



Center for Iranian Studies in Ankara

# The Dynamics of Change in Iran

Serhan Afacan & Mehmet Koç





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Perspective



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### Özet

- 1979 Devrimi İran’da İslamiyet’i hakim ideoloji ve kamusal alanın temel düzenleyicisi olarak ön plana çıkarmıştır.
- İran 1979 yılından beri yaptırımlarla karşı karşıya kalmış ve bu yaptırımlar zamanla ülkenin sosyo-politik yaşamının parçası haline gelerek bu alanları önemli oranda belirlemiştir.
- Uluslararası yaptırımların İran ekonomisini durmanın eşiğine getirmesi İranlı karar alıcılar üzerinde büyük bir baskıya neden olmuştur. Bu durum İran’ın siyasi elitlerini Devrim Rehberi’nin tespit ettiği birçok kırmızı çizgiyi çiğnemek pahasına nükleer anlaşmayı imzalamaya zorlamıştır.
- Batılı devletlerin İran’ın nükleer projesini ne pahasına olursa olsun durdurma ısrarı karşısında İran’ın nükleer kapasiteye ulaşma kararlılığı bu ülke ile Batı arasındaki ilişkilerde temel mesele olmuştur.
- İranlılar nükleer anlaşma konusunda ikiye ayrılmış durumdadırlar. Bazıları İran’ın Batı ile ilişkilerinin normalleşmesi için anlaşmayı desteklerken diğerleri Batı’ya verilen tavizlerden rahatsızlık duymaktadırlar.
- İran’daki ikili eğitim sistemi, ülkenin eğitim sorunlarını çözemediği gibi derinleştirmektedir. Üst düzey dini eğitim kurumları ülkenin bazı şehirlerinde temerküz etmişken, toplumun çoğunluğu ülke çapında yayılmış olan modern eğitim kurumlarında eğitim almaktadır.
- İran İslam Cumhuriyeti, uyguladığı yapısal ekonomik politikalarla orta sınıfın yükselmesini mümkün kılmıştır. Bir noktada bu orta sınıfın mevcut rejim açısından tehdit oluşturması olasıdır. Bu nedenle, toplumsal taleplerin başarılı bir şekilde siyaset sahnesine tahvil edilmesi İranlı siyasetçiler açısından temel bir sorundur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İran İslam Cumhuriyeti, nükleer proje, yaptırımlar, JCPOA, Direniş Ekonomisi, Devrim Rehberi, Ali Hamenei, Muhammed Hatemi, Ekber Rafsancani, Hasan Ruhani, orta sınıf

### Abstract

- The 1979 Revolution brought Islam to the forefront by embracing it as the governing ideology, as well as the premise of directing the public space.
- Since 1979, Iran has been subject to various sanctions which in time became an integral part of its socio-political life and became the defining pillar of these spheres to a certain extent.
- The internationally-imposed sanctions brought the Iranian socio-economic life to the brink of stagnation; a situation that has mounted enormous pressure on the policy makers. This forced the Iranian political elites to sign a deal on Iran’s nuclear Project by breaching many of the redlines formulated by the Supreme Leader.
- The obstinacy of the Western states to halt Iran’s nuclear project at every cost, and Iran’s determination to obtain nuclear capacity, defined the course of Iran’s relations with the West for a long time.
- Iranians are divided into two camps about the nuclear deal. While some are supportive of the agreement for the sake of normalization of Iran’s foreign relations, others are frustrated by the compromises given to the West.
- The dual structure of education in Iran not only fails to offer solutions to educational problems but also deepens them. As top religious education institutions are concentrated in just a few cities, most the population receives education at modern schools scattered throughout the country.
- The Islamic Republic facilitated the rise of the new middle class through its structural economic reforms. One day, this growing middle class may potentially pose an existential threat to the existing system. Thus, how to ensure a successful translation of the popular demands to the political arena remains to be a fundamental concern for Iranian politicians.

