



ELECTIONS

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- i. *Under the Qajar and Pahlavi monarchies, 1906-79.*
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i. UNDER THE QAJAR AND PAHLAVI MONARCHIES, 1906-79

Elections, or more specifically parliamentary elections underpinning constitutional representative institutions introduced in Persia in 1324/1906, constituted the primary vehicle for expressing popular sovereignty and the constitutionally stipulated means of conferring legitimacy on political arrangements. A survey of elections in the era under consideration can be divided into four periods.

The first period(1285-1302 Š./1906-23). The elections for the first Majles, conducted on the basis of the electoral law of Rajab 1324/September 1906, provided for 156 deputies to be elected for two-year terms by men aged twenty-five or over, from six classes (*ṭabaqāt*; see CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION iii). Concern for simplicity, practicality, and expediency resulted in the adoption of this arrangement. Similarly, the desire to expedite the formation of the Majles and to facilitate the inclusion of constitutionalist



figures who largely resided in Tehran resulted in the allocation of sixty deputies to Tehran, to be elected by direct ballot and upon whose election the Majles began its work (Ādamīyat, 1976, pp. 347-50). The election of other deputies proceeded slowly and remained incomplete. The novelty of the practice and restrictive property qualifications for voters, together with uncooperative government officials, and the absence of infrastructural facilities meant a low voter turnout.

The electoral law of Jomādā II 1327/July 1909, drafted in haste prior to the forced abdication of Moḥammad-ʿAlī Shah Qājār (Etteḥādīya, 1982, pp. 189-90), superseded the first electoral law. The number of deputies was reduced to 120; the class division of the electorate was abolished, the minimum voting age was reduced to twenty, and the property qualification was modified. The number of seats allotted to Tehran was reduced to fifteen, and five tribal constituencies and four religious minorities were each to elect one deputy (tribal constituencies were abolished in Mehr 1313/October 1934; Lambton, p. 656). The elections would be held by secret ballot and conducted indirectly in two stages. The elections were conducted with delay and, as with the previous elections, were not completed.

Universal male suffrage was established by the electoral law of 28 Šawwāl 1329/22 October 1911, which was adopted by the second Majles two months prior to its dissolution as a result of a Russian ultimatum. The law established direct elections, abolished property and educational qualifications for the electorate, and fixed the number of deputies at 136. The elections for the third Majles, conducted on the basis of the new law, began three years later in Rabīʿ I 1332/January 1914. Despite foreign opposition, the reluctant government bowed to public pressure to conduct the elections (Etteḥādīya, 1992, pp. 61-111). However, as a result of the weakness of the central government exacerbated by Anglo-Russian pressure, nearly one year later only some seventy deputies had been elected. In its efforts to control the elections, the central government had to contend with the competing interests of foreign powers, local notables, constitutionalist politicians, and a vociferous press.

Landowning notables, benefiting from government favor and the votes of the rural population, were able to dominate and influence the elections. Powerful and well-connected political brokers (*motawallī*), likely to lead parliamentary factions (*ferāksīon*), helped to secure the election of their candidates, who would in turn join or support their factions (Moṣaddeq in *Moḍākarāt-e Majles*, 22 Tīr 1329/13 July 1950). Although fully congruent with democratic



aspirations, universal male suffrage, being susceptible to greater abuse, did not prove to be a practice conducive to the election of deputies overwhelmingly dedicated to democratic objectives. Some parliamentarians regretted the unqualified extension of the franchise, describing it as one of the “most harmful laws,” as it facilitated the manipulation of the expanded electorate (Bahār, I, p. 306). Some later tried to modify it (see below). Candidates were elected primarily on the basis of personal prominence, patronage, kinship ties, government favor, and actual or perceived foreign support, rather than on grounds of party political or ideological affiliations. Demonstrated dedication to constitutionalist and nationalist causes, however, strongly appealed to the electorate in Tehran and in other large cities.

Elections for the first, second, and, to some extent, third Majles are generally regarded as having been free from improper governmental intervention (Matīn Daftari, p. 4; Elections of the National Consultative Assembly [Majles], 19 August 1959, F.O. 371/140789). With the start of the elections for the fourth Majles in 1336/1918, however, the situation began to change. The government of Ḥasan Woṭūq (Woṭūq-al-Dawla) blatantly but inconclusively manipulated the elections, apparently with the aim of creating a parliament favorable to the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 (q.v.; Moṣaddeq, 1986, p. 256; Šayḡ-al-Eslāmī, I, pp. 326-37). The deputies elected during the premiership of Woṭūq-al-Dawla were obliged to express publicly their opposition to the 1919 Agreement in order to forestall the threatened cancellation of the elections (Šajī, p. 146). The elections resumed in the wake of the coup d'état of 1299 Š./1921 (q.v.), which resulted in Reżā Khan's domination of the political scene. The Majles convened in June 1921, after a disruption of more than five and a half years.

The second period (1302-20 Š./1923-41). In the elections for the fifth Majles (1302-4 Š./1924-26), Reżā Khan and his army commanders played a crucial role in determining the outcome (Moṣaddeq, 1971, pp. 167-78). Reżā Khan reportedly told the British minister in Tehran that he interfered in the elections in order to secure a Majles favorable to improving Anglo-Persian relations (Lorraine to Curzon, 11 October 1923, F.O. 371/7810/10954; Lorraine to MacDonald, 16 October 1924, F.O. 371/10145/2430; Sabahi, p. 196). Elections in Tehran, however, remained free, and the same pattern was followed in the elections for the sixth Majles. Sayyed Ḥasan Modarres, a vocal adversary of Reżā Khan (now shah), was re-elected as Tehran's first deputy, with Ḥasan Mostawfī (Mostawfī-al-Mamālek) and Moḥammad Moṣaddeq, another



opposition figure, both re-elected in second and third place, respectively (Makkī, IV, p. 112).

