

# Chapter VIII The Shaping of *Rūstā-shahrs* and the Emergence of Self-Governance in the Postrevolutionary Rural Societies of Iran<sup>1</sup>

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## Foreword

The ninth Iranian presidential election, held in June 2005, proved to be one of the main turning points in the Iranian political process in recent years. President Khātāmī's 8-year-old mission for an Iranian democratization process finally lost its effectiveness and ended its historic role. Iran now seems to be in a new political era, experiencing more influences and pressures from fundamentalist militant power, especially from Revolutionary Guards and Basīj.

Current President Ahmadīnezhād has been standing strong against Israel and the United States. In the domestic political arena, even conservative groups are criticizing his inconsistent, populist economic policies, which have resulted in years-long period of extreme inflation.

Things have changed in Iran since Seyyed Mohammad Khātāmī was elected president in May of 1997. He received a sensationally high percentage of support (about 60%) from the Iranian people, which showed that Iranians were eager for political reform. Four years later, it appeared that the majority of people still supported him, as he was elected to serve a second term.

Was this process toward democratization only a superficial phenomenon, or does it reflect drastic changes occurring deep inside Iranian society? In this respect, special attention must be paid to developments that occurred after the first nationwide election for local councils in February 1999, which is considered to be one of the most important achievements of President Khātāmī's reform program. Since the second election, held in February 2003, and the third in December 2006, local councils appear to have become fully established in Iranian society.

During the past 25–30 years—including the 1979 revolution, the 8-year war against Iraq, and the reconstruction and democratization which occurred in that war's aftermath—Iranian society has experienced a drastic transformation, which completely changed its traditional urban-rural structures. In a traditional Iranian society,

<sup>1</sup> Several parts of this article are based on my doctoral thesis—submitted to the University of Tokyo in March and accepted in October 2008—and also on other related articles.

typical landlords (*mālek* in Persian) mostly reside in cities, and they sometimes sell their village land and its people together as an organic segment of their wealth. This system has changed in recent years.

In this paper, these huge social transformations will be split into 4 parts. First I will trace the emergence of self-governance in reference to Iran's legal developments, from the supplementary constitutional law of 1907 through the 1979 constitution to the present day. Second, I will review discussions about local councils and nationwide elections that appeared in the Iranian media—specifically in daily newspapers—during the past 3 elections. Then I will examine the structural changes of Iranian rural society during the 1979 revolution and the 8-year war with Iraq, using data from population censuses in 1956, 1976, 1986, and 1996. Finally, I will examine some examples of typical *rūstā-shahrs*<sup>2</sup> from my 2 years of field research, which concluded that the recent formation and articulation of small rural cities (*rūstā-shahrs*) has made the traditional village society and local system mostly outdated.

The word *rūstā-shahr* is a new word in the Persian language. It was originally a translation of a French term, most probably *cit  rurale*, which is used in contrast with *cit  urbaine*. Although it is essentially a sociological term, most Iranians understand it to mean a cross between a city and a village. The term *shahrak* (meaning “small city”) could also be used, but since *shahrak* includes newly constructed areas inside big cities, such as Tehr n, Mashhad, or Esfah n, I prefer to use the word *r st -shahr* here.

## 1. Legal-Historical Overview of the Emergence of Self-Governance in Modern Iran

### 1.1. Era of Constitutional Revolution

To explore the prehistory of the local councils in Iran, I will review the constitutional provisions on local councils (*anjomans*) and their relevant legislations before the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The following laws are covered in this chapter: relevant articles in the 1907 supplementary law of the 1906 constitution, which was the first written constitution in modern Iranian history; articles in the Province (*ey lat*) and District (*vel yat*) *Anjomans* Bill, submitted to parliament in 1907; the Law to Organize the Municipal Office, the City *Anjoman*, and the *Qasabe* (small town) *Anjoman*, approved in 1949; and the District (*shahrest n*) and Province (*ost n*)

<sup>2</sup> The definition of the term of *r st -shahr* will be discussed in Section 3, but the basic meaning is “village-town,” or small town with a population size of 2,000 to 20,000, located in the rural part of Iran. The term *r st -shahr* was first suggested by Dr. Mohammad Jav d Z hed  of Pay m-e N r University in 1999 when I was just starting to carry out a series of field studies in Iran, which I executed between 1999 and 2001.

*Anjomans* Bill, submitted to parliament in 1970, together with its amendment bill, submitted in 1976.

First, less than a year after the introduction of the constitution in 1906, there appeared 4 articles in the supplementary law of 1907. It dictates that “provincial and departmental” *anjomans* in which the members are directly elected by local citizens

Table 1-1. Legal-Historical Process of Local *Anjomans* and *Showrās* in Modern Iran

Year	Date	Subject
1906		<u>Constitutional Revolution in Iran</u>
1906	12.30	Proclamation of the constitution
1907	4.21	Submission of the Province ( <i>eyālat</i> ) and District ( <i>velāyat</i> ) <i>Anjomans</i> Bill
1907	10.7	Proclamation of the supplementary articles to the constitution
1945		<u>End of the Second World War</u>
1949	7.26	Approval of the Law to Organize the Municipal Office, the City <i>Anjoman</i> , and the <i>Qasabe</i> (small town) <i>Anjoman</i>
1952		<u>Government of Dr. Mosaddeq</u>
1952	9.27	Preparation of the bill on farmers' share expansion and agricultural development organizations
1962		<u>Inauguration of the Shah's Land Reform (White Revolution)</u>
1968	7.4	Approval of the regulation on the functions of the <i>anjoman-e deh</i> in order for the improvement and the development of the villages
1970	6.19	Submission of the District ( <i>shahrestān</i> ) and Province ( <i>ostān</i> ) <i>Anjomans</i> Bill
1975	3.16	Approval of the law on village <i>anjoman</i> formation and village chief ( <i>dehbānī</i> ) nomination
1976	6.9	Approval of the amendment law on village <i>anjoman</i> formation and village chief ( <i>dehbānī</i> ) nomination
1976	6.15	Submission of the amendment bill for the District ( <i>shahrestān</i> ) and Province ( <i>ostān</i> ) <i>Anjomans</i> Law
1979		<u>Islamic Revolution in Iran</u>
1979	12	Approval of the new constitution by national voting
1996	5.22	Approval of the law on the structures of <i>showrā-ye eslāmī</i> , their obligations, elections, and appointments of mayors
1997	5	<u>Khātāmī wins the seventh presidential election</u>
1999	2.26	First nationwide election of the local <i>showrā-ye eslāmī</i> is held

