

# Social Gaps Affecting the Political Space of Two Decades after the Islamic Revolution of Iran

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## Abstract

This survey aims to investigate the main social gaps in Iran including ethnical gap, class gap and old/modern gap. After investigating these gaps, we will review their functions over 20 years. These gaps appeared at the beginning of the establishment of Islamic republic of Iran; however, with the outbreak of war, the ethnical and class gaps were inactive approximately. Meanwhile, the traditional/modern gap was prevalent among the politicians. After the war, the class gap appeared because of the economic policies affecting poor classes of the society. This gap led to the success of politicians. Moreover, the traditional/modern gap increased under the influence of cultural changes.

This survey explores the social gaps which formed the political conditions over two decades after the establishment of the Islamic revolution of Iran. These gaps make the internal interests of the society active and increase the political challenges and conflicts. Therefore, understanding the performance of these gaps can explain political activities in Iran including elections.

**Keywords:** Islamic revolution history, Social gap, Class gap, Ethnical gap, Old / Modern gap

## The Current Social Gaps of Iran

The social gaps include active gaps, inactive gaps, structural gaps, and historical gaps. As their names indicate, the active and inactive gaps are related to the activity conditions. Structural gaps refer to those gaps

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influenced by the structure of the society. By historical gap, we mean the religious or ethnical gaps created by historical conditions of a society.

Religious, ethnical, gender, and generation gaps are regarded as the current gaps of Iranian society. The traditional/modern gap is the main gap of Iran. Therefore, the structural gaps include gender, generation, and class gaps. The historical gaps include ethnical, religious, and traditional/modern gap. In Iran, the religious gap is synchronized with the ethnical gap & generally activates with it. Moreover, gender and generation gaps are under the influence of the traditional/modern gap because they appear in the modern parts of the society having various moral aims. Therefore, there are three kinds of main gaps in Iran: ethnical gap, class gap, traditional/modern gap that will be examined as follows:

### **Ethnical Gap**

Evidences show that the ethnical gap plays a main role in the history of Iran. Based on the information related to the ethnical and language differences, Iran is in the sixteenth position of the world's countries (Abotalebi, 1999). Authors have divided the ethnical groups of Iran into three races:

- Aryan races including Afghans, Hizareh, Baluchs, Bakhtiaries, Farses, Isfahanees, Kermanies, Kurds and Lures
- Non-Aryan races including Turks, Qashghaees, Mongols, Turkmans, etc
- Mixed tribes

Moreover, the Russian researchers have divided the tribes of Iran into 29 groups. Evidence shows that 58 % of Iran's people are Persian-speaking (Abotalebi, 1999) and this shows the importance of ethnical gap in Iran. On the other hand, the activity of this gap is very important. It is clear that ethnical gap is potentially active in Iran because of the weakness of national identity against ethnical forces (Bashiriyeh, 2006, p.137). this fact is obvious over the past century in Iran. During the recent years, the weakness of the central government has increased and its ethnical control has decreased. Therefore, with the increase of the central government power (Reza Shah, MuhammadReza Shah & Islamic Republic of Iran), the ethnical tendencies have been suppressed. However, they are potentially active.

When the ethnical gap coincides with religious gap, it becomes more important. In these conditions, a more active ethnical–religious gap is formed (e.g., Kurds, Baluchs, Turkmans, Assyrians, and Jews). This is observable among Kurd/Sunni minority in the west of Iran. On the other hand, this gap can be deeper under the influence of the class gap. The adjustment of these gaps can be caused by disharmonious development of the country. Therefore, the available harmonies can lead to the synchronization of ethnical and class gaps (Maghsoodi, 1998).

Synchronization can change the identity of each gap in the sense that structural obstacles related to the formal activity of gaps are regarded as the clues of ethnical and religious gaps of a society even though the government tries to decrease them.

### **Class Gap**

Class gap, not only emphasizes the conflict between poor and rich, but also describes the life style and the political objectives of different classes. Evidence shows that poor people consider economy as more important than freedom, but rich people believe that democracy and freedom are more important. In this regard, Brington Moor has concluded that the autonomous people play a main role in the development of parliamentary democracy and the appearance of democracy is based on bourgeoisie (as cited in Bashirieh, 2002, p. 63).

On the other hand, there are some pieces of evidence about the tendency of the poor towards power. For example, during an investigation in Germany, the correspondents were asked to answer this question: "Among the democratic, single–party and without–party systems, which one is more important?" Results showed that poor people supported the democratic system lesser than the rich ones (Lipset, 1965). The similar researchers of some countries including Australia, Japan, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, West Germany, Italy, and France showed that poor people do not support democratic systems (Rose, 1948).

In his article titled Democracy and the authority of laborers, Lipset has presented subjects related to the tendency of poor people toward the authority. In this regard, David & Erikson emphasize the nervous behavior of those who do not have a tendency towards authority. In their opinion, there is a negative relationship between the authoritarianism and nerve behavior of the poor people, because authoritarianism plays a main

role in the personality of these people (as cited in David & Erikson, 1957).

