

MEDIA, POWER, AND POLITICS IN THE DIGITAL AGE



THE 2009 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION UPRISING IN IRAN

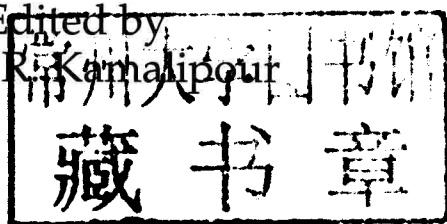
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FOREWORD BY CEES J. HAMELINK

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The 2009 Presidential Election Uprising in Iran

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*In memory of those who have lost their lives in their quest for upholding
freedom of expression and human rights during the widely contested and
protracted 2009 postpresidential election demonstrations in Iran*

Human beings are parts of a body, created from the same essence. When one part is hurt and in pain, the other parts remain restless. If the misery of others leaves you indifferent, you cannot be called a human being.

—Sa'adi Shirazi, Persian poet-philosopher

For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.—Nelson Mandela

Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labor in freedom.—Albert Einstein

Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom. A man can't ride you unless your back is bent.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

If we don't believe in freedom of expression for people we despise, we don't believe in it at all.—Noam Chomsky

Nothing can be more abhorrent to democracy than to imprison a person or keep him in prison because he is unpopular. This is really the test of civilization.—Winston Churchill

When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall, always.

—Mahatma Gandhi

I have estimated the influence of Reason upon Love and found that it is like that of a raindrop upon the ocean, which makes one little mark upon the water's face and disappears.—Hafez Shirazi, Persian poet

Out beyond our ideas of right-doing and wrong-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there.—Mowlana Jalaluddin Rumi, Persian poet

Acknowledgments

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I thank Dr. Sandra Littleton-Uetz for her careful and professional reviewing and editing of this volume. Her continued support and expertise are appreciated.

At Rowman & Littlefield, I am grateful to Niels Aaboe, executive editor of political science, American history, and communication, for his enthusiasm and interest in this project. Also, Janice Braunstein, Michelle Cassidy, Elisa Weeks, and the marketing and publicity teams deserve my sincere gratitude. Their collective contribution and involvement during the various stages of this publication have been quite valuable and necessary in the success of this volume.

I am, of course, indebted to my family members for their unconditional love, emotional support, and understanding throughout this project.

YRK
March 2010

Foreword

Cees J. Hamelink

The book you are about to read combines arguably the most essential variables for an understanding of the contemporary context. That context is largely shaped by processes in which the key resource in today's world—"information"—is generated, distributed, consulted, and exchanged in digital formats. At the center stage of these informational developments, media—both conventional and new—are the crucial intermediaries between the governed and the governors. This mediascape has important implications for the management and the perception of political realities. It creates both unprecedented forms of access to information and massive overloads of data. It both hampers and facilitates social communication and reshapes power configurations, in both empowering and disempowering ways.

All of this implies sufficient complexity for the contents of one volume. The editor and the authors, however, ventured even further and focused their investigations and reflections on one of the most challenging and puzzling events of 2009: all that happened in connection with the presidential elections in Iran.

This intellectual courage brought us a fascinating book. It is common knowledge that the topic of global media coverage of national news events has received over past decades much attention. Although there is quite a library of valuable studies on news coverage, the present book not only adds a collection of original contributions from a variety of countries, it also helps to further our still somewhat limited theoretical understanding of the manufacturing of news and the resultant shaping of worldviews.

The world has been largely exposed to what happened in Iran in 2009 through new social networking formats of information provision. Several chapters of the book address the rise of new communication tools, discuss their role in citizen journalism, and assess their (limited) effects. It is particularly helpful that the authors in the part on New Media and Social Networking Dimensions did resist the temptation to declare that the new tools brought the world a social revolution. There is a sound dose of skepticism and a useful reminder that the role of the conventional or traditional media is not fundamentally diminished.

An interesting issue—not directly addressed in the book—is the relationship between new mobile technologies and their application in the political power struggle. Western firms—such as the Finnish Nokia—have provided Iran with communication technologies that both supported governmental surveillance tactics and made pictures available to global audiences that otherwise would not have been seen. Evidently, technology always is double-faced, and in the Iran case, this has raised perplexing questions for “green” banks (for example, in the Netherlands) regarding the social responsibility of their investments in companies that (possibly inevitably) facilitate suppressive and liberating uses of modern technologies.