Underlining indicates the main topics in the modern history of Iran.

Source: Prepared by the author.

should be the main actors of all the reforms concerned, and should also supervise the finances of local governments.<sup>3</sup>

The elaboration of these articles was the Province (*eyālat*) and District (*velāyat*) *Anjomans* Bill, which was submitted to parliament on the 21st of April, 1907. This bill was composed of 122 articles in 4 sections; the sections were entitled, “Structure of *Eyālat Anjoman*,” “Function of *Eyālat Anjoman*,” “Budget Account of *Eyālat* and *Velāyat*,” and “Structure of *Velāyat Anjoman*.”

As Mangol Bayat puts it, these efforts to regulate the activities of *anjomans* were to “no avail.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, it is interesting to see that several *anjomans* became active even if in a very short time; of those, the Tabrīz *anjoman* was the most eminent example.

According to Hachioshi’s pioneering study, the *Anjoman* newspaper, published by the Tabrīz *anjoman*, “was first entitled *Rūznāme-ye Mellī-ye Tabrīz* (Gazette of Tabrīz National Congress) ... it was published under the title *National Gazette* until issue No. 37, then at No. 38 it changed its title to *Anjoman*.”<sup>5</sup> Issue No. 38 is stamped as 2 February 1907 publication; if this date is correct, it must have been published just before the submission of the aforementioned Province (*eyālat*) and District (*velāyat*) *Anjomans* Bill.<sup>6</sup>

Compared with today’s law on the *showrā-ye eslāmī*, the *anjoman* bill of 1907 was far less conscious of self-governance at the village level (for an example, see Part 4 of the bill). This seems to reflect the huge structural transition of Iran’s rural societies during this 100-year period.

As Ettehādīye writes, this 1907 bill was soon put into practice. Yet, beginning immediately after the bill’s execution, the government was faced with a series of

<sup>3</sup> English translation of these 4 articles appears in E. G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905–1909* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910; repr., London: Frank Cass, 1966), 382–83.

<sup>4</sup> See Mangol Bayat, “Anjoman,” in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 2 (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 80.

<sup>5</sup> Hachioshi Makoto 八尾師誠, “Iran rikken kakumei to shimbun: ‘Anjoman’ shi no bunseki ni mukete” イラン立憲革命と新聞——『Anjoman』紙の分析にむけて (The Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the gazette: Toward an analysis of the *Anjoman* paper), in *Nairiku Ajia, Nishi Ajia no shakai to bunka* 内陸アジア・西アジアの社会と文化 (Society and culture of Inland and West Asia), ed. Mori Masao 護雅夫 (Tokyo: Yamakawa shuppansha 山川出版社, 1983), 869 (in Japanese).

<sup>6</sup> According to Kuroda, other than the prominent examples in Tehrān and Tabrīz, “only the *anjomans* of Esfahān and Rasht had enough capacity to publish their own papers.” See Kuroda Takashi 黒田卓, “Iran rikken kakumei to chiiki shakai: Gīrān shū Anjoman o chūshin ni” イラン立憲革命と地域社会——ギーラーン州アンジョマンを中心に (The Iranian Constitutional Revolution and regional society: The case of the Gilan *Anjoman*), *Tōyōshi Kenkyū* 東洋史研究 (The journal of Oriental researches) 53, no. 3 (Dec. 1994): 158 (in Japanese).

enormous difficulties resulting from political confusion and financial crises.<sup>7</sup>

More than 40 years later, the Law to Organize the Municipal Office, the City *Anjomān*, and the *Qasabe* (small town) *Anjomān* was approved by the National Committee in 1949. In that law it was intended that municipal offices be expanded to smaller towns, and in doing so, democratic *anjomāns* be organized there through elections by their inhabitants.

In 1970, nearly a decade after the 1962 Land Reform was introduced by Mohammad Rezā Shāh, the District (*shahrestān*) and Province (*ostān*) *Anjomāns* Bill was submitted to parliament with the intention of more effectively promoting the development of rural society. Its amendment bill was submitted in 1976.

The community basis for organizing *anjomāns* in the 1970–76 law is supposed to be lower than that of the 1907 bill; it occurs at the *shahrestān* level, not the *ostān* level. More importantly, according to the 1970s laws, *anjomāns* were nothing more than the organs of the dictatorship of the Pahlavī dynasty. In those, there is no amount of self-governance that is based on the kind of democratic society that was envisioned at the time of constitutionalism.

### 1.2. Era of the Mosaddeq Government

We can trace another legal-historical root in the *showrā-ye eslāmī* law in 1996, which begins with a bill on farmers' share expansion and agricultural development organizations that was prepared by Dr. Mosaddeq's government in 1952, and which continues to "the amendment law on village *anjomān* formation and village chief (*dehbānī*) nomination" of 1976.

In Part II of the 1952 bill, entitled "Organizations for Agricultural Development," *showrās* corresponding with 4 levels of rural administrative divisions—*deh*, *dehestān*, *bakhsh*, and *shahrestān*—are defined in full detail.

