Education, Urbanization and Propensity towards Democracy in Iranian Society 1995-2010; with Emphasize on Martin Lipset's Theory

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Abstract

Iranian people have experienced two democratic movement between1997 and 2009. For this reason, notwithstanding the result of these struggles, it seems undeniable that there is a significant tendency towards democratic values in Iranian society. This study considers the factor of education and particularly educated women as one of the vital elements which creates democratic demands. Our theoretical approach originates from Martin Lipset's theory that seriously addressed the concept of democracy and its social requisites. Our empirical evidence confirms that despite the behaviour of the Islamic Republic in politics and its control on the economy via oil revenue, Iran's society has a strong propensity towards democracy, specifically because of its educated class.

Key words: Democracy, Martin Lipset, Iranian Society, Education, Democratic Values

Democratic Demands in Iran's Society

Iranian people have experienced two main democratic movement between1997 and 2009, marking turning points in the Islamic Republic life.

The first one, in the aftermath of the seventh Presidential election in May 23, 1997 ('2nd *Khordad*' month in Iran's calendar), is a reformist movement with the leadership of Mohammad Khatami who eventually won the election. Among his followers, words such as pluralism, transparency, accountability and political competition were heard for the first time from the Iranian public. (Brumberg, 2001)

Khatami provided people with a vision from the very start of his campaign. Economic revival could not appear without political reform and more specifically, without institutions for civil society and participation in politics by all the citizens. (Alexandros, 2005)

However, the twenty million voters who cast their vote for President Khatami were not simply supporting him in hope of a better social and economic life; their act was also an expression of revolt against the ideological understanding of Islam that had ruled their lives for more than twenty years prior. (Jahanbakhsh, 2003)
President Khatami was hugely popular and many people were inspired by his vision and so became avidly engaged in political issues. Nonetheless, in response to the reformist movement, the conservative elements in the regime closed newspapers, jailed journalists and writers, attacked student protests in June 1999, and dismantled the effort of reformists in Iran's Parliament.

The second Iranian democratic movement, called as the 'Green Movement', has been taking place since the June 12, 2009 Presidential Election.

The mass demonstration in the summer of 2009 and the months of unrest that followed have revealed Iranian demands for fundamental changes including a change in regime. Mir Hussein Mussavi and Mehdi Karrubi were the candidates in the Presidential Election, both of whom were the opponents of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Shortly after the controversial election period and after the Islamic governments officially announced the results, namely that 'Ahmadinejad won the election', millions of people in Tehran and other major cities of the country took to the streets asking 'Where is my vote?', and accusing Ahmadinejad to be a liar. Although the government arrested many protesters and political activists, the movement grew in strength throughout the country, from July 2009 until February 2010. In the spite of these achievements, there is taking place a human rights disaster as there are still a few hundred political prisoners in prison at the time of writing. Clearly, the political, economic and social discontent with the Islamic Republic was a vital point for the people taking part in the movement. (Freedom House, 2010)

Despite the fact that the Islamic regime's unprecedented repression succeeded to largely contain the popular dissent, the Green Movement clearly revealed Iranian's demand for democratic changes and they demand an Iran where there is free election, greater freedom, and greater respect for human rights. These two appreciable movements, apart from their results, have raised some questions about Iran's society and the main political demands of the people. In other words, what are the elements that affect Iranian's tendency toward democratic values as well as protesting the current rules?

This article is structured in three sections. In the first section, the theoretical and recent investigations of the researches are reviewed. The second section analyses the data from the different aspects of higher education and democratic demand in Iran's society. The final section includes a summary and concluding remarks.

Martin Lipset and Social Requisites of Democracy

Seymour Martin Lipset is one of the most famous political scientists who concentrated on the different dimensions and the essential elements of democracy.

His research is not limited to the definition of democracy, which we can also attribute this to his other publications such as Agrarian Socialism (1950) and the United States and Continental Divide (1990), which have been written to compare the society, politics and radicalism in Canada and the United States. Generally, in his wide range of investigations, Lipset has attempted to explore some controversial concepts such as anti-Semitism, class structure, the direct or indirect connection between historical and social cleavage, the importance of institutions as well as the different aspects of political behaviours and the role of religion in the United States particularly in comparison with Canada.

Nonetheless, in his most famous theory, Lipset illustrated the quintessential conditions of democratic order. Very few contributions in his canon have proven more seminal and durable over time than his 1959 article in the American Political Science Review, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy'. Lipset's assertion of the direct relationship between economic development, social elements and democracy has been subjected to extensive empirical examination, both quantitatively and qualitatively. (Diamond and Marks, 2007)

Lipset has been strongly influenced by Aristotle. More than twenty three centuries ago, Aristotle wrote about economic prosperity as one the most important element that can stimulate democracy. Aristotle believed that a wealthy society, with few people living in poverty, can predispose a democracy to arise. (Aristotle, 1932) Lipset following Aristotle shaped his theoretical and philosophical approach and thus he wrote: 'perhaps the most widespread generalization linking political system to other aspects of society has been that democracy is related to the state of economic development. Concretely, this means that the more well-to-do a nation, is the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy'. (Lipset, 1959)

Lipset elaborated his idea, noting that in order to test this hypothesis, different indicators such as wealth, industrialization, urbanization and education must be defined. Comparing these indicators in the Anglo-Saxon world, Europe and Latin America, as Lipset wrote in 1959, illustrated that the existence of these elements is much higher for the more democratic countries.