The coverage of the 2009 presidential elections in Iran became a theme of particular importance in my home country, the Netherlands. This was due to a new radio station that was established in Amsterdam. Radio Zamaneh (“The Times” in Farsi) began broadcasts through the Internet in 2006 followed by transmissions via satellite and shortwave radio. Radio Zamaneh became an important forum for a large number of very popular Iranian bloggers. Financial support came from the Dutch government and from independent foundations such as Press Now. Press Now supports independent news sources that play important roles in the political developments of their country of origin.

The Iranian government has intimidated the station from its inception and has—particularly at the time of the elections uprising—expressed its discontent over Dutch funding. The Iranian representative in the Netherlands complained in June 2009 to the Dutch minister of foreign affairs about the “terrorist” and propagandistic activities of Radio Zamaneh.

The book—and this is touched upon in one of the chapters—offers implicitly a strong and convincing argument for the need of media literacy. In complex historical processes—such as the Iranian presidential elections and the related protest movements (and countermovements)—the larger volume of news stories that is now available through many different vehicles makes the issue of what to believe and what not to believe and how to distinguish propaganda from journalism for media audiences a tall order. Therefore, un-

less there is a global effort to empower audiences to meet information flows with critical, alert, and discerning minds, the greater availability and greater diversity of information provision could be a massive exercise in futility. We need—as recipients—to find ways to deal with a rapidly expanding supply of multiple perspectives. The information multiplicity can make us into detached nonparticipants who want to remain at safe distances from disturbing realities; it can also render us utterly confused and clueless observers, but it can also trigger our sociopolitical activism.

Actually, the present volume suggests the urgent need for a follow-up: Yet another book—to be edited by the indefatigable and prolific Yahya Kamalipour. This time its focus and title should be *Making Sense of a Chaotic World: Guidelines for Survival in Modern Complexities*.

I wish you enjoyable, instructive, and reflexive times with the collection in front of you.

Introduction

Yahya R. Kamalipour

It is a terrible thing to see and have no vision.

—Helen Keller

As a successful author, lecturer, and activist of her time, the legendary Helen Keller was both blind and deaf. Apropos her above comment, how true it is of our shortsighted politicians and self-centered world leaders who refuse to change in spite of monumental challenges taking place before their very eyes, including globalization, technological advancements, information flow, global interconnectedness, increased public awareness, and enhanced education.

For over a century, Iranians have relentlessly pursued—sadly, without much success—their quest for the institutionalization of freedom, human rights, and the rule of law in Iran. Since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution, which was derailed by Russia and, again, the 1953 revolution that was derailed by a CIA-British coup, their historical quest has remained a lofty aspiration and continues to reemerge in various historical contexts, including the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the 2009 contested presidential elections, which resulted in sustained and often bloody public protestations. After the release of the June 12 election results in favor of the incumbent candidate, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and public endorsement of the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi believe that the elections were rigged. The officially declared election results were viewed as inconclusive and unfair; hence a huge number of unsatisfied Iranians took to the streets of Tehran and other major cities en masse, proclaiming “Where is my vote?” Their initially peaceful and sustained demonstrations turned bloody after the

Iranian government forces attempted to crush them by force, which resulted in killings, beatings, and arrests and jailings of hundreds of protestors. The unfolding events quickly captured people's attention everywhere and remained, for at least two weeks, the top media news story around the world. As of this writing, and seven months after the elections, the "Green Movement" or "Green Wave" continues to gather momentum within and without Iran.

In retrospect and in view of Western countries' historical miscalculations and repeated mistakes, such as the derailment of the 1953 democratic movement headed by Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh and their continued meddling in the internal affairs of Iran, let's hope this time they will have the fortitude and foresight to allow Iranians to determine the political destiny of their own nation.

MEDIA AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Media experts, foreign policy experts, commentators, and academicians have often outlined the benefits of new media technology for consumers and confidently predicted that the global information revolution will result in political, economic, and social democratization in the developing and underdeveloped countries around the world. This hopeful outlook, however, requires certain prerequisites including education, infrastructures, cultural basis, access to technology, and adherence to the time-tested and successful political, economic, social structures, and diverse media outlets, as evidenced in the developed nations.

