

# Teaching Political Science in I.R. of Iran: Opportunities and Challenges

by

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## Abstract

We know political education as an indicator of development is a precondition for political participation. When a country such as Iran topples a long term despotism in 1979 and establishes new political system based on republicanism and popular votes, the people of such a country need to know some related laws and rules. Republicanism or more specifically democracy can be defined as a majority rule, and minority rights to oppose. Although the establishment of a democracy is very prominent opportunity for development, at the same time there is a possibility that the majority overlook the minority rights. The main element which can manage this basic challenge concerns with teaching political science. In addition to the citizens who should deal with political science, the authorities should consider the point as well. This investigation in a descriptive analytical study examine the opportunities and challenges towards teaching political science in I.R. of Iran utilizing Tocqueville's theory of democracy as a theoretical framework. Within a theoretical framework the paper also empirically elaborates the measures which have been made according to the constitution and attempt to analyze the probable shortages proposing solutions to remove them.

Key words: Political science, Political participation, Majority rule, Minority rights, Opportunities and Challenges.

## Introduction

The word *democracy* has many meanings, but in the modern world its use signifies that the ultimate authority in political affairs rightfully belongs to citizens. Democracy or majority rule, as a political regime has a great Potential and can be as an appropriate regime when to be able to make a balance between majority and minority.

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) believes that it's a social revolution which before the beginning of a political revolution must change the society. He also had found this

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fundamental point that although democracy is respectable, but most of the time it is accompanied by despotism of groups or majority dictatorship (Tocqueville, 1966).

He warns that the society may change from one form of despotism to the despotism of majority, because the democratic change has not occurred as in French society after the revolution 1798. Tocqueville gives priority to a social revolution than a political one. He is afraid of happening one of these two occurrences: 1. Sacrificing freedom for gaining equality. 2. Vulnerability of modern (democratic) society in front of despotism (Zetterbaum, 1967). According to his interpretation there is a danger or threat which represents "Despotism of majority" against the rights of minority and hence corruption of political democracy. In other words, he does attempt to remove peril from democracy or democratic society.

Tocqueville believes in democracy as acquisitive value for gaining a premium goal which is political liberty (freedom). With regard to the fact that he wants to remove any misuse from democracy, he emphasizes that first a social revolution must occur to change outlook (lay men's view) about the rights of minority and majority, political participation and the like (Tocqueville, 1966).

The primary and determinative concern in this article is to analyze the way by which we can prevent the problem of majority despotism in a modern or democratic society in general and in I. R. of Iran in particular using Tocqueville's theory. Hypothesis of the paper is that teaching political science in a suitable manner can prevent the problem. In addition to analytical and descriptive methodology some empirical information in this context is given.

### **Democratic Society**

If we intend to distinguish a legitimate political system via democracy and call it democratic society or democratic political system, it will be useful to have a look at some definitions of democracy. Democracy is a problematic term to be defined and universal agreement cannot be expected. Buried under so many layers of philosophy, propaganda, and different descriptions, it is indeed not an easy job to choose a single criterion by which one can put the societies into a clear, dichotomous distinction of democratic and non-democratic societies.

The classical theory, in brief, is the theory that democracy is the rule of the people, and that the people have a right to rule (Bogdanor, 1987:166). Social philosopher Karl Popper believes that this theory is based on the completely impractical ideology that it is the people, the whole adult population, who are, or should by rights be, the real and ultimate and the only legitimate rulers. But, of course, no where do the people actually rule (Popper, 1988: 25). Popper in his characteristic parsimonious style, defines democratic society as a society where transition of power can occur within the rule of law without bloodshed. He says: democratic society does not mean the "rule by the

people but the rule of law that postulate the bloodless dismissal of the government by a majority vote" (Popper, 1988:26).

Additionally, Popper distinguishes two kinds of regimes including despotism and democracy in the societies. He conceives that the goodness of democratic one may be doubtful, but the evilness of despotism is certain. Not because the despot is bound to make a bad use of his power, but because a despot or dictator, even if he were benevolent, would rob all others of their responsibility, and thus their human rights and duties. This is enough basis for deciding in favor of democratic society (popper, 1988:27-28).