**Keywords:** Islamic Republic of Iran, nuclear project, sanctions, JCPOA, Defensive Economy, Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, Muhammed Khatami, Akbar Rafsanjani, Hassan Rouhani, middle class

## چکیده

- انقلاب ۱۳۵۷ در ایران، اسلام را به ایدئولوژی حاکم و یگانه عنصر تعیین کننده ی نظم عمومی در این کشور تبدیل کرده است.
- ایران از سال ۱۳۵۷ با تحریم هایی روبرو بوده و این تحریم ها با مرور زمان جزء طبیعی زندگی سیاسی و اجتماعی شده اند و به همین دلیل تحریم ها در حد قابل توجهی به یکی از عناصر تعیین کننده تحولات در این عرصه مبدل گشته اند.
- تحریم های بین المللی که اقتصاد ایران را تا مرز توقف پیش برده بود سبب اعمال فشار زیادی بر تصمیم گیران سیاسی در ایران شده بود. این امر، نخبگان سیاسی ایران را به قیمت عبور از خطوط قرمز تعیین شده از سوی رهبر انقلاب، به انعقاد قرارداد هسته ای وادار کرد.
- مصمم بودن ایران برای دستیابی به انرژی هسته ای در برابر اصرار کشورهای غربی بر متوقف ساختن برنامه هسته ای این کشور مهمترین موضوع روابط ایران و غرب بوده است.
- ایرانی ها در ارتباط با قرارداد امضا شده با کشورهای ۵+۱ که به برجام موسوم است، دو رویکرد متضاد را در پیش گرفته اند. برخی برای عادی سازی روابط با غرب به پشتیبانی از آن برخاسته اند و برخی دیگر به دلیل دادن امتیاز به غرب ناخوشنود هستند.
- نظام آموزشی دو گانه در ایران، مشکلاتی که در این عرصه به چشم می خورد را نه تنها حل نکرده بلکه باعث عمیق تر شدن آنها نیز شده است. در حالی که مراکز آموزشی عالی دینی تنها در چند شهرستان متمرکز شده اند، اکثریت جامعه تابع نظام آموزشی ملی در مدارس سراسری با سبک مدرن هستند.
- جمهوری اسلامی ایران با سیاست های اقتصادی اش باعث رشد طبقه متوسط شده است. احتمال اینکه این طبقه از یک مرحله به بعد به تهدیدی برای نظام حاکم تبدیل شود، وجود دارد. بنابراین، انتقال خواستهای جامعه از طریق مجاری صحیح به عرصه سیاست و متقاعد ساختن طبقه متوسط، یک معضل اساسی برای سیاستمداران ایرانی محسوب می شود.
- کلمات کلیدی:** جمهوری اسلامی ایران، برنامه هسته ای، تحریم ها، برجام، اقتصاد مقاومتی، رهبر انقلاب، علی خامنه ای، محمد خاتمی، اکبر رفسنجانی، حسن روحانی، طبقه متوسط

### Introduction:

Post-revolutionary Iran as an uneventful entity has ceased to be a prosaism among researchers and experts. This shift came about due to a set of multidimensional domestic and international developments occurring in the country since the late 1990s. The 1979 Iranian Revolution evidently brought Islam to the forefront by embracing it as the governing ideology, as well as the premise of directing the public space. Yet, several dynamic factors assumed a fundamental role in molding the political landscape and the related processes for the past three decades in post-Revolutionary Iran. The new regime merged itself by eliminating its potential adversaries as well as the rivals of the nascent 'Islamic Republic' throughout the 1980s. This was followed by a relatively new political orientation that the country experienced under the fourth President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani in the 1990s. Muhammad Khatami's presidency between 1997 and 2005 progressed through loudly voiced popular demands that left significant imprints on Iranian politics and urged him to give careful consideration to broadening the scope of individual rights and liberties. Yet, Khatami's attempt to employ the same rationale in Iran's foreign policy fizzled out due to the post-9/11 security-obsessed policies of the USA as well as due to resistance from the domestic conservative circles. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's election as Iran's President in 2005 unraveled a strained period for the country – both domestically and internationally. He strove to win recognition

as a tough player in the international arena and utilized each open door – especially in the UN – to bolster the international standing of Iran. He additionally attempted to utilize the Iranian nuclear project as a foreign policy instrument. However, he failed to accomplish this objective to the degree that he sought.

