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Source: *Iranian Studies*, Jun., 2008, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Jun., 2008), pp. 297-321

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of International Society of Iranian Studies

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Charles Kurzman

A Feminist Generation in Iran?

Numerous observers have noted that a feminist generation of educated young women appears to be emerging in Iran, despite the anti-feminist discourse of the Iranian government. Evidence from three surveys conducted in 2000–2003 confirms and complicates these observations. Educated young women are significantly more likely to espouse feminist attitudes of various sorts than other Iranians, including educated young men. In addition, educated young women are significantly more likely to work outside the home, marry later, give birth later, have fewer children, and have more egalitarian marriages than other Iranian women. However, surprising proportions of older Iranians also espouse feminist attitudes, and a majority of respondents in one nationally representative sample of urban Iranians identify themselves as proponents of women's rights.

In 1999, I was asked to start a mail-order bride business. The brides asked me. I was at a conference in Tehran, Iran, being interviewed by a group of journalists, half of them women. An American in Tehran is news, and one who speaks bad Persian is apparently particularly newsworthy. As the interview ended, one of the women asked if I was married. I answered, "Yes, thank God!" and asked if she was married. She answered, "No, thank God!"

She went on to explain that she was eager to pursue her career in journalism, and that virtually all of the Iranian men she knew, including educated men who valued education in a mate, did not want their wives to be career women. The issue, she said, was not being barred from working, since many Iranian women are in the paid labor force. Rather, the problem lay in priorities: husbands expected themselves to be the wife's first priority, the husband's family to be second, their children to be third, and the wife's job to be fourth or lower. The trick, in her view, was to hustle in her career to make a name for herself so that she could coast somewhat when she married. The risk in the plan, she noted, was that many eligible men of her generation will already have married by that age. She had heard that educated men in America and Europe encouraged their wives to succeed in their careers, and joked that since educated Iranian

Charles Kurzman is at the Department of Sociology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA. I am very grateful to the Carolina Population Center and the Mellon Foundation for funding this research; to Mohammad Hassan Khoshnevis and other officials at the Cultural Research Bureau for conducting the Iranian Family Attitudes Survey; to Farahnaz Amirkhani and Amanda Elam for research assistance; to Arang Keshavarzian, Marie Ladier-Foulani, Mansour Moaddel, and Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi for sharing their expertise and data with me; to Kraig Beyerlein, Ted Mouw, and Cathy Zimmer for much-needed statistical assistance; and to Kian Tajbakhsh for seeing the whole project through.



women were in over-supply on the Iranian marriage market, I should start a dating service to introduce them overseas. By now a group of women journalists had drifted back and gathered around us, nodding in agreement and laughing.

I started to wonder. Not about the dating service, but about the macro-social implications of educated Iranian women's abstention from marriage. Were these attitudes widespread among Iranian women? Could a feminist generation be forming in Iran, notwithstanding the patriarchal ideology of the country's rulers? You know you are a social scientist at heart when a business opportunity presents itself and you can only think of macro-social implications.

Around the world, it is widely recognized that feminist attitudes are associated with women's education, that women's education increases their economic prospects, that increased economic prospects lead women to delay marriage and bear fewer children, and that this effect is largest in societies that are most patriarchal.¹ It is also known that these changes may co-exist with continued patterns of relatively early and nearly universal marriage, as well as patriarchal social structure.²

It would be noteworthy if Iran's recent experience matches these global trends, since the state in Iran has attempted for more than a quarter century to restrict women's aspirations to the domestic sphere, in the name of a particular interpretation of Islam. While the Islamic Republic of Iran has not denied women education or banned women from the labor force, the government and its supporters have engaged in a lengthy campaign against what they consider to be Western cultural influences on gender relations. In schools, in the media, in political arenas, the government has identified women's subservience as a linchpin of Iranian and Islamic identity.³

At the same time, the Islamic Republic has greatly expanded educational opportunities for women. From 1990 to 2000, women's tertiary enrollment ratio—the number of female students in higher education as a percentage of all women age 19–24—rose from 7 percent to 21 percent.⁴ In 1996, female high-school graduates came to outnumber male graduates; in 1999, girls started to outnumber boys in early childhood education; as of 2001, more women were pursuing bachelor's degrees than men.⁵ If, despite the government's best efforts, this widening cohort of women educated in the Islamic Republic aspires to equality

¹Hans-Peter Blossfeld, ed., *The New Role of Women* (Boulder, 1995); Narumon Saardchom and Jean Lemaire, "Causes of Increasing Ages at Marriage: An International Regression Study," *Marriage and Family Review* 37 (2005): 73–97.

²Elizabeth Fussell and Alberto Palloni, "Persistent Marriage Regimes in Changing Times," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66 (2004): 1201–1213.

³On education policy, for example, see Golnar Mehran, "The Paradox of Tradition and Modernity in Female Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Comparative Education Review* 47 (2003): 269–286.

⁴World Bank, *World Development Indicators* (Washington DC, 2007).

⁵Statistical Center of Iran, *Iran Statistical Yearbook 1382 (2003–2004)* (Tehran, 2004); Golnar Mehran, "Gender and Education in Iran: A Case Study Prepared for UNESCO," unpublished paper, 2005.

with men in important ways, then perhaps educational and generational change are more susceptible to global trends than to government doctrines.⁶

Qualitative Evidence

This speculation emerged from brief visits and a handful of anecdotes. Were my observations representative? In a pilot study, my colleague Farahnaz Amirkhani found consistent sentiments in interviews with a small set of educated women in Tehran. "Men are too self-centered. They don't want to understand their wives," a 25-year-old college student told the interviewer. "Marriage prevents progress in Iran," said a 28-year-old university-educated teacher. "Men are selfish and rude. They think that they have the right to do anything, and society has recognized this right for them," said a 29-year-old dentist. "Because of patriarchal culture, women have to forbear and restrict their liberty in order to keep order in the family," said a 22-year-old graduate student. "Educated women who are independent financially are not acceptable to men," said a 25-year-old college student.

Other observers recount similar anecdotal evidence. A 22-year-old student at Tehran University worried, "I'm not sure whether I'll be allowed to work when I get married. This is the main problem of educated women in Iran." American journalists quoted an unmarried 32-year-old politician: "Being married is a full-time job and politics is a full-time job, and there is only room for one full-time job in life." An Iranian journalist quoted a 28-year-old computer instructor on the importance of financial autonomy for educated women: "In my opinion, women have to be financially secure in order to be independent and not always rely on other people. The average age [of marriage] for professional and educated women has been on the rise, because they believe that they have certain rights and consequently look at the society, the people, relationships, etc. in a different light."⁷

Academic interviewers have discovered similar cases. For example, an enlightened Iranian husband who allows his wife to work reported, "Evidently, men wish to dominate women, and the economic dependence of women on their husband is the best way to dominate them. The economic activity of women prevents his domination." A 33-year-old woman, an accountant, told another researcher, "I have no intention of getting married. . . . Men don't like women who are in a higher position than themselves because this makes it harder for them to have control over women." A volunteer health worker in Tehran was quoted in another study as saying, "My husband had always objected to my working, even though I had a high school diploma and could get a job as a

⁶Nayereh Tohidi, "The Global-Local Intersection of Feminism in Muslim Societies: The Cases of Iran and Azerbaijan," *Social Research* 69 (2002): 851–887.