Therefore, such researches show that democracy is an important mental disturbance of poor people. This is because the needs of poor people are lesser than the riches'. Maslow has classified needs as follows: 1) material needs, 2) security needs, 3) relational needs, 4) respect needs, 5) self-possession needs (Rafipoor, 2003:14)

In Maslow opinion, respect and self-possession needs are more important. Poor people prefer the low-level needs, which are not related to the democratic aims. This issue makes clear why these people should not decide for politics.

Similarly, Dye & Ziegler (1993, p. 72) state that,

American investigations, not only emphasize the lack of democratic motivation of people, but also show that the freedom of thought, magazines and social viewpoints are only belonged to the high – class people. Compared to the high – class people, the poor people seek the authority. Therefore, if democracy was under the influence of poor people support, the democratic values were diminished.

Table 1: The structure of Iran's social classification in census of 1976-1996

Year	High class		Middle class	Low class		All of the employees
	High	Relatively high	Middle	Relatively low	Laborers	
1355 (1976)	113205	486757	273514 1	1270405	4170992	8799420
1365 (1986)	188927	647023	475502 1	1192812	4000452	11001551
1375 (1996)	296848	1169575	505614 1	1369968	6576342	14571572

Source: (Bahrani, 2009, pp. 151 & 161)

Investigation of class gap is based on the conditions of the society. Regarding the definition of the social classes, it is hypothesized that the capitals of a society include economic, cultural, and political capitals. The classification of the society in Iran is based on various criteria. In his book titled "The middle class and the political changes of Iran", Bahrani

has classified people of Iran based on their jobs. He uses a kind of public numeration. Table 1 demonstrates the various classes of people in Iran: Based on statistics of 1355-1357 (1976-1996), Iran's population is classified into three groups:

- High-class
- Middle class
- Low-class

On the basis of the above table, the proportion of the population in each of the social classes are as follows:

Table 2: The percentages of different classes on the basis of census: 1976-1996

Year	High class	Middle class	Low class
1355 (1976)	%6/8	%31/1	%62
1365 (1986)	%7/5	%43	%47
1375 (1996)	%10/1	%35	%55

As is evident in Table 2, the relative volume of the middle class population has increased over the first decade after the Islamic revolution of Iran. Then, during the second decade, the middle-class population has decreased. Meanwhile, the relative volume of high- class population remains constant. The increase in the number of the middle- class population shows that the class gap is not so deep during the first decade.

### **Traditional/Modern Gap**

The traditional/modern gap is a historical gap by which the society is divided into two parts with different life styles and political attitudes. This gap appears in the modern societies. In his books named *The school of Tabriz* and *An introduction on legislation*, Tabatabaee presents the history of the traditional/modern gap. In his opinion, this gap was formed because of the lack of struggle between the traditionalists and the modernists. In the western countries, the modernists ignore the old system totally (Tabatabaee, 2006, pp. 595-596).

The traditional/modern gap is current among the middle and high classes whose traditional and modern educations may affect the political opinions. In order to choose the sample, the related jobs can be used and the work groups can be divided into traditional and modern parts. The traditional middle classes include traders, merchants, clerics, dependent

intelligentsia, and intellectual leaders. The modern middle classes include physicians, attorneys, engineers, architects, and teachers.

The populations of traditional/modern gap are classified in Table 3:

Table 3: Middle class in separation of traditional/modern in census of 1976-1996

Year	All of the employees	Middle class/total	Traditional people	Modernists
1976	4492303	%51	%63/4	%36/6
1986	6594856	%59/9	%54/8	%45/2
1996	7595684	%52/1	%49/4	%50/6

Source: Bahrani, (1388, p. 158)

Results show that traditional classes have decreased from the beginning of the Islamic revolution of Iran. Meanwhile, the relative number of the modernists has increased. Therefore, this is to say that at the beginning of the revolution the old classes had more political successes in comparison with the modernists. On the other hand, the modernists are more successful in recent years.

### **The Function of Social Gaps over 20 years**

At first, it is worth examining the influence of the above mentioned gaps during 20 years from the establishment of the Islamic republic of Iran. At the beginning of this time, the ethnical gaps became activated due to the decrease in the power of the central government. This activity caused the political rebellion by which some political difficulties happened. In this regard, the Kurdistan's democrat party supported by the organization of Cherek-haye Fedaii Khalgh, requested self- autonomy. In Khoramshahr, people's organization of Arab started the armed rebellion. In Turkmenahra, people's headquarters of Turkmen started a rebellion under the support of Kurdistan's democrat party. On the other hand, the central government rejected the self-independence of the provinces and struggles increased. Therefore, the government defeated the centrifugal forces. In Turkmenahra, some military struggles happened in 1979-1980 during which people's councils of Turkmen were defeated (Behrooz, 2001, p. 192). The security forces of Khuzestan defeated the opposition forces. Moreover, Sedum Hossien failed to provoke the Arabs of Khuzestan. The opposition forces of Sistan & Baluchistan failed to make difficulties. The ecological conditions of this providence prevented the

activity of the opposition forces. Finally, these groups could not continue their operations more than the first two years of the revolution. Only the Kurd separatists were the centrifugal forces who caused some problems.

