

Women Contribution to the Modern Political Space in Iran

Shirin Zakeri

Sapienza University of Rome

ORCID: 0000-0002-0099-1612

shirin.zakeri@uniroma1.it

SUMMARY

This article examines part of the Political Participation of Women in Iran, from Reformist President Khamati to the present time. In specific, it focuses on their engagement and challenges for women in Iranian Presidency and Parliamentary (Majles) Elections.

Keywords: *Iran-Women-Political Participation-Political Parties- Iranian Political Power.*

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the role of women in the Iranian political system has been examined through the lens of women's visibility during presidential elections and political campaigns. Women are one of the key segments of Iranian society in terms of potential tools for political mobilization during electoral processes. In recent presidential elections, various candidates promised to give more space to women in political activities and to delegate key roles to them, although only a few positions that have been nominated are held by women.

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Under the Iranian Constitution, Iranian citizens of all cultural and ethnic backgrounds, regardless of their gender, equally enjoy individual, economic, political, social, and cultural rights. However, while Iranian political decision-making is still male dominated, most graduates of Iranian universities are women. Despite the recognition of their rights and the possession of a high level of education, Iranian women still face several barriers to their political emancipation. The main aim of this article is to emphasize how the political participation and activities of women have changed during the reformist group, *Eslah talaban*, and conservative group, *Osul garayan*, in Iran.

The participation of women in political activities is an important issue around the world. Almost half of the population of any country are women and it is clear that democracies cannot succeed without the participation of women in politics. Since 1979, women's socio-political conditions within the Islamic Republic of Iran, have changed drastically, especially for those who are deemed progressive, but at the same time, it has opened more space and possibility for religious women who follow the rule of the new Islamic state. Progressive women under the Islamic Republic of Iran continue to advocate for gender equality and children's rights. They achieved a degree of progress towards these goals during Khatami's presidency, through new openings for civil society engagement.

Iranian Women NGOs and Educational level

One of the important international conferences centred on the role of women was the Fourth World Congress on Women held in Beijing in 1995, where women from many different backgrounds participated, especially from Muslim world. This event focused on increasing women's participation in politics and in its "Platform of Action" recommended ways and means to the participating countries to increase "space for and visibility"

of women in political institutions and processes.²

For the first time since the 1979 revolution, Iranian women activists, through some NGOs “approved by the Iranian government,” were permitted to participate in this conference. As a result of this engagement, women’s organizations in Iran adopted the contextual strategy laid out by the Congress and started establishing some independent NGOs related to the issue of women’s and children’s rights.³ From 1996 to 2007, the number of women’s NGOs in Iran increased dramatically from 55 to 800⁴.

Women’s empowerment through different NGOs in Iran had a very important impact on raising women’s political knowledge and civic participation. Achieving greater rights for women and children through political participation became one of the chief strategies for the new wave of women activists. This period coincided with the jump in female enrolment at Iranian universities. In fact, in 1998 the number of female students surpassed that of male students (51%) for the first time in state universities. In 2012, female students’ admission accounted for 63% of the total number of students admitted.⁵ Iran has a relatively young population. This was especially pronounced in 2001, when 71% of Iranians were under the age of thirty and 44% were under the age of fifteen. Women’s empowerment programmes enacted during reformist President Khatami’s term in office also impacted the rise in the number of women advocating for their rights.⁶

Besides the role of the NGO’s also other socio-political spaces, govern-

² See the *Beijing Congress documents*: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/fwcwn.html>

³ Samira Ghoreishi, *Women’s Activism in the Islamic Republic of Iran Political Alliance and the Formation of Deliberative Civil Society*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. P.145-146

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Goli M. Rezai-Rashti and Somayeh Fereidouni, *The Voices of Female Students in Iranian Universities, The Unintended Consequences of University Education*, IN VOLUM: *Women, Islam, and Education in Iran*, Edited by: Goli M. Rezai-Rashti, Golnar Mehran, Shirin Abdmolaei, Routledge Critical Studies in Gender and Sexuality in Education, 2019. P. 35.

⁶ *Ibid.*

mental and non-governmental organizations played an important part in this growth.