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Although the Obama administration began secret negotiations with the Ahmadinejad government to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue, due credit of breaking the international isolation of Iran was never given to him. Rather the US held out for a more popular government with a relatively stronger legitimacy at home and abroad. The Obama administration viewed Iran's current President Hassan Rouhani as a rational character, which prompted the initiation of open negotiations with the Rouhani administration. Consequently, the talks conducted between Iran and the P5+1, consisting of the US, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany, produced positive outcomes. The nuclear talks – which will be further discussed in the following sections – generated significant economic and social effects inside Iran. Elections for the Assembly of Experts in February 2016, as well as for the Islamic Consultative Assembly or the Iranian Parliament in March 2016, occurred amidst



these major developments which had their ramifications on the outcomes.



“Although the Obama administration began secret negotiations with the Ahmadinejad government to resolve the Iranian nuclear issue, due credit of breaking the international isolation of Iran was never given to him.”

## The 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Iranian Foreign Policy

Since 1979, Iran has been subject to various sanctions, part of which were unilaterally imposed by the US while the rest were endorsed by the UN and the EU. In time, these sanctions became an integral part of Iran’s socio-political life and became the defining pillars of these spheres to a certain extent. Iran’s nuclear project became a hot topic on the international landscape in the early 2000s; only after the West – and primarily the USA – declined to acknowledge the peacefulness of the project and strongly denied Iran the right to obtain a nuclear capacity. During Ahmadinejad’s tenure between 2005 and 2013, the tension reached its peak as the pundits in

Washington weighed military intervention against Iran as an option. The reciprocal enmity and insecurity exasperated the effects of the sanctions imposed by the West and further deteriorated the Iranian economy. The obstinacy of the Western states to halt Iran’s nuclear project at every cost, and Iran’s determination to obtain nuclear capacity, defined the course of Iran’s relations with the West.

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Between November 1979 and May 2013, Iran has faced more than 50 sanctions.<sup>1</sup> These sanctions resulted in significant restrictions on Iran’s foreign trade, international logistics, communications, intra-bank transactions, and foreign investment. This circumstance pushed Iran to reach an understanding, and later an agreement, known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with P5+1 states in 2015. This was only possible by making significant compromises on the red lines once drawn by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei. The breached red lines included lifting of all the sanctions simultaneously, exclusion of the military sites from inspection, and the rejection of any long-term restrictions or prohibitions on the nuclear project.<sup>2</sup> The relationship between the Rouhani government and the Supreme Leader, along with other non-elected components of Iran’s power structure soured

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dw.com/fa-ir/a-17210264>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13940322000015>

because of this nuclear deal. The conservative powerbase anticipated an existential threat for the regime in the arrangement. They believe that such an agreement will be followed by several compromises made by Iran to appease the West in the future. On the other hand, the agreement's Western endorsers— and primarily the US - hoped that this deal could moderate the regime and even internally transform it. Iranians, who since the Revolution have endured many domestic and international hardships, are apparently divided into two camps. While some are supportive of the arrangement for the sake of normalization of Iran's foreign relations, others are frustrated by the compromises given to the West.

The nuclear deal signals the normalization of Iran's foreign relations under Rouhani administration. The current government believes that a similar strategy and compromise can additionally tackle Iran's domestic problems. Inspired by *barjam* – the Persian name given by the Government to JCPOA– the Rouhani administration is poised to implement *barjam* 2 and *barjam* 3 to fix internal social and political issues at home. *Barjam* 2 intends to remove the restrictions on Mir Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karrubi who were put under house arrest following the Green Movement in 2009.<sup>3</sup> Khamenei, however, has harshly criticized this move and expressed his discomfort with such an approach. In similar fashion, when Rafsanjani – the former President – spoke of the future as an arena 'where dialogue not missiles is a priority', he was severely criticized by the Supreme Leader and had to retract his

statement. Thus, the elected government must harmonize its policies with the spiritual leadership's priorities. Otherwise, the disagreements will persist at varying degrees of intensity and may reemerge in different contexts, rather than simply fading away into thin air.

