

Why the Movement Failed

THE GREEN MOVEMENT shook the foundation of the Islamic Republic like no other event in the thirty years since the revolution. The movement unfolded so rapidly that it quickly resembled the last phase of the 1979 revolution, mobilizing a substantial segment of Iran's urban population. Despite repression, the movement succeeded in sustaining protests for twenty months. More importantly, the conflicts and confrontations radicalized a considerable portion of the public, which demanded fundamental changes in the social and political system once the supreme leader declared his support for President Ahmadinejad and dismissed allegations of election fraud. The protesters' slogans revealed that a substantial portion of the public believed that they had no legal recourse and could no longer resolve their conflicts within the framework of the Islamic Republic.

Yet, despite the Green Movement's calls for fundamental change, none of the leading reformists—including Mousavi, Karroubi, and others—called for the overthrow of the Islamic regime.¹ The postelection conflicts also radicalized some reformers who were repressed by the state. The movement's popularity revealed underlying weaknesses in the Islamic regime. During the conflicts, the rulers of the Islamic Republic realized for the first time that they had lost the support of a substantial portion of Iran's population. The regime was unable to mount a single protest in its favor for more than six and a half months.

To maintain power, the Islamic regime resorted to large-scale repression, which further antagonized the people and narrowed its popular support. More importantly, as the regime attempted to repress the protesters after the election, it lost the support of portions of the Revolutionary Guard, a vital constituency in the Islamic polity. Nevertheless, state repression ultimately succeeded in defeating the challengers because the movement failed to forge a broad, nationwide coalition capable of disrupting the social, economic, and political processes to bring about democratic transformation.

Shaking the Foundation

President Ahmadinejad during his first term pursued policies that adversely affected major segments of the population and generated intense conflict. He advocated social justice and policies to gain the support of the poor, but many of his policies were repressive and adversely affected portions of the population. Although his economic policies served some segments, the country's economy suffered due to rising corruption, stagflation, and international sanctions. As a result, broad segments of the population mobilized to vote in the 2009 presidential elections. Conservative forces became alarmed by the rising mobilization of the public in the final days of the campaign. They did not favor the return of reformists to power and viewed them, including former prime minister Mousavi, as counterrevolutionaries. Conservatives argued that reformists did not share the values of the Islamic Revolution and would undermine the Islamic nature of the system if they were allowed to gain power. The most active forces in the effort to block reformists were the president's office and the Revolutionary Guard.

The office of the president heavily pressured IRNA, the Islamic Republic News Agency, to declare Ahmadinejad as the winner of the election. The office released a bulletin in the waning hours of election day announcing that Ahmadinejad had received 90 percent of the vote in small towns and rural areas, despite the fact that polls were still open. The president's office issued another bulletin an hour later announcing that Ahmadinejad had won the election with more than 60 percent of the votes. The office threatened Roohallah Jomeie, deputy head of IRNA, who refused to broadcast the bulletin. Jomeie left his office around 10 p.m. in protest, arguing that such an announcement should come either from the Interior Ministry or the Guardian Council. Within minutes, IRNA broadcast the official announcement that Ahmadinejad was declared the winner with more than 60 percent of the votes, although voting continued for about two more hours.^{2, 3}

The Revolutionary Guard also became actively involved in the election process and played an important role in its outcome. An audio recording of General Moshfegh, deputy director of intelligence for the Sarallah military base, revealed that the Guard had planned to intervene in the election process long before the opposition declared their candidates. The recording disclosed how the Guard eavesdropped on the internal discussions of the opposition campaigns and interfered with the work of election monitors, thereby enabling the regime to declare Ahmadinejad the victor. Moshfegh's revelations prompted seven opposition leaders to file a lawsuit against the commanders of the Revolutionary Guard.⁴

General Mohammad Ali Jaafari, commander of the Revolutionary Guard, revealed in a videotaped, closed meeting a number of important points about the Guard's intervention to alter the election's outcome.⁵ Addressing the senior commanders of the Guard and Ali Saeedi, the supreme leader's representative in the Revolutionary Guard, Jaafari articulated the Guard's specific concerns. He noted that the sensitivity of the presidential election was clear to all. He continued that during the election, the revolutionaries' concern and red line were that those who opposed the revolution and its values would return to power. Those forces "found an opportunity and penetrated governance" when Khatami was elected in 1997. According to Jaafari, the reason reformists insisted that the Guard not interfere during and after the election was to enable the reformists to carry out their plot without interference from the Guard or the Basij. He asserted, "This slope was worrisome, and everyone analyzed that if the trend continued, the election would go to a second round; and in the second round, the outcome would be unpredictable." Jaafari reminded the audience that, shortly after the election, the supreme leader made a speech demanding an end to all protests, including peaceful ones. Finally, Jaafari identified two critical decisions by the security forces and the Guard that disrupted the opposition: to carry out rapid, widespread arrests of the activists, analysts, and reform leaders, and to disrupt the phones, mobile networks, and Internet communication used by reformists to mobilize and protest.⁶