The elections for the seventh Majles and its successors, including the thirteenth, were, however, systematically controlled by the royal court or, in effect, the shah. In response to objections to blatant government interference in the elections for the seventh Majles, ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Teymūrtāš, the influential court minister, reportedly offered to allow six of the twelve Tehran deputies to be representatives of the people (*mellat*), but he failed to win over the opposition (Mošaddeq’s speech in the Majles, 16 Esfand 1322/7 March 1944, text in Key-Ostovān, I, pp. 22-35). Cognizant of the changing political climate, Mošīr-al-Dawla Ḥasan Pirnā, who had several times presided over the crucial Tehran central electoral supervisory council and had prevented electoral misconduct, refused to perform the same role in the elections for the seventh Majles (Makkī, IV, p. 526). Reżā Shah was determined to exclude every undesirable and recalcitrant figure (Taqīzāda, *Zendagī*, p. 209). Henceforth the court, the army, and the government prepared a list of acceptable candidates for membership in the Majles, who were thereby assured of success (Matīn-Daftarī, p. 5). According to a British embassy report, at election times the shah issued separate, confidential instructions to the governor or governor-general, provincial army commander, and police chief of each province, asking for a secret list of suitable candidates. Such candidates had to be not only supporters of the shah and the regime but also of local standing and acceptable to the constituency which they would represent. Each of the three officials in each province submitted a separate list directly to the shah. Then “the more competent candidates out of the three lists were chosen by the Shah and ordered to be elected” (Elections for the National Consultative Assembly, Majles, 19 August 1959, F.O. 371/140789).

The third period (1320-32 Š./1941-53). The elections for the fourteenth Majles were the first in fifteen years to be openly contested rather than stage-managed by the court and the army. The elections were scheduled to take place between 6 Šahrīvar and 14 Mehr 1322/28 August and 6 October 1943, but six months later only 108 deputies had been elected (Bullard to Eden, 3 April, 1944, F.O. 371/40186). In the hope of nurturing support for the government, Prime Minister ‘Alī Sohaylī and his interior minister, Moḥammad Tadayyon, had promised free elections (Kūhī Kermānī, II, p. 453). However, they improperly interfered in the elections, thereby provoking formal charges of misconduct, although these did not result in their conviction (Key Ostovān, II,



pp. 308-404). Besides the British and Soviet embassies and their forces now occupying large areas of the country, other factors affecting the outcome of the elections were the court and the army, as well as the political elite, in particular local notables. A large number of political groups, associations, parties, newspapers, and constitutional figures also strove, mainly in Tehran and other major urban centers, to influence the elections.

Mindful of Soviet influence in northern Persia and over large segments of the intelligentsia, the British encouraged the election of reformist candidates who would abate dangers of “extremist movements” (Bullard to F.O., 16 March 1943, F.O. 371/35069). Such candidates could also include members of the Tūda party, provided they were not “irresponsible” (Bullard to all consuls in Persia, 6 June 1943, F.O. 371/35071). The Soviets favored the election of forty Tūda candidates, of whom only eight were elected, seven of them from the Russian-occupied zone. A handful of other deputies from the northern areas were also elected with Soviet support, a clear indication that Soviet influence was not as effectively exercised as had been expected or feared.

Frustrated by his inability to exert greater influence over the course of elections, and outstripped by the prime minister, ‘Alī Sohaylī, Moḥammad-Rezā Shah, who had ascended the throne in September 1941, toyed with the idea of declaring the elections null and void, but was warned by the British minister against such a course of action (Bullard to F.O., 20 January 1944, F.O. 371/40186). Besides the shah, the political elite and local notables, including tribal chiefs, were able to play a considerable role in the elections. Even in the cities the role of individuals, informal alliances, leaders of the crowd, and representatives of the guilds or the *bāzār* overshadowed the vague, uninspiring, or incomprehensible programs of fragile and short-lived political parties. The existing electoral law, ensuring inefficient, slow, and confusing electoral procedures, confounded the situation and facilitated extensive electoral rigging or manipulation, particularly in rural areas. Between 1925 and 1943 the electoral law of 1911 had been amended eight times (Stevens to Macmillan, 17 April 1956, F.O. 371/120713) but continued to be open to abuse and was considered defective in crucial respects.

Moṣaddeq, elected to the fourteenth Majles as Tehran’s first deputy, consistently but inconclusively endeavored to revise the electoral law. The main components of Moṣaddeq’s proposal—concerned only with urban districts and with increasing the representation of these areas—were: (1) the separation of urban and rural constituencies, (2) the establishment of electoral



supervisory councils consisting of senior judges, university professors, and senior government officials, (3) limiting the duration of elections to one day, and (4) the provision that the urban electorate be literate (“Mas’ala-ye entekābāt,” repr. in Afšār, ed., 1979, pp. 103-12). Such ideas, including the notion of proportional representation (*enteḳābāt-e tanāsobī*) as an ultimate goal, had preoccupied Moṣaddeq since the 1920s (“Entekābāt,” repr. in Afšār, ed., 1979, pp. 73-90). Similar ideas were advocated by others (e.g., Qāsemzāda, pp. 391-94). During the term of the fifteenth Majles, Sayyed Ḥasan Taqīzāda and Aḥmad Matīn Daftarī unsuccessfully attempted to push through a bill for electoral reform along the lines advocated by Moṣaddeq (Azimi, 1989, p. 206). In Mordād 1323 Š./August 1944 the Tūda deputies in the fourteenth Majles, critical of the introduction of literacy qualifications for the electorate, submitted a bill to the Majles aimed at extending the franchise to women (*Rahbar*, 30-31 Mordād 1323/21-22 August 1944; Kešāvarz, pp. 198-200; Abrahamian, 1982, p. 336). Such an issue, however, provoked strong opposition. Even some lawyers with modern education were opposed to the change (Nazīh, pp. 204-5). The issue remained dormant for some time, only to be revived again during Moṣaddeq’s premiership (see below).

