

**Blogging Outside Iran:
A Tool for Internal Democratic Change?**

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I. Abstract

This research examines whether expatriate Iranians communicate with Iranians inside Iran using blogs to promote democratic reforms. The 1979 Islamic Revolution set historical precedent for using modern communication technology as a tool to instigate regime change in a country. It also resulted in an Iranian diaspora. Iranians left Iran during and after the Islamic Revolution to pursue liberty, education, and economic opportunities in democratic countries. Twenty-eight years later, these expatriate Iranians, such as the founder of one of the first Iranian blogs, Hossein Derakhshan, see one example of modern communication technology, blogs, as possessing the potential for additional historical precedent. They view blogs as an opportunity not only to communicate with Iranians inside Iran, but also to advocate democratic values and reforms, if not regime change. This research interviews Iranian blog experts, surveys the authors of Iranian blogs, and analyzes the content of 153 blogs by Iranians. While many blogs promote democratic values and urge political reform in Iran, the majority of them do not. Thus, assertions and generalizations that portray Iranian bloggers working toward the goal of bringing democratic change needs more evidence.

II. Research Introduction

This research examines the extent of democratic advocacy in the content of blogs authored by expatriate Iranians. Political dissidents use modern communication technologies, in addition to traditional forms of mass communication (such as newspapers, leaflets, and radio), to undermine authoritarian regimes. For example, during anti-government protests in Burma in October of 2007, Burmese bloggers played

a large role in perpetuating the protests. They took pictures of the protests, posted the pictures on their blogs, and encouraged other Burmese citizens to protest against the government (AFP).

Iran also experienced political regime change facilitated by communication technologies. In 1979, smugglers brought audiotape cassettes condemning the policies and government of the Shah of Iran into the country. The audiotape cassettes socially mobilized the Iranian public into an anti-Shah coalition which ultimately led to the overthrow of the Shah as the king of Iran and the beginning of the Islamic Revolution (Sreberny-Mohammadi). Thus there is historical precedent for producing political change using modern communication technology in various countries, in part from a flow of information originating external to the subject country. This study examined whether expatriate Iranians are using the modern communication device of the blog to undermine the Iranian political regime with a flow of democratic advocacy originating outside of Iran.

III. Background Information about Iran

Geographic and Demographic Conditions

Iran is a country located in southwest Asia, bordered clockwise by Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to the east and Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey and Iraq to the west. To the north lies the Caspian Sea and in the south are the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Indian Ocean (World Facts). Iran's terrain is rugged and mountainous, and contains a diverse set of environments represented by deserts, semitropical coastal ranges, and dense forests. Iran currently has a population of roughly 65 million people

(CIA). About 89% of Iranians are Shi'a Muslim (CIA). Other religions practiced are Sunni Muslim, Zoroastrian, Jewish, Christian, and Baha'i (CIA). The national language in Iran is Farsi. About 58% of Iranians speak Farsi as a native language (CIA). Other languages in Iran include Azeri Turkish and other Turkish dialects, Kurdish, Arabic, Luri, and Balouchi (CIA). English, however, is widely taught from the primary school level upwards and "seems to have found its way right into the heart of Iranian society, becoming a necessity..." (Lin).

Political Conditions and Government

Since the 1979 revolution overthrowing the monarchy, Iran has been an Islamic, or theocratic, republic. That is, the tenets of the religion of Islam constitute the basic laws of government, subject to clerical interpretation (Index Mundi).

The president and parliament (Majlis) are elected, but the executive and legislative branches of government have limited powers (PBS). The president is mainly responsible for formulating Iran's economic policy (PBS). The president is elected every four years and can serve no more than two consecutive terms (PBS). The current president of Iran is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The Majlis is a unicameral legislature made up of 290 members (PBS). Members are elected every four years (PBS). The speaker of the Majlis is Gholamali Haddad-Adel.

Actual government authority, however, is controlled by a Supreme Leader who by law must be a clergyman and who is not directly elected by popular vote (BBC). The Supreme Leader is elected by the Assembly of Experts, a congressional body of 86 clergymen, who are popularly elected (BBC). The current Supreme Leader of Iran is Ali

Khamanei. Although the Assembly of Experts is designed to supervise the actions of the Supreme Leader, they have never intervened in any policy action by the Supreme Leader (BBC). The president of Iran is one of the few heads of state who does not possess control over the armed forces or the ability to declare war (PBS). This power belongs to the Supreme Leader (BBC). In addition, the Supreme Leader also presides over national security and foreign policy issues (BBC).

Since Iran is an Islamic theocracy, its laws are based on the Sharia: law derived from Islamic texts, the life of the Prophet, and teachings (Wiechman et al.). Clergy are deemed best qualified to interpret Sharia law and thus the judiciary is composed mainly of clergymen (PBS). Currently, the head of the judiciary is Mahmoud Shahroudi. At the head of the judiciary is the Guardian Council, a very influential body operating somewhat like European constitutional courts in its authority to review and veto pending bills in the Majlis based on their constitutionality, e.g., their compliance with Islamic Sharia principles and laws. (See the French Court of Cassation). The Guardian Council is comprised of 12 members (PBS). The Supreme Leader appoints six members and the other six members are nominated by the judiciary and confirmed by the Majlis (PBS).

The Guardian Council also has the power to review the qualifications of candidates for president and the Assembly of Experts and to declare them ineligible for public office (PBS). In recent years, the Guardian Council has vetoed many candidates running for the office of president. For example, in the 1997 presidential election the Guardian Council deemed only 4 of the 230 candidates fit for office (Iranian Chamber). In 2001, only 10 of the 270 presidential candidates survived the review process (Iranian

Chamber). Candidates are largely turned away because they are insufficiently sympathetic to the views of the ruling clergy (Iranian Chamber). In essence, the Guardian Council hand picks the candidates who can run for office and most of those selected are religiously conservative. Thus, Iranian citizens generally choose among only religiously conservative candidates (Human Rights Watch).

Iran's Democratic Past

Although Iran is currently ruled by a non-democratic theocracy, this has not always been the case. In the early 20th century, Iranians enjoyed many of the same freedoms and rights found in modern liberal, secular, democracies. In 1906, the first Iranian constitution was created. According to Janet Afary (1996), the adoption of the Constitution established a bicameral, popularly elected parliament and placed the monarch under the rule of law. The reforms made the Qajar monarchy more ceremonial than ruling in role and power.

The Constitution also guarantees free speech and a free press (1906 Iranian Constitution). Afary finds that during this time the guarantee of free speech and press permitted newspapers, magazines, and journals to examine and criticize the current political, social, and cultural traditions of Iran. In addition, the 1906 Constitution for the first time provided religious minorities, such as Zoroastrians, Christians, and Jews, protection under secular law equal to Muslims (1906 Iranian Constitution). The Constitution also guaranteed the right to trial, the right to privacy, and the right to property (1906 Iranian Constitution).

Two events dealt major blows to liberal, secular democracy in Iran. First, the British staged a coup in 1921 that overthrew the weak Qajar dynasty and brought Reza Pahlavi, a former military officer, to power as the new Shah and founder of the Pahlavi dynasty. Ullman (1972) asserts that the British placed a monarch in power at the expense of a democratic government because they feared Russian influence in Iran would pose a threat to their colonial possessions in India. The British believed that Reza Shah would do a better job than the parliament of limiting Russian influence in Iran. The installment of Reza Shah, a strong ruling monarch, undermined many of the reforms that had been initiated by the 1906 Iranian Constitution and effectively transformed the parliament into a “rubber stamping” body.

A second blow to liberal, secular democracy in Iran occurred in 1953. When the widely popular, elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq nationalized Iran’s oil, the American CIA and Great Britain staged a coup that overthrew Mosaddeq and installed Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Reza Shah’s son (Ansari, 2003). This was a fatal blow to Iranian democracy because the new shah opposed genuine popular elections and ruled as a dictator, whereas Prime Minister Mosaddeq had been popularly elected and had governed through the parliament.

Ironically, these two interventions by Western powers in Iran ultimately led to the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran that these same Western powers now oppose today (Ansari). In establishing the Islamic Constitution in 1979, Iran abolished the 1906 secular, liberal Constitution (NYU). Thus, liberal, secular democracy in Iran was dead.

Expatriate Iranians

According to Shirin Hakimzadeh (2006), emigration from Iran drastically increased immediately following the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Prior research conducted by Kazemi (1996) shows that approximately two million people emigrated from Iran between 1979 and 1984. As of the year 2000, the top ten countries that Iranians have immigrated to are the United States (291,040), Canada (75,115), Germany (65,750), Sweden (53,982), Israel (51,300), United Kingdom (42,494), Netherlands (21,469), Australia (18,789), France (18,376), and Armenia (15,999) (Hakimzadeh). Nine out of ten of these countries are liberal, secular democracies.