The public postelection pronouncements of the rulers of the Islamic Republic demonstrated how seriously they regarded the threat of the Green Movement and its alarming character. Months after the election, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei admitted that "the sedition was a great challenge."⁷ He criticized the opposition for damaging the system and bringing it to the "edge of the cliff."⁸ In response to calls that Mousavi, Karroubi, and Rahnavard be released from house arrest, Khamenei noted that their crime was great and that if the imam had been alive, he would

have treated them more severely. He said that, had they been put on trial, their punishment would have been harsher. "We have treated them with kindness," Khamenei said.⁹

Similarly, in a public speech, General Jaafari declared that during the sedition, "the Islamic system went nearly to the border of overthrow." He added that in the recent events, all the domestic reformists and their external supporters had capitalized to achieve victory and regain power. It was by the people's astuteness and the leadership of the supreme leader, he said, that this huge conspiracy was neutralized.¹⁰ Ayatollah Jannati, head of the Guardian Council, commented that the country would have been destroyed during the 2009 sedition had it not been for the supreme leader's perceptiveness and tact. The enemy had been confident that the revolution and the Islamic Republic would be terminated, but God didn't want that.¹¹

Officials of the Islamic Republic acknowledged divisions in the armed forces and difficulties of repressing the opposition and ending the protests. General Ataollah Salehi noted that portraits of the sedition's leaders were hanging in garrisons.¹² General Jaafari admitted publicly that "the post-election protests were more dangerous for the revolution and Islam than the eight-year war against Iraq."¹³ He added that during the sedition, the credibility of the Islamic system had been undermined and that it would take years to eradicate its negative impact.¹⁴ Mohammad Jaafar Asadi, a senior officer in the Revolutionary Guard, commented that defending against the 2009 protests was considerably more difficult than defending against Iraqi aggression during the eight-year war.¹⁵

The Islamic Republic's leaders were greatly alarmed by the decline of support for the regime within their most important constituency—namely, the Revolutionary Guard—in the aftermath of the 2009 election and conflicts. During these conflicts, the Revolutionary Guard's rank and file was not unified, and many members were unwilling to repress the protesters. Possibly, some Guard members dissented against their leaders because of the Guard's alleged interference in the outcome of the election, as General Jaafari indicated in his video. Clerics representing the supreme leader in the Revolutionary Guard and a Guard commander confirmed that the regime's support base during the conflicts had narrowed dramatically. Even with the challengers' lack of a broad nationwide coalition, the regime had difficulty repressing their protests for several months. Seyyed Amrollah Mohammadi, a cleric and the supreme leader's representative in the Revolutionary Guard, stated in an interview published by the Islamic Republic's official news agency that during the postelection conflicts, "many of our own waived; the Revolutionary Guard was the only entity that fully supported the supreme leader to the end."¹⁶ According to

Mohammad Hajizadeh, many of their forces "deviated and lost their way because they had not gained perfect insight."¹⁷ Ali Saeedi, Khamenei's representative in the Revolutionary Guard, complained at a national gathering of Guard commanders that even some commanders had remained silent during the conflicts.¹⁸ "Some of our commanders had sealed their mouths," Saeedi noted.¹⁹

General Jaafari went further and acknowledged that the schism and opposition within the Revolutionary Guard forced the regime to rely on the Basij, the Revolutionary Guard's paramilitary division. He noted that the "presence of the Basij and their support for the supreme leader put an end to the conspiracies. Had the Basij not existed, we don't know what might have happened, and it is possible that the seditionists might have achieved their goals."²⁰ Ali Fazli, another Revolutionary Guard commander, revealed that "due to inadequate forces to repress protesters in Tehran, all the Basijis from the province of Tehran and even some from other provinces had to be recruited to put down the rebellion."²¹

Despite some inconsistencies, these statements illustrate the regime's situation in repressing the protesters during the postelection conflicts. Segments of the Revolutionary Guard refused to carry out the repressive policies, thereby undermining the regime's most important base of support. According to a dissident general in the Revolutionary Guard, the regime replaced several dozen Guard generals and senior Basij personnel for refusing to use violence against protesters.²² An Iranian dissident source reported that ten commanders of the Revolutionary Guard from the Iran-Iraq war died in less than a year.²³ Four commanders died on four consecutive days. Another commander, Ahmad Sodagar, who died a few weeks after the four, requested in his will that his body be autopsied and that his coffin be inscribed with the words "fate of the person who lived honestly."²⁴

