

## **Parties and Ethnicities in Iranian Politics from the Islamic Revolution to the 2017 Protests**

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### **Abstract**

*This research aims to study the evolution of the role of the Iranian Islamic political system in the conflict between conservative and reformist parties, as well as ethnic minorities. The Iranian political system is unique in nature, characterized by the presence of various factions and parties vying for power and influence. The developments witnessed by the Iranian political system over time, starting from the Islamic Revolution in 1979 until the present, will be analyzed. The focus will be on the major party conflicts among conservatives, reformists, and ethnic minorities, and the role of each group in shaping Iranian politics and determining the trajectory of the political system. Additionally, the role of ethnic minorities in the Iranian political system and their impact on party conflicts will be highlighted. The research will explore different nationalist tensions and demands and how they influence the political dynamics in Iran. Through the research findings, the major developments in the Iranian political system and their impact on party conflicts will be elucidated. Furthermore, the challenges and future opportunities that the Iranian political system may face in achieving stability and change will be discussed.*

**Keywords:** *Role of the Iranian Islamic political system - Conservative parties - Reformist parties - Ethnic minorities - Islamic Revolution - Political dynamics - Political history.*

### **Introduction**

During the final years of the rule of the Pahlavi monarchy, starting from 1975, the Iranian political arena was completely closed. There was only one recognized political party operating legally, which was the Rastakhiz Party. However, several politically banned parties continued to operate clandestinely. These parties included those advocating peaceful political change and those supporting armed and violent overthrow of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi.

With the success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the political arena was reopened, albeit cautiously. All political parties or organizations opposing the approach of the regime, particularly those adopting Marxist or communist ideologies, were banned, despite their significant contribution to the success of the revolution and their active participation in overthrowing the Pahlavi regime.

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Based on this, a partisan and political landscape emerged in Khomeini-era Iran dominated by the broad concept of Islamism. There was talk of an Islamic right alongside an Islamic left.

First, a compass of the concepts that shape the religious-political currents in Iran:

But before we discuss the major historical events in Iran after the Islamic Revolution and how they affected the development of political parties and the political system, we must begin by familiarizing ourselves with these currents, which are as follows:

First: The Conservative Current:

It should be noted that the term "conservatives" or "principlists" has been used in Iranian political literature in a specific historical context. However, its connotation, which refers to those strictly adhering to the approach of Imam Khomeini and seeking to preserve Iranian traditions, has been present since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran until today. Even during the Shah's era, the term "traditional right" was used to refer to conservatives, representing the alliance between the traditional Shia religious establishment and the commercial capitalism embodied in the forces of the bazaar marketplace.

The terms "conservatives" and "reformists" used in Iranian political circles are relatively recent. About two decades ago, terms such as Islamic right and Islamic left were used to describe the political currents. Then, after President Mohammad Khatami's victory in the 1997 elections, the term "reformists" emerged, used by the Islamic left to describe themselves as a new political faction, replacing the usage of right and left terms.

The term "conservatives" was first used in the Iranian presidential elections in 1992, and this designation became common in both Iranian and foreign media to describe right-wing politicians. However, the reality indicates the presence of several factions within the Iranian right, including the extremist or principled right (Principlists), who directly draw their ideas from Safavid deputies.

The principled conservatives are the parties and factions that seek to maintain the status quo and oppose changes in the structure and traditional Islamic beliefs in Iran. They differentiate themselves from traditional conservatives through their greater involvement in politics and their acceptance of change as a means to preserve cultural heritage.

This category is characterized by their support for the Islamic system over the republican system. They see themselves as supporters of free-market economics and reducing state intervention in the economy, making them somewhat aligned with liberal tendencies in the economic field. Regarding foreign policy and international relations, they place great importance on the Arab and Islamic community and their issues, while exhibiting anti-Western and anti-United States sentiment.

In Iran, there is a political trend known as the "Pragmatic Right," which emerged under the leadership of Sheikh Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani when he assumed the presidency in 1989. The Pragmatic Right is characterized by a diversity of political ideas, where individuals can adopt liberal political ideas and an open culture while maintaining moderate and tolerant religious views. On the other hand, there is also a politically conservative and religiously strict faction that adheres to its political positions and tends to be more politically closed-off.