More Educated Population, More Chances for Democracy

At first, Lipset defined democracy as a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials. In other words, it is a kind of 'social mechanism' for the resolution of the problem of societal decision-making among conflicting interest groups which permits the largest possible part of the population to influence these decisions through their ability to choose among alternative contenders for political office.

In this framework, Lipset emphasizes education as the vital element which can prepare an educated class with democratic demands and values. For this reason, although some other indicators may seem important, education remains one of the key factors in enriching people's self-consciousness about their environment. He believed that better the educated the population of a country, the better the chance for democracy. In addition, he examined data gathered by public opinion research agencies which have questioned people in different countries with regards to their belief in various democratic norms. He concluded that the single important factor differentiating those giving democratic responses from others has been education.

In order to shed light on the importance of education on democracy, Lipset wrote a separate article 'University students and Politics in Underdeveloped Countries' (Lipset, 1964); in this article Lipset discussed the function of student movements and universities in enriching democratic demands versus authoritarian governments. For example, he concentrated on student movements in Communist China in 1957 and a similar demonstration at the University of Moscow in 1901, which illustrated how the university students demanded freedom and economic reform. He argued that the major concern of the educated strata is with the modernization of their country; in other words, to reject so-called backwardness in the economic, social, political and cultural spheres.

In February 1994, Lipset again briefly highlighted his theory in the article 'The social Requisites of Democracy Revisited' and emphasized that The rise of capitalism, a large middle class, an organized working class, increased wealth, and education are associated with socialism and the institutions of civil society which help create autonomy for the state and facilitate other preconditions for democracy. (Lipset, 1994)

Re-examination, opponents and supporters of Lipset's theory

Edward Glaeser et al. (2004) put their finger on this point, namely that differences in schooling are a major element in describing the similarities and differences in democracies and furthermore, the situation of political institutions via this view, Glaeser and his colleagues argued about the impact of the education system on society.
It is important to note that before half a century of Lipset theory, John Dewey (1916) wrote about the relationship between a high level of academic attainment and democracy. In his opinion, education gradually prepares a 'culture of democracy' which led to political development as well as to greater prosperity. In their paper 'From Education to Democracy?', Daron Acemoglu et al. (2005) claimed that democracy is not robust to including fixed effects and exploiting the within-country variation. They strongly suggested that the cross-sectional relationship between education and democracy is driven by omitted factors influencing education and democracy rather than a causal connection. Acemoglu et al. (2008) found evidence against Lipset's theory that, there is no evidence of a linear effect of income on democracy.

In their paper, 'Inequality, Development and the Stability of Democracy; Lipset and Three Critical Junctions in German History', Florian Jung and Uwe Sunde (2011) consider the internal factors of political regimes in societies in which productive resources are distributed inequality. They refer to three main junctures of German history: Reich in 1871, the Weimar Republic in 1919, and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949. The main result of their paper is a novel characterization of the conditions under which democracies emerge or break down in the absence of external factors that ensure the credibility of political commitments.

Furthermore, in 'Lipset Reconsidered: A Rational Theory of the Stability of Democracy' Jung and Sunde (2010) conclude that for any economic environment, there exists a distribution of resources, such that democracy is a possible political outcome within a heterogeneous society, whereas the opposite does not hold.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to study about the importance of education and its effect on democracy in affluent countries which have natural resources such as oil and gas.

In other words, these countries have huge revenue, perhaps because of the lack of taxation, but the question which can be addressed is about distribution of the revenue and its political issue. Enrique Moral- Benito and Cristian Bartolucci in 'Income and Democracy' (2011) documented that the within-country correlation between income and democracy in wealthy nations is surprisingly weak. On the other hand, they found that in poor countries there is a strong positive within-country association between both indicators. Gylfason (2001) provided theoretical justification for why countries rich in natural resources might neglect education. He finally wrote that the exploitation of natural resources wealth may reduce returns to human capital investment, and therefore diminish incentives for educational attainment. Gylfason found that natural resource intensity is negatively and significantly related to public spending on schooling as a percentage of income and gross enrolment in secondary schools in a sample of 85 countries from 1965 to 1998.

Prior to these researches, since half a century ago Becker (1960), Mincer (1973) and Schultz (1981) seriously have studied the connection between natural resources revenue, education and democratic demands. They generally explained that the distribution of revenue is completely determined by the level and distribution of schooling across the population. Chiswick (1971) found a direct correlation between earnings inequality and educational inequality.