⁷Muhammad Tahir, *Illegal Dating: A Journey into the Private Life of Iran* (Np, 2005), 36; Geneive Abdo and Jonathan Lyons, *Answering Only to God: Faith and Freedom in Twenty-First-Century Iran* (New York, 2003), 268; Paksima Mojavezi, "Dokhtaran-e kar dar sarab-e zendegi: Cherayi-ye bala-raftan-e senn-e ezdevaj-e dokhtaran-e tahsil-kardeh va shaghal," *Entekhab*, 18 October 2000.

teacher, or something like that. You know men do not want their wives to work because they feel that if they bring money home then they will not obey or respect them. They feel they can no longer play the king of the home."

In the opening paragraphs of a study of women's position in Iran, a young female physician explained why she rebuffed a religiously-conservative suitor: "He is one of those men who have no respect for a woman. He sees her not as a human being, but as a weak creature, good for nothing except providing sex, breeding, cooking, and suffering." A 23-year-old electronic engineering major in Tehran complained, "After graduation we [women] get married and end up at home and/or we will never use our education."⁸

"When girls fall in love here they lose their judgment," an 18-year-old female student in Tehran told an Australian journalist. "Yes, sure, they can put all kinds of conditions in the wedding contract, but who does it? It's always, 'Ah, he loves me, he'll never hurt me.' I've watched them. Watched them walking with this stupid smile on their faces into the biggest risk you can take in this life."⁹ The risks of marriage are real. The laws of the Islamic Republic grant husbands veto power over wives' ability to leave home, work, and travel abroad.

Still, patriarchy in the Islamic Republic is not absolute: women have a presence in public life that they do not have in, say, Saudi Arabia. Women drive, vote, serve in parliament, appear on the evening news, and star in and direct films. In addition, there have been marginal improvements in women's legal and social situation in recent years. Contraceptives are widely available, due to a shift in government policy in the early 1990s; in fact, couples must pass a family-planning course before they are granted a marriage license. A new policy in 1992 allowed women to serve as "legal consultants" in many courts, and required that "in determining the value of their work in equal circumstances, equal wages must be paid to men and women."¹⁰ In recent years, women have won additional reforms, including legislation in 1997 that pegged dowries to inflation, making divorce more feasible economically, as women are supposed to receive their dowry upon divorce. In 2002, the minimum age of marriage for girls was increased from 9 to 13.

Still, the risks of marriage are no secret among Iranian women. They form a recurrent theme in contemporary popular culture. A cartoon in a women's

⁸Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud, *Les femmes iraniennes entre islam, état et famille* (Paris, 2002), 176; Maryam Poya, *Women, Work, and Islamism: Ideology and Resistance in Iran* (London, 1999), 149–150; Homa Hoodfar, "Volunteer Health Workers in Iran as Social Activists," *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Occasional Paper No. 10, 1998, 18; Hammed Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Gender Politics in the Islamic Republic* (Westport, 2002), 1; Mitra K. Shavarini, "Wearing the Veil to College: The Paradox of Higher Education in the Lives of Iranian Women," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (2006): 202.

⁹Geraldine Brooks, *Nine Parts of Desire: The Hidden World of Islamic Women* (New York, 1996), 59–61.

¹⁰Valentine M. Moghadam, "Revolution, Religion, and Gender Politics: Iran and Afghanistan Compared," *Journal of Women's History* 10 (1999): 172–195.

newspaper showed a husband urging a robber to shoot his wife, not him, since “under Islamic law the compensation the thief would have to pay the family would be half what he would have to pay for killing a man.” The newspaper was later shut down by the authorities.¹¹ A short story by Parvin Fadavi describes a generation gap in women’s attitudes, as a young wife leaves her unfaithful husband and gets an earful of unwanted advice from her elders in the women’s section of a bus.¹² The best-selling Iranian novel of the 1990s told the story of a young woman who married a poorer man for love and had to be rescued by her father; apparently older relatives gave this book to young women as a sort of warning against high marital expectations for love matches.¹³

At the same time, a vibrant women’s literature emerged, much of it outspokenly feminist.¹⁴ In addition, a spate of films in the 1990s, several by women directors, presented critical visions of gender inequality in Iranian society, including marital life.¹⁵ Iranian women authored a variety of weblogs and other Internet sites that documented dissatisfaction with marital limits on women.¹⁶

Literary representations of marital oppression are not new in Iran. Prior to the 1979 Revolution, as well, female authors pointed out that women have “not been fattened at the table of male supremacy,” in the words of a 1971 poem by Tahereh Saffarzadeh.¹⁷ Declarations of women’s rights date back to the nineteenth century, and the women’s movement has existed in various organized forms since the early twentieth century.¹⁸ One of the most famous poets of the Pahlavi era, Forugh

¹¹Elaine Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (New York, 2000), 120.

¹²Parvin Fadavi, “The Bitter Life of Shirin,” in *A Feast in the Mirror: Stories by Contemporary Iranian Women*, eds. Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami and Sholeh Vatanabadi (Boulder, 2000), 225–226.

¹³Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, “Negahi bar movafaqtarin roman-e irani dar daheh-ye gozashteh,” *Iran-nameh* 15 (1997): 447–470; Hamed Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Emerging Voices in the Women’s Movement* (Westport, 2002), 118.

¹⁴Hasan Mir-‘Abedini, “Dastan-nevisi-ye zanan: Rah’ha-ye rafteh va dast-avard’ha,” *Zanan* 115 (2004): 60–66; Kamran Talattof, “Iranian Women’s Literature,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29 (1997): 543–552.

¹⁵Hamid Dabashi, *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future* (London, 2001), 223–243, 262–276; Michael M. J. Fischer, *Mute Dreams, Blind Owls, and Dispersed Knowledges: Persian Poets in the Transnational Circuitry* (Durham, 2004), 307–314; Maryam Habibian, “Under Wrap or the Stage: Women in the Performing Arts in the Post-Revolutionary Iran,” *Cahiers d’études sur la méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* 28 (1999): 295–311; Shahla Lahiji, “Chaste Dolls and Unchaste Dolls: Women in Iranian Cinema since 1979,” in *The New Iranian Cinema*, ed. Richard Tapper (London, 2002), 224–225; Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking Global Sisterhood: Western Feminism and Iran* (Minneapolis, 2007), 108–139.

¹⁶Nasrin Alavi, *We Are Iran* (Brooklyn, 2005), 186–188.

¹⁷Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse, 1992), 165.

¹⁸Janet Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911* (New York, 1996), 177–208; Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman* (Gainesville, 2002); Homa Hoodfar, *The Women’s Movement in Iran* (Grabe’s, 1999); Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge, 1995); Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran* (New York, 1982); Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran* (Cambridge, 2007).