In 2008 during President Ahmadinejad's term, women's enrolment in higher education reached 66% of the total enrolment. Soon, however, Iranian women became a target for tackling economic problems by reinstating a gender imbalance both in universities and in the job market. Many universities applied a "rigid gender quotas system"⁷ by which a specific number of seats and courses were designated for men only.⁸

The engagement of Iranian women in the educational sphere and job market has undergone various challenges throughout the different periods of political power in Iran, from reformist President Khatami (1997- 2005) to the ultra-conservative President Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) to the recent moderate presidency of Rouhani (2013-2021). Nonetheless, today most university seats are occupied by female students and women play an essential role in the economy. The percentage of women in higher levels of employment such as political leadership, managerial and decision-making positions is still very low, and women face many obstacles in the workplaces and in the halls of power. In 2019, during Rouhani's presidency, women managers represented 18.8 percent of the workforce, and women were 41 percent of all government employees. This is significant considering that the number of unemployed female graduates is 4 times that of male graduates.⁹

⁷ Nazanin Shahrokni, *Protecting Men and the State, Women, Islam, and Education in Iran*, Edited by: Goli M. Rezai-Rashti, Golnar Mehran, Shirin Abdmolaei, Routledge Critical Studies in Gender and Sexuality in Education, 2019. P. 93.

⁸ Azam Alizade, Parvaneh Danesh, *پتیسنج یدنب هی مہس یتخانہش ہ عم اج لیلحت*, (Sociological analysis of gender quotas in Iranian higher education), Women Studies, N.1 Spring, 2017. <http://ensani.ir/file/download/article/20180210162239-9830-126.pdf>

⁹ *دندہدی لی کشت ناز ار تلود نازکراک دصرد دن چ؟* (What percentage of government employees are women?) <https://www.donya-e-eqtasad.com/fa/tiny/news-3579339>

Despite persistent patriarchal political attitudes, women have participated into just as voters, but also as candidates in municipal, parliamentary and presidential elections. Nonetheless, the main political sphere in Iran is still completely male-dominated and women are not present in the key posts of political power¹⁰. In fact, to date, women have had no leadership role in any of the three fundamental organs of the Iranian political order, the Guardian Council *Shoraye Negahban*, the Assembly of Experts *Majles-e Khobregan* or the Council for the Discernment of Regime Interest *Majma-e Tashkhis Maslahat-e Nezam*. The absence of women from decision-making positions has been noted by different women activists and organizations in Iran across the previous three governments of Khatami, Ahmadinejad and Rouhani.

Women and Political System

With the end of the Pahlavi monarchy (1925-1979), following the 1979 revolution, women were systematically excluded from holding judgeships in the newly founded Islamic Republic of Iran. In 1934, during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the “judges’ employment law” was ratified in which there was no specific mention of the gender of the judge. In 1970, for the first time in Iranian history, five women were appointed as judges and worked in this position until 1979. It is important to note that the first draft of the 1979 constitution also does not specify the gender of judges or those who hold any other positions such as the head of the judiciary, attorney general and the head of the Supreme Court. It was only in 1982 that the Law Governing the Appointment of Judges was ratified and for the first time it was stated that only men could become judges.¹¹

¹⁰ Majles shoray-e Eslami (Islamic Parliament of Iran). At this article I use the name of “Majles” as parliament.

¹¹ Jamileh Kadivar, *Women Working as Judges and Making, Judicial Decisions*, Edited by, Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran: Women and Executive Power*, Routledge, 2016. 108.

Through different resistance to change the situation by women, some conditions have improved and some positions in the judicial system have been unblocked for women in Iran. “Women can now work as advisors in other legal institutions such as the Supreme Administrative Court and as investigative judges at the Offices of Legal Studies and the Codification of Law in the Ministry of Justice. They can also work as advisors to legal departments and other departments which require judicial positions. Women are allowed to work as advisors in the special civil courts in relation to divorce and as judicial advisors in the family courts. Despite all of these reforms over the past decades, women still cannot make legal judgments or issue warrants and sign final verdicts.¹²

Since the Islamic Republic’s founding, the number of women in the Majles has always been a very low percentage. Except for a slight rise - from the ranking drawn up during the World Economic Forum - during the period of the reformist President Khatami, the situation has remained unchanged since 2006.