In addition to that, within the conservative right, there are those who support party pluralism and popular participation in decision-making. Conversely, there are also those who do not believe in the principle of popular legitimacy and do not consider popular choice as significant.

The conservative wing in Iran enjoys significant strength due to its extensive network of interconnected relationships with various branches and institutions of the system, as well

as internal and external pressure groups. This wing receives support from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Basij, in addition to senior Shia clerics. They control key state institutions and have a strong presence in the Assembly of Experts, the judiciary, and decision-making bodies such as the Expediency Discernment Council, the Guardian Council, and the Supreme National Security Council of Iran. The conservatives leverage their influence in religious institutions and control over influential organizations such as the Association of Qom Seminary Scholars and the Society of Militant Clerics to influence Iranian politics.

Secondly: The Reformist Movement:

In the presidential elections of 1997, a group of political parties supported Mr. Khatami and joined his electoral campaign. These parties accompanied Mr. Khatami throughout his second presidential term. Despite the diversity of intellectual concerns among these parties, they rallied under the banner of the rule of law, civil society, political reform, and popular sovereignty.

The Reformist Movement consists of approximately 15 political parties and associations. Among these parties and associations, notable ones include the Society of Militant Clerics and the Islamic Participation Front, which was established in 1997 prior to the presidential elections. Its Secretary-General was Mohammad Reza Khatami, and its leaders included Mohsen Mir Damadi and Saeed Hajjarian. The movement also includes the Organization for Student Mobilization and the Islamic Iran Participation Front, led by Mohammad Salamati and featuring leaders such as Behzad Nabavi, Mohsen Rezaei, and Mohsen Armin. Additionally, the movement includes the National Trust Party led by Mehdi Karroubi and the Construction Executives Party led by Gholam Hossein Karbaschi, which includes figures like Fa'ezeh Rafsanjani and Ataollah Mohajerani.

The Reformist Movement represented the symbols of calling for change and reform within Iran, advocating for moderation in dealing with the world after two decades of the revolution. Mr. Khatami played the role of a symbol for this movement, rather than that of a leader.

In the economic field, the Reformist Movement focuses on the need for strong government intervention in the economy and opposes the idea of complete privatization. The movement believes that the economic and social conditions in Iranian society require government involvement in economic affairs due to economic underdevelopment and lack of growth. The movement believes that success comes through a strong government with broad economic programs. Therefore, the Reformist Movement encourages a focus on economic development and prioritizes it over political development, which has become a key promise in President Khatami's agenda. The movement emphasizes the necessity of achieving comprehensive, balanced, and cohesive development in the political, economic, cultural, and scientific fields to improve the lives of citizens and promote economic growth. Based on this thinking, it can be said that the Reformist Movement calls for an active role of the government in the economy to ensure the achievement of comprehensive and sustainable development in Iran.

In the political aspect, Mr. Mohammad Khatami defines the Reformist Movement as the movement that defends the essence of the system and its leadership, operating within its overall framework. The characteristics of this movement lie in following the path of Imam Khomeini and the revolution, defending Islamic interests, and adhering to the constitution. The reforms aim to rectify the flaws in the system and restore dignity to the lives of citizens. The movement sees objections to the approach of some officials in governing the country, viewing it as contrary to democracy and a deviation from the ideology of Imam Khomeini.

The Islamic Revolution has contributed to modernizing society within an Islamic cultural environment, with the elite defending the revolution emphasizing the importance of culture in organizing social life and shaping the relationship between religion and culture.

Secondly, the role of the Supreme Leader in the Iranian Islamic political system and its influence on the party conflicts:

Understanding the institutions of the Iranian political system is crucial in comprehending its stability and the tensions that exist within it. The Iranian political system is characterized by the plurality of decision-making sources and the diversity of its constitutional institutions. It possesses a distinct nature that differs from many political systems found in other countries.

Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the transitional period witnessed a state of chaos. However, the alliance between opposition parties and the faithful masses managed to draft the constitution and organize general elections. They sought to establish a qualified executive body composed of educated elites who had traveled to Europe, particularly to France. Abu al-Hasan Banisadr assumed the presidency as the first president of the republic, while Imam Khomeini became the first Supreme Leader of a state bearing the banner of the Islamic Republic in contemporary Islamic history.

In Iran, the executive authority has a distinct nature that sets it apart from other countries. The highest authority in the country, at all levels, is vested in the Supreme Leader or the Leader. Following the Supreme Leader in the hierarchy is the President of the Republic, followed by lower ranks progressively.

When Imam Khomeini presented his book "Wilayat al-Faqih" as a theory of governance, most religious scholars did not participate in political activities. The Imam's goal with this book was to motivate religious scholars to engage in politics by providing this governing framework. In his speeches delivered in 1977 and 1978, Imam Khomeini criticized religious scholars who did not participate in politics and called on them to join the opposition. The theory of Wilayat al-Faqih succeeded in attracting supporters among the radicals and the populist groups, who became members of the first Council of Experts, which drafted the first constitution of the Iranian Revolution. Among these individuals was Beheshti, who played a crucial role in promoting the theory of Wilayat al-Faqih and led collective efforts to secure a majority of seats in the Council. These efforts aimed to ensure the status of Wilayat al-Faqih in the constitution and guarantee a role for religious scholars in the power of the nation. Therefore, the leadership of Beheshti and the collective work of supporters of the theory of Wilayat al-Faqih, along with the approval of Imam Khomeini, were key factors in establishing the rule of Wilayat al-Faqih in Iran after the revolution.

The constitutional changes in 1989 sparked intense debates about their purpose, especially since Imam Khomeini approved them during his lifetime. There are diverse opinions regarding these changes. Some believe that they aimed to reduce the powers of the Supreme Leader, asserting that they no longer have absolute authority in determining the general policies of the system. On the other hand, there are those who see things differently, believing that the changes granted greater powers to the Supreme Leader, despite the presence of the principle of impeachment within the two constitutions. However, the practical application of these extensive powers by the Supreme Leader and their intervention in all branches of government, particularly in issuing fatwas, make them a central force that cannot be ignored in Iranian political life. Through this position, final decisions are made in all political and economic domains.

However, in the Fifth Council (1999-2000), the reformist movement prevailed, joined by popular forces that opposed the conservatives and raised the banner of reform. This movement presented several issues such as political openness internally and externally, the question of transitioning from revolution to the state, as well as its desire for change,

especially in the economic field and freedom of expression. However, the reformist movement faced obstacles due to the strength of the conservative faction on one hand and the significant challenges posed by the United States to the Islamic Republic on the other. This led to the return of the conservative majority in the 2004 and 2008 elections to regain control of the Shura Council once again.

Important figures have assumed the position of the President of the Shura Council, a very significant role in the legislative and political life of Iran. These figures include Hashemi Rafsanjani (1980-1984 and 1984-1988), Mehdi Karroubi (1988-1992), Nategh Nouri (1992-1996 and 1996-2000), Mehdi Karroubi again (2000-2004), Haddad Adel (2004-2008), and Ali Larijani (2008-2012). The truth is that the election of the President of the Shura Council in the Islamic Republic relies on political balances within the legislative institution.

During the appointment of council members, Imam Khomeini specified the qualities that should be present in the candidates. He declared, "You should investigate the past of individuals and their backgrounds, how they were before the Islamic Revolution and what they did during and after its victory. They should be supporters of the person who adheres to Islam, believes in its laws, obeys the content of the constitution, and believes in what is stated in Article 110, which pertains to the rule of the jurispudent, or they should be committed to it and loyal to it." After that, you must elect someone of this kind and guide people to vote for him and choose similar individuals. Discrimination should be avoided, and caution should be exercised against fragmentation.