The elections for the fifteenth Majles were postponed pending the evacuation of foreign forces from Persia and were largely conducted in the winter of 1947. Throughout virtually all of the country, with the exception of Azarbaijan and Fārs, where due to the repercussions of the autonomy movements, polling was postponed, the elections were controlled by the government of Aḥmad Qawām (Qawām-al-Saḷṭana) and his Ḥezb-e demokrāt-e Īrān, formed in June 1946. No protests were heeded. Following an assassination attempt on his life in Bahman 1327/February 1949, the shah proceeded to arrange not only for the convening of the constitutionally stipulated Senate but also for his long-cherished revision of the Constitution through a constituent assembly, the elections for which were conducted under martial law and were widely regarded to have been largely fraudulent. The assembly met between 1 and 21 Ordībehešt 1328/21 April-11 May 1949 (See CONSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTION iii).

In the elections for the sixteenth Majles the court minister, ‘Abd-al-Ḥosayn Hażīr, who overshadowed Premier Moḥammad Sā’ed, together with interior minister Manūčehr Eqbāl, chief of the general staff General Ḥāji ‘Alī Razmārā, and behind them the shah, played the crucial controlling role. Publicly it was announced that elections would be free and, in order to substantiate this



claim, Sayyed Moḥammad-Şādeq Ṭabāṭabā'ī, much to the chagrin of Eqbāl, was assigned the task of supervising the elections. The failure of the authorities to live up to their promises, however, resulted in widespread protest, violence, and demands for the dismissal of Eqbāl. It also prompted the formation of the National Front (Jabha-ye mellī) led by Moşaddeq. Benefiting from the increasing preponderance in Persian politics of the issue of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company concession, Moşaddeq and his supporters were able to mobilize public opinion in urban centers against the government by linking the latter's intention to rig the election with its desire to use a malleable parliament for concluding an agreement favorable to Britain (Azimi, 1989, pp. 206-17).

The assassination of Hażīr on 13 Ābān 1348/4 November 1949 and the appointment a few days later of Razmārā's rival, General Fażl-Allāh Zāhedī, as chief of police eventually benefited the National Front. Zāhedī's rivalry with Razmārā prevented the latter from being able to exclude all of the opponents from the Majles. Seven members of the National Front were elected from the capital, including Moşaddeq, who, with 30,738 votes, became Tehran's first deputy (*Bāktar-e emrūz*, 22 Farvardīn 1329/ 11 April 1950). Elsewhere election results were largely determined by the preference of the court and the government. In contrast to the elections for the Majles, the two-stage elections of thirty senators (the other thirty being appointed by the shah), which began in Şahrīvar 1328/late August 1949, aroused little enthusiasm; voting was confined to the literate and in Tehran only 15,280 votes were cast in the primary stage (*Bāktar-e emrūz*, 9 Şahrīvar 1328/31 August 1949). On 28 Dey 1338/ 18 January 1960, the government submitted a bill to the Senate which would replace the cumbersome two-stage procedure with direct elections. In Tīr 1342/July 1963, the literacy qualification clause for the Senate electorate was dropped.

Elections to the seventeenth Majles were conducted by the government of Moşaddeq, who had long championed the cause of free elections but had not succeeded in changing the electoral law. He tried to minimize irregularity, fraud, and the impact of vested interests through measures such as replacing several governor-generals and governors and ordering members of the electoral supervisory councils to be selected by lot. However, the government proved unable to control the shah, the army, the notables, and some of its own actual or putative supporters (Azimi, 1989, pp. 277-78). In Tehran the elections inspired unprecedented public attention and overwhelming support for the



government (*Šāhed*, 20 Bahman 1330/9 February 1952), while elsewhere a considerable number of active opponents of the government were elected. Unable to stop this trend, the government suspended the elections when only 79 deputies had been elected. In Dey 1331/December 1952 the draft of a new electoral law was published, containing proposals similar to those previously advocated by Mošaddeq, under which vacant seats in the seventeenth Majles were to be filled and the number of deputies increased to 172.

On 17 Ābān 1331/8 November 1952 Mošaddeq signed a new municipal electoral bill which by implication extended the franchise to women (*Pūrīā*, II, p. 300); his proposed parliamentary electoral law did not, however, entitle women to vote. Some of his supporters, notably Maḥmūd Narīmān, were in favor of enfranchising women, but many deputies were strongly opposed and enjoyed or invoked the backing of the '*olamā*' (*Bāḳtar-e emrūz*, 9 and 14 Dey 1331/30 December 1952 and 4 January 1953). The Speaker of the Majles, Ayatollah Abu'l-Qāsem Kāšānī, had been opposed to extending suffrage to women (Kāšānī, interview, *Bāḳtar-e emrūz*, 28 Āḍar 1330/19 December 1951) and did not respond positively to appeals made by a number of women's representatives (*Dehnavī*, III, pp. 192, 448). The Majles proved unfavorable to Mošaddeq's electoral law, and increasingly strained relations with the prime minister eventually led the latter, in Mordād 1332/August 1953, to resort to a referendum to dissolve the parliament for the first time in Persian constitutional history. He intended to hold new elections on the basis of his recent electoral law, but his government was toppled as the result of the coup of 28 Mordād/19 August 1953 (q.v.).

The fourth period (1332-58 Š./1953-79). The elections for the eighteenth Majles and for the Senate were conducted in winter 1954 and were controlled by the shah and Zāhedī, who was prime minister as well as minister of the interior. For virtually the last time in his reign, the shah had to give a measure of real leverage in electoral matters to his prime minister, whom, due to the circumstances leading to the coup d'état of Mordād 1332 Š./August 1953 (q.v.), he had not personally chosen but who had helped to secure the monarchy. Pursuing a separate agenda aimed at securing a degree of autonomy for himself, Zāhedī ran into "difficulties with the Shah and his relations" (Persia, Quarterly Political Report, October-December 1953, F.O. 371/109990). This situation did not, however, create opportunities for government opponents, who were hampered by strong-arm government tactics; very few candidates critical of the regime were allowed to be elected. Relentless but not always



skillful in managing election rigging, the government sometimes “handled the customary rigging of elections with unnecessary clumsiness” (Stevens to Eden, 9 April 1954, F.O. 371/109990).

