

Political Repression and Islam in Iran

By Amy Kirk

Introduction

Signs with the slogan, 'I am Neda', flooded the streets of Tehran in the violent aftermath of the 2009 presidential elections and assassination of Neda Agha-Soltan. The internationally publicized video of Neda's death became an iconic rallying point for the reformist opposition in Iran. Stringent clampdowns since the 1979 revolution have signified a sociopolitical change that has endured for three decades. President Khatami's reform efforts of the late 1990s were stifled by Ahmadinejad's election of 2005. Since Ahmadinejad's appointment there has been little official tolerance for political and fundamental Islamic dissent, leading to serious human rights violations against the reformist opposition. Despite claims of implementing four of the six principal human rights treaties, the Iranian government has continually operated outside the bounds of these treaties as well as its own laws. Some of the most flagrant abuses have included discrimination of women and minorities, repression of the freedom of assembly and expression, and the torture of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. Though not exhaustive, these categories are representative of the violent and fervent abuse of human rights by the Iranian government.

Women and Minority Discrimination

Gender, religion, and ethnicity have become points of conflict within the state. The Islamic Republic sanctions discriminatory social practices and laws against various groups based on violations of religious customs and values. These individuals and groups are denied full participation in civil, political, and social activities as Iranian citizens.

Women are repressed both privately and publically. In the home women are considered subjects of their husbands and their autonomy, citizenship status, and rights have been restricted. One of the first political actions taken by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini following his return to power in 1979 was the demand of the 'reveiling' of women. Despite the initial success of women protesters against Khomeini's order, their victory was short-lived and Iranian feminists became increasingly isolated. Since the election of Ahmadinejad the situation has worsened. In 2005, in the first public demonstration of dissent since the revolution, more than 250 demonstrators took to the streets to advocate women's rights. The government and the Basij paramilitary responded by beating and arbitrarily arresting those in the crowd. The success of neutralizing women's right advocates gave the regime confidence to suppress other groups that challenged their Islamic beliefs and political domination.

Religious and ethnic minorities are also denied full participation in civil society and are frequently abused and arrested for their beliefs and ethnicity. Despite the inclusion of the rights of non-Muslims in the Iranian constitution, persecutions of minority religious groups not only persist but have drastically increased. The fundamental Islamic regime continues to act against religious groups including the Baha'is, Ahl-e Haq, Mandaens, Christians, Jews, and Shi'a and Suni Muslims. Moreover, Azeris, Kurds, Arabs, Azerbaijanis, Turkmen and Baluchis are also discriminated against

for the cultural expression of their ethnicity. These groups have faced repressions such as property confiscation, denial of employment, restrictions on social, cultural, linguistic and religious freedoms, arbitrary arrests, unfair trials, corporal punishment and sometimes death penalty sentencing. The government of the Islamic Republic has tightened its grip on the enforcement of fundamental Islam and continues to persecute religious and ethnic groups that the government does not recognize as fitting their ideological construct.

Freedom of Assembly

To repress/silence women, minority groups and others opposed to their political principles, the regime has cracked down on the assemblage of activists and protest groups/the regime has practiced more stringent policies in restraining groups of activists and protesters. Included in the Iranian constitution is a set of vague articles that allocate a wide scope of government authority to suppress anyone found to be threatening national security. The rhetoric used to explain these threats includes the prohibition of joining any group that opposes Islamic principles and the ruling regime.

Government reaction to protests of the 2005 and 2009 presidential elections shed light on major human rights violations against the freedom of assembly. When hundreds of demonstrators flooded the streets of Tehran to protest alleged voter fraud during the June 2009 presidential elections, they were confronted by Basij paramilitaries who beat, arrested and killed those in the crowd. Various human rights activists faced similar fates from the Iranian regime.

In recent decades, student activists have entered the political scene in full force and have consequently become victims of human rights violations. In 2005, students held demonstrations in the city of Mahabad to commemorate the anniversary of the 1999 student protests, which the government violently suppressed. The brutality of the government reaction to the demonstration was marked by the atrocious murder of prominent activist, Shawaneh Ghaderi who was shot, tied to a car, and dragged through the streets of Tehran.