In his chapter, Ibrahim Al-Marashi quite keenly observes that "the crisis in Iran was not merely a domestic conflict between reformists and a conservative establishment but represented another greater battle for information." The reality is that most people make decisions, vis-à-vis political candidates and even consumer products, based on what they hear, read, and see in the media. In today's digital age, it is clearly evident that we now possess an array of highly sophisticated communication and telecommunication technologies that span the entire globe and, indeed, can be used to engender such basic and vital human values as human rights, freedom of expression, mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and the rule of law. Alternatively, with the concentration of global media in the hands of autocratic governments and a few self-serving global corporations, it is possible to use the media to brainwash, agitate, fuel conflict, and create a divisive and polarized political and cultural environment within and without nations.

During the post-Iranian election demonstrations in June 2009, the video footage of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, which was captured by cell phones and distributed widely via the Internet and subsequently published in

the global media, drew international attention and rallied public opinion and sentiments toward the liberal movement, commonly known as the “Green Movement.” In fact, several chapters in this book focus on this particular phenomenon and the power of the new digital technologies to bypass altogether the physical-geographical boundaries and governmental restrictions and censorship. Indeed, the heart-wrenching postelection events in Iran illustrate that the new digital media have empowered the traditionally voiceless and marginalized people.

In his Noble Prize speech (Obama 2009), the president of the United States, Barack Obama, referred to Neda indirectly by saying “that’s why this award must be shared with everyone who strives for justice and dignity; for the young woman who marches silently in the streets on behalf of her right to be heard, even in the face of beatings and bullets.”

All political and religious leaders around the world have the responsibility to adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, including emphasis on “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women” (United Nations).

OBJECTIVES OF THIS BOOK

Given the significance, prominence, and unique utilization of new digital technologies, and the continuing debate vis-à-vis the recent controversial Iranian presidential elections, this timely volume provides a multifaceted and diverse perspective and analysis of the global media coverage of the postelection uprisings.

Focusing on the pre- and post-Iranian presidential elections and the ensuing demonstrations in major cities across Iran and the world, this book is intended to provide an intellectual, multifaceted, and balanced discussion of the role and impact of modern communication technologies, particularly the novel utilization of “small digital media” vis-à-vis the elections and global media coverage. Further goals are to explore the interplay between various national and global forces, which tend to stifle free expression and restrict reporters from covering certain events such as the postelection uprisings in Iran. Given the global scope, timeliness, and significance of the Iranian election and its prominence in the global media and public discourse, this book should shed some light on the interplay of media, power, and politics. At the invitation of the editor, prominent scholars, media professionals, and researchers from throughout the world have contributed original chapters to this timely volume.

In terms of content and representation, this book is comprehensive and inclusive and, to the extent possible, the editor has tried to avoid promoting a

specific worldview, political faction, or ideology. Hence, attempts have been made to ensure objective, reasoned, and balanced perspectives. A cornerstone of this truly global and multifaceted volume is to inform, educate, enlighten, and contribute to the existing literature in media, power, and politics. Another aim is to illustrate the complexity of the Iranian social-political-religious structure and help readers to understand and appreciate the continued struggle of Iranians toward achieving freedom and democracy.

As globalization continues to spread at a dizzying pace throughout the world, the role and functions of new digital technologies in politics, commerce, culture, human relations, international communication, and international relations become more apparent. Focusing on the various aspects of the 2009 contested presidential elections in Iran, this book is intended to:

- provide a multifaceted analysis of the role of global media in reporting the 2009 controversial and widely contested elections in Iran;
- provide a multifaceted global analysis of the postelection uprisings and media coverage around the globe;
- discuss the impact of government-imposed restrictions on foreign reporters in Iran;
- analyze the reliance of major global media on documented and personalized but yet difficult-to-confirm sources of blogs, video footage, photos, and reports;
- provide an analysis and critique of the role and impact of new social networking channels and technologies (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, cell phones) in the dissemination of news and information about the uprisings;
- discuss the international and Iranian media coverage of the elections;
- discuss the social-political-ideological dimensions of the elections;
- discuss the cultural and communication dimensions of the elections;
- analyze the role and impact of “e-journalism” and “e-diplomacy” and social messaging tools on the modern international communication processes;
- trace and describe similar historical instances in which communication media played a crucial role; and
- discuss the global interface between new media, politics, and religion and its consequences for nation-states.