Farrokhzad (1935–1967), launched her meteoric career in the 1950s with a collection of poems that treated marriage as a prison: “Come here, o self-centered male creature, come open the door of the cage. I am that bird, that bird who for a long time has had thoughts in her head of flying.” In an even more bleak moment from the same period, she wrote, “I know I’ll never be able to leave this cage even if the warden should let me go[.] I’ve lost the strength to fly away.” “Woe to this [wedding] ring, with its features that glitter yet and glow, whose meaning is slavery and mere servitude,” she wrote.¹⁹ Farrokhzad’s fame continued to grow with her later poetry’s celebration of extramarital sexuality, before her life was cut short in a car accident. Apparently her poetry and her mystique as a “free spirit” are undergoing a resurgence in popularity among young women in the Islamic Republic.²⁰

For feminist women of the late Pahlavi era, the coming of the Islamic Republic and the loss of the limited legal rights that had been gained under the monarchy were appalling developments. Haleh Esfandiari interviewed 33 women of this generation, most of them highly educated, and found them speaking about men in the most derogatory terms. “I don’t have much esteem for Iranian men,” said a married physician born in the 1940s. “I find the behavior of men despicable,” said an unmarried academic born in the 1950s.²¹ Mina, another woman born in the 1950s, told an American journalist that “depression has spread like a contagious disease among her generation. ‘When I turned forty, the sadness that came was a passing thing,’ she said. ‘But for some women the depression stays. A lot of my friends say, ‘I wasted my youth raising kids and now I’m worth nothing.’”²² Various observers have argued that Iranian women in general were radicalized by the coming of the Islamic Republic.²³

Nonetheless, it is common in analyses of contemporary Iran to note that younger women, especially the widening numbers of educated young women, constitute a group apart. They are considered to be more feminist than their mothers’ generation, more committed to economic autonomy and marital equality, and more politically active. “[E]ducated younger women . . . feel they deserve the same rights as men. . . . They want something much more fundamental than

¹⁹Michael C. Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman: Forugh Farrokhzad and Her Poetry* (Washington DC, 1987), 14; Milani, *Veils and Words*, 134; Forugh Farrokhzad, “The Ring,” trans. Jascha Kessler with Amin Banani, in *Bride of Acacias* (Delmar, 1982), 126.

²⁰Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Emerging Voices*, 126.

²¹Haleh Esfandiari, *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran’s Islamic Revolution* (Baltimore, 1997), 175; see also Christiane Bird, *Neither East Nor West: One Woman’s Journey Through the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York, 2001), 173.

²²Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors*, 95.

²³Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven, 2003), 297; Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud, “From Motherhood to Equal Rights Advocates: The Weakening of the Patriarchal Order,” *Iranian Studies* 38 (2005): 45–66; Ali Akbar Mahdi, “Iranian Women: Between Islamicization and Globalization,” in *Iran Encountering Globalization*, ed. Ali Mohammadi (London, 2003), 59–69; Azam Torab, “The Politicization of Women’s Religious Circles in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” in *Women, Religion, and Culture in Iran*, eds. Sarah Ansari and Vanessa Martin (London, 2002), 143–168.

sisterhood. They want power.”²⁴ “Today, young women are asserting their individuality,” a young feminist activist told an interviewer.²⁵ They are experiencing “rising expectations,” according to another author, as more of them receive higher education.²⁶ In the words of another author, “A sharp consciousness of injustice, of social inequity between the sexes, is passing through the new generation of women born of the revolution.”²⁷

Survey Sources

Published survey results have not consistently confirmed these observations. In a series of questions about life satisfaction, for example, women’s satisfaction appears to be similar to men’s with regard to finances, health, family life, “luck and fortune,” and place of residence, and to have increased since the Revolution in all these respects, except for place of residence. Perhaps most relevant is women’s rate of satisfaction with family life, which rose from 57 percent to 80 percent between 1974 and 1995, only two or three percentage points lower than men’s rates at both points in time.²⁸ The methods for these surveys are not reported, but if increased numbers of women experienced rising expectations, we would expect to see the opposite trend, that is, lower rates of satisfaction and increasing gaps between men’s and women’s rates. Similarly, satisfaction with family life is greater among more highly educated Iranians than among less educated²⁹—opposite the trend one would expect if education spurred women’s aspirations.

In order to test the proposition more fully, however, we need to combine data on gender, age, and education. This is now possible with datasets from three large-scale surveys conducted in Iran over the past half-dozen years:

The Iranian Family Attitudes Survey (IFAS). This survey, directed by the author along with Professor Kian Tajbakhsh and conducted by the Cultural Research Bureau in Tehran, sampled 3,006 adults age 18 and above in urban areas of Iran in Fall 2003. Five provinces were selected randomly from the cluster analysis of a development index developed by the Iranian government’s Management and Planning Organization, using 64 socio-economic indicators

²⁴Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors*, 116.

²⁵Nouchine Ahmadi-Khorassani, “Les chemins du féminisme,” in *Jennesse d’Iran*, ed. Delphine Minoui (Paris, 2001), 76.

²⁶Jaleh Shaditalab, “Zanan-e irani: Entezarat-e erteqa’-yafteh,” *Pezhubesh dar javame’-e farsi-zaban/ Studies on Persianate Societies* 1 (2003): 86–128; Jaleh Shaditalab, “Iranian Women: Rising Expectations,” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14 (2005): 35–55.

²⁷Farhad Khosrokhavar, “Le mouvement des femmes en Iran,” *Cahiers du genre* 33 (2002): 139.

²⁸Abbas ‘Abdi and Mohsen Gudarzi, *Tabavolat-e farhangi dar iran* (Tehran, 1999), 197; *Jensiyat va negaresb-e ejtema’i* (Tehran, c. 2004), 15; Manuchehr Mohseni, *Barresi-ye negaresb’ha va raftar’ha-ye ejtema’i-farhangi dar iran* (Tehran, 1997), 257.

²⁹Abdi and Gudarzi, *Tabavolat-e farhangi*, 204.

at the provincial level.³⁰ Within each province, the capital city was selected, as well as one other city chosen randomly with weightings for population. Within the capital cities, block groups were selected randomly, weighted by population, and every Nth household was selected within the block group. In the smaller cities, the block group step was not necessary. At the household door, two female surveyors asked to speak to a randomly numbered adult in the household. The sample is intended to be representative of the urban adult population of Iran.