Freedom of Expression

Despite membership to the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights guarantying freedom of expression and the press, Iran has greatly infringed of these rights. The post-revolution constitution contains articles of vague rhetoric that allow for government discretion in the suppression and punishment of those they deem to be acting unfavorably against the fundamental principles of Islam and the regime. Such nebulous acts include insulting religion, spreading propaganda against the state, and creating public anxiety. Courts have stifled the reform movement by shutting down dozens of pro-reform journals, magazines, and websites. Various forms of communication – television, radio stations, cell phones, and websites–have also been shut down or censored by the government. In the most recent elections, internet censorship became a core part of the state's apparatus of repression.

In addition to the pervasive closure and censorship of journals, broadcast stations, and other forms of communication, the government has instigated violent attacks, arbitrary arrests, and

imprisonment of authors, journalists, scholars and activists. The government justifies these actions with unclear laws that permit the punishment of anyone violating Islamic principles and codes. A widely publicized case of random censorship and police brutality was the imprisonment and murder of Iranian-Canadian photojournalist Zahra Kazemi. She was arrested in 2003 for taking pictures of protests outside a prison in Tehran and reportedly died from a stroke while in custody. It was later confirmed that she had been brutally raped, beaten and tortured before her death.

Political Prisoners and Prisoners of Conscience

Prisoners who are confined for their involvement in political activities or for their race, gender, ethnicity or expression of beliefs are increasingly at risk for ill-treatment and torture during their detainment. Those targeted include political opponents and reformists, parliamentarians, clerics, human rights defenders, NGO affiliates, religious dissenters, journalists, students and academicians. Following the 2009 elections, authorities detained some 4,000 people in the month of August for involvement in post-election protests. A majority of prisoners were convicted in flawed legal proceedings. The Iranian Judiciary does not act as an independent body as the Revolutionary Courts and Special Courts also operate as legal bodies that try cases against Iranian citizens. Also, judges appointed by Ahmadinejad have long records/have made careers of violating due process and human rights. Iranian jurist and former Prosecutor General of Tehran Saeed Mortazavi is notorious for the jailing of hundreds of journalists and has been linked to the torture and death of Zahra Kazemi.

Despite the official ban on torture in 2005, the Iranian government continues to persecute its own citizens. During detainment, political prisoners and prisoners of conscience are violated in numerous ways. The Evin Prison is infamous for acts of torture including solitary confinement, sensory deprivation, denial of medical treatment, deprivation of light, food and water, flogging, stoning, amputation and sexual assault. Those arrested in post-election protests reported various forms of interrogation and abuse. Many were questioned on personal and political beliefs, held captive in small confined spaces with other detainees and severely beaten. Furthermore, the Iranian regime has used executions as a form of repressing political dissent. Between 1979 and 1994, the government has been charged with the execution of nearly 5,000 political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.

Conclusion

Although international attention has focused on human rights abuses in Iran since the 1979 revolution, concern significantly increased following the 2005 presidential elections. Ahmadinejad's halt of political reform sparked widespread fervor among demonstrators and activists. The past five years have been among the most tumultuous in the history of the Islamic Republic. Repeated abuses of human rights convey the stranglehold of power that Tehran's ruling radical clerics and their allies have maintained through various branches of the government. Internal conflicts in present day Iran are set in a complex framework where fundamental ideals of Islam are in constant tension with modernizing interpretations of Islam within society. Through the continued repression and abuse of

its own citizens, the regime has stifled all social and political reform efforts to maintain its dominant political position and fundamental Islamic rule.

Annotations

Abrahamian, Ervand. 1999. Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Annotation: Ervand Abrahamian, Middle Eastern Historian, presents a unique prospective on the relationship of torture and the creation of propaganda. He examines how recantations of political prisoners were used by the government to reinforce authority and weaken their enemies. These recantations included videotaped 'interviews' of prisoners affirming the supremacy and righteousness of the authorities and the criminalist qualities of themselves. Abrahamian begins by explaining the various arguments for the recent return of torture in Iran. He then argues the limitations of these simplistic theories through several accounts of political prisoners, tortures, confessions and recantations. This book is a valuable contribution to understanding the history of political torture and its reemergence in modern Iran.