However, despite the cogency of Popper's definition, for the operationalization of the notion, a more structured approach in this context has been presented by Dipak Gupta (1990). He has defined a society as democratic if it had a civilian government, if the effective chief executive were elected, and if the effective chief executive were operating within some measure of checks and balances. Obviously, this operational definition is not flawless, but it is one of the best so far invented. Lane and Ersson (1999) underline one more significant condition which is "majority rule and minority rights to oppose" in their definition of democratic society that is our important emphasis in this investigation.

If we see industrial society in August Comte's thought and capitalist society in Karl Marx's thought, we can observe democratic society in Alexis de Tocqueville's thought. Democratic society in Tocqueville's words represents a society in which the inclination towards equal social conditions is observed. In such a society the distinctions derived from family, ethnicity, race, religion and class are not recognized, and most of the members of the society incline to be equalized. Tocqueville does not mean ideological or economic equals because such equals are neither possible nor desirable. He does mean social equality (Tocqueville, 1945). In other words in democratic society where Tocqueville describes the ideological and practical bases of hereditary differences gradually grow feeble and all jobs, positions and honors get accessible for all citizens and a plenty of the people in the society enjoy relatively equal conditions of living. The purpose of such society like in pre-modern societies does not rest in acquiring honor and glory but welfare and tranquility for the members of society.

Tocqueville maintains that democratic society faces with serious political and social dangers. In the first view a democratic society does not seem as a dangerous one because political system is liberal, i.e., citizens are equals and nobody has priority to another. In this society representatives are elected by people for a specific period of time through democratic mechanisms. A government in such society apparently should protect citizens' rights and undertake to solve problems of the society. However, in spite of victory of French liberal revolution in 1789, however, French people suffered from despotic democratic regime rather than liberal democratic one (Tocqueville, 1966).

More specifically, such democratic regime in the name of majority of people exerts power on citizens and instead of majority rule, rules the majority. In this society not only majority rule is not realized but also minority rights will be absolutely overlooked. According to Alexis de Tocqueville these circumstances seriously jeopardize democratic society. This is why French society got rid of political despotic regime via the revolution but got into difficulty of social despotism after the revolution. That is, to come out of the ditch and fall into the pit.

### **Social power**

Tocqueville maintains that democratic society in which traditional middle institutions such as family, tribe, religion and class are enfeebled, an individual rules his or her destiny. However, unlike our expectation this individual seriously faces to be marginalized because these separate and atomic individuals against power of organizations that in the name of public manage the society or against social power cannot do any thing. He believes such social power can even be more despotic than political power of kings in ancient societies (Boudon, 1998). Tocqueville believes that in a democratic society if the despotic social power can be curbed we witness a democratic liberal society but if we cannot control it we see democratic despotism and, to rule majority and forget about minority rather than majority rule and minority rights.

Now the question is that why people of the democratic society in curbing the social power confront difficulty. Several reasons may be specified.

1) When government and officials in the name of people announce their programs and implement them, if members of the society are not satisfied with the programs there is no possibility to proclaim their collective protest against the plans and programs, i.e., there is no possible collective mobilization against the government. The only ways they can pursue are to wait at least four years to show their dissatisfaction when they cast their votes in next election or an apathy towards political field. Such apathy and hopelessness among citizens indicate one of the main reasons of continuation to rule majority and neglect the minority (Boudon, 1998).

2) In accordance to Tocqueville the domination of public opinion or ideologies affect all aspect of the society and does not let the individuals to give another way or solution. Every body in the society believes the correctness of a phenomenon only because the others believe so (Boudon, 1998). In other words, common opinion is the sole guide of people's reason and thereby largely impinges upon minds and hearts of the people. With regard to equality principle which is one of the main pillars of democracy many realities may not be allowed to detect and hence, the grounds lead to an influence of public opinion despotism. Therefore, the domination of public opinion has a relation to the equalitarian characteristic of democratic society.