Mossayeb and Shirazi (2006) explored the reasons Iranians immigrated to the United States from Iran. They found that the main reason is that greater educational opportunities existed in the U.S. than those offered in Iran (87% of survey respondents cite this as a reason). The other reasons cited by Iranians for immigrating to the United States include a lack of social freedom (46%), political persecution (15%), and religious persecution in Iran (12%). Interestingly, Mossayeb and Shirazi also found that a majority of Iranians who responded to their survey (71%) said they would move back to Iran if they perceived political, social, and economic change in Iran in the foreseeable future.

In sum, the immigration destinations and motivations of Iranians following the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the findings by Mossayeb and Shirazi suggest why educated expatriate Iranians might be supportive of restoring democracy in Iran.

IV. Literature Review

Role of Media in Shaping Iranian Political History

In her book *Small Media, Big Revolution* (1994), Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi examines the impact of audiotape cassettes upon the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. Sreberny-Mohammadi defines small media (audiotape cassettes) as media that are participatory, public, and are controlled neither by the government or big corporations. She also borrows Asghar Fathi's (1979) definition of public communication to describe the audiotape cassette media. According to Fathi, public communication is an autonomous sphere of activity independent of the state. With popular production of messages, the public viewpoint comes into being which can voice its own opinion in opposition to state-orchestrated voices. Public media has use of channels and technology that are readily available, and can produce and distribute messages freely. Sreberny-Mohammadi cites Barrington Moore's (1978) theory that social and moral transformation requires that there be a cultural and social space for citizens to voice their opinion publicly. Sreberny-Mohammadi points out that prior to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, when the Shah was in power, an open public sphere did not exist. Instead, those who voiced opinions that ran counter to the Shah's policies, were beaten, arrested, or jailed. The government-controlled television, radio, and newspapers running contrary viewpoints were shut down. Sreberny-Mohammadi argues that audiotape cassettes can fill this cultural and social space void by acting as a virtual space where citizens can share their opinions with others freely through the exchange and shared use of this small medium. The social and cultural mobilization which takes place in virtual space can act as a precursor for physical mobilization.

Exiled Shia'a leader Ruhollah Khomeini recorded antigovernment sermons on audiotape cassettes criticizing the Shah. Iranians returning from their pilgrimage to Mecca smuggled the cassettes and distributed them throughout Iranian society. Local religious leaders in turn played the cassettes at Friday mosque services throughout urban and rural Iran, taking a political message to an audience not customarily active in politics. Student leaders played the tapes at college political gatherings, redirecting their secular opposition towards clerical leadership. The information shared on these audiotape cassettes thus acted as the virtual space for Khomeini to connect with disparate anti-Shah forces within Iran to effectuate political change. Anti-Shah opposition led to his overthrow in 1979 and the beginning of the Islamic Republic.

Political Reform Potential of Blogs

Some authors and scholars believe that Internet blogs share many of the same characteristics of audiotape cassettes that Sreberny-Mohammadi describes in her book and have the same political reform potential. In her book *We Are Iran: The Persian Blogs* (2005), Nasrin Alavi defines a blog as a kind of diary or journal posted on the Internet. Jones (1997) notes that blogs possess four dominant characteristics: they are interactive, have a variety of communicators, have sustained membership, and create a virtual common public space. In an article titled *Mullahs Versus Bloggers* (2005), Ben Macintyre writes that in Iran "blogs offer an opportunity for dissent, discussion and dissemination of ideas that is not available in any other forum."

Political dissent and the free dissemination of ideas are not tolerated in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Those who are critical of the government are subject to physical abuse, arrest, and/or imprisonment (MacFarquhar; Fathi).

In 2001, Hossein Derakhshan, an expatriate Iranian journalist writing from Canada, created the first Iranian blog (Halevi). He titled his blog: *Editor: Myself*. After creating his blog, Derakhshan published instructions online on how to set up a blog in Farsi (Pelta-Heller). Derakhshan started the blogging revolution in Iran by acting as an Internet activist and encouraging Iranians to voice their own opinions and to start a blog (Jensen). As a result of Derakhshan's efforts, today, there are over 700,000 blogs (Halevi). Farsi is tied with French as the second most used blogging language in the world, trailing only English (Macintyre).

In an interview with Jensen (2004), Derakhshan admits that the reason he developed a blog was unhappiness with Iran's current political, social, and economic situation. Derakhshan felt that the Internet weblog could be exploited as a tool for socio-political change in Iran (Jensen).

In a June 12, 2005 *USA Today* article titled *Internet Boom Alters Political Process in Iran*, Barbara Slavin writes about the Internet "weblog explosion" in Iran. In particular, she claims that the weblogs have laid the groundwork for political change in Iran. Later in Slavin's article, Abbas Milani, Director of the Iranian Studies program at Stanford University, asserts "...The Internet boom...has reunited Iranians in Iran with those who fled the Islamic Revolution, a dynamic that could dramatically accelerate democratic change." Milani suggests that expatriate Iranians may be communicating with Iranians inside Iran through blogs for the purpose of promoting democratic change

in Iran. He states “We in the diaspora can seriously participate in Iranian politics as vibrantly as those inside...allowing democratic forces to keep in touch.”

In a study published in April 2008 titled *Mapping Iran’s Online Public: Politics and Culture in the Persian Blogosphere*, John Kelly and Bruce Etling of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School were the first scholars to address Milani’s assertion regarding expatriate Iranian bloggers’ attempts to participate in Iranian politics. Kelly and Etling analyzed the Persian blogosphere by using both computational social network mapping and automated and human content analysis with Farsi-speaking coders. Their analysis allowed them to construct a cluster map which grouped blogs with other blogs based on the number of links they had in common with each other. The map is dominated by four poles: one comprised of secular/reformist bloggers, another comprised of conservative/religious bloggers, a third comprised of bloggers discussing poetry and literature, and the last pole comprised of a mixed network of bloggers. Kelly and Etling found that expatriate Iranians were well represented only in the secular reformist pole. In fact, the secular/reformist pole was comprised mostly of expatriate Iranians, rather than Iranians inside Iran. This allowed Kelly and Etling to situate expatriate Iranians within the macro-level picture of the Persian blogosphere which, for the purposes of their study, was useful. However, the macro-level-focused nature of Kelly and Etling’s study prevented them from further exploring the blogging tendencies of expatriate Iranian bloggers at the individual or micro-level.

Iran's Internet Environment

In order to accomplish the goal of using blogs to promote democratic reform, expatriate Iranians must first be able to connect with Iranians inside Iran over the Internet. This can be a challenge given Iran's high-censorship Internet environment.

There are currently 7.5 million Iranians using the Internet in Iran (Guardian, 2006). All 7.5 million Internet users in Iran face heavy censorship from the Iranian government. According to Reporters Without Borders (2006), Iran is considered one of the 13 "enemies" of the Internet. The Iranian government engages in censorship by forcing every Internet service provider (ISP) to be approved by the Telecommunication Company of Iran and the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (RWB). In addition, Iranians who wish to create a website must register with the Ministry of Art and Culture (RWB). The government censors any website that contains pornography, promotes women's rights, describes homosexual behavior, or discusses ideas that undermine Islam and the Iranian political regime (RWB). Bloggers and website owners violating these restrictions are subject to arrest, physical abuse, and time in jail (RWB). The government also restricts the connection speed at which Iranians can browse the Internet to 128kbit/s (Guardian). This action prevents Iranians from downloading Western media such as movies and songs (Guardian).

Expatriate Iranians Connecting with Iranians inside Iran through Blogs

Despite these conditions, scholars claim that expatriate Iranians are able to connect with Iranians living inside Iran through blogs. Peder Are Nøstvold Jensen's research study, *Blogging in Iran – A Case Study of Iranian English Language Weblogs*

(2004), investigates this claim. Jensen found evidence of cross-linking between blogs produced inside and outside Iran. Jensen also found expatriate Iranians commenting on blogs inside Iran, and Iranians inside Iran commenting on blogs outside Iran. Finally, Jensen notes that Derakhshan complained that he lost thousands of readers over the summer of 2004. This loss coincided with the Iranian government increasing their censorship of the Internet (Halevi).

In his research study, *The Iranian Weblog Research Project* (2006), Jordan Halevi arrives at the same conclusions as Jensen regarding expatriate Iranians connecting with Iranians inside Iran through blogs. Halevi examined blogs produced inside Iran and found that these bloggers identified bloggers outside Iran among their favorite bloggers. In particular, they mentioned Hossein Derakhshan's blog, produced in Canada. Halevi found further evidence that expatriate Iranians connect with Iranians inside Iran via blogs. Halevi's research study includes a survey which was initially posted on Derakhshan's blog and on Behi's blog, a popular site produced inside Iran. Halevi tracked the referral pattern of his survey and discovered that his survey posted on Derakhshan's blog was also found on many blogs in Iran. Halevi also discovered that his survey posted on Behi's blog was also found posted on many expatriate Iranian blogs produced in the United States and Canada.