The relative power of Kurd separatists was because of several factors. First, the ethnical gap and religious gap of Kurdistan and West Azerbaijan overlapped with each other. This matter intensified the degree of disputes among Kurds in comparison with the East Azerbaijan where only ethnical gap was active. On the other hand, the existence of "Agaba"(supporter) in both countries (Turkey and Iraq) enabled them to act speedily. Moreover, the mountainous conditions of Kurdistan increased opportunities for guerrilla and partisanship operations.

The democrat party of Kurdistan was the main opposition party whose slogan was "Democracy for Iran, self-autonomy for Kurdistan". Challenges among the party and the central government continued till 1983. Finally, the chiefs of the party left Iran (Keddie, 2004, p. 38). After some times, the Komleh party withdrew from Iraq and continued its guerrilla activities. After withdrawal of the democrat party of Kurdistan in 1983, the Komleh party retreated. Meanwhile, some challenges happened among the two parties (Behrooz, 2001, pp. 223-224).

After the Islamic Revolution of Iran, ethnical gap disappeared under the influence of the central government pressure. Besides this gap, the class gap appeared from the beginning of the revolution. Because of disharmonious development, this gap is related to the ethnical gap. Meanwhile, the main shareholders of the previous regime were under the control of political forces. In this regard, some of the big industries were under the control of the government. After the establishment of the new government, the class gap was inactive for some time due to the war. The class gap was controlled by the governors who emphasized on the rights of the poor. Moreover, it was influenced by the struggles of the hoarders and the market policies. After the war and the change of economic policies, the poor people were more and more under the pressure of class gap. When Hashemi Rafsanjani was elected as the president of Iran for the second time, an inflation of 50% endangered the economy of the country and people revolted in some cities including Shiraz, Mashhad, Arak, Mobarakeh, Chahardang and Tehran. Therefore, the circumstances extended class gap. This issue encouraged the poor people to change the

circumstances, and their efforts led to some changes which overlapped with the efforts of new classes for the achievement of political positions

The traditional/modern gap appeared after the first days of the Islamic revolution of Iran. It is worth noting that this gap was supported by some parties. The parties such as the Islamic Republic Party, the soldiers of holy war and the clerics who supported the traditional gaps competed with the modernists including the volunteers' organization, the liberals and the mass party. The main challenges between these groups were related to women's veil, the Lord, women's retaliation and the Islamic title of the government. They competed with each other in order to achieve the parliamentary chairs and to elect the first president.

After the war, the activity of this gap decreased. In such circumstances, the activities of most of the parties were prevented by Liberals and socialists. In addition, these oppositions were because of the traditional religious jurisprudence, the role of the government in economy, and the role of leader in decision-makings. The difference between the opinions of the crusaders started in the middle 1981 and caused the Islamic republic party to get into difficulties. The main challenges were rooted in various religious attitudes. For example, some people asked the government not to intervene in internal and economic affairs of the country and some others supported the government's intercession in economy, external business, nationalization, and limitation of shareholders. (Fawzi, 2005, p. 108). This movement represented the socialist ideals in line with the modernists' objectives who had lost their political leaders during the first years of revolution. Although they did not reach the directorship positions in the republic until the seventh period, they could achieve the majority of the votes of the third assembly. Moreover, this political course was ruined by the elections of the forth and the fifth assemblies. It was a democratic course because of the ideological changes and political tendencies.

In such circumstances, the democratic course called left wing gave the parliament to the neoclassicisms for the first time. As mentioned before, it was because of the class gap. The activity of the traditional/modern gap increased in the seventh elections because of political circumstances.



### **Political Gap's Dispute**

Political gaps affect on the formation of political structures. There are two kinds of gaps: condensed gap and intersecting gap. The first is referred to the political gaps which support each other (e.g. the religious gap and the ethnical gap of Kurdistan). The second is referred to the political gaps which interrupt and inactivate each other.

Therefore, the society of Iran has three intersecting gaps; but if the economic gap of Iran leads to the ethnical gap, the society will include two condensed gaps and one intersecting gap. From the viewpoint of Bashiriyeh, the ideologies and political parties will increase and the dispute potential will be intensified (Bashiriyeh, 2002, p. 105). Therefore, the dispute potential of Iran is high.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This survey explored the current gaps of the society of Iran including ethnical, class, and traditional/modern gaps. Sometimes, these gaps may be based on the other gaps which are inactive. These gaps are related to the several stages of the 20-year old history of the revolution by which the political structures are shaped.

The activity of those gaps started at the beginning of the Islamic Revolution of Iran because there were no structure obstacles. With the start of the imposed war, the ethnical and class gaps were temporarily inactivated and the traditional/ modern gap continued its activity among the politicians. At the end of the war, the class gap was activated under the influence of economic policies and an increase in the population of low classes. The activity of this gap, combined with the activity of traditional/ modern gap resulted from the cultural conditions and the increase in the relative population of modernists, caused the political representatives of new classes to be more successful. This caused the increase of the traditional/modern gap too.

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