Furthermore, there are no appropriate laws or facilities that support women at the managerial level in view of their family duties and their dual work in this regard. This patriarchal attitude toward women’s responsibilities is one of the main reasons why women have been denied roles in high level jobs and the ability to hold key positions in society.

This is the context in which progressive women, during the tenth parliamentary elections in 2016, pursued their demand for a minimum female quota of 30 percent, which is still under evaluation by some political parties and male members of the Majles. Currently, the percentage of women present in the Majles has reached its all-time peak at 6%, with 17 female members out of 290.¹³

¹² Ibid. p. 109.

¹³ Interview with Azar Mansuri, *Political activist of the reformists: The role of women in*

Taking a step back, we must remember how Article 20 of the Constitutional Law supports all individuals, men and women equally, and emphasizes that all members of society, in relation to the principles of Islam, have equal political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

Iran, unlike some countries in the Global South, has a large cadre of educated, professional women capable of stepping into decision-making roles. Therefore, the fact that Iranian women are still largely excluded from positions of influence relates to the unequal division of Key roles in Iran's political power. This reality forces some Iranian women to accept society's limitations, even if they are well qualified for those careers. But in other job spaces for example during the Moderate President Rouhani in 2021, the engagement of the women in government management position increased from 12% to the 26%.¹⁴ and there was also a notable increase in female managers (up to the 36%).¹⁵

One of the strategies that women have achieved under resident Khatami for strengthening their presence and enhancing their voice inside the Iranian Majles was the foundation of the *Women's Commission* in 2000. The main effect of this commission has been and still is to limit the dominant male voice inside the Majles and concentrate on promoting women's and children's rights and their living conditions. This Commission found a degree of success when the Majority of MPs were in the hands of the reformists.

This Commission had four main priorities:

(1) Considering women's legal issues, including guardianship of children, Mahriyeh (marriage contract), divorce, re-marriage, and so forth;

political development. Part of the construction of power resists the political participation of women. <https://women.gov.ir/>, 2019.

¹⁴ IRAN News Agency *Ebtekar*: 26% of government management positions are held by women, irna.ir/xjDxZ8. 18/April/2021

¹⁵ ISNA News Agency, *What percentage of women sit at the management desk?* <https://www.isna.ir/news/99030402020/چ-حصه-دندان-مجلس-پن-انز-حصه-دندان-چ> 25/May/ 2020.

- (2) Women's social issues and some social bans against women, such as a ban on leaving the country without the husband's permission;
- (3) Addressing cultural traditions that impede women's rights, particularly in specific areas in the country and among some ethnic and religious minorities, such as underage and forced marriage;
- (4) Women's economic issues, such as women's employment and retirement.¹⁶

Today, the Women's Commission is mainly in the hands of conservatives. The women's faction of the 11th parliament (2020) has a 5.5 percent share of Majles seats. Only eight of the country's 31 provinces have women representatives and just some independent Majles member has a specific socio-political agenda: review and approval of the bill to ensure women's security against violence and the spouse child (married under 18); pursue the goal of a 30% share of women in government management positions, which was a continuation of the plans of the female members of the 10th parliament.¹⁷

According to article 62 of the Constitution, the deputies of the Parliament and the president, as well as the representatives of the councils of provinces and cities are elected without regard to their sex. In fact, women have received the investiture from the Constitution and the possibility of being elected or appointed to the highest political and administrative positions in the country. This is a right that has led some women to run not only as representatives of Parliament, but also in presidential elections.

The only exceptional rule concerns the office of president. According to an interpretative clause of Article 115 of the Constitution, the candidate for

¹⁶ Samira Ghoreishi, P.139.

¹⁷Zanan Magazine: «دنگیم هچ سلجم نازن ز نویسکارف (What does the women's parliamentary faction do?) <https://zanaan.com/featured/1400/5335/> 2021. Dey.

this role must be “rajol” (statesman), literally an “illustrious political and religious personality”. So far, however, this term has only been interpreted in a masculine sense: the candidacy of some women has been excluded - by the Guardian Council - without any explanation in some cases, or due to the lack of “necessary requirements” in others. “The interpretation of Islamic laws and regulations by the members of the Guardian Council and some Islamic jurists has in practice disqualified women from running for presidential elections”¹⁸. Considering also that according to Article 134 of the constitution, the president of the Islamic Republic is the second most important person after the supreme religious leader who currently is Ali Khamenei.