Kelly and Etlings (2008) confirm that 80-90% of the secular/reformist blogs, which are dominated by expatriates, are actually accessible to Iranians inside Iran. They were unable to conclude, however, whether the Iranian government chose to ignore these blogs or was unable to censor them. Moreover, censorship of Iranian blogs was not as

pervasive as Kelly and Etling originally thought; thus weak censorship potentially opens the door for blogs to act as a strong platform for democratic discourse.

While research by Jensen, Halevi, and Kelly and Etling suggest that censorship is not a strong barrier impeding expatriate Iranians' efforts to communicate with Iranians inside Iran through blogs, it is nonetheless an issue that should continue to be investigated qualitatively given the regime's history of media censorship.

Blogging Outside Iran – A Tool for Internal Democratic Change?

In his research study, Jordan Halevi references Abbas Milani's assertion that "We in the diaspora can seriously participate in Iranian politics as vibrantly as those inside...allowing democratic forces to keep in touch." Halevi states that Milani's comment has not been backed yet by quantitative data. As already noted, Kelly and Etling are the first scholars to investigate Milani's assertion quantitatively. Their study only addresses Milani's assertion at a macro-level, however. This research expands on Kelly and Etling's finding regarding the existence of a secular/reformist pole of blogging expatriates, and examines Milani's assertion through a micro-level content analysis of blogs by expatriate Iranians. A micro-level content analysis allows the researcher to investigate the specific and different democratic reforms expatriates advocate for in Iran. This research will be guided by the question: Are expatriate Iranians connecting with Iranians inside Iran through blogs for the purpose of promoting democratic change in Iran? The democratic reform nature of Slavin's "weblog explosion" will be deemed established if most (at least 50%) of these blogs advocate at least in part for democratic changes in Iran.

V. Conceptual Framework

The research question arises from Iranian immigration patterns to democratic countries, their historical experiences with democracy in early 20th Iran, past use of small communication devices to promote political change in Iran, blogs' potential for socio-political change as postulated by Derakhshan, Kelly and Etling's classification of Iranian bloggers into four poles, and Milani's assertion that expatriate Iranians connect with Iranians inside Iran for the purpose of promoting democratic changes. For the purposes of this study, "expatriate" is defined as Iranians residing outside of Iran. The overarching research question and following specific answerable research questions are framed by three defining concepts: Freedom House's definition of democracy, Liora Hendelman-Baavur's (2007) definition of Iranian blogs by subject, and Dan Gilmor's (2004) definition of locations within blogs where communication takes place between the blog author and reader.

Freedom House's Democracy

A working definition of democracy is necessary in order to examine the question, "Are expatriate Iranians connecting with Iranians inside Iran through blogs for the purpose of promoting democratic change in Iran?" This research relies on the criteria used by Freedom House and examines the extent of democracy and freedom in a country. In 1941, Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Wilkie established Freedom House in reaction to international threats to democracy and freedom (Freedom House). Freedom House is a non-profit and non-partisan organization. Its goal is to provide a clear voice

for democracy and freedom around the world, and as such, is a credible organization for categorizing democratic values (Freedom House).

Freedom House publishes an annual survey titled “Countries at the Crossroads” that evaluates a country’s government across four broad democratic principles, defined by reputable scholars. These four principles are: (1) accountability and public voice, (2) civil liberties, (3) rule of law, and (4) anticorruption and transparency. Freedom House lists democratic ideals that relate to each principle (See Appendix).

Just as these four principles form the conceptual framework for “Countries at the Crossroads,” these principles serve as a conceptual framework for this study. Specifically, the democratic values listed under each of Freedom House’s four principles serve as the working definition of democracy that are used to assess the content of expatriate Iranian blogs. The definition is also particularly useful because it is comprehensive.

Hendelman-Baavur Blog Subjects

In her article “Promises and Perils of Weblogistan: Online Personal Journals and the Islamic Republic of Iran,” Hendelman-Baavur separates blogs into nine different categories. These nine categories are: (1) Internet, Computers, and Technology, (2) History, Culture, and Art, (3) Society, Family, and Life, (4) Personal, (5) Other, (6) News, (7) Economy and Commerce, (8) Religion and Philosophy, and (9) Entertainment and Sport. The blogs of expatriate Iranians examined in this study are categorized on the basis of these criteria.

Gilmor's Communication Locations between Blog Author and Reader

In his book *We the Media: Grassroots Journalism by the People, for the People* (2004), Dan Gilmor defines the locations within a blog where communication takes place between the blog author and reader. These three locations are: (1) blog posts, (2) blog post comments by readers, and (3) links to websites or blogs. These are the three locations in which evidence of democratic advocacy content are examined and thus shape the scope of this study.

VI. Research Questions

Using Freedom House's definition of democracy, Hendelman-Baavur's definition of Iranian blogs by subject, and Dan Gilmor's (2004) definition of blog communication locations as the conceptual framework for the study, the following questions are examined.

Overarching Research Question

Are expatriate Iranians communicating with Iranians inside Iran through blogs for the purpose of promoting democratic change in Iran? If most (at least 50%) of these blogs are advocating democratic values and change, blogs can be considered to be a significant and widespread tool by those seeking such changes in Iran. The selection of this percentage is arbitrary but serves as a good starting point for research in this new area.

Specific Answerable Research Questions

1. Are expatriate Iranian bloggers promoting democratic changes in Iran?
2. What percentage of expatriate Iranian bloggers advocate for democratic changes in Iran?
3. How do expatriate Iranian bloggers use their blogs to advocate for democratic changes in Iran?
4. What democratic values are advocated most in blogs by expatriate Iranians?
5. Is the propensity to promote democracy in Iran through blogs explained by differences in gender or resident country?
6. Which types of blogs are most likely to promote democratic values?
7. Are Iranians inside Iran reading blogs by expatriate Iranians?
8. What are the demographic characteristics of expatriate Iranian bloggers?
9. Do expatriate Iranian bloggers think that blogs can be used to inform Iranians inside Iran of the importance of democratic values in society?
10. Do expatriate Iranian bloggers think that blogs can facilitate democratic changes in Iran?

VII. Methods

The research relies upon three methods to answer these questions: interviews with Iranian blog experts; content analysis of the blogs of expatriate Iranians; and a survey of expatriate Iranian bloggers.

Interviews

E-mail interviews were conducted with Iranian blog experts Jordan Halevi, Arash Kamangir of Mideast Youth, and Hamid Tehrani of Global Voices. The purpose of the interviews is to use the answers provided to help focus the search and analysis of the blogs and to help draft and guide the administration of the survey instrument. In addition, their answers are used to address qualitatively the overarching research question.

Content Analysis

Similar to the methodology used by Kelly and Etling, a content analysis of blogs by Iranians was conducted. The content analysis, however, differs in a number of ways. First, the researcher's unreliable Persian-language reading skills preclude analysis of Persian-language blogs. Instead, English language blogs were analyzed. Second, the study examines only blogs authored by expatriate Iranians. Third, only one person, the researcher, coded blogs. This created a level of consistency that would have been difficult to maintain using multiple coding assistants.

All of the blogs analyzed were drawn from the portal website <http://www.blogsbyiranians.com>. This website organizes English-language blogs written by Iranians both inside and outside Iran. Hossein Derakhshan created the website directory and it is currently maintained by Ali Azimi. According to the website, a blog may be listed in the directory "If you are Iranian and have a weblog in English."

The content analysis examined blogs from January 2006 through December 2007. Using a 2-year sample focused the study and confined observation to the same

time period. However, as a result of this, a few blogs listed on <http://www.blogsbyiranians.com> were excluded because their content did not fit within this time parameter. In all, 153 English-language blogs produced outside of Iran were analyzed. This is an excellent sample size to conduct the quantitative analysis needed to answer specific answerable research questions 1-7. The content analysis of the blogs took place between January 5 and May 5, 2008.

To conduct the content analysis, a coding form was created and the blogs were tagged by category (for example, Entertainment and Sport) and by the democratic values they exhibit (for example, Freedom of Association and Assembly). A codebook was created to define these variables in greater detail and provide instruction on how to examine blogs (See Appendix). A coder-reliability test was also conducted to evaluate the coding accuracy of the original coder (See Appendix).

During the blog content analysis, the democratic values listed for each of Freedom House's four principles serve as the working definition of democracy. The blogs were tagged according to the democratic values listed under Freedom House's four principles.