In Article 17 of this bill, members of the *showrā-ye deh* are described as being constituted by "one representative of the landowner(s), a legally elected *kadkhodā* (headman), and 3 trusty representatives of the villagers." Considering the basic structure of Iranian rural society at that time, which has generally been described as the "*mālek-ra'īyat* system,"<sup>8</sup> this article is noteworthy in that it gives the representatives of the villagers more than half of the seats in the *showrā-ye deh*.

<sup>7</sup> See Mansūre Etehdāīye, *Majles va Entekhābāt: Az Mashrūte tā Pāyān-e Qājāriye* (National Congress and the election: From the Constitutional Revolution to the end of Qajar dynasty) (Tehrān: Nashr-e Tārīkh-e Īrān, 1996/7 [1375]), 33.

<sup>8</sup> For more on this traditional system of Iranian rural society, see the works of A. K. S. Lambton (especially *Landlord and Peasant in Persia* [London: Oxford University Press, 1953]), Morio Ōno's several works (in Japanese) and others.

Moreover, it is important to see that in this 1952 bill, the community basis for “the organizations for agricultural development” (the *showrā* system) is described as the *deh* (village), and not as the *dehestān* (administrative village). At the level of *showrā-ye bakhsh*, and even *showrā-ye shahrestān*, the bill prescribes that 2 representatives of landlords or villagers of each *bakhsh* should have seats, thus paving the way for villagers to extend their voices to higher *showrās*.

In the 1952 bill by the Mosaddeq government, each *showrā* was expected to function as an active manager or operator of the community’s funds (see the first part of Article 25). In the fourth sentence of Article 25, the *showrā*’s activities are prescribed as “the preservation and scavenging of public places, the cleaning and supervision of public boulevards, the cleaning of small streets (*kūche-hā*), the preserving of the health of the villagers...” This shows that the *showrā* system in this bill was designed to be the core of future developments toward self-governance at the village level.

Yet, Dr. Mosaddeq’s government did not last long. Due to the coup d’état by the Shah, the grand design of the 1952 bill did not materialize in Iranian rural society at that time.

After the Land Reform, instigated by the Shah for the purpose of eliminating the large-scale landowners who were the most serious obstacles to the Shah’s government, “the regulation on the functions of the *anjoman-e deh* in order for the improvement and the development of the villages” was approved in 1968. This was intended by the government to enable the accruing of huge investments from the West, particularly the United States.

Later, the law on village *anjoman* formation and village chief (*dehbānī*) nomination, approved in 1975 with amendments added in 1976, was intended to redefine the emerging new villages that were appearing after the 1962 Land Reform. Although too idealistic in some ways, many of that law’s perspectives were obviously inherited by the 1996 law on the *showrā-ye eslāmī*. Some articles, including those relating to the qualifications required of candidates for membership in the *anjoman-e deh*, were even more progressive in 1976 than in 1996.

These laws were passed for the purpose of improving the productivity of Iranian villages through the introduction of large-scale farming, for which the *anjoman-e deh* was also intended to serve. The government moved to suppress the self-governance of individual cities. Even so, many points of the abovementioned laws can be said to have paved the way for the developments that occurred after the 1979 revolution, particularly in the era of the Khātāmī government.

## 2. Introduction of the *Showrā-ye Eslāmī* after the 1979 Revolution

### 2.1. The 1996 Law on the *Showrā-ye Eslāmī* and Its Inauguration

Soon after the establishment of the revolutionary government in 1979, Āyatollāh Khomeynī issued a fatwa (legal order by religious authority) “to prepare legally for a *showrā* system” (30 April 1979 at Qom). Articles 100–103 of the new constitution were the first step toward the materialization of Khomeynī’s order, but they were suspended for years before a specific law on the *showrā-ye eslāmī* was passed, in the last days of the Rafsanjānī government (1987–97).

From these articles, one can decipher several characteristics of the new *showrā* system. One is that the term *showrā*, which is Arabic in origin, appears in place of *anjoman* which is of Persian origin. This seems to reflect the intention of the revolutionary government to prepare a “one hundred percent Islamic” constitution.<sup>9</sup>

The law on the structures of *showrā-ye eslāmī*, their obligations, elections, and appointments of mayors was approved on 22 March 1996, a year before the seventh presidential election of Iran, in which Seyyed Mohammad Khātāmī was first elected. This law was then amended twice after the second nationwide *showrā* election.

The law consists of 95 articles divided into 5 parts: Structure, Election, Obligation and Function, Coping with the Violation of Law, and Other Regulations. This structure resembles the District (*shahrestān*) and Province (*ostān*) *Anjomans* Bill of 1970, and the sentences of the first Article were taken from Articles 100–101 of the constitution.

Compared with the presiding laws on *anjomans* and *showrās*, the community basis of the new *showrā* system is twofold, including villages (*rūstā*) and cities (*shahr*). Thus, the members of *showrā-ye rūstā* and *showrā-ye shahr* are to be elected by the inhabitants of respective villages and cities. As to other *showrās*, namely *showrā-ye bakhsh*, *showrā-ye shahrestān*, and *showrā-ye ostān*, members are all elected from among the members of *showrā-ye rūstā* and *showrā-ye shahr*.

After the establishment of the reformist government led by President Khātāmī, the first nationwide election of the *showrā-ye eslāmī* was held on 26 February 1999. Four years later, a second election was held, on 28 February 2003. After the election, the *showrā-ye eslāmī* law was amended 3 times in 2003—27 May, 27 July, and 28 September.

The third election was held on 15 December 2006, several months earlier than the ordinary cycle, in order to coincide with the election of the Assembly of Experts. Today the third *showrā-ye eslāmī* is active in every city and village in Iran.