The issue of women’s participation in the political sphere took centre stage in a significant way during the 1997 presidential election: nine women attempted to run for the presidential elections, although their attempt was rejected by the Guardian Council, which disqualified women from competing with men for this position. This decision was followed by a debate on the lawfulness of this sentence and whether it was to be attributed solely to gender segregation.

Azam Taleghani, women’s rights activist and the daughter of Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, was the first woman to present herself as a candidate in presidential elections. This opened up an important debate with the *Ulema* religious scholars and functionaries about a women’s right to run for president and other important political offices. Taleghani argued that,

¹⁸ Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran: Women and Executive Power* (London: Jamileh Kadivar, Routledge, 2016), p. 121. “Since 1979 a number of women have signed up as presidential candidates; however, all female candidates have been rejected by the Council of Guardians (*Shoraye Negahban*). The Council of Guardians is the authority that is responsible for supervising all elections including the presidential elections and consists of six *faqih* (religious jurists) appointed by the religious leader and six laymen nominated by the head of the judiciary and approved by the *majlis*, the Islamic Consultative Assembly (the parliament)”.

according to *Shari'a* Islamic Law, there are no Islamic Injunctions against a woman becoming president"¹⁹. She never stopped her activities in this regard, and her actions helped open a new space in public debate over political equality for women.

Since 1997, Iranian women have developed various forms of activism, despite ongoing cultural, political and gender barriers. Women's political participation was highlighted during Mohammad Khatami's presidency. In 1997, 76% of Iranian women voted for Khatami who was and is, until today, the only candidate who ever offered a special plan for the improvement of women's conditions²⁰. But despite the different approach to the matter, Khatami did not assign any women as minister during his two terms, and when he was asked why there were no female members in his cabinet of ministers, he replied simply that he didn't want to lose any chances with such a choice.

However, following the inauguration of President Khatami in June 1997, reforms were implemented in all sectors, with a particular focus on strengthening the participation of women in socio-political activities, which has led to an institutional change approach to women's rights issues.²¹

During that time, the Women's Office, within the presidential office, which was later transformed into a Centre for Women's Participation, played an extremely effective role in integrating gender perspectives into national decision-making. Alongside the activities of this office, the Women's Committee in the Provinces has become active in the management of women's issues within the infrastructure of the government's decentral-

¹⁹ Homa Hoodfar and Shadi Sadr, *Islamic Politics and Women's Quest for Gender Equality in Iran*, *Third World Quarterly* Vol. 31, No. 6, P. 895.

²⁰ See: Valentine Moghadam, Fatemeh Haghghatjoo, *Women and Political Leadership in an Authoritarian Context: A Case Study of the Sixth Parliament in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2016.

²¹ Heshamt Sadat Moinifar, *Participation of Women In Iran's Polity*, in GEMC Journal, 2011.

ization policies.

Later, to regain female support for his government, Khatami appointed women to higher levels of the administration and decision-making roles and increased their political participation. Some examples of this trend include his selection of Masumeh Ebtekar as vice president and head of the organization for the environment in his cabinet. According to Article 124 of the constitution, vice presidents can perform the president's constitutional duties. Ebtekar was the first woman vice president in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and she was one of the founding members of the Iranian reformist political party, *The Islamic Iran Participation Front* and participated in the *Beijing Congress* in 1995.²² In addition to Ebtekar, Khatami also appointed Zahra Shojaee as advisor to the president and the head of the Centre for Women's Participation.