World Values Survey (WVS). This survey of 2,532 Iranian adults forms part of the fourth wave of the World Values Survey, based at the University of Michigan, USA, which was conducted in 75 countries during the years 1999–2002. The Iran survey was directed by Professors Mansour Moaddel and Taqi Azadarmaki. The sampling procedure for Iran is not described on the World Values Survey website or in the codebook, but the data themselves indicate that respondents lived in towns and cities of less than 100,000 population in eight provinces of Iran. The lead investigators of the Iran survey have used this sample as representative of the adult population of Iran.³¹

Socio-Economic Characteristics Survey of Iranian Households (SECSIH). This survey was conducted in January 2002 by the Statistical Center of Iran, an agency of the Iranian government, in collaboration with the Monde iranien research group, a consortium of four research institutions in France. The survey was sponsored by the Institut français de recherche en Iran and was directed by Professors Azadeh Kian-Thiébaud and Marie Ladier-Fouladi. The sample size is 6,960 households, 30 each in 232 clusters, for a total of 30,715 persons: 15,399 persons in 139 urban clusters and 15,316 persons in 93 rural clusters. Attitudinal questions were asked of 7,746 ever-married women in these households; questions about contraception and childbearing were asked of 5,639 ever-married women age 15–49. Despite its large size, the sample is not intended to be representative of the Iranian population as a whole, and results for the urban and rural

³⁰Sazman-e Modiriyat va Barnameh-Rizi, *Sath-e refah va mahrumiyat-e nesbi-ye ostan'ba* (Tehran, 1997). The selected provinces were (1) Tehran, (2) Isfahan, and (3) Sistan/Baluchistan, representing clusters of a single province each; (4) Hormozgan, representing a cluster of Ardabil, Bushehr, Hormozgan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Kohgeluyeh, Kordestan, Lorestan, West Azarbaijan, and Zanjan; and (5) East Azarbaijan, representing a cluster of Chaharmahal, Fars, Gilan, Golestan, Hamdan, Kerman, Khorasan, Khuzestan, Markazi, Mazandarn, Qom, Qazvin, Semnan, West Azarbaijan, and Yazd. I thank Kian Tajbakhsh for performing this analysis.

³¹Mansoor Moaddel and Taqhi Azadarmaki, "The Worldviews of Islamic Publics: The Cases of Egypt, Iran, and Jordan," *Comparative Sociology* 1 (2002): 299–319.

clusters must be presented separately.³² I thank the survey directors for sharing this dataset with me.

How are we to measure feminist attitudes? There is no consensus among feminists as to what exactly feminism consists of, and there are ongoing debates over the meaning and manifestation of feminist positions on a wide variety of subjects. This study cannot resolve these debates, and will not select any single indicator or index of feminist attitudes. Rather, this study follows the precedent of influential comparative analyses of gender in selecting multiple indicators concerning a variety of areas of life. One theoretical statement, for example, highlights gender-differentiating attitudes about labor, family, maturity, and politics; a recent study draws on attitudes about gender equality in politics, employment, education, and parenting; another study incorporated 78 questions in 17 topic areas.³³

The present analysis adopts a similarly broad-ranging approach, adopting 42 attitudinal questions from the three surveys under study. These questions cover women's rights in the workplace, gender equality in the family, the value of combining work and family roles, and other subjects. These represent important nodes in feminist movements, both in Iran and elsewhere around the world, but they are not intended to be definitive or exhaustive representations of feminism. I welcome re-analyses of these datasets using sub-sets or supra-sets of these indicators.

Tables 1–3 list attitudinal questions in the three surveys on subjects related to feminist thought, as translated by the author from the Persian survey instruments. In one case, the question asked in Persian differed significantly from the English-language version of the questionnaire. For simplicity of presentation in these tables, the variables were dichotomized, with feminist-associated categories coded as 1. Separate models not shown in the paper—chi-squared tests and ordered logits using the original response categories—confirmed the present findings.

Feminist-Related Attitudes

Tables 1–3 compare highly educated young women, defined as women born in 1968 or later who have studied beyond high school, and all other adult respondents (age 19 and above). Birth-year cut-offs other than 1968 generate findings consistent with those shown here. The comparisons take two forms. The left-hand side of each table presents the percentages giving feminist-associated responses, with an asterisk denoting statistically significant difference between the educated young women and other respondents (Pearson chi-squared *p*-value below the conventional level of

³²See Marie Ladier-Fouladi, "Nouvelle identité des femmes iraniennes," *Espace, populations, sociétés*, 2004 (2004): 45–58; Markaz-e Amar-e Iran, *Amargiri az vizhegi'ha-ye ejtema'i-egtesadi-ye khanevar* (Tehran, 2003).

³³Lynne B. Iglitzin, "The Patriarchal Heritage," in *Women in the World*, eds. Lynne B. Iglitzin and Ruth Ross (Santa Barbara, 1976), 15; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World* (Cambridge, 2003), 32; Nancy M. Henley, Karen Meng, Delores O'Brien, William J. McCarthy, and Robert J. Sockloskie, "Developing a Scale to Measure the Diversity of Feminist Attitudes," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 22 (1998): 317–348.

Table 1. Attitudes of Educated Young Women versus Other Urban Iranians (Iranian Family Attitudes Survey)

Question	Feminist-Related Categories	Percent of educated young women	Percent of other urban Iranians	Odds ratio
Do you consider yourself a strong proponent of women's rights (a feminist)?	Agree or strongly agree	68.3	58.8*	1.51 +
The relationship of a working mother with her children is just as warm and secure as that of a mother who is a homemaker.	Agree or strongly agree	44.3	34.3*	1.60 +
Preschool children may suffer when their mother works.	Disagree or strongly disagree	25.2	18.4*	1.45 +
In general, family life suffers when a woman works full-time.	Disagree or strongly disagree	22.4	16.2*	1.39 +
What most women really want, more than a job, is a home and children.	Disagree or strongly disagree	34.6	16.0*	2.10 +
Being a homemaker is just as fulfilling as a job.	Disagree or strongly disagree	48.0	21.4*	2.82 +
Having a job is the best way for a woman to be independent.	Agree or strongly agree	56.5	45.4*	1.74 +
Both the man and woman should earn money to contribute to the household income.	Agree or strongly agree	64.6	46.4*	2.13 +

(Table continued)

Table 1. Continued

Question	Feminist-Related Categories	Percent of educated young women	Percent of other urban Iranians	Odds ratio
The man's duty is to earn money; the woman's duty is to look after the family.	Disagree or strongly disagree	23.6	10.8*	2.01 +
Men ought to do a larger share of household work.	Agree or strongly agree	83.3	76.6*	1.47 +
Men ought to do a larger share of childcare.	Agree or strongly agree	82.9	74.0*	1.48 +
With regard to women's working or not working, what is your view on the following options?				
Before marrying?	Full-time	55.7	25.6*	3.13 +
After marrying and before children?	Full-time	20.7	8.6*	2.16 +
When a child is under school age?	Full-time or part-time	70.3	41.2*	2.83 +
After the youngest child starts school?	Full-time or part-time	85.8	56.3*	4.18 +
After the children leave home?	Full-time or part-time	72.8	50.7*	2.57 +

Notes:

Educated young women are defined as having more than 12 years of schooling, being age 19 or above, and being born in 1968 or later (N = 246). Other urban Iranians are age 19 and above (N = 2,522).

*Statistically significant difference (Pearson chi-squared p-value < 0.05) between this category and young educated women.