3) If the elites, intellectuals and experts not only do not criticize the situations and refrain to mention the flaws but capitulate the status quo, people will also deal with difficulty to curb the social power. Tocqueville refers to Voltaire<sup>2</sup> who had been familiar with liberal and democratic institutions during his three years stay in UK but when returned to France forgot about them and accepted the status quo. Or French famous economists defended a contradictory principle of governmental competitive economy and did not say a word against the uncurbed power of government (Tocqueville, 1966).

Concerning the fact that based on Tocqueville's view traditional middle institutions are being weakened, Some scholars such as Habermas maintains that modern middle institutions such as trade unions, labor syndics, scientific and artistic associations, and new social movements can moderate or control social power (Habermas,1987). However, Tocqueville believes that social power or public opinion power is too strong to be resisted by such middle institutions. This is why he emphasizes on judiciary system and news paper (mass media) power to protect individual's rights. But, at the same time he refers to the fact that an independent judiciary system is infrequent and governments mostly impinge upon the decisions. Also, media, press and pressmen or reporters are not as strong as to do their best independently and without any personal impressions. Thus, to enjoy a majority rule and minority rights, curb the social power and prevent from democratic social despotism what should we do and what is a solution?

### **Individual's Education**

A fundamental remedy to avoid majority despotism must be sought in the individuals. Tocqueville conceives that America in second half of nineteenth century could almost have power over such despotism through resistance of puritans and religious bourgeois. He asserts that individuals understand the difference between what is true and what is public (Budon, 1998). When individuals can distinguish side effects of social power it means that they can have a reaction. Such characteristic of individual to show his or her resistance or critique in this context mainly depends on his or her education in general and religious education in particular (Tocqueville, 1944). In an Islamic view also refers to this fact as "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong" and call those who do so the best of people (Koran, S.3 A. 110).

Tocqueville concentrates on individual responsibility and believes that when individuals believe in true values and respect to each other – the values which religions emphasize on – individual responsibility is undertaken. Majority despotism does not need to religious belief, it needs to some fear. However, freedom does need to moral and religious beliefs. Real liberal democracy depends on individuals and citizens who morally and

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<sup>2</sup> - Francois – Marie Arouet better known by the pen name Voltaire (1694-1778) was a French Enlightenment writer whose works and ideas influenced important thinkers of French Revolution.

responsibly undertake, but those who are not so, deserve despotism of majority and ignoring minority rights. Therefore, due to insufficient moral and responsible individuals, democratic and equalitarian society of France after the revolution was conducive to despotic democratic political system.

Education represents a very inclusive context referring to the transmission of attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, behaviors and skills, from one to the other (Borgatta, 1992). Although education is preliminarily in the social development (Arndt, 1987), it also enjoys a prominent place in the arguments of its role in the process political development. Exposure to education in general and political science in particular through universities, mass media, etc., provides some values and attitudes such as openness to new ideas, respect to other opinions, logical tolerance, independence from traditional authority, willingness to plan and calculate future exigencies, and a strong sense of personal and social efficacy.

Human capital is human because it is embodied in man, and capital because it is a source of future satisfaction, or of future earnings, or both. Education is defined as " a set of attributes of acquired population quality' which are valuable and can be augmented by appropriate investment" (Schultz, 1981:21). Human capital theorists regard educated people as holders of capital who have the capacity to invest in themselves. To them the provision of education is not a form of consumption but a productive investment in society's stock of human capital (Benavot, 1989:15)

Walters in his analysis acknowledges that " An educated population help to build the nation by promoting political awareness and fostering nondependent forms of consciousness" (Walters, 1981). The main contribution of education to political development is to enhance the level of cognitive skills and interactions and consequently to improve political and social behavior of the members of society. Thus, in the aggregate, the greater the level of education, the greater the stock of human capital in a society and the greater the increases in political development. If a democratic society produces collective despotism and closes the eyes to minority rights, the reason will be rest in poor political development which is largely based on insufficient related education.