Of course, having the majority of seats in the Majles' in the hands of reformists also made possible more changes in favour of women's rights and living conditions. This ended by the time of the Seventh Majles (2004-2008), during which conservatives formed a majority with 54 percent of the seats while the reformists were in a minority with only 13 percent of the seats.²³ All women except one who entered the Seventh Majlis were from the Conservative faction and they demonstrate the "women against women" phenomenon and the status of women's rights and legal needs did not improve nor were they really considered in during this period.²⁴

The situation quickly changed with the arrival of conservative President

²² See the website: <https://shora.tehran.ir/Default.aspx?tabid=149>

²³The defeat of the reformers was mainly because the Council of Guardians disqualified many reformist candidates. Many pro-reformists, moreover, boycotted the election. Considering in the previous Majles the reformists were in the majority and had 65 per cent of the seats. In 7th Majles the Women's Fraction which had been formed in the 6th Majles was also dissolved.

²⁴ Mehrangiz Kar and Golriz Farshi, *Focusing on Women in the Internal Politics of Iran*, *The Brown Journal of World Affairs*, FALL / WINTER 2008, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 75-86.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005. There was a return to the idea of women as a mother and housewife to the detriment of her socially active role. With the coming to power of the ninth government, Ahmadinejad, in his first term as president, transformed the Centre for Women into the Centre for Women and Family Affairs and Nasrin Soltankhah was selected as the head of the centre. Ahmadinejad also included a few women as vice presidents and advisors in his administration, like Fatemeh Javadi who became a vice president and the head of the Department of the Environment.

In Ahmadinejad's second term, and particularly during the 2009 Iranian presidential elections, several women's rights groups were organized as a result of the desire to tackle the discriminatory policies of the Ahmadinejad era and revitalize women's rights and the status of women in Iranian politics. Amongst the central demands of most women activists was an increase in the accessibility of decision-making positions for women, including in the most important body on women's issues, *Jaame Zeinab* – the women's organization founded in 1986 by the conservatives and which was accepted by the Ministry of Interior as a political party in 1992. In the 2009 presidential election, 42 women were among the 475 candidates for president but once again all female candidates were disqualified by the Council of Guardians. They justified this rejection on the grounds of a lack of required skills for the job and not because they were women.

Despite this, in 2009, in contrast with his first term, Ahmadinejad appointed three women to his cabinet. This decision still surprises many in the political field, considering that the two more moderate presidents, who held the office before and after him failed to appoint any women to such high-level positions, despite many campaign promises. Following this decision, the secretary of the Islamic women's organization *Jaame'e Zeinab*, Zahara Naderi, explained that the move by the neoconservative president was "entirely foreseen, since Ahmadinejad was subjected to a lot of pres-

sure from women's groups and is the type of person who is likely to make bold moves".²⁵

Equally surprising was the decision of the conservative-dominated Iranian parliament to accept the nomination of Marzieh Vahid-Dastjerdi to the health ministry, who consequently became the first female minister of post-revolutionary Iran²⁶. Certainly, choosing a female minister, who belonged to the conservative camp, was an important step in the path of promoting and protecting the political rights of women in theocratic state. Nonetheless, during Ahmadinejad's presidency, the situation for women did not improve. Indeed, it has undergone a further deterioration, both at a social and work-related level, and the access to different university courses.²⁷

The other important reason that has led women to greater demands for participation in the country's politics has been the exponential growth of women's access to secondary education. The data show an increase in women's enrolment from 26% in 1990 to 67% in 2019. The access of Iranian women to the intellectual world and the change in the nature and strategy of their campaigns for equal opportunities and equal rights confirms this factor.²⁸

Thanks to access to digital tools and various social platforms, such as Telegram, Instagram and Twitter, awareness of the right to greater protection has spread. President Rouhani expressed the need for an urgent program to improve the status of women, particularly during his 2013 election cam-

²⁵ Mona Tajali, «Islamic Women's Groups and the Quest for Political Representation in Turkey and Iran», in *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Autumn 2015), pp. 563-581.

²⁶ *ivi*

²⁷ Jalil Roshandel, Fatemeh Sadeghi, Shima Tadrissi, «Gender Equality and Empowerment in Iran: A Comparison between Ahmadinejad's and Rouhani's Governments», in *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Spring 2019), pp. 35-53.