The elections for the nineteenth Majles (1335-39/1956-60) were conducted when Ḥosayn ‘Alā was prime minister and Amīr Asad-Allāh ‘Alam, a close friend and adviser of the shah, was minister of the interior. The shah, however, was this time personally in control, acting through ‘Alam, among others. ‘Alam would henceforth play a crucial role in managing and controlling elections (Mo’assasa, I, p. 257). During the elections protests both inside and outside the Majles and by several of Moṣaddeq’s supporters, most notably Allāhyār Ṣāleḥ, were frustrated and suppressed by the ever-present office of the military governor (Farmāndārī-e neẓāmī).

In managing the rigging of elections, the common practice, then as in the past, was for the authorities to prepare a list of favored candidates and instruct senior civil and military officials at the local level to secure their election. Electoral supervisory councils, selected or controlled by provincial governors, played a crucial role in manipulating elections. The candidates in turn endeavored through various means to ensure that the councils, the civil and military authorities, and the local elite regarded them with favor. If need be, uncooperative governor-generals and governors could be replaced, recalcitrant supervisory councils dissolved, or elections suspended or delayed. Ballot boxes could be switched overnight, and councils could declare a winner without mentioning the number of votes cast. Critics of such operations would be coerced into silence (Stevens to Macmillan, 17 April 1956, F.O. 371/120713). The use of blatantly manipulative tactics during the elections for the nineteenth Majles rendered principles of credible choice, representation, and competition among candidates irrelevant, for it was “absolutely certain that no one would succeed if the Shah did not agree.” The total number of voters “was reduced and virtually limited to government officials, including menial servants, sweepers, policemen and the workers of the government factories. . . . This was the first time that the people in general refused to vote; it was, in fact, a form of passive resistance” (Elections of the National Consultative Assembly [Majles], 19 August 1959, F.O. 371/140789).

As stipulated by law, the royal decree concerning the elections for the twentieth Majles was issued on 20 Dey 1338/10 January 1960, five months prior to the beginning of elections. Two political parties were to dominate the elections. Mardom, founded in late Ordibehešt 1336/May 1957 and led by



‘Alam, officially declared itself the opposition party. The Mellīyūn, founded in Bahman 1336/February 1958 and led by Premier Eqbāl, officially declared itself to be the government party. The shah had announced that non-party candidates could no longer contest elections (Tehran Embassy to F.O., 2 December 1958, F.O. 371/133007), although he later appeared to have modified his position. Pledges and promises of free and fair elections by the shah and the government of Eqbāl, together with the relaxation of press censorship and the candidacy of a number of personalities marginalized since the coup d’état of 1953, resulted in considerable speculation and comment with the press, as well as keen public interest. The shah, however, told the American ambassador that it was “premature to think in terms of free elections . . . in Iran” (Harrison to Stevens, 5 May 1960, F.O. 371/149756). The elections, which began on 8 Mordād/30 July 1960, were extensively and clumsily rigged, resulting in a massive victory for the Mellīyūn party. The rigging, exposed in the press, provoked public rancor and restlessness. Even ‘Alam and his Mardom party denounced the conduct of the elections (Westwood, p. 161). Alarmed by the growing public outcry, the shah publicly admitted that the elections had not been free, replaced Eqbāl, who had resigned, with Ja’far Šarīf Emāmī on 8 Šahrīvar/30 August, and secured the mass resignation of the elected deputies.

Fresh elections began on 20 Dey 1339/10 January 1961, and were again contested by opponents of the official parties, including the revived National Front. This time the press was less free and rigging more discreet, but public restlessness remained unabated, prompting the shah to dissolve both houses of parliament on 19 Ordībehešt 1340/9 May 1961, just eleven weeks after their inauguration. With a mandate to stem public agitation and to tackle the mounting socio-political crisis, the new premier, ‘Alī Amīnī, appointed on 6 May 1961, postponed elections indefinitely pending revision of the electoral law and attempted to suppress groups such as the National Front, which focused its political demands on free elections (Najātī, I, pp. 207-14). Revision of the electoral law was enacted by his successor, ‘Alam, who was appointed on 28 Tīr 1341/19 July 1962. On 6 Bahman 1341/26 January 1963 the shah’s program of reform, the so-called “White Revolution,” which included the revision of the electoral law, was put to a referendum, a move previously decried as unconstitutional. In early summer 1342/1963 the government announced new measures governing the conduct of elections. The government had also extended the franchise to women. The overall significance of this measure was, however, eclipsed by the eroding credibility of the electoral



process.

Elections to the twenty-first Majles and the fourth Senate were conducted on 26 Šahrivar 1342/17 September 1963. Two weeks earlier “The Congress of the movement of free women and free men of Persia” (Kongra-ye nahzat-e āzād zanān o āzād mardān-e Īrān) had endorsed “a slate of candidates” for election. The list, however, had been drawn up by several task forces, and the shah had personally approved it (Central Intelligence Agency Report, p. 45). He had assigned Aḥmad Nafīsī, the mayor of Tehran, and others the task of helping him to choose desirable candidates and of ensuring the satisfactory conduct of the elections (ibid., p. 77). The shah’s aim was to discard the traditional, mainly landowning elite and to create a new elite which did not enjoy traditional patronage ties, connubial links, or any independent base of support and would thus be increasingly dependent on the shah himself. In the new Majles, 81 percent of the deputies, including six women, were serving for the first time. The implicit assumption was that it was no longer links with the dominant interests in the constituencies but only loyalty to the shah and support for his objectives and style of rule which guaranteed entry into the ranks of the parliamentarians.

Elections for the twenty-second and twenty-third Majles and the fifth and sixth Senate followed a similar pattern, and the composition of the parliament remained largely unchanged. The elections, together with the entire constitutional edifice, became increasingly meaningless. They held little appeal for the politically discerning urban citizenry or even for the urban poor and the rural population, who perceived elections to be irrelevant to their concerns and a confirmation of their powerlessness. Watchful control and manipulation continued to extend to the local and municipal elections, whenever they were held, despite the arguments of royalists such as ‘Alam, who underlined the expediency of allowing free elections at those levels (‘Alam, I, pp. 339-41).