Imam Khomeini later emphasized in a speech, "The entire people must be Islamic, and there should be one party, which is the Party of God (Hezbollah). Based on this position rejecting party pluralism, Imam Khomeini's supporters formed the Islamic Republican Party in 1979. On the other hand, the Party Law was issued in July 1981, which required parties to obtain a license from the Ministry of Interior. The law included ten loosely defined violations that could result in the withdrawal of the license and the dissolution of the party, including exploiting religious, ethnic, and cultural differences in Iranian society, harming Islamic principles, misleading the people, or undermining independence".

Since the enactment of the law, in practice, only two political organizations remained that fully supported the regime: the Tudeh Party (Communist) and the majority faction of the People's Mojahedin Organization (close to Tudeh). However, both parties were accused of treason and were banned in February 1983. Only the Republican Party remained, but the picture began to change with the dissolution of the Republican Party in 1987 by a decision of Imam Khomeini. With the amendment of the constitution in 1989, demands for political life increased.

In the 1990s, despite intense competition among political factions, numerous organizations and political movements emerged. However, we can examine the Iranian regime's experience in managing the power transition process as an example of the competitive and representative nature of political systems. The Iranian regime has achieved a successful experience in this regard by organizing the process of rotation in top leadership positions in a legal and peaceful manner. Regarding the position of leadership, Imam Khomeini took early steps to organize the succession to this role within the institutional framework. Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri was appointed as the successor to the Imam in 1982, before Montazeri resigned in 1988 for political reasons. Imam Khomeini passed away in the same year, leading to a serious political crisis. Despite the absence of a figure with the religious and political weight of the late Imam to assume the position, the regime succeeded in activating constitutional procedures and selecting Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the new leader of the regime in a short period of time. This demonstrated the regime's ability to transition systematically to a post-Khomeini phase while simultaneously maintaining the continuity of the position of the Supreme Leader.

### Chapter Three: The Iranian Regime's Handling of Minorities in the Context of Iranian National Security:

Firstly, the Developments in Confronting the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) and Other Nationalist Parties:

Minorities are a natural phenomenon in different countries around the world, and they also exist within Iran. However, the challenge lies in striking a balance between the demands of minorities and the unity and national security of the state. When the political system fails to appropriately address the issues of internal minorities or when the state faces regional external interventions, it weakens the political regime and undermines its strength.

The political power is influenced by its interaction with the land and the components of society. When there is harmony and integration between the authority and the people, the political system is able to create a state of cohesion and balance within society. The political system can effectively penetrate and control the economic and social structures of the state, transcend political and social divisions, and address security tensions. This, in turn, enables the political system to be creative and adaptable in facing internal and external changes.

Countries differ in their composition and organization, and these differences affect their ability to deal with emerging challenges, whether they are internal or external.

The Iranian people's revolution that led to the fall of the Shah's regime in 1979 witnessed active participation from non-Persian ethnic groups. They had expectations of obtaining their rights under the new system that called for Islamic values based on justice, equality, and the rights of peoples regardless of their racial or ethnic background. However, the emerging Islamic Republic dealt with them in the opposite manner, launching a widespread suppression campaign against the Arabs in Ahvaz, the Turkmen in Turkmen Sahra, and the Kurds in western Iran. Their demands for self-governance and equal rights were met with mass executions, protest repression, and invasions of Kurdish regions.

In recent years, ongoing protests in the Azerbaijan region of northwestern Iran have shed light on the issue of ethnic minorities in Iran and denounced the insults directed at the Turkish nationalist television. A notable example was the Arab uprising in April 2005 against the "Ahvaz Document" aimed at altering the demographics of Arab-populated regions. The demands of these ethnic groups, which constitute more than half of the country's population, are increasing, and they warn of the potential consequences of not granting them their basic rights, including the potential disintegration of the country.

The Islamic Republic system continues to follow the path of the Shah Reza Pahlavi and his son, adding the condition of Shia identity to the Persian state identity. Consequently, the ruling elite, which adopts a revolutionary ideological or religious nationalist approach, maintains control over power in Iran and deprives religious minorities and non-Persian ethnic groups of their basic rights. They persist in forcibly assimilating them and eroding their identities.