As to election and membership, the *showrā-ye eslāmī* law regulates that “for

<sup>9</sup> See Shaul Bakhash, *The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1985), 81.

the villages under the population of 1,500 *showrā* members are three, for over 1,500 five" (Art. 4). For cities, it multiplies by 9 and corresponds to the number of members according to population (Art. 7). Cities with under 20,000 people have 5 *showrā* members plus 2 substitutes, while cities with over 2 million have 25 members plus 8 substitutes. Tehrān's *showrā* members are 31 in number, plus 12 substitutes.<sup>10</sup>

Here I will present some typical arguments which appeared at the time of the 3 aforementioned elections, which help us to understand city-dweller's comprehension of the new administrations in the rural sector.

The first *showrā-ye eslāmī* election held at February 1999 was the first occasion of its kind in the history of Iran, and was accepted enthusiastically by the Iranian people as a symbol of the Khātāmī government's reform policy. One newspaper, *Nashāt*, writes that the "*showrā* committee is now realized after 100 years of effort," reflecting the history of its legalization from the time of Constitutional Revolution in Iran (*Nashāt*, 19 April 1999).

Another newspaper, *Īrān*, writes that the "*showrā* system expands the free space for people's discussions," and expresses its hope for a complete change of face in Iranian cities and villages (*Īrān*, 23 February 1999). On the other hand, the *Qods* paper cites Supreme Leader Khāmene'ī's words as "people should vote for experienced, pious, and affectionate persons, not for persons eager for the fame, bread, and high position," thus warning against opportunists who want to exploit people's excitement (*Qods*, 25 February 1999).

Another paper, *Zan*, writes that 7,251 women stood for the first *showrā-ye eslāmī* election (*Zan*, 5 January 1999), and *Āriyā* reports just after the election that "women won the election in several cities," citing Bahār and Lālejīn, both in Hamedān Province, with Sāleh-ābād and Pārs-ābād in Ardabīl Province (*Āriyā*, 1 March 1999). The *Towse'e* paper also reports that 10 female members were elected to the *showrā-ye eslāmī* in Semnān Province (*Towse'e*, 1 March 1999).

These few examples show how enthusiastically the nation of Iran accepted the first nationwide *showrā-ye eslāmī* election, and how it became a political event symbolizing the reformist policy of President Khātāmī's government. At the same time, this election was the first such experience for most city and village citizens, and several unexpected occurrences followed.

The *Resālat* paper writes that in about 6 percent of villages the election wasn't to be held, mostly because the number of candidates did not reach the regulation (*Resālat*, 12 January 1999). In addition, the *Jomhūrī-ye Eslāmī* paper reports that the Majles (parliament) decided to "fix the election date as before 30 March 1999 separately, for the communities of pastoral nomads" (*Jomhūrī-ye Eslāmī*, 21 January

<sup>10</sup> These numbers are written only in the law; in reality the members of Tehrān are fifteen in number. The mayor of Tehrān is now appointed by the government. Incidents leading to this alteration should be treated with other interests and focuses.



1999).

The second *showrā* election, held on 28 February 2003, reflected the experiences of the first *showrās* in all of the communities, and in most of the cases the election was more practical than symbolic in nature. At the same time, however, the result of the election in large cities, including Tehrān, clearly showed a political trend in favor of “revolutionary” conservatives.

The voting rates of this election, especially in large cities, were at a remarkably low level. The *Khorāsān* paper wrote that “the national average is about 50 percent,” and the rate in Tehrān was lower than 24 percent (*Khorāsān*, 4 March 1999). But another side of this story is that the new administrative system permeated local societies; in many of the villages, the *dehyārī* (village chief) was appointed after this election. An analytical article appeared in the *Hambastegī* paper before the third election and concluded that “comparing the results of the 2 elections, the average school career of the elected in the second election is higher than the first, which shows that people who are more skilled in practical affairs are expected to join the *showrā-ye eslāmī*” (*Hambastegī*, 15 November 2006).

The results of the third *showrā-ye eslāmī* election, held in December 2006, were generally discussed as showing an early decline of support for President Ahmadī-nezhād, a conclusion mostly based on results in larger cities. Yet, seen from the viewpoint of the way in which the new administrative system was established in rural societies, the differences are obviously widening between the communities that adopted the new system efficiently and those that did not.

## 2.2. Some Observations on the Second Local *Showrā* Election

With regard to the second nationwide local *showrā* election, held in February 2003, I had different impressions from those of major Iranian newspapers, whose analyses were mainly based on results in Tehrān and other big cities. I had a chance to observe this election in 2 of the communities—*rūstā-shahrs*, according to my definition—in which I was continuing my fieldwork; these were Varzane and Zībā-shahr, near Esfahān.

My general impression was that the smaller cities and villages you visit, you can generally find that elections are conducted more seriously. In a sense this is very natural because the operation of the election was targeted for the development and well-being of cities and villages that are smaller and more remote from the center, Tehrān.

Here I want to elaborate on the details of a second *showrā* election in Zībā-shahr (“beautiful city” in Persian), a typical *rūstā-shahr* situated near Mobāreke, Esfahān Province. I think it is difficult to identify this small city only by name because it was recently created on 24 July 2002, by integrating the 3 former villages of Lenj,

Khūlenjān, and Ādergān.