With the elections for the twenty-fourth Majles and the seventh Senate, conducted on 30 Kordād 1354/20 June 1975, however, the shah attempted to change the situation. Elections were preceded by the discarding of the experiment with “multi-party” politics and by the formation of the Ḥezb-e rastākīz-e mellat-e Īrān. There were multiple candidates for all seats, pre-approved by the party committees and the security forces. More than 10,000 candidates nominated themselves for the 268 seats in the Majles and 30 seats in the Senate, among which 841 were approved, all equally acceptable to the



shah and to the government (Mohammadi-Nejad, p. 111). The candidates were allowed to campaign for the popular vote but were not permitted to broach the issues of royal powers and programs, oil, or foreign policy. The electorate now faced the prospect of largely free elections devoid of real choice.

The government announced that voting was mandatory and threatened the electorate with punitive measures for failing to vote (Mohammadi-Nejad, p. 109). According to the U.S. Embassy in Tehran (U.S. Embassy, p. 190), approximately 6.8 million people registered to vote, but the final vote count was well below half of those registered. The government, however, claimed that 9.8 million had registered, of whom 7 million had voted (Mohammadi-Nejad, p. 114). Curiously, the government had instructed the voters to prepare their own ballots; no official ballot papers were printed, and the system of counting the votes was rudimentary. Despite the emphasis on new faces, almost half of the approved candidates had previously been Majles deputies or prominent government officials. Personal wealth played a crucial role since very large sums of money had been spent by the successful candidates (Mohammadi-Nejad, pp. 112-14).

Whenever free even to a small degree from improper central government interference, parliamentary elections invariably aroused considerable enthusiasm and revealed the strength of democratic aspirations, which, however, were increasingly frustrated by overt or covert rigging and manipulation, to the detriment of the very foundations of constitutional monarchy.

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(Fakhreddin Azimi)

ii. UNDER THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC, 1979-92



Introduction. Elections have been a regular feature of the Islamic Republic since its founding in 1979. The Constitution provides for the direct election of the president, the legislature (Majles-e šūrā-ye eslāmī), and the Assembly of Experts (Majles-e koḅragān). The Assembly of Experts selects the *faqīh*, or supreme jurisconsult, the highest authority in the Islamic Republic. Elections of the president and these two bodies have been held at regular intervals. In addition, nationwide referenda have been conducted on a number of issues. The Constitution also provides for the election of local councils at the village, ward, district, town (or city), township, and provincial levels. A law enacted on 1 Āḍar 1361 Š./22 November 1982 provides for the election of “Islamic councils” (*Šūrāhā-ye eslāmī*) at all these levels, with the lower councils electing the councils at the next level from among their own members (*Rūz-nāma-ye rasmī*, 1361 Š./1982, pp. 103-4). By the end of 1994, no local councils had been established. Islamic councils at factories and other places of work, government offices, and colleges and universities, also foreseen in the law, however, have been elected. These councils lobby for the interests of their members and mobilize support and votes for various political factions.

The president and Majles deputies are elected for four-year terms; members of the Assembly of Experts are elected for eight-year terms. The president is restricted to two terms. Runoff elections are required if candidates fail to secure over 30 percent of the votes cast. The Constitution gives both men and women the right to vote. The voting age is set at sixteen (the young were thought to be among the most ardent supporters of the revolution).

Parliamentary elections. The first Majles was elected in 1980, and elections were subsequently held at regular four-year intervals. There were 270 deputies in this assembly in 1992. Recognized religious minorities elect their own deputies: the Jews one deputy, the Assyrians and Chaldeans one, the Zoroastrians one, and the Armenians two. The Bahais, not recognized as a religious minority, are not represented in the Majles. The number of deputies may increase by no more than twenty following each decennial census (Foreign Broadcast, 20 September 1989, p. 60).

Elections to the first Majles (1359-63 Š./1980-84) were contested to a considerable degree on a party basis. The Islamic Republic party (Ḥezb-e jomhūrī-e eslāmī) and deputies affiliated with it won about 130 seats and the Iran Liberation Movement (Nahzat-e āzādī-e Īrān) of Mahdī Bāzargān about twenty. Other political groups were also represented, including the National Front (Jabha-ye mellī) and the Revolutionary Movement of Persian Muslims



(Jam'iyat-e mosalmānān-e mobārez-e Īrān); more than eighty deputies stood as independents (Bakhash, p. 105; *Middle East* IV, p. 453). The Islamic Republic party also dominated the second Majles (1363-67 Š./1984-88; *Middle East* VIII, p. 437). However, the activities of most political parties not affiliated with the ruling clerics continued to be proscribed or severely restricted. In 1987 the Islamic Republic party also dissolved itself. In the post-1984 electoral campaigns and parliaments loose factions have contested the elections and coalesced in the Majles. Two major clerical groups, the Association of Militant Clerics (Jāme'a-ye rūḥānīyat-e mobārez) and the Assembly of Militant Clerics of Tehran (Majma'-e rūḥānīyūn-e mobārez-e Tehrān), contested the 1988 and 1992 elections, primarily in the capital (*Middle East* XII, pp. 491-92; *New Yorker*, 22 June 1992, pp. 41-42). Factions in the Majles were identified either with broad political trends (radical, moderate, and conservative), with prominent clerics in or outside the Majles, or as members of groups generally supporting or opposing government policies.