From the beginning, the figures of the Iranian revolution and its leader Ayatollah Khomeini sought to gain the support of non-Persian ethnic groups by raising the slogan of "Iran, a multi-ethnic state." However, Khomeini consistently warned against separatist tendencies among Iranian minorities in particular, and other minorities in Islamic countries in general, fearing that they would weaken the unity of Islamic forces, in his view. The conservative faction has long advocated the slogan of "Islamic unity" in response to the demands of Iranian minorities for their political, social, and cultural rights. Nevertheless, this has not prevented their leaders from addressing the role of minorities in Iranian society in their political speeches. Former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani, for instance, described Iranian minorities as a factor that enhances the position of the Iranian state.

The central state views nationalist demands from a narrow security perspective, often proposing repressive solutions to suppress the movements of these peoples. Lawyer Hussein Raissi points out that the atmosphere influenced by the security outlook, coupled with severe repression that targets all activists of ethnic and religious minorities, has led to numerous difficulties and challenges in the daily lives of these minorities. He emphasizes that "unjustifiable discrimination against minorities, which is widely implemented in Iran with the support of the constitution and laws, has entrenched a culture of discrimination and violence against all ethnic groups in Iran".

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Throughout the time, conservative factions raised the slogan of "Islamic unity" as a response to the demands of Iranian minorities for their political, social, and cultural rights. However, this has not prevented leaders of this faction from addressing the role of minorities in Iranian society in their political speeches. Former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani previously described Iranian minorities as a factor that enhances the position of the Iranian state.

It can be said that minority issues often receive attention in political discourse ahead of electoral events. In the programs of presidential candidates, these issues are given broad attention and are presented as promises that reflect a theoretical response to the demands of those minorities and improving their conditions. This has been clearly observed during the campaigns of current Iranian Presidents Hassan Rouhani and former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

For example, the program of former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad included several points related to the situation of minorities, where he announced a development plan for border provinces. He also maintained the position of presidential advisor to the Sunni community in Iran by issuing a decree on January 3, 2006, to continue the tenure of Sunni scholar Mohammad Es'haq Madani as the advisor to the President for Sunni Muslim affairs.

During the presidential race, President Hassan Rouhani continued to make promises to Iran's minorities, especially during his visits to border provinces. For example, during a campaign rally in Bandar Abbas, Rouhani pointed to his desire to develop the city and improve the port. Former candidate Ebrahim Raisi, during a campaign rally in the city of Birjand in South Khorasan province, emphasized the unity of the Iranian society, stating: "The divisions of Sunnis, Shiites, and different nationalities in Iran are not real. The real criterion for us is the enemies of the Islamic system." In another context, it is worth noting that President Hassan Rouhani appointed for the first time a Sunni Kurdish ambassador, Ambassador Saleh Adibi, to represent Iran in Vietnam and Cambodia, according to the Review.

Despite implementing some initiatives related to minority issues in the past, Rouhani was unable to fulfill all of his electoral promises due to challenges and pressures from conservative factions.

The Iranian government pursues a policy of continuity that relies on implementing measures to marginalize and weaken other elements, particularly in light of its awareness that the movements of non-Persian ethnic groups pose a real threat that can negatively impact the internal and external stability of the regime. The government faces ongoing challenges from non-Persian ethnic groups, as manifested in a series of protests witnessed in several cities with a Kurdish majority. It started with protests following the suicide of a



Kurdish girl on May 9, 2015, which implicated a prominent security official in an attempted assault on her. These protests ultimately led to the expansion of protests to another province.

The ongoing confrontation with protests condemning marginalization faced by minorities in Iran requires the use of significant force and deterrence by the regime, in addition to relying on other means alongside security solutions and excessive violence. The awareness of the Iranian public towards the demands of minorities is a source of challenge, as there is often a lack of understanding by the majority regarding nationalist movements, viewing them as factional demands. This belief is politically and religiously propagated by the Iranian regime through mosques, Friday sermons, and influential social entities in Iranian society that greatly influence the formation of awareness among specific segments of the Iranian society.

