a large proportion of the reformist candidates were disqualified and those who were allowed to campaign were not allowed to hold public rallies and their newspapers were regularly closed down. Nearly 40% of the original 7,597 candidates who registered to compete for office were disqualified under an elaborate system that weeds out anyone believed to have an "unsuitable" political record of loyalty to the Islamic Republic. The vast majority of those rejected were from the reformist camp. In the aftermath of the 2008 elections, the conservatives held 70% of the seats with the remaining 30% split evenly between reformists and independents. Moreover, the conservatives that were elected in 2008 appear to be more committed to the hardline policies of the Supreme Leader and the President. While conservatives dominated the previous parliament, nonetheless, most had no great loyalty to the President and were often quite critical of him and his policies. Those newly elected members now seem to be more strongly supportive of both the domestic and international policies advocated by the President and the Supreme Leader. The judiciary is subject to government and religious influence.

Political Participation: Restricted Competition (2)

The ruling Islamic clergy firmly controls political competition in the country. All candidates for elected offices have to be approved by the Council of Guardians on the basis of an ill-defined set of requirements, including the candidates' ideological beliefs. Two attempts by the reformist-dominated Majlis to curtail the role of the Council in vetting candidates were firmly rejected by the Council (in April 2003 and August 2003), as well as its attempt to strengthen the powers of the president (in May 2003). After 1979, the Islamic Republican Party was the nation's sole ruling party until it was disbanded in 1987 on the grounds that it fomented political "discord and factionalism." Since October 1988, political parties have been allowed to function, but only if they demonstrate their "commitment to the Islamic system." Since early 1990s, there has been an on-going struggle in Iran between moderates and conservatives for political influence. President Khatami, leader of the moderate coalition around the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF), has faced staunch opposition from the hard-liners who have fought to suppress his efforts at reform. In 2000, conservatives in the government closed nearly all reform-oriented publications and brought charges against prominent political figures and members of the clergy for expressing ideas viewed as contrary to the ruling orthodoxy. However, February 2000 parliamentary elections marked the first time that political parties other than the National Liberation Movement of Iran (NLMI) were granted recognition and were permitted to take part in elections. The new legislature convened in June 2000 featured more reformists than hard-liners for the first time since before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Intimidation tactics by conservative forces increased substantially in the period following the legislative elections and prior to the 2001 presidential election. Especially prominent was the closing of several pro-reform media and the March 2001 ban of the Iran Freedom Movement and the arrests of its leaders. On the other hand, Ayatollah Khamenei has sided with the President in reining in the more egregious abuses of ultra-conservative forces, such as the January 2001 conviction of 15 defendants in the 1998 murders of pro-reform activists and the June 2001 legislative inquiry into the conservative Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). In July 2002 clashes erupted in Tehran and other cities between anti-government demonstrators and the police backed by Islamic militant groups. As a result of the 2002 disturbances, Tehran's Revolutionary Court sentenced 33 pro-reform nationalists to up to 10 years' imprisonment for trying to overthrow "the holy system" of the Islamic Republic "with new methods." The court also confirmed an earlier judicial ruling outlawing the reformists' party, the Iran Freedom Movement. Iran continues to restrict and repress the large Kurdish minority and other smaller non-Shia minority groups. Periodic skirmishes with the militant opposition group Mujahedeen-i-Khalq Organization (MKO), based largely in neighboring Iraq, continue to be reported.

Conservative forces in Iran have been strengthened since the US-led military missions in the neighboring countries of Afghanistan (late 2001) and Iraq (March 2003) and increasing US influence in neighboring Pakistan. In February 2003 municipal elections, conservatives recovered virtually all the local council seats that reformers had taken in the Islamic republic's first municipal elections in 1999. In April and May 2003, the Council of Guardians rejected several reform bills passed by the Majlis and open appeals by reformers in the Majlis to allow reforms and normalize foreign relations in order to reduce the threat of US military action were also rejected by conservative forces. On 10 June 2003, student-led demonstrations in favor of reform and against Islamic restrictions were openly supported and encouraged by the US government. While the protests continued for ten days, reaction by conservatives remained muted and the demonstrations fizzled, while reformers and conservatives closed ranks against what was widely perceived to be undue interference by the US in Iranian affairs. In August 2003, President Khatami acknowledged that his attempts to introduce democratic reforms had largely failed. On 11 January 2004, a political crisis was triggered when the Council of Guardians barred nearly half of the 8,000 candidates who had requested to stand for election in the 20 February 2004, legislative elections. President Khatami appealed to Ayatollah Khamenei to reverse the Council's decision but Khamenei's call for the Council to reconsider their decision resulted in only a few of the rejected candidates gaining approval. On 1 February nearly one-third of the members of the reformist Majlis resigned their seats in protest and only 8 of the original 22 groups of the reform movement agreed to stand in the elections, including President Khatami's reformist clerical faction, the Association of Militant Clerics (MRM); in addition, 700 qualified candidates withdrew from the election. As a result of the Council rejection of reformist candidates and the reformist boycott, conservatives gained an absolute majority in the Majlis, winning at least 195 of the 290 seats with reformers winning only 48. The new, conservative-dominated Majlis was convened on 27 May 2004. In August 2005, large numbers of government troops were deployed in the mainly Kurdish northwest region

bordering on Iraq to crack down on demonstrations and growing unrest among the Kurdish population. The opposition rejected the results of presidential elections held in June 2009, claiming massive fraud, and initiated mass demonstrations which were forcibly suppressed by conservative forces. The opposition in Iran has been systematically suppressed since these demonstrations, although it has been allowed to remain organized.