Except for the period of the Banī-Šadr presidency (1980-81), when intense hostility between parliament and president led to Banī-Šadr's impeachment, the Majles has generally been supportive of governments. Parliaments, however, have shown their independence of the executive in various ways, including rejecting ministerial appointments or interpolating ministerial policies, rejecting government-proposed legislation, and enacting legislation not always in keeping with the government's policy. For example, the Majles rejected President Kāmena'ī's nominee as prime minister in 1360 Š./1981 (Hiro, p. 198); forced the resignation of the minister of health in 1370 Š./1991 and of the minister of Islamic guidance in 1992 (*Foreign Broadcast*, 15 January 1991, p. 65 and 16 July 1992, p. 66); refused to confirm the minister of finance and economic affairs in President Rafsanjānī's new cabinet in 1993 (*ibid.*, 16 August 1993, p. 75); and, having issued a report highly critical of the programming and operations of the radio and television (*ṣedā wa sīmā*) of the Islamic Republic, induced the *faqīh* to dismiss in 1994 the head of the broadcasting services, who was also the brother of President Rafsanjānī (*ibid.*, 25 January 1994 and 14 February 1994, p. 70). In the third Majles (1988-92), a radical faction regularly obstructed the government's economic policies (*Middle East* XV, pp. 387-88). In the fourth Majles (1992-96) a conservative faction pressured the government to adopt more restrictive social and cultural policies.

The Majles has also found itself at loggerheads with the Council of Guardians



(*Šūrā-ye negahbān*), a body of senior Islamic jurists and experts in Islamic law that can veto legislation it finds in violation of Islamic principles or the Constitution. In the mid-1980s several items of legislation approved by the Majles, including a new labor law, a law nationalizing foreign trade, and a land-distribution law, were vetoed by the Council of Guardians (Bakhash, pp. 213-14). These actions led Ayatollah Rūḥ-Allāh Komeynī to propose in 1983 a mechanism (called a finding of *zarūra*, “over-riding necessity”) by which the Majles could, by a two-thirds majority vote, override the Council of Guardians’ objections to laws that appeared to violate Islamic principles (Bakhash, p. 216). As differences between the Majles and the Council of Guardians persisted, Ayatollah Komeynī appointed in February 1988 a new thirteen-member commission, *Majma‘-e taškīṣ-e mašlahat-e neẓām-e jomhūrī-e eslāmī* (the Council for discerning the interests of the system of the Islamic Republic). The council, made up of the six jurists of the Council of Guardians and six representatives of the three branches of government (the president, the prime minister, the minister directly concerned with the legislation under consideration, the speaker of the Majles, the head of the judiciary, and the prosecutor-general), all serving as *ex-officio* members, was to adjudicate differences between the Majles and the Council of Guardians (Bakhash, p. 253). The amended 1989 Constitution made this new council a permanent institution of the state and empowered the *faqīh* to appoint at his own discretion all of its members (*Foreign Broadcast*, 20 September 1989, p. 64).

Presidential elections. Three presidential elections were held in an eighteen-month period in 1980-81. Abu’l-Ḥasan Banī-Ṣadr was elected the first president of the Islamic Republic in January 1980, but he was impeached by the Majles in June 1981. The next elected president, Moḥammad-‘Alī Rajā‘ī, was sworn in on August 2, and was killed by an assassin’s bomb on 30 August 1981. A third election was held in October and ‘Alī Kāmena‘ī became president. He was elected for a second term in 1985. ‘Alī-Akbar Hāšemī Rafsanjānī succeeded him in 1989 with enhanced powers. The amended Constitution of 1989 abolished the prime minister’s post and transferred his powers to the president (*Foreign Broadcast*, 20 September 1989, pp. 66-68). Rafsanjānī was elected for a second term in 1993. The first presidential election was genuinely contested. In subsequent elections, there was generally only one serious candidate, selected and allowed to run by the ruling clerics. Rajā‘ī, Kāmena‘ī, and Rafsanjānī were all elected by overwhelming majorities.

The Majles-e kobraḡān. The Assembly of Experts, not to be confused with the



first “constituent assembly” which bore the same name, was mandated under the Constitution and under a law approved by the jurists on the Council of Guardians in October 1980 (*Rūz-nāma-ye rasmī*, 1359 Š./1980, pp. 541-44) and amended in August 1982 (*ibid.*, 1361 Š./1981, pp. 63-64), as well as under enabling regulations approved by the jurists on the Council of Guardians in June 1982 (*ibid.*, app., pp. 91-114). The first Assembly of Experts was elected in 1982, the second in 1990. Members must be experts in Islamic law. The Assembly is required to convene at least once each year for a five-day session in Qom. Deliberations are not normally public. In addition to selecting the *faqīh*, the assembly is also empowered to declare the *faqīh* no longer competent to serve on the grounds of either physical infirmity or failure to meet the requirements of the office. Under the procedure set forth in the law, Khomeynī’s successor could be chosen only after Khomeynī’s death, but the regime wished to settle the succession question during Khomeynī’s lifetime. For this reason, the Assembly of Experts met in 1983 to discuss this question, among others, but no successor was formally announced (Hiro, p. 264; Bakhash, p. 281). During its 1985 session the Assembly of Experts named Ayatollah Ḥosayn-‘Alī Montazerī as Khomeynī’s *qā’em maqām* (deputy), thus avoiding the term successor (*jānešīn*), although he was universally recognized as the heir-apparent (Bakhash, p. 281; Akhavi, pp. 182, 194-97). However, without referring to the Assembly of Experts, in 1987 Khomeynī declared Montazerī unqualified for the succession (Bakhash, p. 261). When Khomeynī died in 1989, the assembly named Kāmena’ī his successor. During the 1990 elections for the second Assembly of Experts some candidates tried to argue that the assembly was authorized to exercise continuous supervision over the *faqīh*’s policies and activities (Khomeynī’s remarks, cited in *Foreign Broadcast*, 13 September 1990, p. 64). In practice, however, the assembly has exercised no such mandate.

The constituent assemblies. A constituent assembly, also called Majles-e kōbragān, was elected in 1979 to review and approve the draft constitution. It extensively revised the draft, giving centrality to the concept of *welāyat-e faqīh*, whereby the authority to rule belonged to the outstanding *faqīh*, or jurisconsult, of the age and, more broadly, to the community of Islamic jurists (Bakhash, pp. 82-83). A second twenty-five-member constituent assembly was convened in July 1989 to amend the Constitution. This assembly was not elected. Khomeynī named twenty of its members and invited the Majles to name the remaining five members (Bakhash, 284).