Afshari, Reza. 2009. "A Historic Moment in Iran." *Human Rights Quarterly* 31: 839-55.

Annotation: Reza Afshari's publication in *Human Rights Quarterly* is an extremely well written piece that divulges the Iranian class-cultural divide, which has become even more apparent following the June 2009 elections. He assesses the split between the religious hard-line fundamentalism of the Ahmadinejad regime and the secular modern uprising of the "other" Iran. Afshari argues that the post-election protests show that this secular class is no longer a minority and that there is tremendous potential for the sociopolitical environment of Iran to greatly alter in coming decades. The publication is a fascinating piece that will challenge anyone interested in the social and cultural context of modern day Iran.

———. 2001. *Human Rights in Iran: The Abuse of Cultural Relativism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Annotation: In this book, Reza Afshari, professor of History at Pace University, lays out a thorough record of human rights in post-revolutionary Iran. He emphasizes the need to understand the historical evolution of rights in Iran before being able to analyze the current abuse of human rights. Using government documents, UN reports, journals, and memoirs of political prisoners, Afshari presents a wealth of information on Iranian rights violations from the 1980s through 2001, when his book was published. Afshari structures the book by critically analyzing five major categories presented by the UN and then highlights the absence of other significant categories. This piece is a powerful and unique fusion of government reports, personal accounts and theories that makes for an excellent read for anyone trying to understand the complicated realism of Islam and human rights in Iran.

Amnesty International. 2010. "Iran: Submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review:Seventh Session of the UPR Working Group of the Human Rights Council." Available online: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/009/2009/en/06e8bc8a-81d7-4207-9eff-2bd644dca632/mde130092009eng.html>.

Annotation: This report, prepared by Amnesty International, gives a ten page overview of the current human rights violations in Iran. It explains the issues of: (1) restrictions on the freedom of expression, association and assembly; (2) legislation, unfair trials, violence in prisons and the death penalty; and (3) the discrimination of and restrictions against women, and ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities. In each case (chapter? section?) Amnesty International gives a quick overview of the issue and often cites various violations against certain people or a group of people. This report is brief but is a good source of information for the breadth of human rights violations in Iran.

Amnesty International. 1990. "Iran: Women Prisoners of Conscience." Amnesty International. Available online: <http://www.iranrights.org/english/document-350.php>.

Annotation: This report published by Amnesty International documents the immense problem of the thousands of political prisoners who were imprisoned because of their protests of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. Specifically, the authors describe the imprisonment of eight women who were detained for their association with left wing political parties. Despite the peacefulness of their political activities, they were arrested and subject to lengthy pre-trial detention and faced torture and other forms of coercion. Although this report was published 20 years ago, it provides valuable information about the dominant position of religious leadership in Iranian politics. It also expresses the concerns of Amnesty International regarding the imprisonment of people for their non-violent political belief.

Amnesty International. 2009. "Iran: Worsening Repression of Dissent as Election Approaches." Available online: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE13/012/2009/en/6401b61f-f779-11dd-8fd7-f57af21896e1/mde130122009en.pdf>.

Annotation: This Amnesty International report focuses on the increasing tensions in Iran before the June 2009 presidential elections. The report specifically lists names of various people from different ethnicities, religions and activist groups who have been arbitrarily arrested and harassed in the months before the election. The goal is to show the major repressions of a variety of different groups as a possible attempt to stifle debate and silence critics as the elections approached. Finally, it calls for the government of Iran to take series steps towards halting the abundance of human rights violations that are taking place.

Bina, Cyrus. 2009. "Post-Election Iran: Crossroads of History and a Critique of Prevailing Political Perspectives." *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 26(2).