+Statistically significant coefficient (one-tailed logit coefficient p-value < 0.05), controlling for the following variables: years of education of respondent's mother; whether the respondent has never married; whether the respondent's family owns their own home; whether the respondent has worked in the last 12 months; the number of the respondent's siblings; whether the respondent lived in Tehran; whether the respondent grew up in a city over 250,000 in population; whether the respondent grew up in a village. There were no problems of multicollinearity (VIF < 1.6 for all independent variables).

Source: Iranian Family Attitudes Survey, nationally representative adult urban sample, N = 3,006, Fall 2003.

0.05). The right-hand side of each table presents the odds ratio of a dummy variable for young educated women, controlling for a series of demographic and contextual variables. Plus-signs denote statistical significance of the one-tailed logistic regression p-value at the 0.05 level; the one-tailed test was selected because of

Table 2. Attitudes of Educated Young Women versus Other Iranians (World Values Survey)

Question	Feminist-Related Categories	Percent of educated young women	Percent of other Iranians	Odds ratio
When jobs are scarce, men have more right to be hired than women.	Disagree or strongly disagree	41.3	19.1*	2.24 +
How many children do you think are the ideal number for a family?	0, 1, or 2	88.7	74.2*	2.67 +
Do you think that a woman's happiness and prosperity is tied up with having children, or do you consider this not necessary?	Not necessary	64.3	45.5*	1.77 +
Marriage is an outdated institution.	Agree	21.1	16.9	1.30
A women who does not work can maintain a warm and stable relationship with her children.	Disagree or strongly disagree	35.7	19.2*	2.30 +
Being a housewife and homemaker are just as fulfilling as working for a wage.	Disagree or strongly disagree	30.0	21.4*	1.39 +
Wife and husband should both earn income for the family.	Agree or strongly agree	71.8	66.0*	1.29

(Table continued)

Table 2. Continued

Question	Feminist-Related Categories	Percent of educated young women	Percent of other Iranians	Odds ratio
In general, men make better political leaders than women.	Disagree or strongly disagree	38.0	28.7*	1.37 +
University education is more important for a son than for a daughter.	Disagree or strongly disagree	75.1	56.7*	1.95 +
I'm going to read the names of several institutions for you. For each item, please say to what extent to you have confidence in that institution: Women's movement.	Complete confidence or lots of confidence	28.6	22.7*	1.22
<i>Which of the following characteristics is most important in a woman:</i>				
Islamic garb (<i>hejab-e eslami</i>)	Somewhat important, a little important, not important	24.9	11.8*	1.83 +
Education	Important or very important	81.7	70.3*	1.65 +
Independence of thought	Important or very important	81.7	68.8*	1.89 +
Working outside the home	Important or very important	40.4	30.2*	1.34 +

(Table continued)

Table 2. Continued

Question	Feminist-Related Categories	Percent of educated young women	Percent of other Iranians	Odds ratio
Having more than one wife is appropriate and correct for a man.	Disagree or strongly disagree	86.4	74.7*	2.08 +
A married woman should obey her husband.	Disagree or strongly disagree	59.2	25.0*	3.44 +

Notes:

Educated young women are defined as having some university schooling, being age 19 or above, and being born in 1968 or later (N = 213). Other Iranians are age 19 and above (N = 2,102).

*Statistically significant difference (Pearson chi-squared p-value < 0.05) between this category and young educated women.

+Statistically significant coefficient (one-tailed logit coefficient p-value < 0.05), controlling for the following variables: whether the respondent has never married; whether she is currently working; and whether the respondent's family is high income (categories 7–10 out of 10). There were no problems of multicollinearity (VIF < 1.1 for all independent variables).

Source: World Values Survey, Iran, nationally representative adult sample, N = 2,532, January–February 2000.

theoretical expectations of a positive relationship between young educated women and feminist-associated opinions. The control variables, listed at the bottom of each table, include items in each survey that address the respondents' family background, current family situation, place of residence, employment status, and household wealth and income.

On the left-hand side of Tables 1–3, we find statistically significant differences between young educated women and other respondents on all 16 IFAS attitudinal questions (Table 1), 15 of 16 WVS attitudinal questions (Table 2), all 10 SECSIH attitudinal questions in urban areas (Table 3a), and 6 of 10 SECSIH attitudinal questions in rural areas (Table 3b). Beginning at the top of Table 1, for example, we find that 68.3 percent of young educated women agreed or strongly agreed with the question, "Do you consider yourself a proponent of women's rights (a feminist)?", while 58.8 percent of other respondents agreed or strongly agreed.³⁴ The asterisk indicates that the difference between these percentages is statistically significant at the 0.05 level: that

³⁴On the use of the term "feminist" in Iran, see Roja Fazaeli, "Contemporary Iranian Feminism: Identity, Rights and Interpretations," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 4 (2007): issue 1, article 8; and Elahé Rostami Povey, "Feminist Contestations of Institutional Domains in Iran," *Feminist Review* 69 (2001): 62–65.

is, young educated women are significantly more likely than other urban, adult Iranians to call themselves feminist. Indeed, for all 47 statistically significant pairs of percentages in these tables, young educated women give answers that were more feminist-associated than other respondents. Among the five pairs that are not significantly different, young educated women gave slightly less feminist responses for only one question: among rural women in the SECSIH sample, whether women should be treated with equal privileges and rights as men in the selection of a spouse.³⁵

These findings suggest that young educated women in Iran constitute a group apart. But another way of looking at these percentages suggests that these women's attitudes are not so different from other Iranians' attitudes. Returning to the question, "Do you consider yourself a strong proponent of women's rights (a feminist)?" we see that the difference between the young educated women and other respondents is only 10 percentage points. A majority of both sub-samples responded in the affirmative. If this sample is an accurate representation, then women's rights appear to be surprisingly popular among urban adult Iranians.³⁶

The average difference between all of the pairs of attitudes is 14 percentage points, which can be interpreted as relatively large (since most of these differences are statistically significant) or relatively small (since both halves of most pairs fall in the same general range as one another). Only a handful of questions show strikingly different percentages for young educated women and other respondents. Of the six questions with a difference of more than 25 percentage points, one of the largest gaps appears in a telling question in the WVS: "A married woman should obey her husband." Among young educated women, 59.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, compared with 25.0 percent of other respondents.

Turning to the right-hand side of Tables 1–3, we see that the odds-ratio for wifely obedience is astonishingly high, 3.44. This means that—controlling for marital status, employment status, and income—young educated women are 3.44 times as likely as other respondents to disagree or strongly disagree with this item. The average odds ratio for the items in these tables is 2.06: young educated women are just over twice more likely than other respondents to give feminist-associated answers. In the IFAS, all 16 odds ratios listed are statistically significant at the 0.05 level, using a one-tailed test; in the WVS, 13 of 16 are statistically significant; in the SECSIH urban and rural samples, seven and four of

³⁵Young educated women are relatively rare in the SECSIH rural clusters: only 32 in total, or 1 percent of the valid responses in the sample, compared with 164 (4 percent) in the SECSIH urban clusters, 246 (9 percent) in the IFAS urban sample, and 213 (9 percent) in the WVS sample.