In these years there has been a tendency towards formulating new cities in Iran by integrating nearby villages. This occurs because villages can accrue numerous privileges by becoming cities, including an official budget provided by the government. In the case of Zībā-shahr, the second election proved all the more serious because having 5 seats in the *showrā* means having only one-third of the 15 seats of the 3 former villages. The corresponding 3 districts (*mahall* in Persian) that constitute this new city are still competing keenly with each other for political leadership. There have been serious discussions and disputes for years, primarily about the name of the new city. In Khūlenjān the strongest public opinion was to attach its own “historical” name to the new city, but people in Lenj and Ādergān were generally against it. At one time they proposed the name “Zāyande-shahr” as an alternative, but it was officially rejected by the regional government “because the name of the river Zāyande Rūd is not to be used only for one specific city.” At last, the simple and ordinary name “Zībā-shahr” was offered by the provincial governor of Esfahān, and for the villagers there was nothing to do but accept it.

As to the second *showrā* election, it was clear from the starting point that Khūlenjān had an advantage because of the size of its population. Several residents of the rival village Ādergān got very serious about it and organized a kind of political group with the name of E‘terāf-e Sabz,<sup>11</sup> meaning “Green League,” in cooperation with some inhabitants of Lenj. Their tactic for the election was to campaign with the list of 5 candidates from E‘terāf-e Sabz—Ebrāhīm Rahīmī, Farjollāh Nazariyān, and Hamīdreẓā Bakhshiyān from Lenj, plus Morteẓā Nāderī and Hoseyn Mohammādī from Ādergān—and to ask their supporters in Lenj and Ādergān to vote for all of them.

The immediate result of this election is shown in Table 2-1, and it is clear that the Khūlenjān side almost won outright, gaining 4 of the 5 available seats. The only exception was the first winner from Lenj district, Ebrāhīm Rahīmī; he was the core member of E‘terāf-e Sabz, so naturally his position became very important after the declaration of the result.

At first he was said to have pretended to resign, but in the end he accepted a position in the new *showrā-ye eslāmī-ye Zībā-shahr*. It is said that he is very good at negotiation and compromise. The second winner Mohammad Bāqerī from Khūlenjān is straightforward in character. He was the main person to appeal for the adoption of the “historical” name of Khūlenjān for the new city. He had been elected as the fifth winner of the first *showrā* election in Khūlenjān, so apparently it was only after that election that he convinced the residents of Khūlenjān that he was an able and enthu-

<sup>11</sup> It was explained to me that the naming of E‘terāf-e Sabz had no relation to a political group in Tehrān of the same name.

Table 2-1. Results of the Second Local *Showrā* Election in the City of Zībā-shahr

Ranking	Name	District ( <i>mahall</i> )	Poll
<b>1st</b>	<b>Ebrāhīm Rahīmī*</b>	<b>Lenj</b>	<b>1,394</b>
<b>2nd</b>	<b>Mohammad Bāqerī (son of Fathollāh)</b>	<b>Khūlenjān</b>	<b>1,338</b>
<b>3rd</b>	<b>Sādeq Ja'farī</b>	<b>Khūlenjān</b>	<b>1,329</b>
<b>4th</b>	<b>Valīollāh Mo'menzāde</b>	<b>Khūlenjān</b>	<b>1,099</b>
<b>5th</b>	<b>Mohammad Bāqerī (son of Yadollāh)</b>	<b>Khūlenjān</b>	<b>1,055</b>
6th	Daryūsh Ghazanfarpūr	Khūlenjān	1,037
7th	Farjollāh Nazariyān*	Lenj	924
8th	Hamīdrezā Bakhshiyān*	Lenj	827
9th	Valīollāh Shafī'zāde	Khūlenjān	804
10th	Mortezā Nāderī*	Ādergān	744
11th	Mohammad'alī Mūsavī		718
12th	Rahmatollāh Mohammadī		636
13th	Ne'matollāh Mohammadī	Ādergān	556
14th	Hoseyn Mohammadī*	Ādergān	523
15th	Hoseyn Nazariyān		515
16th	Hasan Khādēmī	Ādergān	499
17th	Esma'il Mohammadī	Ādergān	477
18th	Mohammad Mardānī	Lenj	333
19th	'Abdollāh Ebrāhīmī	Lenj	331
20th	'Abbās Mūsavī	Bāghmalek	253
21st	Hoseyn Bāqerī	Khūlenjān	201
22nd	Hasan Karīmī	Lenj	136
23rd	Mas'ūd Ebrāhīmī	Lenj	95

The first five persons (bold type) were elected as *showrā* members.

\* = members of E'terāf-e Sabz

Source: Official declaration by *shahrdārī* of Zībā-shahr

siastic leader of the community. He is still in his thirties, and it seems that when he learns to behave more moderately in accordance with other districts, he will become a promising leader for this new city in the future.

In the case of Zībā-shahr, the second *showrā* election was a bitter experience for many inhabitants. Yet, several new people are emerging as possible future leaders of the city management, and in my understanding this is one of the most important conditions for the future development of cities and villages.

### 3. Statistical Facts Showing New Trends

Here I want to take a glance at some statistical data in order to understand the social background of recent changes in Iran. I have pointed out some overall trends in the

Table 3-1. Number of Villages in 1956 Census

Population	Villages	Percentage
1–2,000	48,609	99.03%
2,000–5,000	445	0.97%
5,000–20,000	0	0.00%
More than 20,000	0	0.00%
Total	49,054	100.00%

Source: *Gozāresh-e Kholāse-ye Sarshomārī-ye ‘Omūmī-ye Keshvar dar Sāl-e 1335* (General results of the population census 1956) (Tehrān: Vezārat-e Keshvar-e Irān, c.1961/2 [1340]), vol. 1.

Table 3-2. Number of Cities in 1956 Census

Population	Cities	Percentage
1–2,000	0	0.0%
2,000–5,000	0	0.0%
5,000–20,000	136	73.1%
More than 20,000	50	26.9%
Total	186	100.0%

Source: Same as Table 1.