Structure of Educational System in Iran

It is expected that for Iranian people, with around five thousand years civilization and a rich background in literature and art, education is important.

The 'Law on Compulsory Education' is approved before the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and during the Constitutional monarchy on July 28, 1943 and then on June 19, 1971 the 'Ministry of Education' has been assigned. The main task of this Ministry was to implement the necessary provision of the Law on compulsory and free education for all of Iran's school-age children. At the post-1979 era and in the Islamic Republic regime, there are several ministries and other governmental institutions which are directly or indirectly involved in this field. The Ministry of Education administers and finances schools at the primary and secondary level. The Supreme Council of Education, as the highest legislative body, approves all policies and regulations to non-university education. (UNESCO, 2010) The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (formerly the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education) is responsible for universities of science, arts and technology. The Ministry of Health and Medical Education supervises medical schools and universities and moreover organizes the training of medical students. These ministries are directly and indirectly involved in Islamic Republic's higher education. Now let us consider the Islamic Republic's Constitution (1979) on this matter. There are two Articles that clearly emphasize on education; Article 30 reads:

> 'The government is bound to make available, free of charge, educational facilities for all up to the close of the secondary stage, and to expand free facilities for higher education up to the limits of the country's own capacity.'

Also, paragraph 3 of Article 43 in 'Economy and Financial Affairs' chapter reads:

> 'The provision of basic necessities: housing, food, clothing, hygiene, medical treatment, education, and the necessary facilities for the establishment of a family.' (Husseini Nik, 2007)

In this framework, World Bank's data states that the Literacy rate of Iranian adults (% of people ages 15 and above) has increased since 1996 and has remained at a satisfactory level. (World Bank, 2010) Table 1 illustrates this index.

Table1. Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above)

Year	Percentage of literacy rate of people ages 15 and above
2008	85%
2006	82%
2005	82%
2002	77%
1996	73%

Source: World Bank, Country Report, Iran-Islamic-Republic

Higher education institutions include universities, colleges and some centres, but access to higher education is only for high school graduates who have been successful in the national entrance examination. Universities divided to public (governmental) and private, the Comprehensive Technology University, Islamic Azad University, the *Payam-e-Nour* University (for distance education) and medical universities. A Bachelor's diploma normally lasts four to five academic years and then, the master's degree generally requires two academic years of study following the bachelor's qualifications. Finally, doctoral programmes take four to five years to conclude after the master degree. (UNESCO, 2010)

The quality of education at the Islamic Azad University (IAU) is lower than that provided by publically funded universities. The IAU was founded in August 1, 1981. Today it has over 400 branches throughout the country and moreover, some international branches in Lebanon, Armenia, and United Arab Emirates and even in the United Kingdom. Latest statistics shows that Islamic Azad University is now the world's third largest in term of population of students. (Shahriari and Mashayekhi, 2010)

University Students and Political Field

Firstly, we should consider the official reports about the number of university students during the period of our study.

There are three institutions in the structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran which publish official reports about different matters related to education; Statistical Centre of Iran, Institute of Research and Planning for Higher Education (IRPHE), Central Bank of Iran. Figure 1 shows the increasing rate of university student between1995-2010. We drew this figure based on reports published by the Statistical Centre of Iran and the IRPHE. The Statistical Centre of Iran's report covered only 1995-2006 data. (Statistical Centre of Iran, 2008) For the remaining four years we used solely the IRPHE's data It must be noted that the data presented below is to be used with caution. (Institute of Research and Planning for Higher Education, 2010)
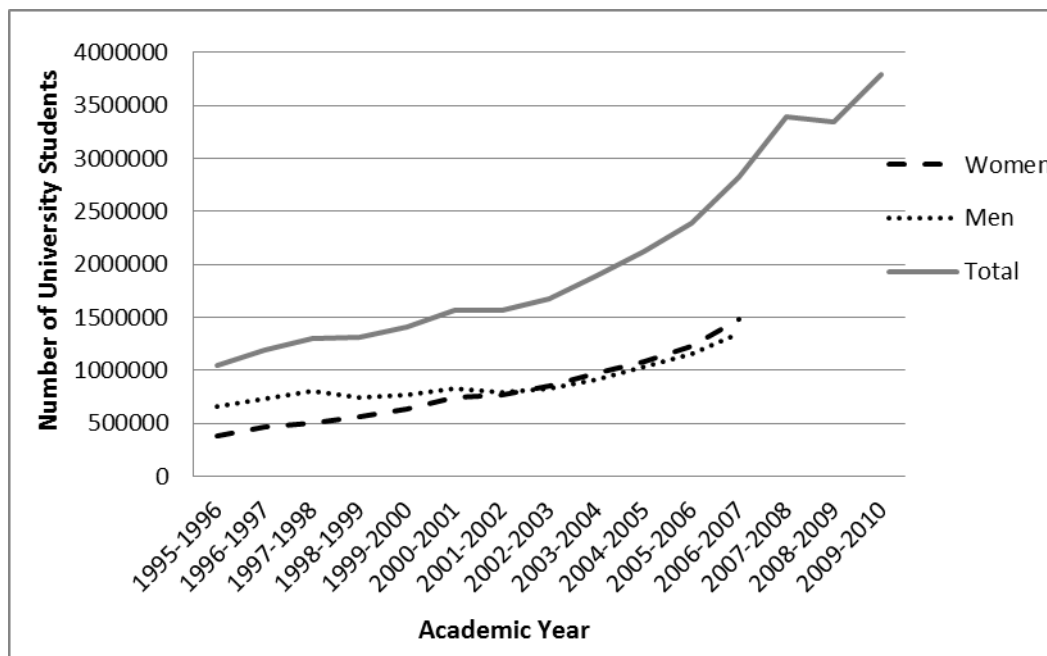