³⁶Another survey in Iran conducted in mid-2006 confirms this finding: 61 percent of 340 female respondents said they considered it important to increase rights for women, as did 53 percent of 470 male respondents. Zogby International, "Poll of Iran, May–June 2006," *Reader's Digest* [website], 2006, 17.

Table 3a. Attitudes of Educated, Ever-Married Young Women Versus Other Ever-Married Women, Urban Sample (Statistical Center of Iran survey)

Question	Feminist-Related Categories	Percent of educated, ever-married young women	Percent of other ever-married women	Odds ratio
<i>Do you agree with the statement that women should be treated with equal privileges and rights as men in all areas of life, such as:</i>				
Education	Yes	93.9	89.6*	1.57
Employment	Yes	84.2	78.7*	1.21
Political activity	Yes	65.8	56.2*	1.31
High-ranking government posts	Yes	68.9	53.5*	1.68 +
Local and national decision-making	Yes	84.2	72.4*	1.74 +
Selection of spouse	Yes	95.1	90.6*	1.83 +
Number and spacing of children	Yes	98.2	92.9*	3.72 +
<i>Do you agree with the statement that women and men should have equal shares and responsibilities in childrearing (such as care, nutrition, and cleaning of children, etc.) and housekeeping matters, such as cooking and cleaning?</i>				
Childrearing	Yes, shares and responsibilities should be equal	56.7	41.3*	1.63 +
Housekeeping	Yes, shares and responsibilities should be equal	34.2	20.5*	1.68 +
<i>In your opinion, what is the most appropriate situation for the marriage of a son or a daughter?</i>				
Daughter	After completion of higher education	48.8	31.5*	1.81 +

10 odds ratios, respectively, are statistically significant. In the WVS and SECSIH, the frequency of significance is somewhat lower for these logistic regressions than for the chi-squared tests on the left-hand side of the tables, suggesting that some portion of the difference between the opinions of young educated women and other respondents is explained not by youth, education, or gender, but rather by employment status, household income, and

Table 3b. Attitudes of Educated, Ever-Married Young Women Versus Other Ever-Married Women, Rural Sample (Statistical Center of Iran survey)

Question	Feminist-Related Categories	Percent of educated, ever-married young women	Percent of other ever-married women	Odds ratio
<i>Do you agree with the statement that women should be treated with equal privileges and rights as men in all areas of life, such as:</i>				
Education	Yes	93.8	82.4*	2.62
Employment	Yes	81.2	72.9	1.52
Political activity	Yes	78.1	44.6*	4.13 +
High-ranking government posts	Yes	84.4	45.9*	5.88 +
Local and national decision-making	Yes	75.0	61.7	1.69
Selection of spouse	Yes	81.2	85.6	0.64
Number and spacing of children	Yes	100.0	88.2*	1.24
<i>Do you agree with the statement that women and men should have equal shares and responsibilities in childrearing (such as care, nutrition, and cleaning of children, etc.) and housekeeping matters, such as cooking and cleaning?</i>				
Childrearing	Yes, shares and responsibilities should be equal	46.9	35.2	1.60
Housekeeping	Yes, shares and responsibilities should be equal	31.2	17.1*	2.27 +
<i>In your opinion, what is the most appropriate situation for the marriage of a son or a daughter?</i>				
Daughter	After completion of higher education	34.4	14.4*	2.85 +

Notes:

Educated young women are defined as having post-secondary schooling, being age 19 or above, and being born in 1968 or later (N = 164 urban and 32 rural). Other ever-married women are age 19 or above (N = 4,287 urban and 3,070 rural). *Statistically significant difference (Pearson chi-squared p-value < 0.05) between this category and young educated women.

+Statistically significant coefficient (one-tailed logit coefficient p-value < 0.05), controlling for the following variables: whether the respondent has worked in the past seven days; net household income in the previous 12 months; and number of rooms per household member (as a proxy for wealth). Standard errors for the logistic regression are adjusted for clustering through the svylogit procedure in the Stata statistical software package. There were no problems of multicollinearity (VIF < 1.1 for all independent variables).

Source: Socio-Economic Characteristics Survey of Iranian Households, non-representative sample, N = 6,760 households, January 2002.

other control variables. The control variables may themselves affect or be affected by youth, education, and gender, but these logistic regressions do not account for such relationships. We know only, from separate models not presented in this paper, that multicollinearity among the independent variables is low ($VIF < 1.6$).

Logit models treating birth year and education as continuous variables confirm these findings: youth, education, and gender are significantly correlated with almost all of the feminist-associated responses in these survey samples. Interaction terms for gender*birth year and gender*education are also positive and significant for most attitudes, suggesting that a gender gap is most visible among young and educated Iranians. Among women, an interaction term for birth year*education is frequently negative: education seems to mark a difference in attitudes for older women, who had fewer opportunities for advanced schooling, than it does among younger women. Even less-educated young women have considerably more feminist ideals than either educated or less-educated young men.

Still, the Iranian women in these samples did not subscribe to all manifestations of feminist thought. Fewer than a quarter of educated young women in the IFAS sample, for example, felt that women should work full-time after marriage, even if there were no children in the house (Table 1). Only a quarter of educated young women in the WVS sample expressed resistance to *hejab*, women's Islamic garb (Table 2)—contrary to the emphasis placed on this issue by many Western feminists. Moreover, individuals' responses to the dozens of questions listed in Tables 1–3 were not particularly consistent, with average inter-item correlations ranging from 0.07 in the WVS to 0.24 in the rural SECSIH sample. Exploratory factor analysis found six underlying factors for the 16 IFAS questions, eight for the 16 WVS questions, and four each for the 10 questions in the SECSIH samples, and all of these factors were weak. Not only was there no single ideology of feminism expressing itself through this wide variety of questions, the questions could not be parceled out into a small set of ideologies.

Feminist-Related Behaviors

Do feminist attitudes matter in Iran? Highly educated young women are distinctive with regard to several behaviors widely associated with feminism: participation in the paid labor force, the postponement of marriage, egalitarian relations within marriage, and the limiting of the number of children.³⁷ However, feminist attitudes are only weakly associated with these behaviors.

³⁷For example, United Nations, *The World's Women, 2000* (New York, 2000).

Labor force participation. Women's labor force participation rose by a third between the 1980s and the 1990s, according to time-series data from the World Bank and the Statistical Center of Iran, though it is still somewhat lower in Iran than the global average.³⁸ Analysis of census data by Ladier-Fouladi shows that this rise is due primarily to women remaining longer in the labor force, not young women joining the labor force in greater numbers.³⁹ Nonetheless, the IFAS, WVS, and urban SECSIH samples find that educated young women, at least in urban areas, are two to nine times more likely to be working after marriage than other women, as shown in Table 4. (The difference is not statistically significant in the rural SECSIH sample.) This difference is driven primarily by the spread of women's education—when controlling for years of education, younger urban women are *less* likely to participate in the paid labor force than older urban women. Women's labor force participation is not strongly associated with feminist attitudes—relatively few of the attitudes covered in these surveys were significantly correlated with working for pay, and even fewer when controlling for education and age.