Table 3-3. Number of So-called Cities in 1976 Census

Population	Cities	Percentage
1–2,000	0	0.0%
2,000–5,000	6	1.6%
5,000–20,000	260	69.7%
More than 20,000	107	28.7%
Total	373	100.0%

Source: *Sarshomārī-ye ‘Omūmī-ye Nofūs va Maskan, 1355* (Population census 1976) (Tehrān: Markaz-e Āmār-e Irān, c.1979/80 [1358]), “Kolle Keshvar.”

long-term changes in the Iranian population structure. When looking at the city-village statistical data of Iran in 1956, at the time of the first national census of Iran, it is apparent that at this time in history, Iranian society was clearly divided among cities, villages, and a rapidly declining nomadic society.

There was a clear definition of cities and villages at that time, with a borderline of 5,000 inhabitants. This means that the places with more than 5,000 inhabitants were nominally called cities (*shahrs*), and the others were defined as villages (*rūstās*). Yet, in the data of the third national census, taken in 1976, there appeared 6 cities with populations between 2,000 and 5,000. The definition of cities (*shahrs*) at that time was “places with a population of more than 5,000, or the administrative center of a township (*shahrestān*).” The main trend at this stage was an increase in the number of relatively big cities (those with more than 20,000 inhabitants), together with an increase in the population of those cities; but since 1976 was just 3 years before the revolution, the published results of that year’s census are not sufficiently precise.

Table 3-4. Number of So-called Villages in 1986 Census

Population	Villages	Percentage
1–2,000	63,850	97.70%
2,000–5,000	1,305	2.00%
More than 5,000	194	0.30%
Total	65,349	100.00%

Source: *Sarshomāri-ye ‘Omūmī-ye Nofūs va Maskan, 1365* (Population census 1986) (Tehrān: Markaz-e Āmār-e Īrān, c.1989/90 [1368]), “Farhang-e Rūstā’ī.”

Table 3-5. Number of So-called Cities in 1986 Census

Population	Cities	Percentage
1–2,000	8	1.6%
2,000–5,000	64	12.9%
5,000–20,000	225	45.4%
More than 20,000	187	37.7%
Total	496*	

\* Three cities with a population of less than 100 were omitted. There are 9 cities whose populations were not released. Most of them are located near the war front with Iraq.

Source: Same as Table 4.

Table 3-6. Numbers of So-called Villages and Their Inhabitants in 1996 Census

Population	Villages	Percentage	Inhabitants	Percentage
1–2,000	66,395	97.46%	16,648,060	72.30%
2,000–5,000	1,493	2.19%	4,315,859	18.74%
5,000–20,000	224	0.32%	1,723,626	7.48%
More than 20,000	10	0.01%	338,748	1.47%
Total	68,122	100.00%	23,026,293	100.00%

Source: *Sarshomāri-ye 'Omūmī-ye Nofūs va Maskan, 1375* (Population census 1996) (Tehrān: Markaz-e Āmār-e Īrān, c.1998/9 [1377]).

Table 3-7. Numbers of So-called Cities and Their Inhabitants in 1996 Census

Population	Cities	Percentage	Inhabitants	Percentage
1–2,000	13	2.12%	15,315	0.04%
2,000–5,000	70	11.43%	270,391	0.73%
5,000–20,000	287	46.89%	3,039,008	8.25%
More than 20,000	242	39.56%	33,493,075	90.98%
Total	612	100.00%	36,817,789	100.00%

Source: Same as Table 6.

Table 3-8. Numbers of So-called Cities and Villages and Their Inhabitants in 1996 Census

Population	C & V	Percentage	Inhabitants	Percentage
1–2,000	66,408	96.62%	16,663,375	27.84%
2,000–5,000	1,563	2.27%	4,586,250	7.66%
5,000–20,000	511	0.74%	4,762,634	7.96%
More than 20,000	252	0.37%	33,831,823	56.54%
Total	68,734	100.00%	59,844,082	100.00%

Source: Compiled from Tables 6 and 7.

In the fourth census, taken in 1986–87 years after the revolution—a new trend appeared that moved toward obscurity and ambiguity of the division between and the definition of cities and villages. Today there is no clear distinction between small cities and big villages; their definition is becoming a matter of administrative decisions. At the time of this census, the definition of cities according to the size of their population was nearly abandoned; now a city is a city only when it is a place where a mayor and a municipality are appointed.

This trend became even more apparent in the census of 1996. In that census there were 1,727 villages with more than 2,000 inhabitants, and 10 villages with populations of more than 20,000. There were 83 cities with less than 5,000 inhabitants, and 13 so-called cities with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants. Those are located mostly in borderland areas.

Today, the number of cities and villages with populations of 2,000 to 20,000 is over 2,000, and the inhabitants of those places number a total of over 9 million. This population constitutes 15.6 percent of the whole population in Iran and far surpasses the population of Tehrān (11.3%). This newly blossoming population is powerfully affecting the whole structure of Iranian society. This stratum of society can thus be tentatively called the *rūstā-shahr*.

Of course, we must be careful when analyzing such statistical data because its reliability is low, especially those in the early years; but general trends can be observed in this data, and we cannot neglect the social facts that are indicated by these numbers.

#### 4. Situations in Typical *Rūstā-shahrs* Observed during Field Study

##### 4.1. A *Rūstā-shahr* in Āzarbāyjān-e Sharqī Province

For the sake of understanding a typical *rūstā-shahr*, here I want to choose the example of Sowme'e-oliyā near the city of Miyāne in Ostān-e Āzarbāyjān-e Sharqī, and draw on several social and political factors. Sowme'e-oliyā is the second largest city in Bakhsh-e Torkamānchāy after Torkamānchāy itself, with a population of 3,369 in 2001,<sup>12</sup> about half the size of Torkamānchāy.