Figure1- The number of university students (1995-2010) with separation of women and men

Source: Institute of Research and Planning for Higher Education (IRPHE) and Statistical Centre of Iran

Figure 1 illustrates the number of university students between 1995 and 2010. It is worth mentioning that the 1995-1996 academic years was a turning point in Iran's higher education, because since that time, the Islamic Azad University has begun to increase its admission and capacity. The growth coincided with the end of the President Hashemi Rafsanjani's administration that started soon after the end of Iraq-Iran war (1980-1988). President Hashemi prides himself to have achieved two 'Reconstruction Governments' because he tried to revive Iran's infrastructure, industries and social services after eight years of destructive war.

Some observers of Iranian society have analysed the importance of increasing the number of students from a sociological perspective. Students in general and politically active students in particular can be treated as a subcategory of the social category of 'intellectuals'. What is common to students is not their place in the production process; instead they are defined by their common relation to science, thought, ideas and certain cultural products. (Mashayekhi, 2001)

Let us concentrate on female university students. Although the number of women students was around 384,461 in the 1995-1996 and 459,759 in the 1996-1997 academic years, that is to say less than male students, it has significantly increased and finally in the 2002-2003 academic years, it reached equality to men. Since then, the number of female university students has remained equal to or more than men. The importance of this quantitative jump can be seen exemplified when examining the role of women in democratic movements, particularly in 2nd *Khordad* movement. In addition, the number of state universities that increased from twenty-six in 1978-1979 academic years to eighty-seven in 1996-1997 provided a better chance for women to further their education at a higher level (Mashayekhi, 2001). Although Iranian women were strongly participated in the 1979 Revolution, some fundamentalist groups believe that women are physically, intellectually and morally inferior to men. This sexist view eclipses the possibility of equal participation in any area of social or political activity (Hughes, 2010). However it is undeniable that women have been one of the most important social groups in the Iranian civil rights movement between1996-2000. Iranian female university students, intellectuals, journalists and political activists have raised the students' political participation in the country (Mohammadi, 2007). It is worthy to mention here that some reliable indicators of international organizations' findings confirm that Iranian society has noticeable condition which definitively deserves better government and political situation. Figure 2 shows the Human Development Index (HDI) of Iran's society in comparison with South Asia, World and High Human Development index countries. (Human Development Index, 2010)
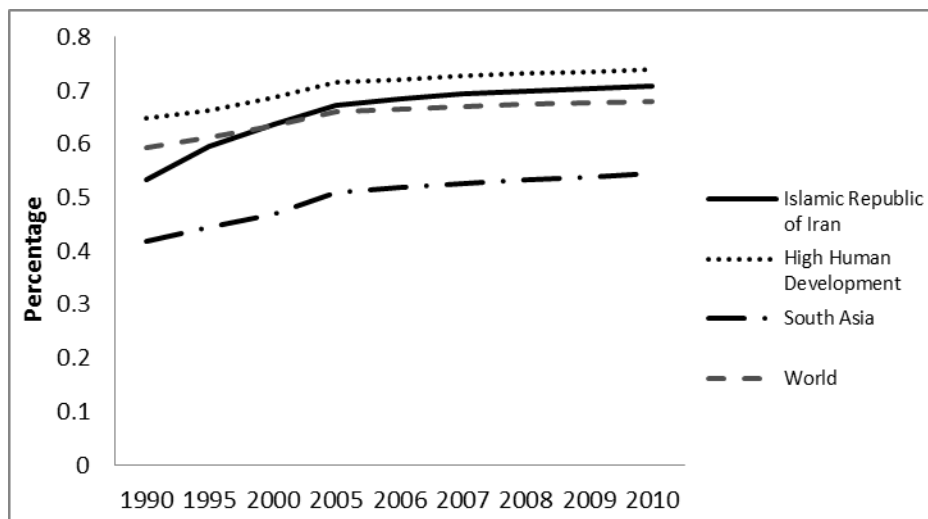

Figure2: Human Development Index (HDI) of Iran's society in comparison with South Asia, World and High Human Development countries

Source: Human Development Index (HDI), Country Report, Islamic Republic of Iran

The HDI represents a push for a broader definition of well-being and provides a composite measure of three basic dimensions of human development: health, education and income. The Islamic Republic of Iran's HDI is 0.707, which gives the country a rank of 88 out of 187 countries with comparable data. The HDI of South Asia as a region increased from 0.356 in 1980 to 0.548 today, placing Iran above the regional average.