The rulers of the Islamic Republic had expected to have the backing of large segments of the population. They were surprised to see that so many people remained silent during the protests and confrontations. Saeedi, the supreme leader's representative in the Revolutionary Guard, noted in a public gathering that those who chose silence and watched the events made a great mistake. He emphasized that past mistakes should not be allowed to be repeated. "Two hundred years from now we will be history, and we will be judged; therefore, the divine trust that was gifted to Islam and the revolution must be protected and maintained."²⁵

The rapid mobilization, scale of protests, and swift radicalization of protesters so eroded the regime's social base of support that it was unable to mount a single progovernment demonstration, despite having done so repeatedly over the previous thirty years. The regime finally assembled

rallies to support the supreme leader in a few major cities on December 30, 2009, more than six and a half months after the postelection protests began. Organizers provided free buses, metro rides, and food for the attendees of a "spontaneous" rally.²⁶ The government gave civil servants the day off to attend the rallies²⁷ and bused school children to the event.²⁸ Some factories closed for workers to attend the rallies.²⁹ Some companies also provided buses to transport employees to the rallies.³⁰ Authorities printed placards and flags for the event.³¹ Organizers in Tehran held the demonstration in Revolution Square, rather than the larger Freedom Square, site of the largest events such as the anniversary of the revolution.³²

In contrast, the opposition had no difficulty organizing huge protests in major cities, particularly at the beginning of the conflicts before repression intensified. A comparative analysis of the size of the protests in 1979 and 2009 illustrates the capacity of the opposition to mobilize large numbers of people. The opposition took approximately one year to assemble demonstrations as large as one million people in Tehran during the anti-shah protests. The Islamic regime's opponents needed just three days to mobilize more than three million people in Tehran on June 15, 2009. Furthermore, unlike the early protests of 1979, which did not have a revolutionary character, the 2009 protests quickly surged beyond the election outcome, factional disputes, and calls for reform to slogans and demands that attacked the very existence of the Islamic state. The protests following the 2009 election and demands for fundamental change had the potential to ignite a revolutionary situation. They sounded an alarm for the rulers of the Islamic Republic.

Given the state's difficulties in mobilizing public support, dealing with the Green Movement, and repressing the opposition, some members of the polity expressed concerns about possible future threats. Ayatollah Haeri Shirazi, an assistant to the supreme leader and former Friday prayer leader of Shiraz, addressed an open letter to Mousavi and Karroubi, who remained under house arrest. "With your insistence," he said, "the sedition of the 2009 election will remain as fire under the ashes, and the system cannot remain indifferent toward it. Removal of the sedition is putting out the torch, but putting out the torch is different from putting out the candle. Your admission of error will put out the candle. The enemies insist on keeping the candle lit so that at an appropriate time they can relight the torch. Your insistence is the same as keeping the candle lit, and your admission of error is putting it out. Now, you are the only ones that can undertake this great action; thus, do not neglect its great reward."³³ Similarly, Justice Minister Mustafa Pour-Mohammadi was concerned about the future activities of the leaders of the movement and their political

endeavors. He stated that if Mousavi and Karroubi were to declare that "they are law abiding and would not disturb the peace of the country, they would be forgiven."³⁴

Causes of the Movement's Failure

Despite shaking the foundations of the Islamic Republic, the postelection protests eventually failed. Protesters could not sustain their movement once repression largely demobilized demonstrators and challengers. This outcome can be attributed to four main factors: insufficient leadership and lack of preparation, a disjunction between leadership and protesters, limited solidarity structures, and the failure to consolidate and form a broad, disruptive coalition.

First, the reform movement's leadership exhibited shortcomings from the beginning, notably in its initial tendency to follow events, not lead them. Mousavi failed to use his position during the early stages of the conflicts to direct protesters, devise new tactics, or expand the capacity of the collective actors to challenge the system. The leaders missed an early opportunity to command the largest following in Iran's political history. Mousavi initially attempted to prevent protesters from taking to the streets on June 15, on the grounds that the event did not have an official permit. He appeared at the rally only after they defied his exhortations. Reformist opposition leaders ceased to call for street demonstrations following several rounds of protests, out of fear of greater state repression. The leaders of the Green Movement stopped convening protests because they did not want to put the country through a shock and were concerned about the lives of Iranians, including the lives of security forces that were engaged in repressive activities, according to Ardeshir Amir Arjomand, Mousavi's advisor.³⁵ The leaders also ceased to call for protests, possibly concerned that demonstrators were becoming radicalized and threatened the reformists.

Tactically, the leaders of the movement were unprepared to counter state repression. Despite knowing the history of the Islamic Republic, the leaders failed to devise contingency plans to deal with disruptions in the Internet and their communications systems. They left their key activists unprotected against the first wave of arrests that began the day after the election.