I visited Sowme'e-oliyā for the first time on the afternoon of 27 July 2000, during my first stage of fieldwork on *rūstā-shahrs*. At that time, the weekly bazaar was open in the street, and I took several photos of it. I stayed there for less than an hour and a half, but it was very impressive because of my encounter with *showrā* member Mr. 'Alī Nowrūzī. I conducted an interview with him in the office of *showrā-ye shahr*, which he said he had prepared for himself after the first election of the *showrā* in 1999.

He said he had been politically active during the revolution, and had served on the city committee for years. He also calls himself a reformist and has devoted himself mostly to his town, because in his opinion it is the best way to serve his beloved country and the revolution.

Thirty years ago, Sowme'e-oliyā was only a small village of Āzarbāyjān Province, and there was only 1 dusty, unpaved road to the nearby city of Miyāne. In

<sup>12</sup> Data from Markaz-e Behdāsht va Darmān-e Sowme'e-oliyā.

the winter, access to the city became very limited; it could take almost 1 day to get there and back due to the heavy snow. Nowadays there is a newly built asphalt road connecting Sowme‘e-oliyā with Miyāne, and the journey takes less than an hour year-round.

Sowme‘e-oliyā still has the character of a big village, with most of the inhabitants making their living through agriculture. Mr. Nowrūzī said that he is making every effort to call for some investment in a local factory that produces fruit juice by using agricultural products from the village. He is now writing letters to the governor of Āzarbāyjān-e Sharqī and other government officers.

The day after I left that town, my taxi driver said that he had heard that Sowme‘e-oliyā is famous for its drug addicts. Of course it was very difficult to understand the real situation in Sowme‘e-oliyā after only a short visit. This was one of the reasons why I visited this town again on 24 August 2001.

After visiting the town several times, I understood that there were indeed a number of drug addicts in Sowme‘e-oliyā, and there were several reasons for this.



Picture 4-1.

A training factory of furniture for the drug addicts in Sowme‘e-oliyā. A slogan was written on its wall as: “Getting training of jobs is the first step for your independence, employment, and production.”



According to Mr. Nowrūzī, Sowme‘e-oliyā is famous for its good carpenters and a large number of them are now working in remote places out of the town. Some of those who work in the eastern part of Iran, especially cities in Balūchestān Province, began taking drugs, and it soon became a heavy burden on this town. Mr. Nowrūzī explained that he has prepared a factory of for the purpose of rehabilitating drug addicts.

The town of Sowme‘e-oliyā is in a sense Mr. Nowrūzī’s life’s work. He says that one day he expects Sowme‘e-oliyā to grow bigger than Torkamānchāy, and it is already becoming a city with much better facilities for its inhabitants. Mr. Nowrūzī is himself a typical character of the newly emerging social stratum that I term *rūstā-shahr*.

#### 4.2. Some Other Findings from the Field Study

I stayed in Iran for 2 years from 1999 through 2001 and conducted a series of field studies on *rūstā-shahrs* in the provinces of Ardabīl, Āzarbāyjān-e Gharbī, Sharqī, Būshehr, Esfahān, Fārs, Hamedān, Hormozgān, Khorāsān, Khūzestān, and Sīstān va Balūchestān.

During the first stage, I visited 169 small cities to glean some general ideas on *rūstā-shahrs*—the newly emerging village-cities in Iran. Then I selected 3 regions of the provinces of Esfahān,<sup>13</sup> Āzarbāyjān-e Sharqī,<sup>14</sup> and Khūzestān.<sup>15</sup> In this second stage I conducted more intensive field studies, trying to understand the rationale, manner, and conditions of the development of the *rūstā-shahrs*.

As a short report on my 2-year field study, here I want to indicate several points that I recognized during my fieldwork. The first point is the collection of major rationales and conditions for the shaping of *rūstā-shahrs* as we observe today. Two things were crucial to this effect: the 1979 revolution and the nationwide war against Iraq. The origin of the major changes in Iranian rural societies generally go back to the 1960s,<sup>16</sup> when the late Mohammad Rezā Shāh conducted the so-called “White Revolution,” of which land reform was the most important part.

<sup>13</sup> Lenj, Khūlenjān, and Ādergān, which were recently integrated in 2002 into one city, Zībā-shahr, located near the city of Mobāreke, plus Varzane which is located near the shallow lake region of Gāvkhūnī.

<sup>14</sup> Torkamānchāy, Sowme‘e-oliyā, and Varankesh, located near the city of Miyāne.

<sup>15</sup> Qarye Seyyed, Shamsābād, Shahrak-e Towhīd, and Anjīrak, all located to the south of the city of Dezfūl.

<sup>16</sup> For discussions about Iranian rural society in Japan, see my “Book Review on Akira Gotō’s *State and Rural Society in the Middle East: Villages in the Light of Modern Iranian History* (in Japanese),” *Nihon Chūtō Gakkai Nempō* 日本中東学会年報 (AJAMES) 19, no. 1 (2003): 207–12.