Becoming familiar with the concepts of social sciences

Our research seeks to understand the meaning of certain concepts of social science as understood by the Iranian youth. Comprehension of these concepts is crucial in developing countries, including in Iran. Some important questions should be asked and addressed about this social change and the remarkable efforts by Iranian people to shed light on these concepts in their own national context.

In order to explain this issue, we are going to assess the percentage of university students in different fields of study, based on official reports of the Statistical Centre of Iran and the IRPHE. It is significant that the percentage of students who study in social science is higher than other fields. In other words, there is a clear inclination in Iran's youth to understand different concepts in the subfields of social science such as sociology, psychology, political science, economy, international relations, management, archaeology, religious study and Islamic science, history, and demography. In general, these students become familiar with fundamental concepts of social science like democracy, development, economic growth, political participation, national interests, good governance and secularism during their study.

They comprehend different approaches to political issues and policies related to socio-economic questions such as development and growth in their own country in comparison to other societies which now enjoy a satisfactory level of welfare, peace and comfort.

Although the number of university students in social science has shown ups and downs during the period of our study, it remained a most researched field. We explain this reality in figure 3.
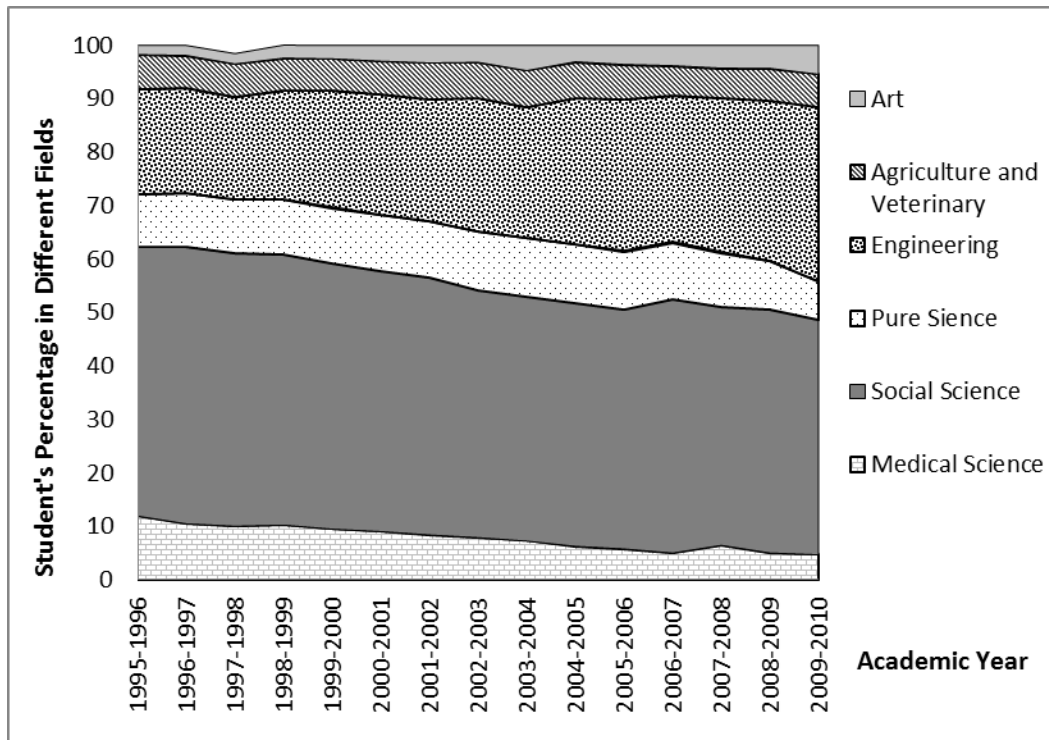

Figure3- The variation of university student's percentage in different academic fields of study between1995-2010

Source: Institute of Research and Planning for Higher Education (IRPHE) and Statistical Centre of Iran

As figure 3 reveals, the number of students in social science was at its highest level between the 1995-1999 academic years. The main reason that would explain this preference for social sciences lies in a new discourse on the social contract between rulers and ruled in Iran. The new proposed governance by President Mohammad Khatami and his 2nd *Khordad* reformist movement has introduced new concepts in the political literature and public debate in a sclerotic system. It was the first time in the Islamic Republic of Iran that the President spoke about 'civil society', 'political tolerance', 'religious democracy' and 'dialogue with other countries'.