In answering research questions 1-7, it is important to note that simply mentioning democratic values such as "Freedom of Association and Assembly" is not the same as advocating for these democratic changes in Iran. In other words, discussions of democratic values did not count as advocacy of democratic values. Advocacy of democratic values in Iran is distinguished from a discussion of democratic values because the former is a policy claim. In identifying evidence of advocacy of

democratic values in Iran, the blog must assert or argue that the democratic value should exist in Iran or changes adopting this democratic value should occur in Iran.

Structured observations were made about the content of the expatriate Iranian blogs and they were tagged according to the categories established by Hendelman-Baavur. Hendelman-Baavur relies on nine categories in her study. This study consolidated Hendelman-Baavur's nine categories into six categories. "Society, Family, and Life" were combined with "Personal" to create the category "Personal and Family Life." "News" was combined with "Economy and Commerce" to create the category "Current Events." These two sets of categories were combined because they had too much content overlap and hence would not be mutually exclusive. Kimberly Neuendorf explains in her book, *The Content Analysis Guidebook*, that categories in a content analysis must be mutually exclusive. Hendelman-Baavur's remaining categories were used and not altered.

The six categories used to label expatriate Iranian blogs are:

- (1) Internet, Computers, and Technology
- (2) History, Culture, and Art
- (3) Personal and Family Life
- (4) Entertainment and Sport
- (5) Religion and Philosophy
- (6) Current Events

The total number of blogs and blog category entries or blogs and democratic value entries did not tally up evenly. This is because a blog could fit under more than one of the categories or democratic values. For example, a blog could discuss Iranian

music (Entertainment and Sport category) and Iranian cuisine (Culture and Art category) or a blog may advocate both “Free and Fair Electoral Laws and Elections” and “Media Independence and Freedom of Expression.”

In addition to coding the blogs by democratic value and content, the blogger’s gender, current location, and visitor information found on web counters were also recorded. A web counter is an Internet tool that records the location of visitors and the total number of visitors a blog receives. They are present on the homepage of the blog as a link. Information found on a blog’s web counter was recorded to confirm that Iranians inside Iran are reading blogs by expatriate Iranians. If a blog’s web counter recorded a visitor from Iran, then that blog was coded as a blog read by Iranians inside Iran. Information identifying the gender and current location of the blogger was present on the homepage of the blog under the “About Me” link. Gender and location were recorded to examine if the propensity to promote democracy in Iran via blogs is explained by differences in gender or resident country.

Surveys

An 18-question survey was given to expatriate Iranian bloggers to identify their demographic characteristics and gauge if they think blogs can be used to inform Iranians inside Iran of the importance of democratic values in society and blogs’ ability to facilitate democratic changes in Iran. The survey was administered using the University of Washington Catalyst Web Tools WebQ format. The survey was sent to the bloggers by web link using the e-mail address they provided on their blog or, if an e-mail

address was not present, in the comments section under the most recent blog entry. This effort yielded 30 survey responses.

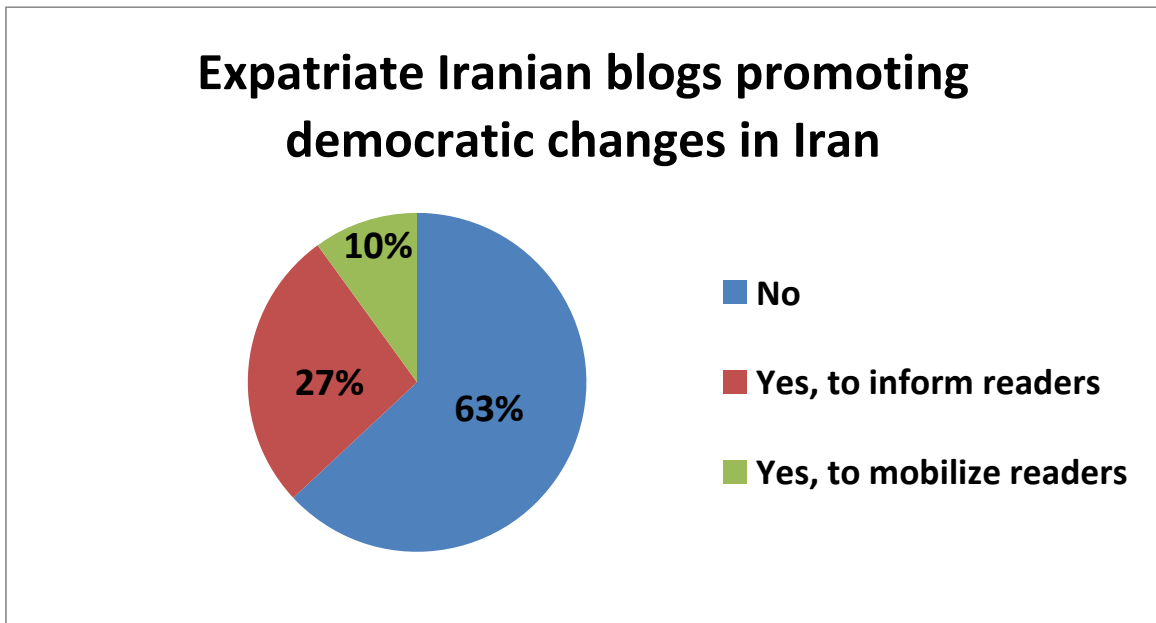
VIII. Content Analysis Results

A coder reliability test was conducted to verify clarity, exclusivity, and consistency. A volunteer coded eight blogs. Coding between the volunteer and the author of this research produced 83% agreement on the six blog categories and 81% agreement on the 18 democratic values.

Advocacy of Democratic Values

The research proposed that if most of the blogs (50%) authored by expatriate Iranians promote democratic values, blogs could be considered to be a significant medium for change in Iran. This research only found that 37% of the blogs are advocating for democratic changes in Iran. This percentage should be further qualified by noting that a blog was tagged as advocating democratic values or changes in Iran if the advocacy was mentioned once on the blog. Such advocacy, however, may range from a passing comment to a series of lengthy discussions. In other words, the extent of democratic advocacy per blog was not weighted.

Table 1



Content analysis of blogs by expatriate Iranians reveals that expatriates are promoting democratic changes in Iran on their blogs. 43 blogs promoted democracy through the written, illustrative, and linked content contained in their blog posts. An additional 14 blogs did not advocate democracy in their blog posts but did link to blogs and websites that did promote democracy through their blogroll or linkroll (lists of blogs or website links) on the sides of their blog pages. Thus, 57 out of the total of 153 blogs (37%) promoted democratic changes in Iran. Table 1 illustrates that 27% of expatriate Iranian blogs promote democracy solely to inform their readers about the lack of democracy in Iran. 10% of the blogs attempt to mobilize their readers, not just by informing them about the lack of democracy in Iran, but also by providing them with tools that can be used to bring about democratic change within Iran. There are two types of tools expatriate Iranian bloggers use to mobilize their readers.

First, they post links to online petitions that readers can sign and forward to leaders of the Iranian government and/or other world leaders. There are five types of petitions circulating on blogs:

- (1) Petitions for freedom of expression in Iran;
- (2) Petitions seeking the release of political prisoners who speak out against the Iranian government;
- (3) Petitions calling for the end of stoning and other forms of cruel and unusual punishment administered by the Iranian government,
- (4) Petitions calling for gender equality in Iran; and
- (5) Petitions for the right to fair trial for those denied the right to a lawyer.

The second way expatriate Iranian bloggers mobilize Iranians inside Iran is to encourage them to demonstrate against the Iranian government. This is seen in their efforts to use their blog to facilitate and stage pro-democracy rallies and demonstrations inside Iran. For example, on February 14, 2006, the blog *Iranians for Human Rights and Democracy* posted an online flyer with a link to information on places where readers could meet in Tehran the next day to demonstrate for greater rights to peacefully assemble and associate. This effort was in response to the recent imprisonment of members of the Trade Union of the Greater Tehran United Bus Company for going on strike.

It is important to note that most expatriate Iranian blogs are not being used to promote democratic changes in Iran. Most expatriate Iranian bloggers are using their blog to discuss current political events such as the U.S. war in Iraq, or Stephen Harper's election as prime minister of Canada, or topics such as how the Iranian national football

(soccer) team did in the World Cup, or to describe their social plans for the weekend. Additionally, even among the blogs that were tagged as advocating for democratic changes in Iran, very few of them dedicated their blog solely to discussing this goal. Most of the blogs that did advocate for democratic changes in Iran discussed other topics such as those mentioned above. Generalizations about Iranian bloggers working toward a common goal to bring about democratic change needs more evidence. No doubt, there is, however, a number of expatriate Iranian bloggers promoting democratic changes in Iran and thus is a topic worthy of further investigation.

