

Three Major Movements in Political Parties' Formation in Iran

Jaseb Nikfar¹

¹ Department of political sciences, Yasouj University, Yasouj, Iran

Correspondence: Jaseb Nikfar, Department of political sciences, Yasouj University, Yasouj, Iran. E-mail: nikfar.jaseb@gmail.com

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Abstract

The political parties were formed in Iran following western countries, after the constitutional revolution and second parliament in 1909, and since then they have witnessed rise and falls. The analytical study and an accurate knowledge of the main movements forming the political parties of the last century that is essential for the development of a democratic society in Iranian society. Based on an analytical and accurate study, from the very beginning of political party formation to the present, three forces are distinguishable in Iranian Society and the partial activities during the past 100 years can be framed in three movements:

The Religious Movement, the National Movement, and the Left Movement to be the major causes for political party formation in Iran in the last century. In this article, the author has tried to explain these major movements and political parties that emerged from these movements using the library sources.

Keywords: constitutional revolution, left movements, national, religious, political party

1. Introduction

One of the most important political phenomena in politics and statesmanship is the political parties that serve as the highest platform of success, contestation and a symbol of public management in the ground of democracy in the power game and election campaigns compared to other strategies. This political phenomenon was first emerged in the west following the appearance of bourgeois system and fulfillment of democracy and liberalism as an insulating and distinguishing agent between society and government to defend and protect individual rights and liberties of people against cruel, despotic, absolute, and authoritative powers and developed along with other anthropocentric causes and became popular around the world.

However, Iranian case is not different except for the parties that traversed the path to enter into the political domain. It began with the Constitutional Revolution leading to the establishment of the foundations of political parties in the first period of Constitutionalism; thence it has experienced lots of ups and downs. During this period, and during the time gap, some parties were made to withdraw and seclude, but they continued their political activities secretly in the basements and private homes or places. Sometimes thanks to some political events such as invasion to Iran and Nationalization of oil industry (1951) open political environment was developed in different parts of the country thanks to Kennedy's pressure (1960) etc. under the same title and names. Also, sometimes hoping to find a better position, they pampered around an influential political individual to follow embezzlement business and with his death, dismissal or resignation, they find their political life over; sometimes, they have served as representatives and subordinates of foreign nations acting upon their policies and schools of thought in the country; at times, they were armed and targeted all the political system and many times they have surrendered to the government's acting as they tell them off.

Since 1979 Islamic Revolution when there was serious aggression and quarrel among the groups and political causes, the Islamic Republic Party including clergymen was formed and lived for a few years. However, this party was called off by Imam Khomeini for various reasons.

During the imposed Iraqi war against Iran, there was no chance for the parties to grow and the atmosphere was too limited thanks to the conditions ruling the country. However, after the war had finished in 1989, the societal atmosphere improved and the country started to reconstruct the damages from the war, to stabilize the prices and develop the economy of the country. However, even during this period, the society and the government were indifferent to the political parties.

After eight years of Hashemi Rafsanjani's Reconstructionist State, people started to look for a solution to the

problems from a different angle. People clearly saw and understood that implementing the economic plans without paying enough attention to the institutionalized political and social participation as well as ignoring people's fundamental rights and irresponsible behavior of the government with the people set the ground to constitutionalize the institutional political and economic activities each of which possessed power beyond-the-law which finally led to economic and social scandals increased by unjust sharing and dividing of wealth among the involved people. It went on until May 22, 1997 when people in another revolutionary presidential election which was a political reformation, cited for the legality mottoes of the government and its institutions, support for legal freedoms and establishing and expanding the partial activities.

It was after the May 22nd, 1997 that the political parties began to enjoy a special standpoint and emphasized by the agenda of the new government of Khatami and his cabinet and political authorities and officials. Moreover, the new government's slogans such as 'civil society' and 'political development' that were discussed after the May 22, 1997 election necessitated the development of partial activities. All the political parties and movements that have been formed in the past 100 years can be discussed in three general categories which is the main focus of this article.