Furthermore, the regime often resorts to accusing protesters of treason and foreign affiliation, specifically accusing the United States and Britain of providing financial support to minorities and assisting them in forming parties and armed movements aimed at destabilizing the country, in addition to supporting the Iranian opposition abroad. This is part of a strategy aimed at creating an internal enemy that the regime and its supporting front can exploit. This was evident during the recent protests that took place in Iranian cities at the end of 2017 when the regime described these protests as a result of Western conspiracy and successfully regained control of the streets through excessive violence practiced by the security apparatus. This ultimately led to a decline in the public's response to calls for protest.

In addition, the researcher argues that security control is further reinforced by leveraging security institutions loyal to the regime, which work to maintain its stability, particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). This is based on the Iranian regime's recognition of the dangers posed by ethnic nationalist concentration on Iran's borders.

The Iranian regime adopts a policy of repression and crackdown on dissenters, utilizing the centralized religious authority as a tool to suppress opposing voices. The Iranian regime is considered an oppressive system, seeking to silence dissenting voices and relying on the centralized religious authority as a source of legitimacy that works to deepen and solidify its influence. This is achieved by resorting to religion and claiming to preserve it. This includes the excessive use of violence and repression, often justified through religious justifications.

In addition, the Iranian regime adopts a strategy of cultural security to counter any attempts to open up to the outside world. Part of this strategy involves adhering to the traditional security doctrine that emerged after the success of the Islamic Revolution and emphasizing its importance. The Iranian regime establishes its own model of cultural security, focusing on promoting hatred towards the West and portraying the external enemy as a means to strengthen the regime internally and incite support around it. The regime imposes strict control over the media and blocks social media platforms with the aim of reducing the chances of protests spreading and preventing communication between advocates for change and their supporters.

The researchers notes that minorities in Iran have a diverse geographic distribution, with ethnic minorities primarily located in the border provinces, while the centralized power remains concentrated in the state's center. These ethnic extensions beyond the state borders are influential factors in the stability of border regions, especially in provinces with challenging geographical terrain, such as Sistan and Baluchestan, which are geographically adjacent to Afghanistan and Pakistan. In these areas, there are active armed groups that oppose the state, further increasing security tensions.

Moreover, these external extensions also contribute to an increased desire to seek external support or transfer anti-regime activities beyond the national borders of Iran. This applies



to the Arab minority in Ahvaz, which has been active in several neighboring countries for years. Additionally, the Kurdish extension of Kurdish minorities in Iran fuels the aspirations of Iranian Kurds to attain similar opportunities enjoyed by Kurds in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

Considering these geographical and political aspects, it becomes evident that the threat posed by minorities to the Iranian regime should be studied and understood through the complex interactions between ethnic, religious, geographical, and political factors. These tensions and challenges form an integral part of the political and security reality in Iran.

Secondly, the formation of opposition parties by minorities:

Opposition movements and liberation organizations have been formed to express the demands of ethnic and religious minorities. Some ethnic and religious minorities have organized these movements to articulate their demands and declare their involvement in international issues when necessary, leading to the formation of pressure groups. Most of these movements operate outside Iran and seek international support for their issues that oppose the Iranian regime.

For example, the Azerbaijani minority has formed the Azerbaijani National Liberation Movement, which calls for joining Azerbaijan and achieving independence for the western regions of Iran. This movement enjoys significant popularity among Azerbaijanis due to its clear stance against the deliberate mistreatment and continuous derogatory portrayal they face in Iranian media. Additionally, the "National Awakening Movement" has also been formed, which maintains strong external relations and operates in the Azerbaijan province.

In the context of criticizing and opposing the regime, the Kurdish minority is considered the most active, seeking the secession of the Kurdistan region within Iran in a similar manner to the Kurdistan region in Iraq. Several opposition parties have been formed within this framework, such as the Iranian Kurdish Democratic Party, which aims to achieve self-governance for the Kurdistan region. This party, operating abroad and involving other ethnic groups such as Arabs, Turks, Baloch, and Turkmen, established the Iranian Peoples' Federal Congress. Additionally, in 2004, the Kurdish nationalist movement formed the Free Life Party of Kurdistan, which employs armed resistance as a method to confront the Iranian regime, including the formation of various military units, including the East Kurdistan Protection Unit. These military units target Iranian security forces.