Table 2

Rank	Democratic Value	Total Number of Blogs Promoting Value	Percentage of Democratic Blogs Promoting Value
1	Gender Equality	30	70%
2	Freedom of Expression	22	51%
3	Freedom of Association and Assembly	17	40%
4	Freedom of Conscience and Belief	12	28%
5	Primacy of Rule of Law	12	28%
6	Protections Against State Terror, Unjustified Imprisonment, and Torture	12	28%
7	Rights of Ethnic and Religious Groups	8	19%
8	Free and Fair Elections	7	16%
9	Equal Treatment Under the Law	7	16%
10	Civic Engagement and Monitoring	6	14%
11	Accountability of Security Forces and Military to Civilian Authorities	6	14%
12	Independent Judiciary	3	7%
13	Effective and Accountable Government	3	7%
14	Protection of Property Rights	2	5%
15	Laws, Ethical Standards, Boundaries Between Public and Private Sectors	2	5%
16	Government Transparency	1	2%
17	Enforcement of Anticorruption Laws	0	0%
18	Environment to Protect Against Corruption	0	0%

Gender equality, freedom of expression, and freedom of association and assembly are the three democratic changes most frequently promoted on blogs by expatriate Iranians. Specific democratic values were only identified as such when the blogger promoted democratic changes in Iran through the written, illustrative, or linked

content contained in their blog posts. The blogs that do not promote democracy through their blog posts but link to blogs and websites that promoted democracy on their blogroll or linkroll were thus excluded. As a result, the working sample size is 43 blogs.

Table 2 shows that 30 out of 43, or 70%, of the blogs promoting democracy call for “gender equality.” This was the most frequently advocated democratic value. Given that the role of the sexes is such a fundamental plank of the Islamic Republic and at odds with the laws and societal values of secular, liberal democracies, it is perhaps not unexpected that this is the most frequently cited value.

Table 2 shows that 22 out of 43, or 51%, of the blogs that promoted democracy call for “freedom of expression.” It also shows that 17 out of 43, or 40%, of the blogs that promoted democracy advocate “freedom of association and assembly.” Again, given official censorship and limitations upon free assembly and association, the frequency of these two democratic values is not a surprise.

Table 2 shows that two values were not mentioned at all. Even though expatriate Iranian bloggers did not advocate for the “enforcement of anticorruption laws” or for an “environment to protect against corruption,” one should not conclude that these problems do not exist in Iran nor that these two democratic values are seen as unimportant to expatriate Iranian bloggers or Iranians. It was often the case that a specific democratic value was advocated in response to a current news article documenting the lack of “freedom of expression” or other democratic values in Iran. Thus, articles documenting the existence of corruption in Iran might have yielded calls for democratic changes in Iran in the name of “enforcement of anticorruption laws” and/or an “environment to protect against corruption.”

Gender of Bloggers

Table 3

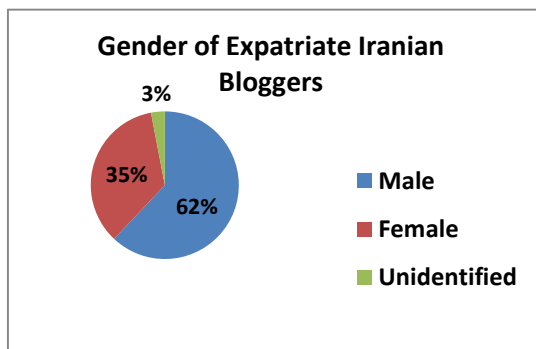
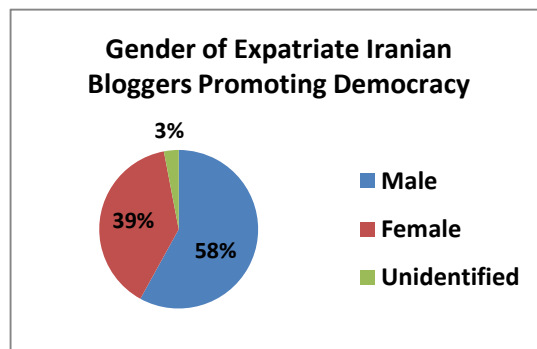
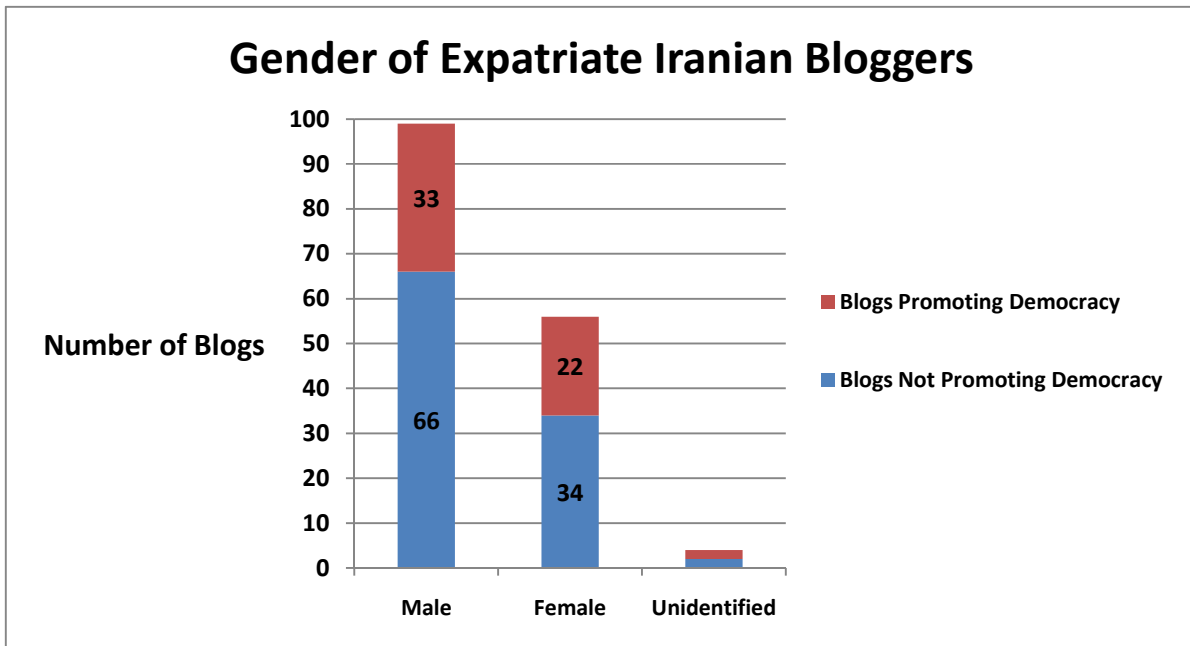


Table 4



Overall, more expatriate men than women author blogs. Specifically, 99 out of 153, or 62%, blogs are authored by men. Table 3 shows that 56 out of 153, or 35%, blogs are authored by women. It was not possible to identify the gender of 4 out of 153 or 3% of the authors. Not surprisingly then, men are more represented than women among expatriate Iranian bloggers promoting democratic changes in Iran. Specifically, 58% of the bloggers who promote democracy are men and 39% of the bloggers that promote democracy are women. Again, 3% of the bloggers who promoted democracy did not reveal their gender. Three blogs promoting democracy were co-authored by male and female bloggers. In these cases, the blogs were coded either as male or female according to which gendered-author promoted more democratic values on the blog between them.

Table 5



It is interesting to note that while there are more male bloggers promoting democracy than female bloggers, female bloggers actually promote democracy at an overall rate higher than male bloggers. Specifically, 22 out of a total of 56, or 39%, of the female bloggers promoted democracy, whereas 33 out of a total of 99, or 33%, of the male bloggers did. One might hypothesize that female bloggers promote democracy at a greater rate than male bloggers because “gender equality” is the specific democratic change most frequently promoted by expatriate Iranian bloggers. Women would be more inclined to promote “gender equality” since they would be the beneficiaries of such change. Surprisingly, this is not the case. Male bloggers are just as likely, if not more likely, to promote “gender equality” in Iran than female bloggers. Specifically, 19% of the male bloggers promote “gender equality” while 18% of the female bloggers promote “gender equality.”