Mousavi and Karroubi assumed greater leadership roles in the final stage of the conflicts and issued more critical statements, which led to their imprisonment. By then, however, security forces had gained the upper hand and arrested thousands of people, including many well-known activists who were given long-term sentences. Throughout hardship in custody,

Mousavi and Karroubi continued to insist that the election results were fraudulent. Both men refused officials' suggestions that they would be released if they repented, and chose instead to remain in confinement despite multiple health problems. Karroubi, a man in his seventies, endured solitary confinement for about three years with no access to sunshine or fresh air and underwent several surgeries. When placed under house arrest to continue his detention, he refused to repent because, according to his son, he did not believe in earthly gods to repent to.³⁶ Instead, Karroubi expressed his willingness to be tried before a jury composed of regime supporters, but he demanded mass media coverage.³⁷

A second factor contributing to the outcome was the disjuncture between the movement's leadership, which pursued a path of reform within the legal framework of the Islamic system, and popular protesters, who quickly embraced radical change and shouted slogans against the regime. Demonstrators even called for an Iranian, not an Islamic, republic. "Mousavi told Iranians they should not, however, be seeking to change the Islamic regime."³⁸ As protesters became increasingly radicalized, Mousavi urged his supporters to protest through legal channels only and remain faithful to the "sacred system of the Islamic Republic."³⁹ He blamed the repressive violence in the early stages of the conflicts on the radical slogans of some protesters.⁴⁰ He also had a message to those who sought the downfall of Iran's Islamic regime: "It is up to you," he wrote, "to distance yourself from them, and do not allow them to misuse the current situation."⁴¹ Other reformist leaders, too, discouraged demonstrators from voicing radical slogans or demanding fundamental change as conflicts intensified and protesters became radicalized. Some reformists even maintained that regime agent provocateurs had concocted radical slogans to provoke state repression. In the end, neither Mousavi nor Karroubi nor any other leading reformist called for the overthrow of the Islamic regime.

This disjuncture within the movement weakened the opposition and prevented it from consolidating. The leaders' attempts to rein in the secular and more radical forces had negative consequences for the opposition as a whole. The two camps never reconciled their positions and, as a result, failed to consolidate behind a unified program. As repression intensified, the number of protesters declined. Some secular and radical activists may have withdrawn from the protests because they were unwilling to pay a heavy cost for a movement reluctant to challenge the Islamic Republic's existing framework. Conversely, some reformist protesters may have backed away from the movement because they were discouraged by its rapid radicalization.

Third, the movement's solidarity structures were limited by the characteristics of its supporters, in part because the leaders of the movement failed to broaden the nature of the conflicts, address the economic shortcomings of the Islamic Republic, or mobilize the working classes. Little detailed data are available about the backgrounds and characteristics of the thousands of protesters imprisoned during the year following the election. The Iranian human rights organization, *bra-news.net*, provided some data on 2,582 individuals arrested during that period. Excluding prisoners of conscience, such as Baha'is, Christians, and Sunnis, who were not involved in the political protests, the data for the remaining 2,394 detainees revealed that the vast majority had no political affiliation.⁴² Of those whose political affiliation was known, 3.67 percent were members of the five legal political organizations that participated in the election (Mosharekat, Mousavi campaign, Karroubi campaign, Mojahedeen Enghelab-e Eslami, and Kargozaran). If all politically affiliated detainees are included, the percentage rises to 5.9 percent. Protesters' lack of strong solidarity structures and preexisting ties to reformist organizations help explain why many rapidly became radicalized and demanded fundamental change despite reformist leaders' reluctance to do so. Ironically, the regime viewed organized constituencies such as the reformist political organizations to be a more significant threat, and efforts to destroy them intensified. Detainees with strong ties to reformist organizations remained in custody, despite their more moderate ideological views. In contrast, many detainees who lacked ties to reformist organizations were eventually released by the regime, although their views were very radical, and some were rearrested later.

Finally, the movement succeeded in mobilizing some segments of Iranian society to act collectively, but failed to attract others. The government provided no statistics, but data provided by the Iranian human rights organization revealed some information about 112 people slain during the post-election conflicts.⁴³ There were many victims in a few weeks of protests, including a conspicuous number of young people. Of forty-four victims whose ages were given, 13.6 percent were below the age of 20; 56.8 percent were between 20 and 29; 20.5 percent were between 30 and 39; 6.8 percent were between 40 and 49; and 2.3 percent were over 50 years old.