The researcher observes an active presence of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) within the borders of the Kurdistan region, and sometimes beyond. It should be noted that some members of the Iranian Kurdish party participate in the formation of the Peshmerga forces in Iraqi Kurdistan. Regarding the Arab minority, they have worked on forming several opposition movements and parties in the Ahvaz region and outside Iran, particularly in European countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden, and France. Some of these movements have enhanced their activities in Arab countries over the past decade through regular visits to gather support for the separation of the Ahvaz region from Iran. Recently, Ahvazi movements have witnessed significant Arab support, particularly during their recent meeting in Kuwait, where several Arab politicians participated.

The researcher also views the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz, the Ahvaz Organization, the Arabistan Liberation Front, and the Arab Struggle Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz as prominent Arab Ahvazi movements and parties. It should be noted that some of these Ahvazi fronts and parties have military wings that target security forces and Revolutionary Guard leaders. These armed wings typically operate during the anniversary of the Ahvaz uprising against the Iranian regime.

It is worth noting that the Arab Struggle Front for the Liberation of Ahvaz encompasses several significant organizations and political parties. Some of these organizations and

parties include the Political Organization of the Ahvazi Arab People, the Arab Popular Movement for the Liberation of Ahvaz, the Ahvazi Arab Vanguard Party, and the Ahvaz Arab Fedayeen Movement. These armed Sunni movements are notable as the sole representatives of religious minorities in Iran, as their nature differs from other minority movements and parties due to their primary reliance on military activities against the Iranian regime. These movements are considered the most violent towards the regime and the most active in carrying out armed operations against security forces and their interests.

The Soldiers of God organization holds a strategic role and is the most significant among Sunni movements that target the Iranian regime. This organization belongs to the Sunni Baloch and calls for the secession of the Balochistan region. The organization follows a specific tactic of targeting and detonating numerous military buses affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, alongside the forces of the Army of Justice. Additionally, the Ansar al-Furqan group and the Ansar Iran Movement are active in the Sistan and Baluchestan region, playing active roles in the area. These movements benefit from the geographical location of the marginalized Sistan and Baluchestan region, which is situated on the border.

Protests continue in Iran despite heightened security control over the street movement and the success of security forces in suppressing both factional and general protests. The protests that took place in December 2017 in Iranian cities demonstrated opposition to poor living conditions, economic deterioration, and high unemployment rates. With these ongoing protests stemming from various reasons, they drain the regime's power, subjecting it to negative criticism in the international community, shaping local public opinion to support more protests rather than reject them, and thwarting the regime's attempts to disrupt supporters of the protest movement.

Mutual empathy among different Iranian minorities becomes evident during the outbreak of factional protests by one minority group. For example, Azerbaijani Turks expressed their support for a protest campaign in Ahvaz to condemn the mistreatment of Arabs on Iranian state television following the 2015 Mina stampede incident. Additionally, the Balochistan region witnessed solidarity protests with the Kurds after the killing of a Kurdish girl in the city of Mahabad during the same year.

## **Conclusion:**

This study examined the evolution of the role of the Iranian Islamic political system in the conflict between conservative and reformist parties, as well as ethnic minorities. Clear findings and important recommendations can be derived from this study.

### **Findings:**

- The Iranian Islamic political system has undergone significant transformations over time, with competition between conservative and reformist parties and the influence of ethnic minorities in the political arena.
- Conservative parties seek to maintain the existing political system and uphold traditional Islamic values and religious institutions.
- Reformist parties aim for political and social change, challenging the restrictions imposed by the ruling regime.
- Ethnic minorities strive to preserve their cultural, linguistic, and political rights within the Iranian system.

Recommendations:

- Enhance dialogue and understanding between conservative and reformist parties and ethnic minorities to alleviate political tensions and achieve stability.
- Strengthen democracy and provide greater space for political freedoms and human rights in Iran.
- Encourage political participation and empower ethnic minorities to have effective involvement in decision-making processes.
- Foster cultural dialogue and cooperation among different ethnic minorities to preserve cultural diversity and peaceful coexistence in Iran.

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