### **Tocqueville's View and I.R. of Iran (Findings)**

According to Tocqueville and Gupta's definitions of democratic society I.R. of Iran is a democratic society. Because the inclination of Iranian society towards more welfare for members of the society and equal social conditions not only have supported by social movements but also have planned within different five years plans by governments. Also chief executive (president) and members of parliament as well as Islamic councils' members are all elected by eligible people including adult men and women. During three decades almost every year there was an election in Iran. According to table (1)

*Table (1): Elections and plebiscites in I.R. of Iran (1979-2004)*

	Elections/ Plebiscites	Date	Number of Eligible Voters	Number of Participants	Participation Percent
1	Regime Change Plebiscite	1979/03/30-31	20,857,399	20,440,108	98
2	Election of Experts for Considering Final version of Constitution	1979/08/03	20,857,391	10,874,932	51.71
3	Plebiscite of Change of Constitution	1979/12/02-03	20,857,391	15,690,142	75.23
4	Presidential Election (1)	1980/01/25	20,993,643	14,152,887	67.42
5	Parliamentary Election (1)	1980/03/17	20,857,391	10,875,969	52.14
6	Presidential Election (2)	1981/07/24	22,687,097	14,573,803	64.24
7	Presidential Election (3)	1981/10/02	22,687,097	1684717	74.26
8	Election of Leadership EXPERTS (1)	1982/12/10	23,277,871	18,093,061	77.38
9	Parliamentary Election (2)	1984/04/15	24,143,498	15,607,306	64.64
10	Presidential Election (4)	1985/08/16	25,993,802	14,238,587	54.78
11	Parliamentary Election (3)	1988/04/19	27,986,736	16,714,281	59.72
12	Presidential Election (5)	1989/07/28	30,139,598	16,452,677	54.59
13	Plebiscite of Constitutional Revision	1989/07/28	30,139,598	16,428,978	54.51
14	Election of Leadership Experts (2)	1990/10/08	31,280,084	11,602,614	37.09
15	Parliamentary Election (4)	1992/04/10	32,465,558	18,767,042	57.81
16	Presidential Election (6)	1993/06/11	33,156,055	16,769,787	50.66
17	Parliamentary Election (5)	1995/03/09	34,716,000	24,682,386	79.1
18	Presidential Election (7)	1997/05/23	36,466,487	29,145,745	79.92
19	Election of Leadership Experts (3)	1998/10/23	38,570,595	17,857,869	46.3
20	Election of Islamic Councils (1)	1999/03/08	36,739,986	23,668,739	64.42
21	Parliamentary Election (6)	2000/02/18	38,726,431	26,082,157	67.35
22	Presidential Election (7)	2001/06/08	42,170,230	28,155,819	66.77
23	Election of Islamic Councils (2)	2003/02/28	40,501,783	20,235,898	49.96

24	Parliamentary Election (7)	2004/10/23			
	AVERAGE				61.78

*Source: Organization of Management and Planning (2004)*

in the period of 1979-2003 (24 years), 24 elections or plebiscites have been held and 61.78 % of eligible voters have averagely participated. Comparatively to the pre-revolution era and to many countries in the world and particularly in the region, these statistics indicate a tremendous development in democracy and majority rule. According to professor Inglehart's empirical research I.R. of Iran political system right now is the best choice of Iranian people. He indicates that 35.4 percent of people are very satisfied and have a full confidence to the system, and 21.6 are satisfied and confident (Tajik, 2004:103). Number of students in the universities has marvelously increased after the revolution and at the present they amount more than 3.3 millions. More interestingly, in 2001, the girls outran the boys so that 61.4 percent of those who entered universities were girls (Moeen, 2004:249) and the situation continues.

In our survey we have 45 political science students who have been selected in random among 550 students, as a sample and given questionnaire. They include 15 boys and 29 girls and 1 missing; 1 under BA, 22 BA , 19 MA and 2 PhD levels. The questionnaire includes 30 questions which are able to be answered closely and two questions able to be answered openly. The mean and standard deviation show in Table (2).