Generally figure 4 shows that between the 1995-2010 academic years, on average 48 per cent of students have studied social science in different universities throughout the country. Therefore, it seems acceptable that these educated young people are so sensitive about Iran's society particularly in vital sectors such as politics and economy. (Najdi, 2011)
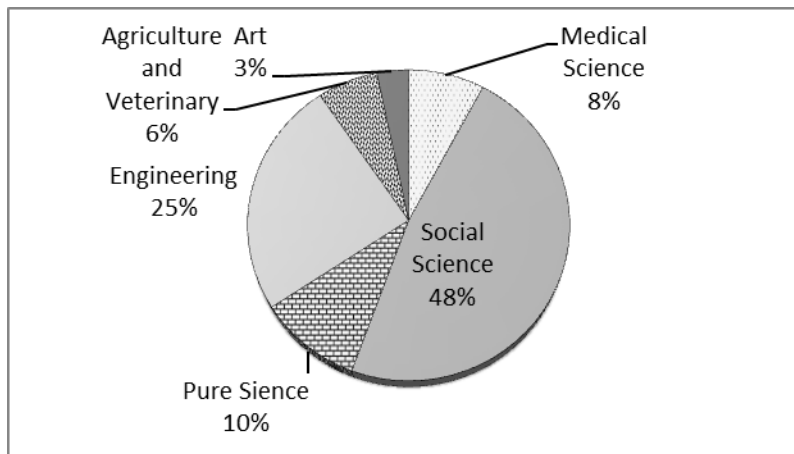
Figure4- The total average of students in six main academic categories (1995-2010)

Source: Institute of Research and Planning for Higher Education (IRPHE) and Statistical Centre of Iran

Urbanization in Iran's Society

Urbanization can be addressed as one of the fundamental indices that influence economic development and social movements. For this reason, it would be appropriate to consider this index in our study. Nowadays, urbanization is developing and therefore changing the face of the planet. Urban growth has flourished in different fields such as economy and politics. Nonetheless, the current urban transition essentially differs from the experience of Europe and United States in the first of the twenty century in the number of vital respects. (Brockerhoff, 2000) Some valuable researchers including Hall (1966), Friedmann (1980) and Wolf (1982) have emphasized the significance of a special class of cities all over the world which definitively are distinct from other urban agglomerations, especially due to their pivotal roles in the global economy. United Nation's projection predicts that virtually all of the world's population growth over the next twenty years will occur in urban areas. (United Nations, 2001)

Furthermore, the UN predicted that the urban population of the world is estimated to increase from 2.86 billion in 2000 to 4.98 by 2030. By comparison, the size of the rural population in the world is expected to growth only very marginally, from 3.19 billion in 2000 to 3.29 billion in 2030. Figure 5 shows United Nation's assessment concerning population divided between urban and rural areas. As can be seen in figure 5, all population growth until 2030 will be concentrated in urban areas, a stark contrast with the pattern of growth seen between1950-1975. Firstly, the following figure gives general view of increasing urban population compare to rural in the world.
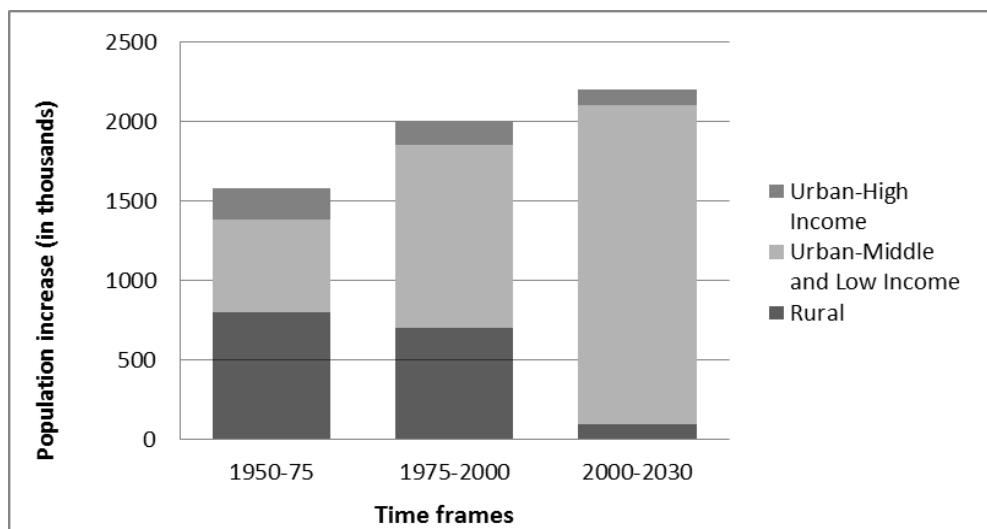

Figure 5- Distribution of world population growth (1950-2030)

Source: Barney Cohen (2004), United Nations (2002), World Bank (2002)

Secondly, about the Asia, we can consider to the 2009 Revision of World Urbanization Prospect, that says Asia remains mostly rural with 42 per cent of its respective population living in urban settlements in 2010 and by 2050, it is expected to be significantly less urbanized than the other major areas, reaching a proportion urban of 65 per cent. (World Urbanization Prospects, 2009)