²⁸ See: Report on gender equality in higher education following the increase in the number of educated women <https://www.msrt.ir/fa/news/46613>

paign. In his first term as president, Rouhani pledged to “give equal opportunities” and “promote the rights of women.” Among the women who took up relevant positions between Rouhani’s first and second mandates, Masumeh Ebtekar, Iran’s Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, Shahindokht Molaverdi, Vice President for Women’s Affairs, and Elham Aminzadeh, Legal Vice President, should be mentioned. Despite this, he never appointed a woman to the cabinet of ministers, even after receiving the request of 157 Majles deputies to choose a woman as minister. This factor was among the main reasons for a strong dissatisfaction among women voters, aware that their action would serve to elect yet another male figure.²⁹ Rouhani’s government stated from the outset that “the plan was to give 30% of the government’s middle and senior cadres to women.”³⁰ Starting from a quota of only 5%, today Iranian women have reached 26%. The results of political and social studies of Iranian society show that currently the needs of women as citizens of society are not recognized. The demands of women in Iran today are different from even twenty years ago, due to the increase in their level of education and awareness. If the social and political structures do not adequately respond to this collective question, they will face a deep rift.

Women’s eligibility to run for president and the resistance of an ambiguous concept such as “men politicians” in the Constitution clearly show the gap still existing between the legitimate request for political participation of women and the official version of the Constitution. This controversial problem is brought as a justification by conservative factions that want to curb the female push towards greater political participation. Today the question that public opinion is asking is whether the role of women in politics is limited only to voting.

²⁹ See: Fatemeh Bezhan, “*Special Circumstances*” behind Dearth of Women in Iran’s Cabinet, 2013, 21 August, <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-lack-of-women-incabinet-/25081794.html>

³⁰ Azar Mansuri, *ivi*.

At the same time, governments have the power to increase the participation of women in politics by adopting new procedures and regulations. Rouhani himself was able to achieve a 25% female presence in the middle and upper management sphere of the government.

In the 10th Majles, the number of female candidates increased from 8% to 11% and the number of female members went from 9 to 17. One of the reasons for the increase in political participation of women in the parliamentary elections of the 10th and 11th Majles is the 30% quota set by some parties for women on their electoral lists. This choice by parties is a strategic one. In fact, an increase in the number of women candidates is proportional to the increase in the number of women who go to the polls, with a consequent increase in the number of votes.

Finally, for the first time in the history of the Iranian Majles, the percentage of female deputies has increased from 3% to nearly 6% and the average age of these women has decreased from 48 to 42, which indicates national confidence in younger women. In the Iranian parliament, in general, women's participation is treated like that of a minority group. The progress towards improvement in women's socio-political situations, however, is still in the hands of the male dominated majority of the Majles Assembly. Some laws, in particular proposed by the women faction of the Majles, were not adopted due to the lack of the necessary majority. One of the most controversial and debated plans of this parliamentary group, for example, was to raise the minimum age of marriage. The women's faction sought to raise the legal age of marriage from 13 to 16 for girls and to 18 for boys. The plan eventually stalled due to "incompleteness" in the Judiciary Commission.

Period	Parliament Dates	female PMs	Total number of PMs	% Female MPs	% Voter turnout	President
1st	1980 – 1984	4	327	1.2%	52.1%	Ali Khamenei
2nd	1894 – 1988	4	274	1.4 %	64.6%	Ali Khamenei
3rd	1988 – 1992	4	278	1.4 %	59.7%	Akbar Hashemi
4th	1992 – 1996	9	275	3.2 %	57.7%	Akbar Hashemi
5th	1996 – 2000	14	277	5.0 %	71.1 %	Mohammad Khatami
6th	2000 – 2004	13	297	4.3 %	69%	Mohammad Khatami
7th	2004 – 2008	13	294	4.4 %	59.5%	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
8th	2008 – 2012	8	288	2.7 %	55.4%	Mahmoud Ahmadinejad
9th	2012 – 2016	9	288	3.1 %	64 %	Hassan Rouhani
10th	2016 – 2020	17	290	5.8 %	61.5%	Hassan Rouhani
11th	2020 – 2024	16	290	5.5 %	42.5%	Ebrahim Ra'isi

Other hotly contested plans of the Rouhani government, which did not have a majority of votes in Majles, included an increase in penalties for acid attacks against women, tackling the need for male permission for women to leave the country and establishing a pathway for women to pass on citizenship to their children. The latter was the most controversial plan

carried out by the women's faction of the 10th Parliament and paved the way for the drafting and approval of the law on "citizenship of the children of Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers", which specified the duties towards 1.5 million children without birth certificates, born from the marriage between Iranian mothers and non-Iranian fathers. This provision was passed by the 11th Majles in 2021.