Resident Country of Bloggers

Table 6

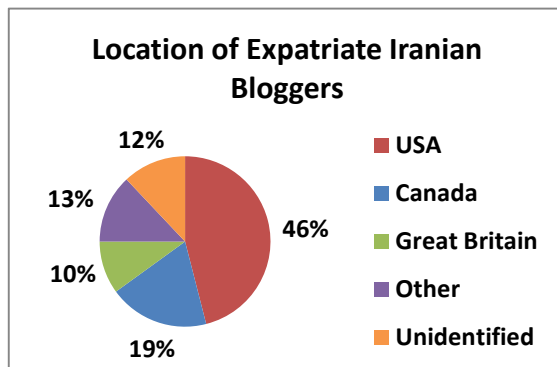


Table 7

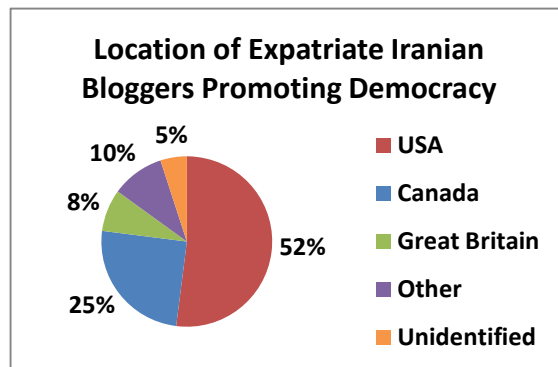


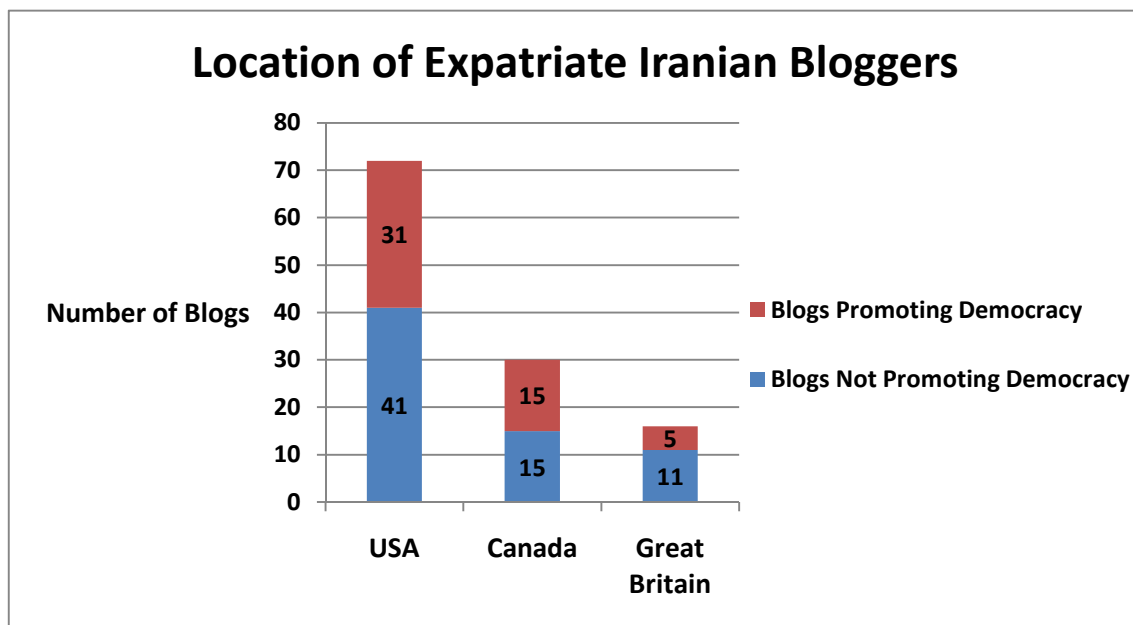
Table 6 shows that there are more expatriate Iranian bloggers residing in the United States than in any other country. A total of 72 out of 156, or 46%, expatriate Iranian bloggers are from the United States. Three bloggers claim they blog from two countries; thus the total was 156 blogs. One limitation of this study that may be a source of bias is that since English-language blogs by Iranians were analyzed, the United States, Canada, and Great Britain (all English speaking countries) may be overrepresented. Future studies will likely confirm, however, that the United States is the origin of the greatest number of expatriate Iranian bloggers.

“Other” countries resident to expatriate Iranian bloggers do not have a large enough sample size to be included in the above graphs. They are Australia (3 bloggers), Sweden (3 bloggers), Norway (2 bloggers), Denmark (2 bloggers), Switzerland (2 bloggers), Austria (2 bloggers) France (2 bloggers), Spain (1 blogger), India (1 blogger), United Arab Emirates (1 blogger), and South Africa (1 blogger). The location of expatriate Iranian bloggers primarily in Western democratic countries

reinforces Hakimzadeh’s research regarding Iranians immigrating primarily to Western democratic countries.

The United States, well represented among the overall population of expatriate Iranian bloggers, is also well represented among those bloggers promoting democratic changes in Iran. Table 7 depicts that 52% of bloggers promoting democracy come from the United States, 25% come from Canada, and 8% come from Great Britain. An important conclusion to draw from this is that no one country possesses all or a strong majority of the expatriate Iranian bloggers promoting democratic changes in Iran.

Table 8



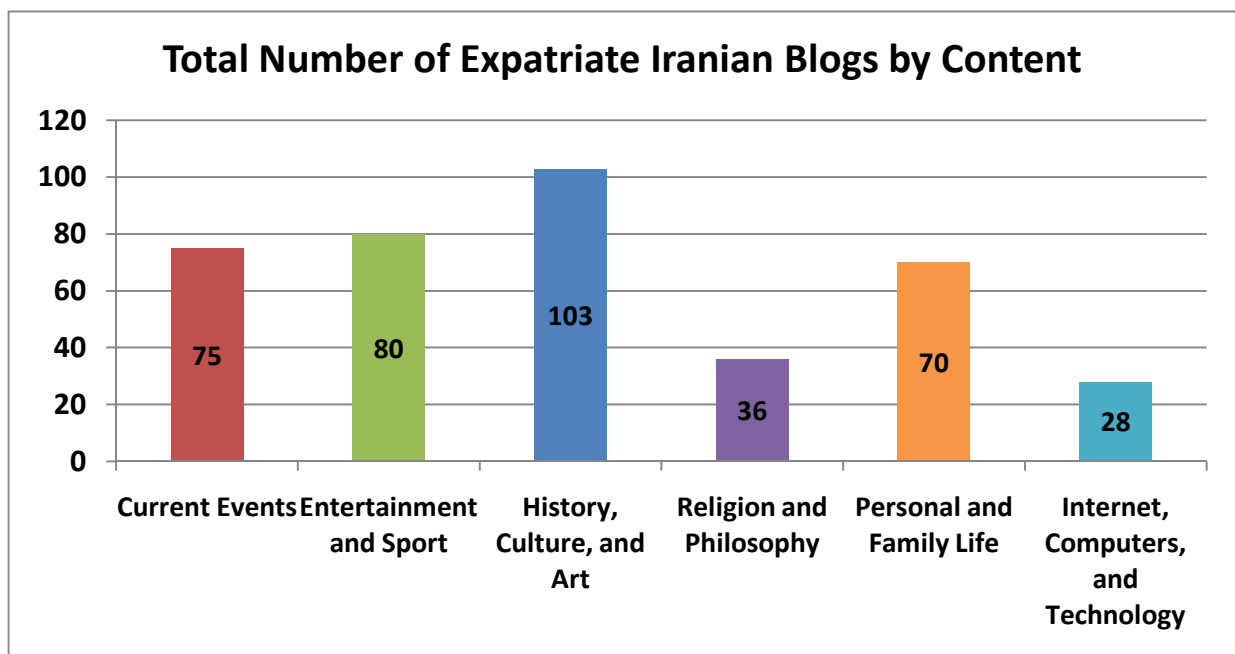
Even though the United States has the greatest number of expatriate Iranian bloggers and possesses the greatest number of bloggers promoting democratic change in Iran, Canada actually contains the highest percentage of expatriate Iranian bloggers promoting democracy relative to its total number of expatriate Iranian bloggers. Table 8 illustrates that 15 out of the total of 30, or 50%, expatriate Iranian bloggers residing in

Canada promote democracy. The United States trails Canada with 31 out of the total of 72, or 43%, of its expatriate Iranian bloggers promoting democracy. Great Britain follows both Canada and the United States with 5 out of the total of 16, or 32%, of its expatriate Iranian bloggers promoting democracy. The “other” countries did not contain enough expatriate Iranian bloggers to draw any conclusions about their propensity to promote democratic changes in Iran.

Finally, while expatriate Iranian bloggers living in Canada promote democratic changes in Iran at a greater rate than expatriate Iranian bloggers living in other countries, it is even more important to note that this percentage is only at 50%. Thus, no one country in the sample can make the argument that most expatriate Iranian bloggers in its community are promoting democratic changes in Iran via blogs.