Iran's population has increased from 60 million in 1996 to 74 million in 2010. Surprisingly, the rate of urbanization has increased from 61.31 in 1996 to 68.46 in 2006. Figure 6 shows the number of population with separation of urban and rural areas between1996-2010; we drew this figure based on the 'Statistical Centre' of Iran's official reports. As can be seen in figure 6 the numbers of total and urban population have increased constantly, on condition that the rural population has decreased in the period of our study. In other words, in 1996 about 61.30 per cent of Iran's population inhabited urban sectors and this index was 64.47 in 2000, 67.87 in 2005 and 71.77 in 2010. On the contrary, the decreasing per cent of rural population was 38.60, 35.52, 32.12 and 28.22 in 1996, 2000, 2005 and 2010 respectively. (Statistical Centre of Iran, 2011)
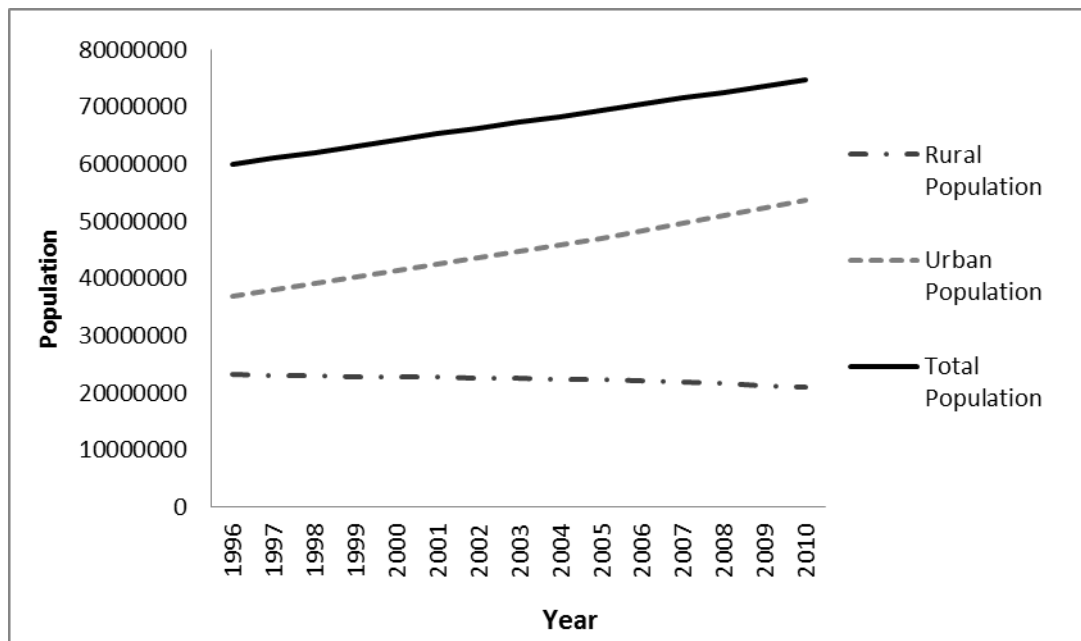

Figure 6- The rate of urbanization in Iran with separation of rural and urban areas (1996-2010)

Source: Statistical Centre of Iran's report

Despite the fact that the world is becoming more and more urban, unfortunately, there is no a unique and comprehensive definition about urban. (Frey and Zimmer, 2001) Nonetheless, as figure 6 illustrates; Iran's society has experienced a considerable rate of urbanization. Undoubtedly, as many investigators have emphasized, cities attract large numbers of rural-urban migrants seeking education, jobs, or better access to basic social services. (Barney, 2003)

Iran's Government and Democratic Demands in Society

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a rich resource country. According to the OPEC bulletin 2009, the proven crude oil reserves of Iran is 136.270 (million barrels), 138.400 (m/b), 136.150 (m/b), 137.620 (m/b), and 137.010 (m/b) in 2005 until 2010, respectively. (OPEC, 2009) The total assessment about the government non-oil revenue of oil exporting rentier states (based on per cent of non-oil GDP) reveals that the share of this indicator in the Islamic Republic's economy is only 12.4, 12.5, 12.0 and 14.9 in 2006 until 2010, respectively. (International Monetary Fund, 2011) While the GDP growth in recent years has been respectable (averaging to around 5 per cent per annum), its apparent dependence on the continued rise in oil revenues sheds doubt on the sustainability of the process. (Ilias, CRS report for Congress, 2008)

Additionally, some analysts such as Moradi (2009) and Arman and Aghajari (2009) have concentrated on this hypothesis that natural resources seem to have been more of a curse than a blessing for the Islamic republic of Iran.

Nonetheless, by these windfall revenues the government has survived and moreover has dismantled all the democratic efforts of Iranian people. As the Islamic regime does not dependent on a fair taxation system as its primary source of revenue, it does not recognize legitimacy of any political activity that questions its agenda. Like other rentier states in the Middle East, the Islamic Republic has no belief in independent representation in absence of an effective taxation system and, consequently, had continuously repressed demonstrations organized by civil society in the past three decades.