Several large, important constituencies were well represented among the protesters. Students and women were among the most active participants in the struggles. Concentrated mainly in large cities, the country's student population had expanded by 2009 to more than 3.5 million, facilitating their mobilization and collective action. With access to the Internet and

social media at the universities, students played an important role in broadcasting opposition activities and innovating new repertoires such as writing slogans on bank notes and posting them on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. While some students belonged to the major, legal reformist political organizations, the vast majority of students and women had no preexisting ties. They mobilized in reaction to the disputed 2009 presidential election. Because they lacked preexisting ties, their political activities were not shaped by reformist organizations. Many students and women became confrontational during the postelection protests, quickly radicalized, and demanded fundamental changes in the Islamic Republic. Students' radicalization and confrontation placed them among the principal targets of repressive violence. They comprised 50 percent of those slain and 11.86 percent of those jailed during the protests.⁴⁴

Students were demobilized following the disputed elections. The universities, historically the conscience of the nation and citadels of freedom, were silenced. Student organizations were shut down, their publications were banned, and their social, cultural, and political activities were blocked. Many students arrested in the aftermath of the election were kept in prison, and countless others were "starred" or marked for disciplinary action, suspension, or dismissal.⁴⁵ As of November 2010, more than seventy students were still in prison and hundreds had been expelled from the universities.⁴⁶ Mohsen Rahamani, a university student, was sentenced to seven years for holding a picture of Mousavi in an election campaign event for Hassan Rouhani in 2013. He was charged with insulting the supreme leader and founder of the Islamic Republic.⁴⁷ Payman Morovati, a student activist, was shot to death in front of his house on December 18, 2015. Intelligence officers and security agents warned the family not to publicize the killing, according to Radio France Internationale Persian service.⁴⁸

Repressive measures further reduced university autonomy and reinforced decisions made by outside entities. After the 2009 disputed presidential elections, Ayatollah Khamenei expressed concerns about teaching Western social sciences that contradicted the Quran and religious principles. Immediately, President Ahmadinejad notified all universities that a new council under the direction of the Cultural Revolution Council would begin purging academic institutions of materialist and Western ideologies. In the autumn of 2009, the Supreme Council formed a new authority headed by Haddad Adel to carry out the task.⁴⁹

State repression severely affected the lives of students in academic institutions. Repressive forces intervened extensively in academic institutions and, for a while, silenced student dissent. At the conclusion of Ahmadinejad's term as president, students lamented the "ruination" of the universities

during his eight-year presidency.⁵⁰ Reza Faraji Dana, President Rouhani's minister of science who defended students' rights to protest, acknowledged that sometimes students in the Tehran University dormitory were too terrified to complain about even simple matters related to student affairs.⁵¹

Despite relentless repression and lengthy jail sentences, student political activities and protests remained a serious threat to the Islamic regime. The supreme leader met with hundreds of faculty members five years after the disputed election and noted that the field of humanities should be based on spiritual and Islamic worldviews. He also emphasized that the universities and higher education must be depoliticized and should not become locations for the activities of political clubs.⁵² He publicly exhorted the minister of science to prevent disturbances of the "calm environment of the universities."⁵³

Women, many of whom were also students, were more actively involved in the postelection protests than they had been in the 1979 revolution. They actively chanted radical slogans and hurled rocks at security forces on some occasions,⁵⁴ and they often led the chants of radical slogans such as "Death to the Dictator," reported Roger Cohen from Tehran.⁵⁵ Young women were seen hurling stones and confronting police and security forces for the first time in Iranian history.⁵⁶ Women sometimes berated as "cowards" the male demonstrators who fled Basiji attacks.⁵⁷ During Quds protests in September 2009, a young female student commented, "The cheating, the raping, the killing and the torture drive you mad. I've come to express my hatred for Ahmadinejad and his protector, that so-called Great Leader of the Revolution."⁵⁸ An older woman declared, "They have raped, murdered and tortured our youth after stealing the election. May God's wrath come down on them."⁵⁹

Women's active participation in the conflicts, confrontations, and radicalization made them among the leading victims of state repression. Women comprised 11.6 percent of those killed during the protests following the election and nearly 13 percent of those imprisoned. Of those women who were in jail, 25 percent had husbands who were also incarcerated for political reasons. Another 41 percent of imprisoned women had other family members who were also imprisoned for political reasons.⁶⁰ Female victims of repression such as Neda became the face of the movement and vivid symbols of women's victimization and struggles.