Annotation: Cyrus Bina, distinguished Research Professor of Economics at the University of Minnesota, explains what caused led to Iran's 2009 post-election uprising and the consequences of the conflicting and cluttered mess of political standings on the issue. He begins by looking at the historical, political and social background, specifically the period leading up to the 1979 "Iranian Revolution," and follows with Iran's paramilitary transmutation. He concludes with a rather harsh critique of the liberal/radical left in the West who he accuses of having not understood the complexity of the current sociopolitical setting in Iran and as having wrongly labeled Ahmadinejad as an "anti-imperialist." The piece is well-written but also a complex read.

Blom, Amelie, Laetitia Bucaille, and Luis Martinez (eds). 2007. The Enigma of Islamist Violence. New York: Columbia University Press.

Annotation: This compilation of the works of eight scholarly authors inspects various aspects of Islamist violence. The goal is not to explain why Muslim terrorists exist but the reasons that lead them to extreme brutality. As such, the editors propose to pursue this thesis by focusing attention on local settings rather than viewing Islamist violence as "transnational and deterritorialized." The seven chapters focus on different countries to track the historical development of violence, the phenomenon of 'martyrdom,' the political signification of self violence, and finally the relationship between Islam and the state. The structure and vocabulary of each chapter, for the most part, is consistent and the build up from chapter to chapter is very easy to follow. There is no conclusion to tie everything together, however, leaving the reader with a lot of information that could use to be condensed.

Byman, Daniel L. 2009. "Is Iran Ripe for Revolution?" Review of Reviewed Item (June 18), Available online: <http://www.slate.com/id/2220795/>.

Annotation: This publication, written by Daniel Byman when he was Senior Fellow of Foreign Policy at the Saban Center for Middle East Policy, assesses the possibilities of revolution in modern day Iran. The basis of the article is that many Iranians seem on the verge of revolution but the question is if anything will really manifest. Byman depicts a scene of corruption and cynicism towards the government since the accusations of fraud in the 2009 presidential elections. He then goes on to explain the factors that may suppress an overthrow or revolution. The article is brief but covers the realities of sociopolitical life in Iran immediately following the elections. Byman's article is easy to read and would be of interest to those less informed on the subject.

Byman, Daniel L., and Jerrold D. Green. 1999. Political Violence and Stability in the States of the Northern Persian Gulf. Santa Monica: Rand Corporation.

Annotation: This article, written by Daniel Byman, director of Georgetown University's Center for Peace and Security Studies and Jerrold Green, professor at RAND in Santa Monica, presents the threats of political violence in the Northern Persian Gulf on the United States (I'm not sure

what the author is trying to say here. Do the threats come from the US? Are they directed at the US?). Their main argument is that political violence can be reduced but not eliminated and that in-depth assessment is crucial to understating the complexities of political violence. The article touches on the atmosphere of discontent in the region and the shift from opposition to radicalism, but the overarching theme is how United States policies can protect US troops through stabilization. One of the main problems of this article is the title. It would be more appropriate to identify the region as the Southwestern Persian Gulf because it examines Bahrain, Kuwait, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, leaving out the actual northern countries of Iraq and Iran. However, it is useful background information on other regions that witness Islamic violence. The article flows smoothly and is easy to read.

Daraghi, Borsou, and Ramin Mostaghim. (2009) "Hundreds of Thousands in Iran Protest Vote Results." *Los Angeles Times*. Available online: <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jun/16/world/fg-iran16>.

Annotation: This Los Angeles Times article reviews the events that occurred following the June 2009 elections in Iran. Middle East correspondents Daragahi and Mostaghim use the article to explain the overwhelming flood of protestors to the streets of Tehran and the backlash from the government that ensued. The article briefly depicts a scene of the hundreds of thousands of protestors and supplements this with several quotes from various sources. It also touches on the role of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and his controversial announcement of an investigation into voter fraud. The article is somewhat unstructured but it is an easy read and is helpful for someone that is not very informed about the scene in Tehran following the presidential elections. However, more information would need to be added to fully understand even the basic events of the election.

Ebadi, Shirin. 2006. Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope. New York: Random House.