Numerous inquiries concerning the conduct of Iran related to the nuclear project still need to be answered. For instance, what made Iran ready to bear heavy costs for its nuclear project? If the aim was to pursue a nuclear program for peaceful objectives, then why did the Iranian authorities keep two of its nuclear facilities a secret from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) rather than opening them for inspections? Why did Iran put up a persistent resistance to the calls of the international community for total transparency of its nuclear program despite the Supreme Leader's repeated declarations about the impermissibility of the Weapons of Mass Destruction WMDs from an Islamic perspective? There are no clear-cut answers for these questions. However, it is obvious that the internationally imposed sanctions brought the Iranian socio-economic life to the brink of stagnation; a situation that has mounted enormous pressure on the policy makers. Consequently, it is difficult to judge the scenario from a purely pragmatic viewpoint and rationally explain Iran's motives behind adopting the policies that intensified its relations with the West – particularly the USA – and risked its national interests. Iran has refused to pay "extortions" in the words

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/450798>



of top Iranian authorities, but also spent a fortune to bypass the restrictions while opposing a rapprochement with the US. It has paid above-average prices for strategic imported items from states like China and Russia who were willing to circumvent the sanctions.

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President Rouhani took steps to bring the existing irrational policy to a logical end after winning the public's support for implementing a tension-free and dialogue-oriented foreign policy. At the same time, the Supreme Leader decided not to appear as the only obstacle in front of the settlement and reluctantly approved the negotiations. However, he occasionally reemphasized the red lines of the Iranian regime while demonstrating appreciation for the resolution of the Iranian populace to initiate the negotiations – a step that was viewed by him as ‘a heroic flexibility’.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the red lines were breached, which has prompted the disillusionment of the Revolutionary Guards and the conservatives inside the country.

The nuclear deal should also be analyzed through the perspective of other parties– particularly the P5+1 states. Among them, China and Russia maintained relatively favorable relations with Iran and expressed their disapproval of the harsh policies towards

this country on many occasions. On the other hand, the USA's stance– whose antagonistic approaches destabilized the Middle East at the turn of the century – as well as its European allies is the opposite. However, the post-Arab Spring developments and the emergence of Daesh terror induced a shift in Western priorities in the region and signaled a new era for Iran's foreign relations. After the tacit Iran-US cooperation in military operations in Afghanistan and in Iraq, the two found another common ground in the fight against Daesh. This laid the foundations for launching open negotiations between the countries regarding the nuclear question. The Trump administration is apparently determined to follow a different course but it remains to be seen how his anti-Iran stand will materialize in his foreign policies.



## A Shrinking Economy

The post-revolutionary policies and the nuclear sanctions left Iran vulnerable to severe economic problems. The sanctions gave way to the idea of ‘a defensive economy’ by promoting domestic industries and substituting the foreign goods with the local products. The initial sanctions in the post-revolutionary period worked indirectly to the advantage of Iran that had to rely on

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2013/09/130917\\_i45\\_khame-nei\\_revolutionary\\_guard\\_sepah](http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2013/09/130917_i45_khame-nei_revolutionary_guard_sepah)

domestic resources, especially for its defense industry. Yet the subsequent sanctions, particularly the ones related to the nuclear program, brought the Iranian economy to the edge of breakdown. On the other hand, the Five-Year Plans that have been executed since the presidency of Rafsanjani gradually liberalized the dominantly statist Iranian economy. Likewise, the 20-Year Vision Plan that was announced in 2005 included various structural reforms for the Iranian economy. However, the nuclear sanctions were imposed just one year after this plan was put into effect. These restrictions created new problems by defeating the reform plan objectives and gave way to negotiations motivated by economic challenges. The Rial, Iran's national currency, fell 63.6 percent against the US dollar in 2011 and even a sharper 111 percent depression followed in 2012. Subsequently, 1 US dollar, which previously equaled 11,000 Rials, was exchanged for 18,000 Rials in 2011 and then for 38,000 in 2012.<sup>5</sup> This depreciation of the Rial, combined with the abolition of market intervention policies, caused enormous inflation in Iran. The purchasing power of the ordinary Iranian dropped substantially in the absence of a respective increase in salaries.

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## Economic Challenges and the Popular Demands for Change

The election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran's seventh President in 2013 needs to be contextualized. Distressed by the economic problems during Ahmadinejad's tenure, Iranians looked for an alternative which they found in the moderate Rouhani government. Rouhani was an acceptable figure for reformists and conservatives alike. He served as the Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council for 16 years and held the position of Chief Negotiator following the eruption of the nuclear crisis. His election, which was interpreted in the West as partial realization of the objectives of nuclear sanctions, increased the hopes of Iranians.