Referenda. A referendum was held in April 1979 to determine the system of government. Komeynī rejected demands from various political groups that voters be given a choice among forms of government. Voters were asked to vote “yes” or “no” on a resolution to establish an Islamic republic. Referenda were also held in December 1979 to approve the new Constitution and in July 1989 to approve amendments to the Constitution (Hiro, pp. 72-73, 120; Bakhash, p. 286).

Voter and organized participation. The government generally claimed high voter participation both in elections and referenda, between 60 and 70 percent of eligible voters in most parliamentary and presidential elections and 89 percent of eligible voters in the referendum to establish the Islamic Republic (Hiro, p. 108). It also claimed large majorities on key votes: a 98.2 percent “yes” vote in the referendum to establish the Islamic Republic (Hiro, 108), a 99 percent “yes” vote to approve the 1979 Constitution, a 97.4 percent majority in favor of amendments to the Constitution in 1989, and 80 to 94 percent majorities in the presidential election of Rajā’ī, Kāmena’ī (twice), and, in 1989, Rafsanjānī (Hiro, pp. 191, 197; *McLeansMagazine*, 26 August 1985, p. 23; *Middle East* IV, p. 446; IX, p. 428; XIII, p. 355). These figures could not be independently verified. However, the government reported participation of only around 50 percent in the first Majles election (*Middle East* IV, p. 452) and a lower voter turnout and majority in 1993 when Rafsanjānī was reelected president.

Restrictions on candidate and voter participation have also been a feature of the system. The Constitution granted the *faqīh* the authority to rule on the eligibility of presidential candidates in the first presidential election (Art. 110), and in 1980 Komeynī vetoed the candidacies of several individuals. For subsequent elections this authority was exercised under the Constitution by the Council of Guardians, which was empowered by the Constitution (Art. 99) to supervise Majles and presidential elections and referenda. The amended 1989 Constitution (Art. 99) extended this supervisory authority to elections for the Assembly of Experts as well (*Foreign Broadcast*, 20 September 1989, p. 62). In May 1991, the Council of Guardians, in a controversial decision, interpreted this authority to include ruling on the qualification of candidates for the Majles (*Rūz-nāma-ye rasmī*, 1370 Š./1991, p. 52). In the 1992 Majles elections, the Council of Guardians thus disqualified several candidates, including many sitting members of the parliament and prominent clerics (*Middle East* XVI, p. 405).



Restrictions were also tightened with respect to candidates for seats in the Assembly of Experts. In the 1990 elections for that assembly, the Council of Guardians required candidates to prove their competency in Islamic law by taking written examinations (*Foreign Broadcast*, 17 July 1990, pp. 53-54 and 1 October 1990, pp. 59-60) and, as a result, excluded several clerics identified with the radical faction from running for seats (*ibid.*, 3 October 1990, p. 57).

In the early years of the Islamic Republic, several political parties were either effectively or formally proscribed. Examples include the National Democratic Front (Jebha-ye demokrātīk-e mellī), the People's Mojāhedīn Organization (Sāzmān-e mojāhedīn-e kalq-e Īrān), the People's Fedā'īān Guerrilla Organizations (Sāzmān-e fedā'īān-e kalq-e Īrān), and the Tūda (Tudeh) party. Other political groups and parties were pressured to dissolve themselves, e.g., the Islamic People's Republic party and the Hojjatiya group. The activities of yet other groups, such as the Iran Liberation Movement, were severely restricted. These measures resulted in a sharp decline in organized political participation in elections.

In July 1991 the Majles passed a law severely limiting methods of electioneering in presidential, Majles, and Islamic council elections (Law of 6 Mordād 1370 Š./28 July 1991 and its further elaboration under the law enacted by the Majles on 27 Esfand 1370 Š./19 March 1992; *Rūz-nāma-ye rasmī*, 1370 Š./1991, pp. 230, 907-8). In November 1991 the Majles enacted a law limiting the period of electioneering to one week before voting day (*Rūz-nāma-ye rasmī*, pp. 539-40). This law also banned high government officials and Friday prayer leaders from expressing preferences for or supporting or opposing candidates.

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(Shaul Bakhash)

iii. IN AFGHANISTAN

General, direct, secret, and free parliamentary elections by citizens of both genders, on the Western model, were first introduced in Afghanistan in the 20th century, but even then they were often manipulated.

Traditions of participatory government in Afghanistan. The Afghan government was traditionally organized by dynasts, who derived their legitimacy from the endorsement of elders assembled in *lōya jergas* (grand councils). It was usually secular and reflected the consensus of notables from tribal communities (khans, *maleks*, *mīrs*, and *begs*), civic leaders, court (*darbār*) officials, military officers, and the clergy (*'olamā'*, *mojtaheds*, *pīrs*, and *sayyeds*), in accordance with social convention and the Islamic Shari'a of the Hanafite school. *Lōya jergas* were extensions of traditional Pashtun *jergas*, councils in which disputes were settled through consultation. All those affected by a particular dispute, as well as persons with special knowledge about the procedures of the *jergas* (*jergamars*), participated in the *jerga* as equals and settled the dispute by consensus. Mullahs were also invited to provide advice when required. A decision was usually accepted by the disputants, whether individuals, families, or tribes; should it be violated, the guilty party was fined or punished by exclusion from the community or the burning of his house by a special tribal militia (*arōbakī*

In 1121/1709 the Mānja *jerga* helped Mir Ways Hōtakī liberate Qandahār from



Safavid domination, and in 1160/1747, following the assassination of Nāder Shah Afšār at Kabūšān near Mašhad, the *lōya jerga* held in Šēr-e Sorḵ in Qandahār elected Aḥmad Shah Dorrānī ruler of Afghanistan (1160-86/1747-72; Ġobār, pp. 319-20, 354-55). Until the reign of Amīr ‘Abd-al-Raḥman Khan (1297-1319/1880-1901) *lōya jergas* generally remained effective institutions of government in Afghanistan. As the 20th century progressed, however, they were convened mainly in national emergencies or to install a new ruler or approve a new constitution. Only Amān-Allāh (1919-29) allowed them to act freely and even required them “to discuss all state affairs, proposals for the uplift, the enactment of all laws and the internal and external policies [of the country]” (*farmān*, 5 Tawr 1303, in Fayẓzād, p. 56; Adamec, p. 81; Kakar, 1995, p. 102). He hoped to convene a *lōya jerga* composed of “. . . the ‘*olamā*’, *sayyeds*, *mašāyek* [elders], khans, and representatives of all tribes [*aqwām*] every year in Kabul.” After his abdication, especially after the communist coup d’état in 1978, *lōya jergas* continued to decline in importance.