Additionally, the Islamic Republic of Iran is a unique hybrid system of government created by Ayatollah Khomeini after the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Although the new political system recognizes in theory the legitimacy of people by organizing Parliament and presidential elections, these bodies are superseded by the office of the Leader, the position held by Khomeini and based on his thesis of *Velayat-e Faghih* (Rule by the Jurisprudent). (Khomeini, 1970) Although Khomeini may have been a charismatic figure, (Post, 1986) the unifying effect of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) bolstered his authority, reducing political disunity across the board. (Gonzalez, 2007) Following Khomeini's death in 1989, internal political divisions became more pronounced, due to the current Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's deficit of charisma and religious credentials. (Menashri, 2001) For these reasons, recent investigations by Hen-Tov and Gonzalez (2011), Alfoneh (2007), Najdi and Mohd Azhari Bin Abdul Karim (2012), among others, have revealed the increasing role of military and security groups, particularly the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) and the *Bassij*, in the new Islamic Republic's structure.

In this context of repression and resistance**,** the importance of university students and urbanization once again was instrumental in the landslide Presidential election of Mohammad Khatami in May 23, 1997 (2nd *Khordad* 1376 in Persian calendar).

Many observers of the Iran scene believe that student activism in its organized, semi-organized and sporadic forms picked up after February 1997 and since the beginning of Khatami's campaign which created a relative opening in the nation's political atmosphere. (Mashayekhi, 2001) One of President Khatami's friends in his memoires wrote that in fact, during Khatami's one hundred day campaign tour of the country, he delivered most of his speeches either in college campuses or at mosques. Interestingly, the first such speech was held at Sharif University in Tehran on 26 February. That speech was organized by the Office for Consolidation of unity (O.C.U.) which played a fundamental role in the revival of the student movement. (Raad, 1999) The O.C.U.'s sixty branches in state universities and several dozens of Islamic Azad Universities were vital allies of Khatami. Polls taken in Tehran universities a few weeks before the election indicated that only 5.5 to 7 per cent of students intended not to vote for one of the four candidates. (Mashayekhi, 2001) University students have constantly had a noticeable effect on the reformist movement, particularly for the Urban and Rural Council (February 1999), the sixth Iran's Parliament (February 2000) and the eighth Presidential election (June 2001).

Nonetheless, the opposite side of the coin is the Islamic republic's resistance confronting democratic movement rising. Shortly after beginning the reform era and at the acme of people's political vitality, the military and paramilitary groups attacked students who protested against the closure of *Salam* daily newspaper (Pro-Khatami) on Wednesday, July 7, 1999. Therefore, it is apparent that the initial students protest was prompted by the closure of *Salam* and that that the protesters expressed strong objection to the restriction of the press by the government. These protests were political and reflected the cumulative resentment of the public against the suppression of the press and restriction of other basic freedom and universal rights. In the aftermath of those events, more than 1500 students and other targeted citizens were arrested and scores of the arrested were tried in total secrecy and without any due process in the kangaroo courts of the Islamic republic.

This story again is repeated during the next democratic movement (the Green Movement) in the aftermath of the controversial Presidential election in June 12, 2009. The mass demonstrations in the summer of 2009 and the subsequent months of unrest have caused uncertainty and in-fighting within the regime, a level of internal discord unprecedented since the 1979 Revolution and the advent of Iran's theocratic system. The role of Iranian women who are becoming more educated, more politically engaged, more civically organized, in the post-2009 protest was significant. Educated women claim their place in Iranian society and are not ready to abdicate before the government crackdown. Women now constitute the majority of the student population in universities and a crucial component of social protest movement.

The face of Iranian protest movement is Neda Agha-Soltan, a 26 years old woman and university student murdered by the regime in broad daylight during a peaceful manifestation against the 2009 fraudulent Presidential election.

Conclusion

This paper re-examined Martin Lipset's theory about the social requisites of democratic demands applied to the Iranian society in light of two major recent democratic attempts between 1995 and 2010, with emphasize on education and urbanization. Our theoretical and empirical model discusses that despite the theocratic structure of the Islamic Republic, there is arguably a tendency towards democratic concepts in the society.

Considering the official reports about university student body and facility expansions, the students' fields of study and the rate of urbanization in the period of our study, we conclude that there is a significant correlation between these elements and the democratic movements in Iranian society. Surprisingly, the noticeable majority of universities with politically active students are located in big cities such as Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz and Mashhad. As we explain in this paper, the majority of these students chose to further their higher education in the social sciences that definitively increase their awareness about politics as well as economy.

Finally, it should be noted that we confirm Lipset's theory in Iranian society and two recent democratic movements, the 2nd *Khordad* and the Green Movement obviously highlighted the effect of educated people located in urban areas and big cities. For this reason, we are optimistic about the future of Iran's effort to transition to democracy, notwithstanding the strong resistance and serious violence of the Islamic Republic government.

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