Conservative forces reacted strongly against women's radicalization and mobilization during the antigovernment protests. The supreme leader declared that gender equality was a Western concept and unacceptable in Islam. He noted that anyone who considered the problem of women separate from the problem of family would be engaging in disorder.⁶¹ Ayatollah

Khamenei reversed Iran's family planning policy and called for doubling the country's population to 150 million.⁶² "Given the importance of population size in sovereign might and economic progress . . . firm, quick and efficient steps must be taken to offset the steep fall in birthrate of recent years," he wrote on his website.⁶³ Authorities imposed new restrictions upon women. Iranian women, who had outnumbered and outperformed men for more than a decade, faced adverse decisions at universities.⁶⁴ In 2012, thirty-six universities and colleges stopped admitting women in seventy-seven fields⁶⁵ and reduced female admission in higher education by 11,500 between 2012 and 2014.⁶⁶ Authorities closed down women's studies departments in some major universities, including Tehran University.⁶⁷ Conservative forces spoke increasingly of the need to segregate genders in public spaces.⁶⁸ The majority of cities barred women from playing music in concerts following the 2009 election.⁶⁹

Other collectivities concentrated in large cities were also active in the protests. Highly educated professionals, such as journalists, university professors, lawyers, and doctors were important groups that participated in the postelection protests. Broad segments of Iran's intellectuals began to defect following the 1979 revolution. Journalists, dissident intellectuals, academics, lawyers, and doctors were among the first to support struggles for democracy. They published critical statements condemning government repression, joined student protesters, addressed campus rallies about the causes of the conflicts, and participated in the 2009 protests. A few professors were arrested and imprisoned, and many were dismissed or forced to retire.

Like students and women, many highly educated professionals lacked preexisting ties to reformist political organizations. Only some of the professionals belonged to these organizations. Like students and women, professionals were located primarily in major Iranian cities. Professionals represented almost 22 percent of those slain during the protests. Altogether, 138 professionals were arrested during the protests following the 2009 election. They comprised nearly 70 percent of all detainees who were employed and whose occupation was included in the data sample made available by the human rights activists in *hira-news.net*.

In contrast, some important collectivities were largely absent from the demonstrations and protests. Aside from the highest religious leaders, or sources of emulation, many of whom criticized the government and the election results (discussed in Chapter 9), the vast majority of Shiite clergy did not support the opposition or join the protests. Only seven members of the clerical community were arrested during the twelve months of post-election protests. Most clerics and Friday Prayer leaders did not participate

in the protests or support the people. Historically, the clergy had possessed independent financial resources from religious taxes. As a result, their politics at times contradicted state policies. After the revolution, mosques lost their autonomy, came under strict state control, and were no longer available to mobilize or launch collective action. Empowered by the Islamic constitution, the vast majority of the Shiite clergy became beneficiaries of the state, and their politics underwent a shift. In the Islamic Republic, clergy gained new economic resources from the state and also depended on the state for their positions and livelihood. Many also ended up working for the state bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, the majority of clergy pursued politics that largely supported the state.

Other major social classes, including bazaar merchants, shopkeepers, and industrial workers, were likewise largely absent as collectivities in the postelection protests, although individuals joined the demonstrations in large cities. Government repression of liberal bazaar organizations after the revolution significantly transformed bazaar politics, weakening the capacity of bazaars for collective action. The liberal Society of Merchants, Guilds, and Artisans of the Tehran Bazaar, which had fought for democracy for decades and played an important role during the revolutionary struggles, was banned and severely repressed by the Islamic government. The Islamic regime also imprisoned, murdered, and executed some well-known bazaar activists, including Ali Asghar Zehtabchi, Ahmad Javaherian, and Karim Dastmalchi, who had supported the liberal-nationalists and dissident organizations. Mahmoud Manian, a bazaar activist and well-known leader of the liberal National Front, was killed in 1994 in a suspicious car accident after earlier attempts on his life had failed.

With the repression of liberal merchants, the Islamic state facilitated the rise of a conservative organization within the bazaar. Its leading members were a small group of pro-Khomeini bazaaris who received permits and resources to operate their organization and promote their cause. Although these bazaaris had modest resources prior to the revolution, they quickly prospered once the Islamic Republic was established. They were organized in the Coalition of Islamic Societies, the Tehran bazaar's only active business organization. As cronies of the Islamic regime, they used their state connections to control important sectors of Iran's economy and amass vast fortunes.

The coalition adopted antidemocratic positions during major political conflicts. It swiftly condemned student protests in July 1999 and accused most of the demonstrators' slogans of attacking the "sanctities" of the system and the foundation of the Islamic Revolution. "The slogans have all been illegal, making the counterrevolution and oppressive America

happy.” The same statement criticized the interior minister for failing to take a firm stand against the protesters or provide security for the public.⁷⁰ The coalition likewise followed the ruling clergy’s definition of the protests as sedition. The leader of the organization, Hassan Habibi, repeatedly criticized the protests that erupted following the 2009 presidential election. In an interview, he remarked that the sedition used the electoral mechanism to overthrow Islamic order. “As long as we insist on preserving the values of the Islamic Revolution, we must be prepared for the fact that conspiracies do not end,” he noted.⁷¹ The organization’s general secretary condemned reformist challenges to the state and opposed lifting the restrictions and the house arrest of Mousavi and Karroubi, arguing that the reformist leaders’ “sins could not be forgiven.”⁷²