Annotation: The author of this book, Shirin Ebadi, is a world renowned human rights advocate who has actively spoken out about human rights(?) violations throughout Iranian history. In this memoir, she describes life in Iran from her childhood through to her professional career. Despite having been imprisoned, abused and humiliated, Ebadi presents a hopeful outlook for a better Iran. Although not a scholarly journal, this book gives a refreshing look into what women in Iran have gone through and the possibilities of Iranian society in the future.

Eickelman, Dale, and James Piscatori. 2004. Muslim Politics. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Annotation: In this book, Professor Dale Eickelman and University Lecturer James Piscatori present the complex and diverse issues surrounding Muslim politics. Each chapter illuminates a different situation inherent in both general and Muslim politics. Within each section, Eickelman

and Piscatori describe several aspects of the main argument. They explore subjects like sacred authority, the politics of family, women and ethnicity, the politics of protest and how the political geography is changing. Despite the abundance and complexity of information presented in this book, the authors have been able to illuminate the topic in a very comprehensive way. The sections flow easily and the structure of the book is very strong. On the subject of Islam politics and violence in Iran, this book can shed light on the significance of women, as well as protest and bargaining in Islamic politics.

Fathi, Nazila. 2010. "Iran Accuses Five of Warring against God." *The New York Times*. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/08/world/middleeast/08iran.html>.

Annotation: This article sheds light on current human rights violations in Iran. Following the most recent presidential elections, several demonstrators have been detained. In the cases presented in this article, five protestors were arrested and face charges of warring against God, which carries an automatic death sentence. Nazila Fathi suggests that the severity of the charges is a direct expression of the Islamic theocracy's increased efforts to intimidate protesters. The author also explains other charges and detainment of activists and political leaders who are against the current presidency.

Fridman, Ari and Maxine Kaye. 2007. "Human Rights in Iran 2007." American Jewish Committee. Available online: <http://www.ajc.org/atf/cf/%7B42D75369-D582-4380-8395-D25925B85EAF%7D/HumanRightsinIran07.pdf>.

Annotation: This report gives a quick but concise overview regarding human rights violations in modern day Iran. The authors outline such violations as torture, freedom of press and the violations of women, children, homosexuals and religious and ethnic minorities. Although not an in-depth report, it sheds light on the various human rights violations in the Islamic Republic since 1979.

Gheissari, Ali, ed. 2009. Contemporary Iran: Economy, Society, Politics. New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.

Annotation: This book, edited by Ali Gheissari, has 12 essays from various scholars covering the economy, society and politics of Iran. The authors present empirical and analytical research on topics such as economic growth, women's employment, religion, health, infrastructure and current regional policies. Of particular interest are the chapters reviewing conservative politics, electoral behavior and the politics of ethnicity and religious minorities. The research papers are highly detailed and provide a wealth of information for those looking to further their understanding of Iranian Studies.

Human Rights Watch. 2005. "Ministers of Murder: Iran's New Security Cabinet." . Available online: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2005/12/15/ministers-murder-iran-s-new-security-cabinet>.

Annotation: The "Ministers of Murder" publication evaluates two important cabinet members of Iran's government and their involvement with inhumane actions. The basis of the article is allegations that both Mustafa Pour-Mohammadi and Gholamhussein Mohseni Ezhei were involved in extremely serious and systematic human rights violations. This is a succinct publication that looks specifically at the two members in question of rights violation. Expansion could be made on the national effect of the two primary decision makers of the two Ministers of Interior.

Human Rights Watch. 2009. "Iran: Freedom of Expression and Association in the Kurdish Regions." Available online: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2009/01/08/iran-freedom-expression-and-association-kurdish-regions>.

Annotation: This Human Rights Watch publication critiques the Iranian government's treatment of various freedoms, specifically in Kurdish regions. The report gives a concise overview of the various limits of freedoms of Iranian citizens, including freedoms of expression and association. In closing, the report presents the differences between the stringent legal standards of International Human Rights Law and the more agree (? does she really mean the chilly standards?), and often bypassed, standards of Iranian law. This is a succinct and easy to read presentation of information concerning the government's suppression of freedom rights to Iranian activists. However, the article fails to explain the relationship between Kurdish populations and the government and the role of this relationship in the suppression of rights.