Postponement of marriage. Iranian women's mean age of first marriage increased slightly from 19.5 in 1976 to 19.7 in 1986, then jumped to 22.1 in 1996.⁴⁰ The trend toward later marriage cannot be attributed to an imbalanced sex ratio caused by the 1980–88 war with Iraq: although the marriage rate dipped somewhat during the final years of the war, the only age cohort with significantly more females than males in 1986 was 30–34 year olds, not the younger men who were probably the most numerous casualties of the war, and by 1996 men outnumbered women in all age cohorts.⁴¹ Nonetheless, the number of unmarried women was broadcast in the Iranian media as a social problem, “an alarming sign that the societal balance is fracturing,” and was transformed into the urban legend among anxious young women that “each year one million Iranian women were unable to find a husband.”⁴² This anxiety may be pushing young women to

³⁸World Bank, *World Development Indicators*; Statistical Center of Iran, *Iran Statistical Yearbook 1382*; Pooya Alaedini and Mohamad Reza Razavi, “Women's Participation and Employment in Iran,” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14 (2005): 57–73; Roksana Bahramitash, “Market Fundamentalism Versus Religious Fundamentalism: Women's Employment in Iran,” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 13 (2004): 33–46.

³⁹Marie Ladier-Fouladi, *Population et politique en Iran* (Paris, 2003).

⁴⁰Mohammad Jalal Abbasi, Amir Mehryar, Gavin Jones, and Peter McDonald, “Revolution, War and Modernization: Population Policy and Fertility Change in Iran,” *Journal of Population Research* 19 (2002): 33; see also Halch Afshar, *Islam and Feminisms: An Iranian Case-Study* (Houndsmills, 1998), 148; Ladier-Fouladi, *Population et politique*, 47.

⁴¹Ladier-Fouladi, *Population et politique en Iran*, 46; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), *Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York, 1998), 14.

⁴²Mojavcezi, “Dokhtaran-e kar”; Azadeh Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran* (New York, 2005), 187.

Table 4. Feminist-Related Behaviors, Young Educated Women versus Other Women

Dependent Variables	IFAS		WVS		SECSIH (urban)		SECSIH (rural)	
	Percent of urban young women	Percent of other urban women	Percent of educated young women	Percent of other women	Percent of educated young women	Percent of other women	Percent of educated young women	Percent of other women
<i>Age of marriage</i>								
Mean age of first marriage	23.0	18.5 +	-	-	22.7	18.1 +	21.2	17.8 +
Percent married by age 22	33.3	78.1*	-	-	30.2	83.3*	21.4	80.3*
Labor force participation								
Percent of married women working	56.6	6.2*	57.8	20.6*	53.4	9.0*	37.5	33.4
<i>Household decision-making: Percent of married women making or sharing decisions on:</i>								
Number of children	-	-	-	-	89.9	74.2*	96.9	71.0*
Spacing of children	-	-	-	-	89.0	70.1*	93.8	68.0*
Type of contraceptive use	-	-	-	-	79.2	61.0*	81.2	57.1*
Children's schooling and extracurricular activities	-	-	-	-	83.2	65.5*	96.9	62.1*
Purchase of home, car, and other major necessities of life	-	-	-	-	82.4	62.6*	87.5	56.9*
<i>Child-bearing</i>								
Mean age of first childbirth	24.4	20.2 +	-	-	24.9	20.3 +	23.7	19.8 +
Percent childbirth by age 22	24.1	73.4*	-	-	15.0	69.4*	13.9	67.5*

Note:

Categories and specifications are the same as in Tables 1-3, with the following exceptions: Comparison group is women only; SECSIH questions on percent married were asked of non-married women as well as ever-married women; SECSIH means are adjusted for survey clustering; and marriage and childbirth by age 22 are restricted to respondents age 23 and above.

*Statistically significant difference (Pearson chi-squared p-value < 0.05) between this category and young educated women.

+Statistically significant difference (difference of means t-test p-value < 0.05) between this category and young educated women.

compete for husbands through symbolic displays of sexual availability,⁴³ but it does not appear to be pushing young women into earlier marriages.

Rather, delayed marriage appears to be associated with changing aspirations of educated women. As shown in Table 4, young educated women are less than half as likely as other women to be married by age 22. (The WVS did not record age at marriage.) When controlling for education, the coefficient for birth year loses its statistical significance in the IFAS and urban SECSIH sample, suggesting that younger women's delay of marriage is due more to spreading education than to a cohort effect. Birth year remains positive and significant in the rural SECSIH sample.⁴⁴ Feminist attitudes are generally associated with postponement of marriage, but this association all but disappears when controlling for education and birth year.

Egalitarian relations within marriage. Are younger women's changing attitudes having an effect on the relationship between husbands and wives? We have no direct measure of egalitarian relations within marriage, but SECSIH questions about decision-making on certain subjects offer a glimpse. As shown in Table 4, educated young married women are significantly more likely than other married women to make or share decisions on these subjects, in both the urban and rural samples. It is interesting that similar proportions of women are involved in decision-making for major purchases such as homes and cars, as are involved in decisions concerning child-bearing and child-rearing, which are more stereotypically associated with wives' domain of authority. It is also worth noting that a majority of less-educated and older married women in these samples also participate in these decisions. When controlling for education, birth year remains positively and significantly associated with decision-making— younger women are more involved in these marital decisions than older women, regardless of their level of education. All of the attitudinal questions listed in Tables 3a–3b are significantly associated with women's decision-making, and most of these feminist attitudes remain significant and positive even when

⁴³Norma Claire Moruzzi and Fatemeh Sadeghi, "Out of the Frying Pan, into the Fire: Young Iranian Women Today," *Middle East Report* 241 (2006): 26–27. For a contrasting view of young women's increasingly sexualized appearance and behavior, see Pardis Mahdavi, "Passionate Uprisings: Young People, Sexuality and Politics in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 9 (2007): 445–457.

⁴⁴These findings are confirmed by hazard models in which the cross-sectional data from IFAS was rearranged as a pseudo-longitudinal dataset, with each record representing one respondent during one year—see the similar method used by James M. Raymo, "Educational Attainment and the Transition to First Marriage among Japanese Women," *Demography* 40 (2003): 83–103. Each respondent entered the dataset at age nine (the legal minimum age of marriage for much of the post-revolutionary period in Iran) and left the dataset the year after marrying. New variables were constructed for time-varying characteristics such as age, years of education (beginning with one year of education at age six), and the dependent variable: marital status (0 = not married in a given year, 1 = got married in a given year).

controlling for birth year, education, women's labor force participation, household income, and the number of rooms per member of the household.