2. Defining 'Party' in Iran

Regarding the word 'party' and its definition, there are different views each of which has similarities and differences with the rest. Article 1 of Iranian Constitution approved in 1981 stipulates that party is a political society, association, or organization which enjoys a statutes or agreement established by a group of natural people believing in some ideals and strategies and the goals, plans and their behavior of which are consistent with the managerial principles of the state and the macro system of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Ketabi, Mohammad has presented a definition of party which seems to include most of the characteristics associated with a party:

"Party is a society composed of individuals and citizens having common ideals, interests, and plans gathering in a political organization with a regular formation. Their main objective is to gain power or a share in power and in this way they employ whatever means and possibilities they have access to such as national and local organizations and legal strategies like elections.

Nonetheless Motaraji, Mohabbat (1998) has distinguished party from the wing as "Parties enjoy well-designed program, practice and framework while wings do not have any well-designed plan and practice, do not develop their framework and they regularly change their positions.

Sari-ol-Ghalam, Mohammad maintains that the objective of a party is to attain power and that of a wing is the internal tendency in a party. He defines 'party' and 'wing' as follows: "Party is a political formation to attain power to implement special programs in different fields, but 'wing' is a thought tendency inside parties which is usually formed when the country is at peace.

3. History of Political Parties in Iran

The political parties in Iran are subject to constitutional system and are a product of western experience. The periods in the past 100 years in which an appropriate ground for the development of parties was provided are classified into three groups:

- 1) The period of constitution (1908-1925): This period started with the late Qajars' reign and ended with Reza Shah Pahlavi's kingdom.
- 2) 1941-1953: In this period, Iran was occupied by the Allies due to World War II and Reza Shah was disposed of power. It lasted till the 1953 coup d'état that was planned by America and England against the National State of Mosadiq.
- 3) Since The Islamic Revolution of Iran (1979-continued).

3.1 The Period of Constitution (1908-1925)

This period can be referred to as the period of parliamentary parties because with the beginning of the elections, different streams activated as a limited number of elites were prepared to enter the parliament and having entered, they formed their fractions. It seemed that these parties did not have any reflection and effect outside the parliament. In the first year of the constitutionalists' conquering Tehran in 1908, two parties were formed one of which was referred to as the 'Revolutionary Party' and the other as the 'Moderate Party'. In the same year, after the inauguration of the second parliament these two parties were officially recognized and introduced to the parliament as 'the DemocartAmiyoon' and 'the EjtemayoonEtedalyoon' meaning 'the common' and 'the moderate and social groups' respectively.

Other parties such as the 'Etefagh and Taraghi' were also politically active but because they did not have any authoritative representatives in the parliament, they were practically helpless.

According to Fardoust (1991), Reza Shah essentially did not believe in political activities, parties and partyism.

3.2 *The Second Period*

The second period of parties in Iran began after Iran was occupied by the Allies in 1941 when Reza Shah did not cooperate with them and had German tendencies (1941-1953).

Reza Shah was disposed of his throne and he was replaced by his son, Mohammad Reza Shah. All the dissatisfaction suppressed for 16 years spread out like a wild fire, the silence and depression were replaced by the unsatisfied representatives, journalists, leaders of parties and demonstrators' verification and clamor.

It was only the Todeh Party which could extend its political activities and survive by following the communist structure of Russia and by being ideologically and financially supported by its big brother Party.

Since these parties had been formed thanks to the conditions of World War II and since people played no role in their formation, they could not last long and were easily dissolved. The intellectuals could maintain the attained freedom under two conditions. Either through getting rooted among the people as well as teaching them political science to stay on stage or by establishing a balance among themselves on one hand, and with the foreign countries on the other hand. However, because neither of the above was guaranteed, the Shah with the super powers' agreement disposed them of political power and they had to leave the stage" (Note 1)".

Within 1953-1979 there were no parties in true sense and all of the official parties were dependant to the state and the opponent parties lost their outdoors significance and they had to work as hidden groups and do basement activities.

3.3 *The Third Period of Political Party Formation (Post-Revolution since 1979)*

After the victory of Islamic Revolution in Iran, there were two different periods of political thought and movement at the governmental level.

a. The religious forces' contrasting the non-religious groups such as the Liberals, Leftists (communists), Mojahedin-e-Khalgh, Fadaee-e-Khalgh guerrillas, and Peikar Party which lasted from 1979 to 1981 when Bani Sadr was dismissed from power.

b. The period of religious rulers and the formation of new groups inside the religious forces since 1981 to the present.