Iranian women activists have also worked to create greater space for women inside Iran's political parties. The parliamentary system in Iran is not based on the political party system, but the main two factions in the Majles are: *Eslah-talaban* the reformists and *Osul-garayan* the fundamentalists or conservatives, both include more than 110 different official political parties.

One of the places that could improve the facility to engage women in political activities is the House of Parties *Khaneh – e Ahzab* which was forced to close during the Ahmadinejad presidency in 2005 and reopened during the Rohani presidency in 2015. This organization mainly provides a space and place for official parties' activity, combining by 3 factions of reformists, conservative and independents, that aims to be a successful model of coexistence of the country's political currents³¹.

The House of Parties' work is in trade unions and is not political, in other words, it defends the culture of collaboration, the rights of parties, and free space for the activities of parties. That is, the House of Parties is a place of interaction, a bridge between the government and the parties.

The role of the House of Parties is to defend the political parties themselves, to defend the rights of the parties in the form of a trade union. The Council of *Khaneh – e Ahzab* includes 21 members, two of whom are women. Women have their own committee and try to raise the number

³¹ <https://www.icana.ir/Fa/News/277728/>

of women at this council to at least 7 women members.³² The Women's Committee of *Khaneh – e Ahzab*, chaired by Fatemeh Rake'i, is working towards the goal of at least 30% women in every political party. In fact, Shahindokht Molawardi, Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, appointed in 2016, highlighted that just 18 secretaries-general of political parties in Iran are women, out of a total of 242³³ parties that are formally licensed by the Article 10 Commission³⁴. It is important to note that women reformists and parliamentarians of the reformist factions tried hard to expand social and cultural institutions in order to meet women's demands, but conservative MPs strove to stop these reforms in favour of women. They tried to reframe a woman's role as a provider of family support, being a good wife and mother and staying at home. The role of Iranian women and their emancipation in the socio-political sphere was and still is challenged by the different political groups. It is clear that they faced more obstacles when the political power in the Majles and the Presidency was in the hands of the conservative faction.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, there are several factors that have a direct influence on women's participation in politics in Iran. Social and political barriers have a considerable weight, as individual and social renewal plays an important role in increasing the political and social participation of women and in the development of society. Widespread access to education is a fundamental factor in limiting the barriers to women's political participation. Through

³² <https://www.borna.news/fa/tiny/news-598232>

³³ Iran News Agency: ۱۱۰ تسالاعف روشک رد میسر بزح (There are 110 official parties in the country) irna.ir/xjvBLy. Until 2019, 250 parties were licensed in the country, but out of this number, according to the new law on "how political parties and groups operate" because they either did not function or did not form a general assembly, 110 parties became official and legal while the other parties have not yet been able to comply with this law.

³⁴Iran News Agency: ۷ درصد بازح ناریارد (7% of parties in Iran are women!) irna.ir/xjj6dz

continuous awareness of women's rights, the unrealistic perception of a certain paradox between women's family roles, on the one hand, and their social, political, and managerial roles, on the other, improved the women's capacity to play the important roles also in the political sphere even with the different barriers. Implementing a quota of 30% of the seats reserved exclusively for women within the current Iranian political system has the best chance of enhancing political participation for women.

In Iran, through education, the points of view of the individual, man or woman, regarding social participation are improved, and the opportunity to accept sharing with women in decision-making and management affairs is gradually realized.

In short, political, and social awareness can be taken as the root of growth in human societies through education and training, which can consequently lead to an increase in the social and political participation of women. At the same time, the role of the media and social networks should not be ignored in the elimination of barriers to women's participation; just as an imprecise interpretation and understanding of Islam is a cultural factor that hinders the participation of women and keeps the rest of society from achieving the goal of making the country more inclusive. Of course, what the reformist women have aimed to do for changing the conservative male centred reading of Islamic laws should be continued.