If there had not been a revolution in 1979, or if the following war, which had an enormous effect to the whole society of Iran, had not occurred, it would never have been possible to reach the situation that currently exists. Today in every *rūstā-shahr* people say that the situation has drastically changed during these 20–30 years, meaning that their life has transitioned from traditional village life to a much cleaner, healthier, easier, and overall “better” life. In other words, the people’s lifestyle has gradually shifted during the past 20–30 years to a more urban lifestyle. The most significant change in Iranian rural society may be that there are hardly any traditional *qal’es*—castle-like walls surrounding villages—anymore.<sup>17</sup>

The only *qal’e* I observed in all the places I visited that was more or less still in use was Qal’e Qūrtan near Varzane, where only 2 or 3 families were living inside. The wall remained in relatively good condition, but one section had been seriously damaged. According to its people, the wall was broken by the Shah’s army. The situation is completely different in Afghanistan, where *qal’es* are still in use as normal living places for villagers. If we take into consideration the rapid increase in population, which occurs at much the same pace as in Iran, this contrast is all the more striking.<sup>18</sup>

The second point is the diversity of the background of each *rūstā-shahr*. It seems that some diversity exists among vast regions on a national level, but even in small regions the diversity is often very great. Here I would like to make an example of the 3 villages near Dezfūl. During the Shah’s regime, several villages surrounding Dezfūl were integrated through governmental programs in 1960s and developed as model regions of large-scale farming. These villages are still continuing their developments by themselves. Since this region was near the war front with Iraq, the damaging effects of wartime are still visible everywhere. There are still a number of refugee camps that have been in operation since the time of the 1980–88 war against Iraq.

The 4 villages of Qarye Seyyed, Shamsābād, Shahrak-e Towhīd, and Anjīrak are located very near to each other in such a region. Shamsābād is the richest village in the region; its economy is mostly dependent on agriculture and fruit production, introduced by American companies in the 1960s. Qarye Seyyed is an ordinary village with various economic activities, and accepts many immigrants, while Shams-ābād does not accept any. Anjīrak is a typical village inhabited by settled nomads, specifically Alīgūdarz, a clan of Bakhtiyārī tribe. Its economic basis is extremely fragile and most of young women work as cheap agricultural laborers. Former inhabitants of Anjīrak are now living in Shahrak-e Towhīd, also a Bakhtiyārī village from 1968.

Although there have been recent discussions about the integration of the 3 vil-

<sup>17</sup> See for example A. K. S. Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia*.

<sup>18</sup> I visited Afghanistan in November 2003, and there I observed several *qal’es* still completely in use on the road between Charīkār and Bāmiyān.

Table 4-1. Chronology of Qarye Seyyed, Shamsābād, Shahrak-e Towhīd, and Anjīrak

Date	Incident
More than 1,000 years ago	Shaping of the village of ‘Eyn osh-shams, today’s Shamsābād. At that time this region was a center of medical science. Ya ‘qūb Leyth dies in this village. Cf. Siyāh Mansūl and Qal’ e Robb are also old villages in this region. Islamization of this region.
About 200 years ago	Qarye Seyyed is settled, named after its landlord’s title.
1962–63	Shah’s “White Revolution.” Sherkat-e Īrān va Āmrīkā (a company from California, USA) enters Shamsābād. Large farming program starts in Dezfūl region.
1968	Village Khalte (today’s Shahrak-e Towhīd) is settled by Bakhtiyārī inhabitants.
1972	Last year of rice cultivation in Shamsābād.
1979	Islamic Revolution. The village of Anjīrak is settled about this time by Bakhtiyārī inhabitants.
1980–88	War against Iraq. Rapid increase in population, outpouring of war refugees from Dezfūl, especially into Shamsābād. Increase of Arab population.
1997	Discussions start about the integration of Qarye Seyyed, Shamsābād, and Shahrak-e Towhīd.
2001	Discussions continue about the separation of Dezfūl Province from Ahvāz Province. Integration of 3 villages into a city or their inclusion to Dezfūl is seemingly related to its result.

Source: Information was obtained from inhabitants of the 4 villages and arranged by the author.

lages, excluding the neighboring Anjīrak, their historical, economic, and cultural backgrounds are seemingly so different. One can see how different these villages are from the short chronology (Table 4-1) that I combined during my stay there in January 2001.

## Conclusion

Now everywhere in Iran you will find representatives of cities or villages who are directly elected by the inhabitants, specifically the members of a committee (*a’zā-ye showrā-ye eslāmī*). There exists a official screening for candidates at election time, but we must not deny the importance of the democratization process because of this point. The fact is that the *showrā* elections were held 3 times in almost every city and village in Iran, and it means that the democratization is still in progress.

In a sense, this election phenomenon is a result of a 100-year history of discussions and related efforts to legally crystallize the system of self-governance in Iranian cities and villages.

In every *rūstā-shahr* I visited, one of the most basic problems was the absolute shortage of workplaces for the young generation. We understand that some of the main problems in Iranian society today are most clearly seen in the *rūstā-shahrs*.

It is my understanding that the difficulties of most of the *rūstā-shahrs* are deeply rooted in their basic condition as neither villages nor cities. They have “grown up from the status of villages,” but still have not reached the level of full-fledged cities. This means that they are in a fragile situation of nationwide transition process that has been going on for years from the time of 1979 revolution.

Generally speaking, the postrevolutionary Iranian government succeeded in bringing the bottom level of the most remote villages upward. Especially important were the improvements in education, healthcare, medical conditions, birth control (since the last years of the war against Iraq), pavement of roads, expansion of electricity, and water supply.

The most effective slogan of Revolutionary Leader Khomeynī in this regard was the one directed toward the so-called “depressed,” or *mostaz‘afān*, which led to the establishment of the *Jahād-e sāzandegī* (Sacred Army of Reconstruction). This organ is now joined together with the former Ministry of Agriculture under the name Ministry of Jihad Agriculture from the year 2001. In contrast to the majority of the city-dwellers who did not garner any privileges after the revolution, we find more supporters of this regime in rural areas because they reaped most of the benefits from the “victory of the revolution.”

Again, we must understand that the present government is facing fundamental challenges from the rural societies that they themselves brought into existence. The difficulties that Iranian rural society poses are mostly those of a newly appearing civil society. The central government must consider the nationwide balance and direction of its development policy for the future. The need for proper policymaking for the growing younger generation is urgent, and if the new government does not succeed in it, the growing social frustration and apathy can lead to a call for the change of regime in the near future.

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