Modern elections. Before Afghanistan adopted its first written constitution in 1922 (see CONSTITUTIONAL HISTORY OF AFGHANISTAN), state councils (*šūrāhā-ye dawlatī*), composed of members chosen by the rulers, assisted in running the country. Although the first Afghan constitution was promulgated in the reign of Amān-Allāh, he ruled mainly with the assistance of *lōya jergas* (see above). Elections for the national assembly (*majles-e šūrā-ye mellī*) were first held in 1931, during the reign of Moḥammad Nāder Shah (1929-33), in accordance with a new constitution (*Oṣūl-e asāsī-e dawlat-e ‘āliya-ye Afḡānestān*), and continued at regular intervals until 1964, in the reign of his successor, Moḥammad Zāher Shah (1933-73). During this period, with the exception of the seventh session of parliament in 1949, the government hand-picked the candidates and barred women from taking part.

In 1949 the government, led by Premier Shah Maḥmūd Ġāzī, permitted general elections to take place without interference. In rural areas a considerable number of known constitutionalists were elected; two were also elected in Kabul in a high turnout. Even though the national assembly was still dominated by conservatives, liberal constitutionalists were able to have an impact. Most were leaders of political parties that had been active for some time but were still not legal. In 1950 the national assembly legalized a nongovernmental press. Thereafter the parliament, the political parties, and the private weeklies that mushroomed overnight, along with a new union of the students (*Etteḥādīya-ye moḥaṣṣelān*) at Kabul University, created a ferment



that prompted optimists to look upon the interval as a period of democracy. They even called the prime minister “father of democracy,” though the designation proved premature.

When, however, members of parliament went so far as to question cabinet ministers on a wide range of issues, the king and leaders of his family saw an intrusion into their domain and an invitation to instability. The next general elections were carefully manipulated, prompting constitutionalists to stage a protest rally. The ringleaders and party leaders were arrested, and the king persuaded Shah Maḥmūd to resign. Subsequently a triumvirate composed of the king himself and two cousins and brothers-in-law, Moḥammad-Dā’ūd and Moḥammad-Na’īm, representing the younger generation of the royal family, ruled authoritatively until 1963 despite the constitution.

In 1964 a third constitution (Qānūn-e asāsī-e Afġānestān) was promulgated (Farhang, pp. 447-48, 455). It granted women the right to vote and to run for parliament. The road to participation of women in political life had been prepared by the rise of an educated middle class as a result of free coeducation (see EDUCATION xxvii) and official emancipation in 1959. Because of such liberal features and in particular the separation of state powers, this constitution was called “the finest in the Muslim world” (Dupree, p. 565). For a variety of reasons, however, the turnout in the general election of 1965 was not high, even though “Most observers agree that the elections were as fair as any they had seen in Asia, or in some parts of Alabama” (p. 589). Although political parties had not been legalized, they participated actively in the campaigns. A large number of liberals and democrats were elected to the national assembly, including four women and a number of leftist members of the pro-Moscow People’s democratic party of Afghanistan (Ḥezb-e demōkrātīk-e kaḷq-e Afġānestān; see COMMUNISM IV). Nevertheless, the conservatives, including bureaucrats and religious leaders, many of whom belonged to the newly organized National unity party (Ḥezb-e waḥdat-e mellī), constituted the majority. Many members did not appreciate the intricacies of parliamentary government and focused on personal gain.

The next general election, held in 1969, was also largely free of government interference. No women were elected, and the number of leftist delegates dropped to two. In Kabul a Hindu was elected. The majority was still conservative, and the proportion of democrats was smaller. In the absence of an electoral law regulating procedures, a larger number of candidates bought votes with money, hospitality, and other illegal incentives. They then



concentrated on promoting their personal interests rather than on legislative affairs. Often the assembly failed to achieve a quorum, which slowed the legislative process (Kakar, 1979).

Despite its shortcomings, the national assembly, including the upper house (*mešrano jerga*), enacted a number of reforms, the most important of which the king refused to endorse. Nevertheless, it proved that a parliamentary system based on a democratic and liberal constitution could function in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the diffusion of power softened the traditionally harsh image of government, with people enjoying greater freedom and security than ever before or since.

In 1973 the monarchy was overthrown in a military coup led by former premier Moḥammad-Dā'ūd, and the constitution was abolished. Despite the promulgation of a new constitution in 1977, no elections were held before Dā'ūd was toppled in a coup led by Ḥafīz-Allāh Amīn in 1979. Ḥafīz-Allāh was in turn replaced by Babrak Kārmal after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan in December. Under Soviet control two further constitutions were promulgated, in 1980 and in 1987 respectively, but no general election was held. The Afghan *mojāhedīn* had wrested much of the countryside from government control. Only in 1988 did Kārmal's successor, Najīb-Allāh, attempt to hold parliamentary elections in Kabul and areas still controlled by his government.

In 1992 the *mojāhedīn* led by Šebgāt-Allāh Mojaddedī declared an Islamic state in Kabul, and in December it convened an all-male council of settlement and resolution (*šūrā-ye ahl-e ḥall wa 'aqd*), an Islamic version of the secular *lōya jergas*, but it failed in its purpose (Kakar, 1995, pp. 257-300). The ensuing civil war still continues, and under Borhān-al-Dīn Rabbānī Afghanistan has no constitution and no central government strong enough to rule.

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