One week before the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the provisional (temporary) State was formed by Bazargan, the Liberals and the secularists groups who objected to Mohammad Reza Shah's government and wanted the overthrowing of the state of the shah. They continued their resistance against violence as they did the same with the radical religious groups after the Islamic Revolution because of their violence and included JebhehMelli, NehzatehAzadi and some other small groups.

The Liberals who could get the provisional (temporary) state under their control with the order of Imam Khomeini by appointing Bazargan as the head of the state and the presidency of Banisadr with people's votes generally believed in some principles:

- 1) Seclusion of religion from politics
- 2) Objection to tension in the international relationships
- 3) Majority of peoples' attitudes and views were derived from western patterns, and the Late Bazargan said, "Our life is all western: our world-view, our reading, our fights, our revolution, our protest and objection against despotism and colonization...are all western.
- 4) They did not believe in the principle of vallayat-e-faghih (the guardianship of a competent jurist over the people) and believed that such a system would turn out to be a religious dictatorship.
- 5) They maintained that Free Economy and Market and Privatization should be the basic economic policy.
- 6) They maintained that Parliamentary Democracy was the best mode of managing a society.

The Liberals' presence at the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran includes various stages including:

a. The first phase started with the formation of the provisional (temporary) state and ended with the occupation of American Embassy and resignation of the temporary state" (Note 2)" The state believed that revolution had been settled up and people and the clergymen had discharged their responsibilities and should have left the stage

for the statesmen to smoothly run the civil and foreign affairs and recompense the damages from the protests and demonstrations.

b. The second phase started with managing of the country by the Revolutionary Council and ended with Rajae's being appointed as the prime minister.

c. The third phase started with Rajae's premiership and ended with Bani Sadr's disposing of presidency in 1981. After 1981, the Liberalists grew quite passive on the political stage until the end of the imposed war between Iran and Iraq and the emergence of a new political atmosphere when they resumed their political and press activities and in 1993 they ran for presidential election in which they failed. The same thing happened later. The Liberty Movement was the most important political formation of this wing whose secretary general was Bazargan and after his death Ibrahim Yazdi was designated to this position.

However, the most important group which could outdo the other groups and could make them leave the arena of politics was the religious group which was so close to the then leader, Imam Khomeini.

At first, religious movement endeavored unitedly under three names of Jomhori-e-islami Party (Islamic Republic), Jameyehrohaniat-e-mobarez (Militant Cleric Community) and Organization of Islamic Revolutionary crusaders. But following the next events some grounds of disagreement were created. Main disagreements between these groups that were effective in the formation of right and left wings were: their interpretation of Islam and their disagreement over economic issues causing them to activate under the name of Majma-e-Rohanion-e-mobarez (assembly of militant clergymen) and Jameyehrohaniat-e-mobarez (Militant Cleric Community) from 1987.

Criterion for classifying these two political groups:

Jameyehrohaniat-e-mobarez believed in jurisprudence Islam and conventional Fiqh, and free market; majma-e-rohanion-e-mobarez believed in non-Fiqh (non- jurisprudence) Islam and dynamic Fiqh and state economy.

The group known as religious left wing that was called majma-e-rohanion-e-mobarez since 1987 has gained majority votes in first, second and third parliament and till 1989 it gained judiciary and executive branches but they were excluded by failure in fourth parliament election. Since then this group entered academic and press circles and they became familiar with new thoughts; they added a new discourse (political freedom and the formation of civil community) to their slogans until 1997 when Sayyed Mohammad Khatami gained power as president and the criterion of classification of political parties and groups of Iran was changed to Islamic democracy and Islamic government. Since then these groups were known as reformists and fundamentalist (conservatives). Since 1997 till now active groups are reformist and fundamentalist.

Had we want to study the presence of these political movements during the important moment of Iran history we can consider:

- the entrance of left thought from Baku, Azerbaijan (Russia) in 1909 as the initiator of political parties in Iran. This intellectual movement was again the most constant political party after 1941 and Reza Shah's dismissal for 12 years. It was weakened following 1953 Aug coup and it was active secretly till 1979. From 1979 to 1981 it was one of political active parties of Iran, but it cannot activate freely from 1981 till now.
- National movement has been sometimes strong and sometimes weak over the political history of Iran. But the most important period of its activity was during nationalization of oil industry led by Mosaddegh between 1951-1953. After 1979 revolution it was also in power for a limited period (8 months) led by Bazargan.
- Religious movements, however were always among effective groups in the country's political issues because the majority of people were Muslim, and it was their strongest presence after 1979 revolution till now.