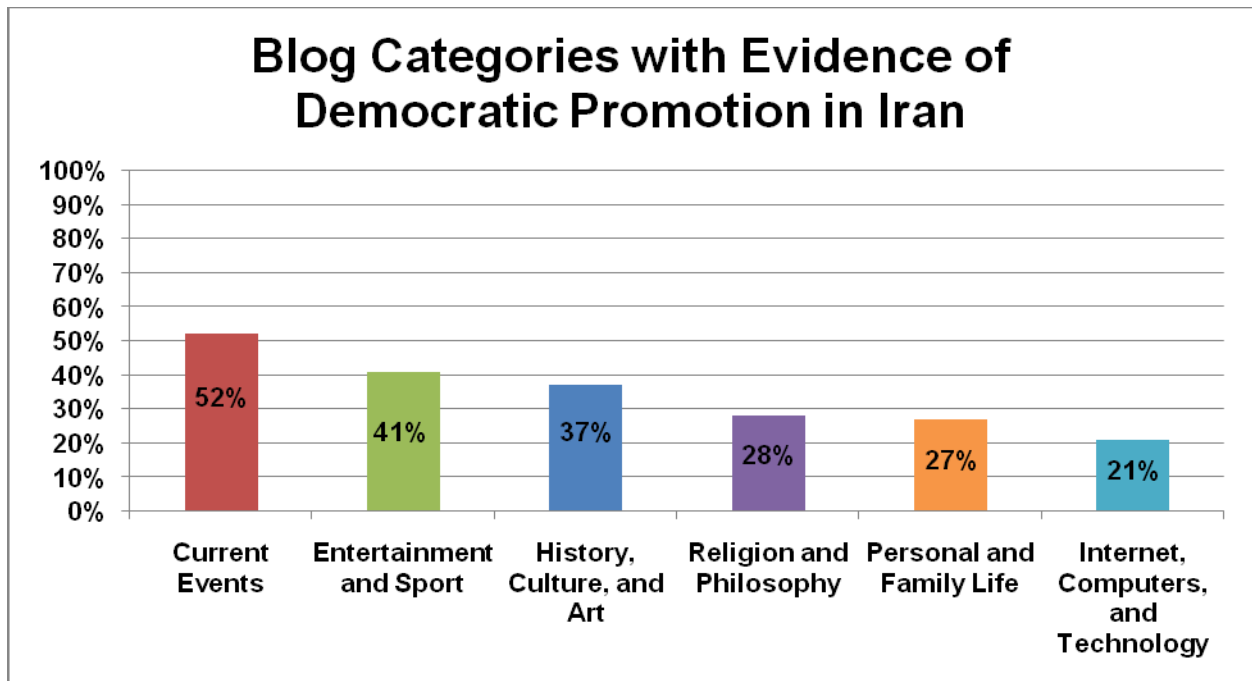
Non-Democratic Value Content Categories

Table 9



The most popular topic expatriate Iranians discuss on their blogs is “History, Culture, and Art.” Specifically, 103 of the 153 blogs analyzed contain historical, cultural, or artistic content. Table 9 shows that 80 of the 153 blogs discussed content relating to “Entertainment and Sport;” 75 of the 153 blogs discussed content relating to “Current Events;” 70 of the 153 blogs discussed “Personal and Family Life” subjects; 36 of the 153 discussed “Religion and Philosophy;” and 28 of the 153 blogs discussed “Internet, Computers, and Technology” related content. The total number of blogs in all of the categories combined does not add up to 153 because the blogs could be coded in more than one category.

Table 10



Bloggers who discuss “Current Events” are most likely to promote democratic changes in Iran on their blog. Specifically, 52% of the bloggers who discuss “Current Events” on their blog also advocate democratic changes in Iran. Table 10 shows that

41% of “Entertainment and Sport;” 37% of “History, Culture, and Art,” 28% of “Religion and Philosophy;” 27% of “Personal and Family Life;” and 21% of “Internet, Computers, and Technology” blogs advocate for democratic changes in Iran.

Future studies looking to measure the pervasiveness of blogs exchanging democratic ideas and beliefs between Iranians inside Iran and expatriates would be best served by analyzing blogs that discuss “Current Events.” Further reinforcing this recommendation is the fact that of the 43 blogs promoting democracy in Iran in the research sample, 39 of the blogs discuss “Current Events.” It is interesting to note the weak link between discussion of religion and democratic advocacy. This is a bit unexpected since religious minorities have been adversely affected by the Islamic Republic, and might have been expected to give voice to their condition, as have the female bloggers.

Blog Readers’ Demographics

Figure 1: Cluster Map of visitors from the blog *S’Can-Iranic*



⇨ distance in which individuals are clustered

Dot sizes: ● = 1,000+ ● = 100 - 999 ● = 10 - 99 ◆ = 1 - 9 visits

Source:

<http://clustrmaps.com/counter/maps.php?url=http://secularcaniranik.blogs.com>

Figure 2: Total Number of Visitors from the blog *Iranian Prospect*

Country of origin		
1. United States	34,289	46.2 %
2. Iran	10,190	13.7 %
3. United Kingdom	5,582	7.5 %
4. Canada	4,536	6.1 %
5. Germany	2,365	3.2 %
6. Netherlands, The	1,004	1.4 %
7. France	984	1.3 %
8. Australia	940	1.3 %
9. Sweden	932	1.3 %
10. Norway	920	1.2 %
The rest	12,413	16.7 %
Total	74,155	100.0 %

Source: <http://webstats.motigo.com/s?tab=1&link=1&id=2832922>

The content analysis of blogs by expatriate Iranians supports Jensen and Halevi's previous findings that Iranians inside Iran are reading blogs by expatriate Iranians. Out of the 153 total blogs analyzed, 38 of them contain web counters that track where readers of that blog originate. 36 of those 38 blogs that had a web counter confirmed Iranians inside Iran were reading expatriate blogs by way of cluster map (Figure 1) or country of origin statistics (Figure 2). Omid Memarian, the author of the blog *Iranian Prospect*, has the greatest number of visitors from Iran at 10,190. This is not surprising given that Memarian is one the most frequently referenced bloggers in articles by Western media outlets regarding Iranians blogs' popularity and potential for facilitating democratic changes in Iran. Even though Hossein Derakhshan (*Editor: Myself*) and Arash Kamangir (*Kamangir*), two expatriate Iranian bloggers who also receive media attention, do not have web counters on their blogs, this research suggests that they will have similar numbers of blog visitors from Iran as Memarian.

It is difficult to conclude exactly how many Iranians inside Iran actually read the blogs because the web counters record the total number of visits instead of the number of unique visitors from Iran. Thus, even though the *Iranian Prospect* was visited 10,190

times by those inside Iran, the blog may have actually been visited by only 1,019 unique bloggers who had checked the blog 10 times since its inception.

One factor to keep in mind, when estimating the total number of people from Iran visiting these blogs, is that these blogs are written in English. Persian language blogs by expatriate Iranians would most likely have a much greater constituency of readers in Iran given the use of the common, native language. Taking this idea one step further, this study's content analysis also reveals that the top country that reads expatriate Iranians blogs is not Iran but rather the resident country of the expatriate Iranian blogger; usually the United States or Canada (two English speaking countries). An interview with the author of *Iran Translated* (a pro-democracy expatriate Iranian blog) conducted with an American journalism student that is posted on the blog on February 24, 2007 sheds more light on this finding. When asked why he blogs, the author of *Iran Translated* stated that he heeded Pedram Moallemian's (a famous pro-democracy expatriate Iranian blogger) call for all Iranians to create a blog in English in order to reach out to non-Farsi speakers. Moallemian's goal is not only being achieved as evidenced by the finding that there are at least 153 expatriate Iranian blogs in English, but his goal is also being achieved because non-Farsi speaking countries (United States and Canada) represent the largest reader constituency of English language blogs by expatriate Iranians.

IX. Survey Response Results

The survey results confirm much of the known literature concerning the demographics of expatriate Iranian bloggers. Expatriate Iranian bloggers are young,

highly educated, and socioeconomically speaking, middle class or higher. The results found that the respondents have the following self-reported characteristics:

- 97% are between the ages of 18-40;
- 83% have at least a college degree;
- 53% have a graduate degree;
- Only 7% describe themselves as lower than middle class.

The survey asked bloggers to write in their answers to two questions about blogs' ability to inform Iranians inside Iran of the importance of democratic values in society and blogs' ability to facilitate democratic changes in Iran.

1. Q: Do you think that Internet blogs can inform Iranians inside Iran of the importance of democratic values in society?