Human Rights Watch. 2009. "Iran: Stop Covering up Sexual Assaults in Prison." Human Rights Watch. Available online: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/06/09/iran-stop-covering-sexual-assaults-prison>.

Annotation: This publication urges Iran's judiciary to immediately investigate cases of sexual assault of political prisoners in Tehran. The authors of the article examine cases of sexual assault and abuse of three specific political activists. The report accuses the government of ignoring and denying such allegations. The absolute prohibition against torture in international law requires authorities to investigate allegations of torture and prosecute those responsible. According to Human Rights Watch, Iran has done neither of these things.

Human Rights Watch. 2010. "The Islamic Republic at 31: Post-Election Abuses Show Serious Human Rights Crisis." Available online: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2010/02/11/islamic-republic-31-0>.

Annotation: This report reviews the violation of the rights of freedom of assembly and expression, the use of torture and the arbitrary detention of Iranian protestors. The goal of this article is to provide a (? what kind of executives are summarizing this/reading this?) summary of the current conditions in Iran and provide recommendations for the government of Iran. There are several quoted accounts of detainees' experiences in the infamous Evin prison. These lay out a background of the violence against Iranian citizens and then provides a brief outline of recommendations for the government of Iran as well as the UN and Human Rights Council.

Iran Human Rights Voice. 2008. "No Life - No Death, a Dismal Report from Prisoners in Evin Jail." Available online: <http://www.ihrv.org/inf/?p=781>.

Annotation: This report, released by the Iran Human Rights Voice, describes various human rights violations in Evin Jail. There are several accounts from prisoners illustrating the worsening situation in the facilities. Such violations include the shortage of medicine and medical staff, poor sanitation, degradation of food quality and quantity, and overcrowded cells. Moreover, prisoners suffer from a lack of rules regarding separation of prisoners and thus prisoners convicted of narcotics-related crimes are mixed with political prisoners.

Matin-Asgari, Afshin. 2006. "Twentieth Century Iran's Political Prisoners." *Middle Eastern Studies* 42 (5): 689-707.

Annotation: In this article, Afshin Matin-Asgari, associate professor of History and Religious Studies at California State, theoretically frames the evolution of political prisoners in Iran throughout the twentieth century. He begins by critiquing other scholarly articles and argues for an expanded viewpoint. The article follows a timeframe and begins with the Reza Shah regime that took power in 1925. This is followed by the regimes leading up to the 1979 revolution and finally with the Islamic Republic of today. During the last 85 years the amount of people imprisoned on political grounds and or religious ideologies has fluctuated as regimes have changed. However, Matin-Asgari's main argument is that political imprisonment is a project (I don't understand the author's use of this word) with the same modern and rational purpose – to isolate, contain, and destroy citizens who seriously challenge the state's claims to political and ideological legitimacy. The publication is a dry read but is very informative for anyone looking to further their knowledge of the role of the government and arbitrary detentions in Iran.

Mayer, Ann Elizabeth. 2007. *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics*, 4th Ed. Boulder: Westview Press.

Annotation: In her book, Ann E. Mayer explores the varying human rights philosophies that attempt to explain how Muslims look at rights in a certain way. Her main argument is that Islam is not a monolith or sole predictor of how a person will take a position on human rights. To supplement this argument, Mayer structures the book to compare the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights with other Islamic equivalents, including the 1979 Iranian

Constitution. The chapters compare the two by looking at the relationship of Islam with such things as legal systems, tradition, restrictions on human rights, and discrimination. This is a well written book that sheds light on the comparative legal analysis of civil and political rights in the Islamic tradition.