Although bazaaris as a class did not join the 2009 protests, not all of them supported Ahmadinejad. Segments of the bazaaris in major cities had gone on strike in 2008 to protest Ahmadinejad’s tax policies. According to one report from Tehran, about 70 to 80 percent of the bazaaris sympathized with Mousavi after the 2009 elections.⁷³ In some cities, a number of bazaaris closed their shops during the protests, and some participated in the protests. A 69-year-old merchant told a reporter, “I came to show solidarity with the youth of my country. The regime is destroying Islam and Iran.”⁷⁴ In cities such as Mahabad and Orumieh many shopkeepers were arrested because they shut down their stores during protests. Some self-employed entrepreneurs were arrested, and others were killed, comprising 10 percent of those slain during the protests.

The regime took preemptive measures to halt bazaar closings and prevent shopkeepers and bazaaris from becoming politicized and joining the protesters in a broader coalition. Before the end of 2009, the regime arrested several well-known bazaaris, including Javad Laary, Mohammad Banazadeh Amir-Khizi, and Mohsen Dokmechi. Dokmechi died while in prison.⁷⁵ In another preemptive action, progovernment militiamen and police officers stormed the Tehran bazaar, leaving a prominent merchant dead. They arrested a member of the textile merchant guild who had given a speech urging the continuation of the bazaar strike that had been organized against government tax policies. Although temperatures were normal, the government then declared two days of national holiday citing excessive heat, in an attempt to encourage the people to leave the capital and blunt opposition protests.⁷⁶ The repressive measures likely played an important role in preventing bazaaris from mobilizing and joining the political protests.

After the Green Movement had been demobilized, Tehran bazaaris shuttered their businesses again and took to the streets in 2012 to protest

government economic policies that depreciated Iran’s currency.⁷⁷ During their protests, bazaaris’ slogans resembled those of the Green Movement, such as “Mahmoud traitor, you ruined the country.”⁷⁸ Other slogans included “Death to the dictator,” “Ahmadi be warned, we are the people, not rabble,” “Death to the government that deceives the people,” and “Mahmoud, shame on you, leave politics.”⁷⁹ Bazaaris reopened their businesses only under pressure by security forces, according to a dissident report.⁸⁰

Industrial workers did not join the political struggles in 2009 nor initiate any strikes as they had done in the final stage of the 1979 revolution. Economic grievances were completely absent from the slogans during the protests. Green Movement failed to broaden the scope of the conflicts by including the grievances of the working classes.

Industrial workers were certainly adversely affected by the country’s economic decline, which became severe after the Green Movement was largely repressed and demobilized. State subsidies for fuel and basic foods, which had helped the less well-off segments of the population, were terminated at the end of 2010, negatively affecting the working class. Stagflation resulting from a combination of state policies and the intensification of Western sanctions appeared largely after the movement had been repressed.

More importantly, Iran’s industrial working class lacked the solidarity structures to act as a class and join the Green Movement following the 2009 elections. Between 70 percent and 90 percent of workers worked on a temporary contractual basis and had no job security. These temporary workers received no protection from labor laws and could not develop strong, nationwide solidarity structures to mobilize for collective action.

Repression was another factor precluding industrial workers from participating in political protests. Iran’s working class has mobilized primarily when political repression was low. Industrial workers joined the revolutionary struggles in the fall of 1978 when political repression declined. Intensified state repression beginning in 2005 under Ahmadinejad adversely impacted workers’ capacity to mobilize for collective action. The secretary of the Isfahan Labor House, Asghar Breshan, complained to reporters that labor organizations had never been so intensely repressed as during Ahmadinejad’s presidency. Breshan also noted that Ahmadinejad’s government intended to extirpate all labor organizations.⁸¹ He complained bitterly about intense government repression, which had reached a peak in postrevolutionary Iran during Ahmadinejad’s rule.⁸² Mansoor Osanloo, a prominent labor leader, remarked that even contemplating organizing union meetings or engaging in strikes could have “devastating consequences.”⁸³

Hence, Iranian workers did not join the protests collectively because, unlike the situation in 1978, state repression did not decline in 2009. Political repression against workers increased both prior to and after the 2009 presidential election. In the weeks prior to the 2009 election, the Islamic government arrested 150 labor leaders and activists during Tehran's May Day celebration. Security forces even arrested Mehdi Farahi Shandeez, cousin of Ahmadinejad's wife and a supporter of worker rights and the labor movement. He was kept in solitary confinement for months.⁸⁴