Table 11

Yes	No	Maybe	Iranians are already aware of democracy	Did Not Answer Question
16	4	3	4	4

Overall, expatriate Iranian bloggers feel that blogs can be used to inform Iranians inside Iran of the importance of democratic values in society. Those who state “yes,” cite blogs' ability to act as a “free media” and their existence as “one of the channels less censored (in Iran).” However, a few of those who felt that blogs could be used to promote democracy also have some reservations. They point out that Iranians inside Iran need to have experienced democracy as it is practiced in Western societies to appreciate it. If not, reading about democracy on a blog won't impact them. Another reservation is that expatriate Iranians trying to promote democracy in Iran aren't

reaching their intended audience because those who read blogs tend to be educated people in urban areas (implying these select few Iranians already understand democratic values). Another reservation is that blogs are more likely to be effective in promoting democracy inside Iran only if they are written in Farsi; Iranians inside Iran may not be interested in English-language blogs. Finally, they point out that, while blogs can inform Iranians inside Iran of the importance of democratic values in society, the extent or pervasiveness of these blogs in Iran is unclear and needs to be examined.

Those who say blogs cannot inform Iranians inside Iran of the importance of democratic values in society point out that Internet filtering by the Iranian government prevents Iranians inside Iran from accessing websites or blogs containing democratic ideas. They also cite the inaccessibility of the Internet to most people in Iran, implying that widespread Internet access in Iran is needed for the exchange of democratic beliefs via blogs to have a real impact. Accessibility to the Internet is clearly income related, unlike the audio cassettes used during the Islamic Revolution which were cheaply duplicated and distributed widely to all classes of society.

2. Q: Do you think Internet blogs can facilitate democratic changes in Iran?

Table 12

Yes	No	Maybe	Not Sure	Did Not Answer
12	9	4	1	4

The results indicate that expatriate Iranian bloggers themselves are divided over whether they think blogs can facilitate democratic changes in Iran. In analyzing the

responses of those who say “yes,” two different camps emerge. The first camp believes that blogs are already facilitating democratic changes within Iran. Although they did not cite any specific examples, they are probably referring to the role blogs have played in distributing online petitions for democratic change and how blogs have served as a tool for organizing offline public demonstrations for greater democratic rights. The other “yes” camp believes that blogs could potentially play a role in facilitating democratic changes in Iran, but they haven’t yet. This camp argues further that when and if blogs facilitate democratic changes, they will not be the central player or catalyst for this change.

Those who respond “no” point out that both Internet censorship and the fact that only a minority of people in Iran read blogs hinders blogs’ ability to facilitate democratic changes in Iran. They also argue that simply reading a blog promoting democratic values will not spark any Iranian inside Iran to advocate for democratic change. In any event, the sample size and the possible self-serving bias in their responses make it difficult to draw firm conclusions from this small, but expert, group of respondents.

X. E-mail Interview Results

The e-mail interviews with the Iranian blog experts illustrate the complexity of the main research question (Are expatriate Iranians communicating with Iranians inside Iran via blogs for the purpose of promoting democratic changes in Iran?) because even they cannot come to a consensus answer when addressing the issue.

Jordan Halevi believes that some expatriate Iranians are intentionally or methodically using their blog to promote democratic changes in Iran. The content

analysis of expatriate blogs confirms this belief. It found that 10% of expatriate bloggers are mobilizing their readers to demonstrate for greater rights in Iran or to sign petitions; these actions constitute an intentional or methodological use of a blog to achieve political change.

Arash Kamangir approaches the question from the standpoint of democratic regime change and argues that expatriates are not using their blogs deliberately to topple the Iranian regime. However, the content analysis proves this is not completely true. At least one blogger, the author of the expatriate Iranian blog *The Spirit of Man*, writes on his homepage that he is seeking democratic regime change in Iran. He proceeds with this plan by not only focusing his blog solely on discussion of this topic, but by also posting petitions, such as one he posted on March 16, 2006 urging readers to sign a petition to demand that world leaders oppose the Iranian regime and denounce it for its civil liberty violations. Thus, there are some bloggers who are even going so far as mobilizing their readers for actions that threaten the survival of the Iranian government.

Hamid Tehrani overall does not believe that expatriate Iranians write blogs for the purpose of promoting democratic changes in Iran. However, he does acknowledge that bloggers inside and outside Iran have worked together in distributing online petitions that criticize the Iranian government's non-democratic policies, such as jailing people who speak out against the Iranian government.

XI. Conclusions

Are expatriate Iranians connecting with Iranians inside Iran through blogs for the purpose of promoting democratic change in Iran? Is there a democratic reform “weblog explosion” as Slavin described? Perhaps Slavin described a false generalization that many Western media such as *USA Today* present to their readers. The proposition that expatriate Iranians are blogging to promote democratic values and reform in Iran simply lacks sufficient evidence. The content analysis identified a few bloggers who promote democracy, but even larger numbers of expatriate Iranians are using their blog to discuss other topics. Even among bloggers who advocate for democratic changes in Iran, most of them are using their blog for other purposes, as well, such as discussing their weekend social plans.

From the data about expatriate Iranians advocating changes in Iran, a picture of these bloggers develops. Most wish to see expansion of the democratic values of gender equality, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly in Iran. While numerically there are more male expatriate bloggers, female expatriates blog about democracy more frequently.

Although Iranian blogging is a big news story in the United States, expatriates living in Canada are more likely to blog about democracy than expatriates from any other country. Expatriates promoting democracy are more likely to discuss current events than any other blog topic, which is a predictable topical tie-in.

Survey data confirmed that expatriate Iranians are young, highly, educated, and socioeconomically speaking, middle class and higher. Thus, the prototypical expatriate

pro-democracy Iranian blogger may be a young, highly educated, upper middle class woman living in Canada!

Although censorship occurs in Iran and has been much commented about in the Western media, it does not appear to be an insurmountable problem for expatriate Iranians blogging in English who wish to have readers in Iran. Perhaps the more influential censorship is self-imposed. While expatriates express confidence in blogs' ability to inform Iranians inside Iran of the value of democratic values in society, their confidence in blogs' ability to facilitate democratic changes in Iran is not high. If true, this may help explain why more expatriate Iranian bloggers are not advocating democratic changes in Iran. Given Mossayeb and Shirazi's finding that 71% of Iranians would move back to Iran if they perceived political, social, and economic change, one would think that if the opportunity (blogs) presented itself to change the political, social, and economic situation, Iranians would take it. Perhaps those expatriate Iranians have become more assimilated to their new secular, liberal countries than they admit.

To date, blogs have not affected the basic political status of Iran as a non-democratic theocracy. Petitions and demonstrations facilitated by blogs have achieved small victories, leading to the release of political prisoners or others who have spoken out against the government. However, the system that put these men and women in prison, in the first place, still exists despite the presence of pro-democracy blogs. Unlike the audiotape cassettes that were able to reach a large audience because they were inexpensive, the Internet and blogs remain accessible mostly to the upper class, educated elite in urban areas. Iranian construction workers and villagers do not spend time in Internet cafes blogging to strangers overseas. If the Internet and blogs are to

have widespread impact upon the majority population in Iran, they will need to become more accessible to the average person in Iran. Advances in technology are already making this possible; one only need witness the widespread use of cell phones by people who may still lack electricity in their homes. Already small shops in the bazaar proudly post their websites; widespread access to blogs may not be a far-off prospect, especially give cell phone advances. However, as with the limits on the Internet speed imposed by the Iranian government, future advances in technology may be withheld from the Iranian people. The Iranian government will not be able to withhold technology from its citizens forever, and if anything, protests against the restriction of the medium, rather than the medium itself, may be the spark that triggers Iranians to protest their political situation and demand greater democratic rights.

Future Studies

Future studies on Iranian expatriates and their blogging habits with respect to democracy should follow the content analysis methodology adopted both in this study and in the Kelly and Etling study. For example, one could conduct a content analysis of Persian-language blogs by expatriate Iranians using coding assistants proficient in Persian, if the researcher is not proficient in Persian. It would be interesting to see the difference in blog content between English-language and Farsi-language blogs. One might hypothesize that Farsi-language blogs should produce more democratic advocacy, since such blogs have a larger indigenous readership. Additional research using the current data base could examine the proportion of democratic advocacy relative to the total content of a blog. That is, the frequency of democratic advocacy per

blog was not tabulated in this research. The effectiveness of those, at the moment, few sites definitely aiming for political action in Iran should be tracked. Also, future studies could expand on this research by examining the correlation between Iranian bloggers' confidence in blogs to facilitate democratic changes in Iran and whether that blogger promotes democracy on their blog. The role that the Internet plays in fostering democracy in other countries is fascinating and multi-faceted, evolving as the technology itself changes. This subject will likely be a fruitful research field for those interested in both communication and political science.

XII. Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to all those that allowed me to pursue and complete this thesis. First, I want to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Kirsten Foot, who encouraged me to join the University of Washington's Department of Communication Honors Program. She introduced me to academic writing and provided me with insightful suggestions on how to improve my thesis. I very much appreciate her confidence in me.

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