According to famous A.B.C. pattern and regarding to Toreney and Farnen (1975:41-42) we have divided Teaching political science education into cognitive teaching, affective Teaching and behavioral Teaching and arranged 30 questions into three parts. In cognitive teaching political science the questions concern with governmental structure, the relations between government and society, as well as power distribution mechanisms.

Affective teaching political science includes respect to others and their ideas, tolerance, respect to law and government, respect to social traditions, willingness to justice and freedom, as well as inclination to opposition to unwise traditions and decisions. The questions in behavioral teaching political science refer to some affairs like ability to have an effective forum with others, good listening, thinking and criticizing others opinions, taking part in decision making and some other social and political activities like voting, participating in memorial in ceremonies and social values, obeying law even if it is to be against our interest, and having relation with media critical use from them.



*Table (2) Current Descriptive Statistics of Political Science Education*

*(Mean and Standard Deviation, 2009)*

		Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Cognitive Education	boy	22.9333	7.85099	15
	girl	53.1034	17.68443	29
	Total	42.8182	20.80840	44
Affective Education	boy	33.2667	7.47822	15
	girl	67.8621	19.01451	29
	Total	56.0682	22.99585	44
Behavioral Education	boy	12.2000	3.48876	15
	girl	26.5517	7.39974	29
	Total	21.6591	9.32599	44
Using Formal Resources	boy	20.0667	4.86190	15
	girl	48.2069	12.51393	29
	Total	38.6136	17.08013	44
Using Informal Resources	boy	5.8667	1.64172	15
	girl	17.4483	9.63471	29
	Total	13.5000	9.60015	44

The paper indicates that the more score belongs to affective teaching political science which mainly supports our hypothesis particularly among women. The second rank belongs to cognitive teaching and the last one is behavioral one. It is true that a large part of majority rule and minority rights depends on affective teaching but we should not overlook cognitive and behavioral ones. Concerning the fact that number of university students have been considerably increased, the quantity of teaching political

science is going up, but the emphasis on behavioral teaching needs to be especially augmented. Furthermore, the most students use formal resources in teaching political science which are provided by government in general and universities in particular. It indicates that government and universities should have more expansion and facilities in this context. Therefore, with regard to the fact that number of universities and students have been remarkably enlarged, the general level of teaching political science is acceptable and the situations are not conducive to be threatened by majority despotism. However, the growth in quality and quantity of universities and students should continue and cognitive and affective teaching in general and behavioral one in particular need to be more emphasized. High number of students and an acceptable level in affective teaching and cognitive one can be considered as very significant opportunity but probable insufficient attention to the quality of teaching and almost low level in behavioral one may be regarded as challenges towards teaching political science in I.R. of Iran.

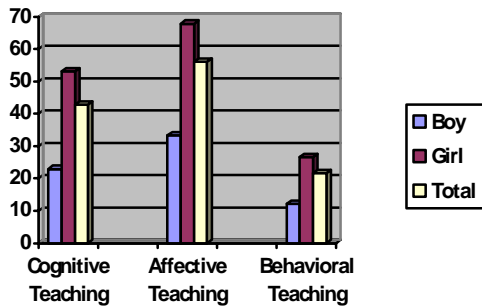


Figure 1. Cognitive, Affective and Behavioral Teaching Political Science

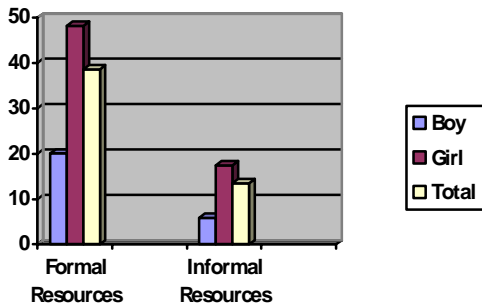


Figure 2. Formal and Informal Resources in Teaching Political Science

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