4. Conclusion

Iranian society essentially relies on pluralism; that is, it can, develop and tolerate a multi-block partial system at the same time. From the very beginning of political party formation to the present, three forces are distinguishable in Iranian Society and the partial activities during the past 100 years can be framed in three movements:

- (1) The Religious Movement,
- (2) The National Movement, and

(3) The Left Movement.

In which some combinations of the above seem possible, such as the National Religious, the Left Nationalists, and the Left Religious Movement.

The Religious Movement

The Religious Movement is divided into numerous trends that can be generally classified as the Conventionalists or Traditionalists and the Revivers. The Conventionalists/Traditionalists believe in Shiite spirituality which with a history of 500 years of social background has best safeguarded the traditions. This cause has strived to attract groups of laymen and common people and enjoys a highly arousing power which has transformed this group into a very important force in the past 200 years.

The second religious group or the Revivers began their activities with the appearance of SayyidJamaledinAsadabadi. This group has presented the Reformist Party but it has not, as the first group, paved a solid ground.

The National Movement

The National Movement is also a very important movement which has had the support of a big group of people; however, the ambiguity in nationalism borders created a problem for the formation of this movement in an institutionalized format. During the history, Nationalism has suffered a lot by claimants who have become completely westernized, and thanks to this reason, the Islamism easily incapacitated that movement.

The Left Movement

Although this movement composes minority, it is important in several senses:

Always, there have always been left and right movements which suggest class benefits/interests believed by Marxists. The first party in Iran was formed with the policies of left cause in the past 100 years. After Reza Shah left the country, the Todeh Party (the Party of Mass) was the most outstanding party in Iran that was heavily affected by the Communist Russia and during their fights with Mohammad Reza Shah, the left parties lived under different titles until after the victory of Islamic Revolution in Iran. The other reason is that the leftists are among the authors, intellectuals, and elites. They are qualitatively important and even today. In the world of Capitalism, they are the feeders and policy injectors in a society and it can be stipulated that the leftists compose an international movement.

Although the last two movements discussed above are politically dormant in Iran, it seems they will in better situations in future arena of power, meanwhile, parties should not be only limited to the ruling groups at power. Nevertheless, in Iran some are the secularists and some are nationalists and they will definitely back up such parties.

Table1. Comparative views of Iran political parties in important issues of society

	Religious	National	The Left Movement
Views of political parties and movements about Guardianship of the Jurist (Velayat Faqih)	They credence Velayat-e-Fagih	They do not credence Velaya-e-Faghih but they accept him according constitutional law	They do not credence Velayat-e-Faghih
Views of parties about political reforms	Reforms according principles and values of Islam and Revolution	Quick reforms based on law and people willing	Quick reforms based on law and people willing
Views over foreign policy	To establish relationship along with protecting principles and values of Islamic Revolution and fighting against hegemonism	To establish relationship according mutual respect and national interests	To establish relationship according national interests
Economic views of political parties and groups	Semi-state economy	Free market	State economy
Cultural view	Strong control over state in cultural area	Development of freedom in cultural are	Strong control over cultural area

Origin and social classes of political groups	Clerics, Mass of people, political figures and political managers of the country	Intellectuals and academic class	Mass of people, Intellectuals and academic class
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Notes

Note 1. August 1953 coup d'état that ousted national government of Mossadegh in cooperation with the USA Britain and intelligence service and coordination of Mohammad Reza Shah and once again the parties fell into the vortex of oblivion, stillness and silence.

Note 2. Temporary administration was formed by Bazargan a week before the 1979 revolution, ordered by Imam Khomeini and run the country for 9 months. One day after the U.S embassy takeover by the students, he resigned from his post as a protest against this action.

Note 3. The Aug. 1953 coup d'état organized by the British and American Intelligence Agencies and Mohammad Reza Shah that disposed Mosadegh's State of power when once more the parties kept silence and were forgotten.

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