Milton-Edwards, Beverly. 2006. Islam and Violence in the Modern Era. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Annotation: Beverly Milton-Edwards, a Professor of Politics at Queens University, examines how Islam and violence are viewed in both pre- and post-9/11 attacks contexts. The book is divided into two main categories. The first half sets the stage by looking at the history of religion and violence (between the US and Islam?) and how the West developed a sense of terror towards Islam. The second half illustrates themes of violence mainly in Iran but also in various other countries. The main objective of this book is to argue against the 'universalization' of Islam and de-couple violence from the core spiritual values of Islam. Milton-Edwards presents an intriguing viewpoint based on both historical and contemporary dimensions. The work presents useful information that accounts for a myriad of aspects involved in Islam and violence.

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. 1999. Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Annotation: This is an interesting book that analyzes women's rights in post-revolutionary Iran. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, an Iranian historian, examines the relationship between gender and Islam using various interviews and narratives. The structure of the book follows three central themes categorized by the viewpoint of (1) traditionalists, (2) neo-traditionalist, and (3) modernists. Despite the fact that all the narratives and interviews are from Muslim men, Mir-Hosseini is able to firmly convey the interpretation of women's rights through sacred texts, political ideologies and social experiences. This is an excellent book for any graduate-level student looking to further his or her understanding of gender studies in contemporary Islamic discourse.

Moghadam, Valentine. 2002. "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 27, (4): 1135-1171.

Annotation: In her publication, Valentine Moghadam, a feminist scholar and Director of Women's Studies Program at Purdue University, examines the scholarly debate on Islamic Feminism, specifically in Iran. She begins by explaining the main arguments for and against the very term and subject its. The major time period the piece focuses on is that from right after the Iranian Revolution to the present.. Traditionally, the view of Islamic Feminism focuses solely on the possibilities that exist within Islam and the IRI (I believe this is the first time this abbreviation is used, so I would suggest Islamic Republic of Iran here) concerning women's interests or on the idea that Islamic Feminism should be rejected completely as women's status cannot be improved while the IRI is in place. The main argument of this article is that an

alternative standpoint can be taken. The author proposes that perhaps a more global view of feminism should be considered and appropriately placed in specific social, political and cultural contexts. This is an interesting piece that not only lays the background for the debate over Islamic Feminism but also challenges scholars and readers to expand their thoughts on the subject.

Sadri, Houman. 2009. "The Straw That Broke the Camel's Back: Iranian Election of June 2009." *Journal of Iranian Research and Analysis* 26, (2).

Annotation: Assistant Professor of International Relations at the University of Florida Sadri Houman explains the unpopular results of the June 2009 presidential election. The article looks to answer why the significant socio-political uprising of the 2009 demonstrations failed to bring clear change to the regime. Emphasis is placed on highlighting the role of two regime opposition leaders, the role and function of the major IRI institutions, the impact of the Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRCG or Sepah) in Regime politics, the trends influenced by the 2009 election results and the IRI records that affect the future of the ruling regime in Iran. The article could expand its depth by analyzing the overarching dissent of the government by the significant population of those under twenty-nine years of age, which is only briefly mentioned in the conclusion.

Wiktorowicz, Quintan, ed. 2004. Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach. Bloomington: Indian University Press.

Annotation: This book is a compilation of various authors' works on explaining and linking social movement theory and Islamic activism. The work is divided into three sections: Violence and Contention, Networks and Alliances, and Culture and Framing. The authors purposely define Islamic activism ("the mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes") in a very broad way to cover various types of activist behavior. These range from peaceful protest to the use of violence to attain movement goals. Although lengthy, it is a very interesting and thorough read on Islamic and social movement studies.

Yaghmaian, Behzad. 2002. *Social Change in Iran: An Eyewitness Account of Dissent, Defiance, and New Movements for Rights*. State University of New York Press: Albany.

Annotation: In this book, Behzad Yaghmaian portrays a narrative of everyday life in modern Iran. He uses his own personal experiences and first hand accounts of Iranian citizens to convey the political scene and the constant sense of fear and tension within civil society. The analysis is focused on the emerging social movement -- mainly of what he calls the 'New Student Movement' --, the movement for a free press and the deteriorating economic scene in the Iranian Republic. The book, although eloquently written, is sometimes a bit too sentimental and repetitive. It is a great read for those looking to understand the political and social setting of Iran and the emerging movement for reform.