As already stated, economic sanctions pushed the Iranian economy to the edge of total collapse— partly due to the high installation cost of the nuclear sites as well as the whole nuclear project. Although the government is willing to rehabilitate the economy in the post-sanctions period no significant improvements have been witnessed thus far. This will be the most serious challenge for Hasan Rouhani in the upcoming presidential elections on 19th of May. Besides, the conservative 9th Parliament has tried to increase pressure on the government by making many crucial economic decisions. For instance, 24 million Iranians were removed from the list of 72.5 million citizens who receive a monthly 13-dollar state subsidy due to their limited income.<sup>6</sup> In addition to that, the expansion

<sup>5</sup> <http://khabaronline.ir/detail/466766/Economy/financial-market>

<sup>6</sup> <http://jamejamonline.ir/online/670943960933205056>

of the military budget has exacerbated the situation for the Rouhani government.

Whether Iranians can withstand these economic hardships or not, is a critical question at this point. For how long will Iranians in a highly interconnected globalized world tolerate this distressing economic situation in a naturally gifted country such as Iran? What will be the political repercussions of the growing income gap between the various segments of the Iranian society? Although each of these questions require a separate analysis, it is obvious that economic demands will dominate the formal and informal political landscape during Rouhani's government. It is unlike the Ahmadinejad era when popular struggle particularly focused on widening the scope of individual rights and freedoms. In the future, the economic demands can potentially unite the – otherwise – conflicting groups of the society.

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## Urbanization and Education

Although in Iran the urban population was only 24 percent (approximately 30 million) in the early 1980s, it has grown steadily and reached more than 70 percent (approximately 80 million)

nowadays.<sup>7</sup> Thus more than half the population is below forty; such a young population naturally has numerous growing needs and expectations. This indicates that urban politics pose another challenge to the Iranian authorities. Education is yet another major issue for the Iranian youth who, like those elsewhere in the world, seek for a better future. The dual structure of education in Iran not only fails to offer solutions to educational problems but also deepens them. As top religious education institutions are concentrated in just a few cities, most the population receives education at modern schools scattered throughout the country. This dichotomy produces two distinct types of individuals, which leads to polarization in the society. Moreover, gradual modernization – in accordance with the universal pattern – is causing individualization of Iranian populace. The crisis of legitimacy between the conservative regime and the increasingly secular Iranian youth is aggravating with every passing day. The Islamic Republic facilitated the rise of the new middle class through its structural economic reforms. One day, this growing middle class may potentially pose an existential threat to the existing system. Thus, how to ensure successful translation of the popular demands to the political arena to keep the middle-class calm remains to be a fundamental concern for Iranian politicians.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.donya-e-eqtesad.com/news/941630/>

“The Islamic Republic facilitated the rise of the new middle class through its structural economic reforms. One day, this growing middle class may potentially pose an existential threat to the existing system. Thus, how to ensure successful translation of the popular demands to the political arena to keep the middle class calm remains to be a fundamental concern for Iranian politicians.”

Since no secular political parties exist in Iran, the channels through which people convey their messages to the political arena should be examined in Iran’s peculiar setting. Election-based alliances and dynamic political fronts exist in the country as a generally accepted norm. These alliances and fronts are either formed around the Revolutionary values or emerge out of conjunctural dynamics. These groupings hardly present any election programs to the electorate. They represent different political attitudes as conservatives (alternately known as principalists), reformists and moderates. Such fronts lack internal harmony and harbor manifold orientations. For example, there are various secular groups among the reformists who support the existing regime.



### Elections and the Iranian Electorate

In early 2016 Iran held two major elections, for the parliament and the Assembly of Experts on February 26, and the third, the presidential elections of May 19, is only a few days ahead. In 2016 only about half of those who registered to run for Parliament – 6,229 out of 12,000 – were approved by the Council of Guardians. According to the Iranian laws, a candidate must win at least 25 percent of votes cast in an electoral district to qualify as a deputy. Thus, 68 seats out of total 290 in the Iranian parliament remained empty on 26 February 2016 as no clear winners emerged due to a low voter turnout of 60 percent. These 68 deputies were then elected in a runoff election held on April 29. Moderates led the election by securing 41 percent of the seats in the parliament – followed by independent candidates with 29 percent of the seats, conservatives with 28 percent of the seats, and minorities with 2 percent of the