To be sure, individual workers in major cities joined the 2009 protests, and some were killed.⁸⁵ Workers slain during the protests accounted for more than 18 percent of the deaths for which occupations were known. Workers continued to be a target of state repression after the election, and dozens were arrested.⁸⁶ Reza Shahabi, the treasurer of the Syndicate of Workers of the Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company, was arrested in June 2010 and sentenced to six years. Behnam Ebrahimzadeh of the Committee to Pursue the Establishment of Workers' Organizations and a children's rights advocate, was arrested in the same month and sentenced to twenty years in prison (later reduced to five years) on what Amnesty International called spurious charges.⁸⁷ Shahrokh Zamani, a labor leader in Tabriz, was arrested for "participating in the organization of an unlawful group opposing the state . . . with the aim of disrupting national security by way of workers' strikes and armed rebellion," "assembly and collusion to further illegal activities," and "propaganda against the regime."⁸⁸ Zamani died in custody after being denied medical care.⁸⁹ Two other workers, Sattar Beheshti and Afshin Osanloo, died in prison in 2012 and 2013, respectively, discussed in Chapters 5 and 7.

The state's decision to continue to repress industrial workers following the presidential election suggests that a significant number were hostile to the regime. The dissolution of independent labor unions, restrictions on even Islamic labor associations, and the continuing detention of labor leaders further suggest that the regime was aware of the threat posed to the state by these groups and lacked confidence in its support base among the industrial workforce.

The differential impact of two major social classes on the revolution and the postelection conflict of 2009 offers a clear, dramatic contrast. Unlike their actions in 1979, bazaaris and workers failed to protest as collectivities to disrupt the economy through bazaar shutdowns or industrial strikes. They took no steps to disrupt the production or distribution of goods and services or, most critically, halt oil exports, the lifeblood of the regime. Had such disruptive actions occurred in combination with the political crisis, they would have signaled instability and, possibly, a realignment of

the contending forces. Instead, the absence of such actions contributed to the defeat of the protesters and challengers.

The 2009 protests resembled the uprising of 1963, when protests erupted in several major cities in reaction against the arrest of Ayatollah Khomeini. Both conflicts failed to disrupt the economy and society or bring about political change. The 2009 protests differed from those of 1963 because millions of Iranians did turn out to engage in collective action in major cities across the country. Unlike the 1963 protests, which lasted only three days, the 2009 conflicts continued for twenty months and resembled in intensity the end stage of the 1979 revolution. But the 2009 protests lacked the breadth of the revolutionary protests, which rocked more than 170 cities during the final phase.⁹⁰ The 2009 protests were confined mainly to large cities. Tehran alone accounted for approximately 80 percent of all arrests. Other protest centers included Tabriz, Orumieh, Sanandaj, Ahvaz, Shiraz, Isfahan, Zanjan, Ahavz, and Ghazvin. But most small and medium-sized cities were not affected by the protests.

In the absence of a national coalition encompassing all major classes and collectivities, the government succeeded in controlling its security and paramilitary forces through close supervision to prevent defections and insubordination. Had the opposition formed a broad coalition and extended its protests across the entire country, the regime's hierarchy would have had greater difficulty in controlling its coercive forces. Thinly dispersed around the country and in contact with the protesting civilian population, these forces would have been vulnerable to insubordination and defections, and the outcome might have been very different.

Summary and Conclusions

Large-scale protests and rapid radicalization of protesters briefly shook the core of the Islamic Republic and demonstrated widespread opposition to the regime's conservative faction. Despite the declining number of protesters over time, challengers sustained their protests for twenty months. In contrast, the regime failed to mount a single progovernment demonstration for more than six and a half months following the election, confirming its narrow base of support. The regime's inability to mobilize the Revolutionary Guard and its reliance instead on the Basij to repress the protesters further demonstrated the erosion of the regime's own power base and how near the system had come to the cliff's edge.

The Green Movement failed because of weaknesses in its leadership, a disjuncture between leaders and protesters, and its failure to consolidate into a broad, disruptive coalition that could effectively usher in democracy.

The movement's leaders were slow to lead the protesters in disruptive events and missed an initial opportunity to lead the largest following in Iran's recent history. A disjuncture developed between leaders that seemed committed to the Islamic Republic and radicalized street protesters that called for large-scale transformation, including the formation of an Iranian republic in place of an Islamic republic.

In time, the movement's leaders, Mousavi and Karroubi, issued more critical statements in response to the elite's intransigence and new opportunities provided by the overthrow of nearby regimes. By then, however, repressive forces had arrested and imprisoned thousands of people in Tehran and several other major cities that were rocked by protests. Ultimately, the movement was defeated because it failed to consolidate and forge a nationwide coalition of all major social classes and collectivities to isolate the state and counter the power of repression. People in most small and medium-sized cities failed to mobilize in protest against the regime. As collectivities, bazaaris and industrial workers did not join the protests or disrupt the economic structure and trading networks. These shortcomings enabled the state to deploy security and the coercive forces to crush the opposition. But the underlying conflicts were far from over.