CONTRIBUTORS TO THIS BOOK

This volume brings together a collection of twenty-four original chapters by thirty-one contributors from fifteen countries throughout the world. Each original chapter (not previously published) is written by a leading media

scholar, media professional, author, and researcher familiar and in tune with the events in Iran and elsewhere. The contributors' areas of expertise include the Middle East, international communication, new technologies, mass media, journalism, religion, history, sociopolitical studies, and cultural studies.

INTENDED AUDIENCE OF THIS BOOK

In view of the rapid and evolutionary changes in communication modes and human interactions, this book provides media professionals, scholars, researchers, and students a wealth of information regarding novel uses, efficacy, and consequences of the new digital communication technologies.

Written in a nontechnical, easy-to-read, and accessible manner, this book has appeal for:

- mass media, international, intercultural and political communication scholars, researchers, and students—graduate and undergraduate—including members of professional associations, and others;
- courses in journalism, international communication, media and politics, persuasion and propaganda, international news, and others;
- policy makers and stakeholders concerned with media, democracy, globalization, international news, and intercultural communication;
- broadcast and print media professionals, educators, and students;
- universities in Europe, Asia, Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and the United States;
- internationally concerned independent writers, critics, researchers, and readers;
- members of cultural groups, organizations, and those interested in international, cross-cultural communication, especially mediated communication.

STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

To provide a global overview of media coverage and diverse perspectives on the controversial 2009 presidential election, this book consists of twenty-four original chapters plus a foreword and introduction. The authors have written their chapters in a nontechnical and easy-to-read style. The book is divided into the following segments:

1. Global Media Dimensions
2. New Media and Social Networking Dimensions

3. Ideological-Political Dimensions

4. Cultural and Communication Dimensions

It should be noted that the chapters do not neatly fit into these general themes and, in some cases, overlap. Nonetheless, readers should find the categorizations helpful, especially when the book is used as either a required or a recommended text in university courses.

A FEW FINAL WORDS

Although I have tried to organize the chapters in a cohesive manner, the writing styles and presentation remain varied yet rich and informative in terms of content. Unlike single-authored or coauthored books, edited volumes tend to be diverse in every respect, including writing style, tone, choice of words, and approach.

Nonetheless, I trust you will find the contents of this book engaging, provocative, and informative. Clearly, all governments have the necessary resources and military apparatus to suppress any uprising, dissent, and demonstration by force. But they must not abuse their power to stifle the legitimate arguments of opposing factions, restrain peaceful demonstrations, inhibit free expression, censor the media, and violate human rights. My hope is that readers of this book will come to the realization that, in any national and international conflict, peaceful means are always the best strategies to settle disputed claims and issues. In order to achieve a relatively peaceful and harmonious global environment, we must collectively reject violence and killings—anywhere and in any form or context—in favor of promoting peaceful assembly, peaceful dialogue, freedom of expression, and human rights. As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once commented, “violence never brings permanent peace. It solves no social problem: it merely creates new and more complicated ones.”

Finally, it should be noted that the views expressed in this book are of the contributing authors and are not necessarily endorsed by either the editor or publisher.

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About Iran

Official name: Islamic Republic of Iran

Former names: Persia or Pars, prior to 1935

Population: About 73 million (World Bank 2009)

Capital: Tehran

Major cities: Isfahan, Shiraz, Mashhad, Tabriz

Languages: The national language is Persian or Farsi. Other languages include Azeri, Turkish, Kurdish, Balochi, and Arabic.

Religions: Islam (includes Shiite and Sunni) 98 percent, 2 percent Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrians, and Assyrians.

Ethnic groups: Important ethnic groups include the Persians (51 percent), Azeris (24 percent), Mazandarani and Gilaki (8 percent), Kurds (7 percent), Iraqi Arabs (3 percent), and Lurs, Balochis, and Turkmens (2 percent each).

Supreme Leader: Seyyed Ali Khamenei

President: Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Area: Slightly larger than the U.S. state of Alaska, Iran covers 1.6 million square kilometers (636,295 square miles).

Currency: Rial (2009 exchange rate: \$1.00 = 10,000 Rials)

Main exports: Petroleum, carpets, agricultural products

GNI per capita: U.S. \$3,540 (World Bank 2008)

Climate: Four seasons with varying climate and temperature ranging from very cold in the north (the Caspian Sea area) to very hot in the south (the Persian Gulf area).

Ancient Persia: The earliest archaeological findings from Iran date to the Paleolithic era, 100,000 years ago. By 5000 BC, Iran hosted sophisticated agriculture and early cities.

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