seats, respectively. The results were certainly disheartening for the conservatives who lost all the capital's 30 parliamentary seats to the 'List of Hope' of the reformist-moderate front. For instance, Mohammad-Reza Aref – the former presidential candidate and a staunch reformist – was the thirtieth elected deputy from Tehran, while Gholam-Ali Haddad-Adel, who was the principle conservative camp candidate, was unable to secure a seat in the Iranian parliament. A similar situation was observed in the Assembly of Experts elections where Rouhani and the former President Hashemi Rafsanjani were elected from the 'List of Hope', but conservative stalwarts like Muhammad Yazdi – the current ultraconservative Chairman of the Assembly – and Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi – a major protagonist of the conservative camp – could not make it to the Assembly.

The upcoming presidential election is significant at different levels. Only six candidates, namely Hassan Rouhani, Muhammad Baqer Ghalibaf, Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi, Mostafa Mir-Salim, Eshaq Jehanghiri and Mostafa Hashimi-Taba were approved by the Council of Guardians. The above discussed problems and issues need to be addressed by the new president. The President Hassan Rouhani asks for a second term from the Iranian electorate to finalize the projects which he started during the last four years. He gives a special priority to not to escalate Iran's relations with the west which he thinks will bring positive economic results. On the other hand, his opponents, mainly Raisi and Ghalibaf, see in Rouhani's policies a dead-end for Iran and a breakdown for the country's

economy. These issues will be a big challenge for the winner of the elections. Also, Iran's involvement and role in regional crises need also be dealt by the new president. Having lost much of the international recognition brought by the nuclear deal after Trump's coming to power in the US, Iran will sooner or later have to come to terms with its neighbors on regional issues. Above all, the ordinary Iranian citizens are rather concerned with such issues as unemployment, high living costs and their individual rights and freedoms. Iranians are not willing to make a choice between bread and freedom and it is the responsibility of the candidates to persuade the voters that they can give them both.



### Conclusion

Iran is experiencing an enthralling period in its domestic and international politics. The nuclear issue, which was the biggest test of Iranian international relations since the early 2000s, has moved to a new stage after the nuclear deal with P5+1 was signed. However, the tensions between Iran and the USA escalated shortly after the deal, as the U.S. Supreme Court ordered the turnover of \$2 billion from Iranian frozen assets to the families of the American victims of 1983 bombing of U.S. Marine Corps Barracks in Beirut and other attacks blamed on Iran. To this, the unfavorable attitude of the US President Donald Trump towards Iran should be added. On the other hand, conservative power holders – most notably the Supreme Leader – use every opportunity to denounce the US and incite Iranians against this “malevolent” enemy. Such an atmosphere poses grave challenges for the Rouhani government which seeks to moderate Iran’s relations with the West after decades of confrontation.

Iran’s Middle Eastern policies, particularly concerning Syria, also should be closely followed. After ending the Western-imposed isolation as a result of the nuclear deal, Iran faces a fresh isolation by its Sunnite neighbors who have been disillusioned by its regional policies. This development was reflected in the Final Communiqué of the 13th Session of the Islamic Summit Conference held in Istanbul in mid-May 2016, where Iran was deliberately criticized for bolstering terrorism and interfering in the domestic affairs of the Middle Eastern countries such as Syria and Yemen. Although Iran is not

expected to make any radical changes in its foreign policy, it will certainly feel the pressure from the regional entities. On the other hand, President Rouhani attended the Conference despite being advised otherwise, and expressed his determination to maintain relations with his country’s neighbors. Yet, Rouhani’s maneuverability may be limited by the fact that the Supreme Leader’s approval is necessary for any policy changes.

The conservatives have now turned their attention to the upcoming presidential elections. During the last few months, they have been trying to discredit the Rouhani government in the eyes of the Iranian electorate to strengthen their position. The economic challenges are among the direst problems faced by Iranians. Despite the notable improvements, inflation is still relatively high, unemployment is climbing, the income inequality is widening, and the essentials are becoming more difficult for low-income groups to afford. President Rouhani believes he spent a productive and promising four years in the office and that he will do even better in his second term. It is not known yet if the Iranian electorate will give him another four years as president. Yet it is obvious that whoever wins the elections, Rouhani or one of his rivals, will certainly encounter a lot of issues to handle.





# About İRAM

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