Childbearing. Perhaps the most well-known change in Iranian women's behavior is the dramatic reduction in childbearing. Over the past quarter century, Iran has undergone the world's most rapid slowdown in population growth: from a total fertility rate (births per woman) of 6.8 in 1982 to 4.0 in 1992, then 2.0 in 2002. Among 96 middle-income countries around the world, as defined by the World Bank, Iran changed over this period from one of the fastest-growing populations to one of the slowest-growing ones.⁴⁵

Explanations for this accelerated demographic transition are numerous, including reduced child mortality, changes in housing patterns, and other factors.⁴⁶ In addition, the Islamic Republic reversed its pro-natalist policies at the end of the 1980s and embarked on a fervent family-planning crusade. Its delegation to the 1994 Cairo conference on population was one of the most adamant in stressing low-cost contraception, widespread clinics, and the empowerment of women.⁴⁷ Smaller families may also be part of a child-centric trend that emphasizes larger investments of time and expense on fewer numbers of children, replacing more laissez-faire parenting and larger numbers of children.⁴⁸ Postponement of marriage may also be a significant factor, especially for younger women, since few childbirths occur outside of wedlock in Iran.⁴⁹

As shown in Table 4, educated young women have their first children around age 24, while other women have theirs around age 20. Fewer than a quarter of educated young women have had a child by age 22, compared with two thirds of other women. Censored regression models (treating the age at first childbirth for childless women age 40 or younger as equal or greater to their current age) find both birth year and education to be strong predictors of delayed childbirth. The coefficient for birth year remains significant and positive when education is included in the model, suggesting that delay of childbirth among younger women is not limited to those with high levels of education, but has diffused more widely in this generation.

⁴⁵World Bank, *World Development Indicators*.

⁴⁶Mohammad Mirzaie, "Swings in Fertility Limitation in Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14 (2005): 25–33; Ali A. Paydarfar, "Effects of Multi-Family Housing on Marital Fertility in Iran," *Social Biology* 42(3–4) (1995): 214–225.

⁴⁷Robert Fisk, "UN Population Conference: Iran Surprises the West with Liberal Line on Birth Control," *The Independent*, 14 September 1994.

⁴⁸Fariba Adelhah, *Being Modern in Iran* (New York, 2000), 171; Kian-Thiébault, *Les femmes iraniennes*, 189–217; Kian-Thiébault, "From Motherhood to Equal Rights Advocates," 61–64.

⁴⁹Mohammad Jalal Abbasi-Shavazi, "Effects of Marital Fertility and Nuptiality on Fertility Transition in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1976–1996," Working Papers in Demography No. 84, Australian National University, 2000, 29; Hassan Hakimian, "From Demographic Transition to Fertility Boom and Bust: Iran in the 1980s and 1990s," *Development and Change* 37 (2006): 589–590.

With regard to women's number of children, birth year and education both retain consistently negative and significant coefficients, even when both variables were included in the censored regression model. Feminist attitudes are unevenly associated with the timing and number of children. In fact, in the IFAS sample, self-identification as a proponent of women's rights is associated with earlier childbirth, net of education and birth year.

Political participation. Women have always participated in the politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Women vote, serve in parliament and many other government positions, and participate in civil society. Nonetheless, after a flurry of mobilization associated with the revolution, women's independent political activism—as well as men's—declined in the 1980s.⁵⁰ Women's political participation revived along with men's during the reformist political movement that brought President Mohammad Khatami to office in 1997, though a recent survey of 243 university students in Tehran found women to be far less politically active than men.⁵¹

For years, self-consciously feminist political participation was limited to the written word, including several outspokenly feminist journals.⁵² In the 1990s, however, informal activism was reported to be on the rise in women's religious circles, and among women who had been mobilized as volunteers in the nation's health-education programs.⁵³ In the Khatami era, approximately 150 women's non-governmental organizations were founded in Iran, according to a press report.⁵⁴ The first celebration of International Women's Day since large-scale protests in 1979 occurred on a small scale in 2000, and the first openly feminist demonstration in recent years occurred in Tehran in June 2005, during the presidential campaign period, drawing several thousand participants.⁵⁵ A second demonstration in June 2006 was suppressed, with 70 people arrested, and a campaign began two months later to gather a million women's signatures on a petition opposing gender inequality in Iranian law. Thirty thousand women had

⁵⁰Nikki R. Keddie, "Iranian Women's Status and Struggles Since 1979," *Journal of International Affairs* 60 (2007): 17–33; Nasrin Mosaffa, *Mosharakat-e siyasi-ye zanan dar iran* (Tehran, 1996); Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*; Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Gender Politics*; Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Emerging Voices*.

⁵¹Alireza Mohseni-Tabrizi, "Patterns of Student Adjustment to the Contemporary Political and Social Scene in Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14 (2005): 83.

⁵²Elham Gheytnchi, "Civil Society in Iran: Politics of Motherhood and the Public Sphere," *International Sociology* 16 (2001): 557–576; Khosrokhavar, "Le mouvement des femmes"; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and Gender: The Religious Debate in Contemporary Iran* (Princeton, 1999); Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Emerging Voices*.

⁵³Torab, "The Politicization of Women's Religious Circles"; Hoodfar, "Volunteer Health Workers."

⁵⁴*The Economist*, 16 October 2003.

⁵⁵Nayereh Tohidi, "International Connections of the Iranian Women's Movement," in *Iran and the Surrounding World*, eds. Nikki R. Keddie and Rudi Matthee (Seattle, 2002), 225–226; Mahsa Shekarloo, "Iranian Women Take on the Constitution," *Middle East Report Online*, 21 July 2005.

signed by March 2007, when dozens more feminist activists were arrested while protesting the earlier arrests.⁵⁶

Conclusion

In Iran, as in many places around the world, educated young women are more feminist than their mothers, and more feminist than young men. What is unusual about Iran is that these developments have occurred under a regime that is openly hostile to the ideology of feminism. Despite the government's best efforts, women educated in the Islamic Republic of Iran aspire to equality with men in important ways, just as educated women in other countries do. In the survey samples discussed in this study, many educated young women support women's labor force participation, even after marriage, and engage in such work themselves far more often than do less-educated women, with the exception of the tiny number of educated rural women in one sample. Many of these educated young women support gender equality within marriage, and they report that their marriages are more egalitarian, at least with regard to decision-making on key issues, than other women report. Educated young women are marrying later, having children later, and having fewer children than other women.

These differences are relative, not absolute. Not all educated young women are feminists, and not all feminists are educated young women. Indeed, these survey samples suggest that certain pro-feminist attitudes are widespread among many groups, including less-educated women and men. There are significant differences between the genders, but considerable numbers of men associate themselves with feminist attitudes. Moreover, feminist-related attitudes are not consistently correlated either with each other, or with feminist-related behaviors such as delayed marriage and limited numbers of children. These behaviors appear to be associated more with the spread of education among Iranian women than with changing attitudes or cohort effects.

What might have caused these changes in Iranian women's attitudes and actions? The paper concludes with several speculations. Revolutionary mobilization may have generated a heightened sense of efficacy among women. The policies of the Islamic Republic may have generated a backlash among women. Education may have generated gender-egalitarian values in spite of the patriarchal content of the instruction. Economic difficulties may have pushed women into assuming greater responsibilities. The present study cannot adjudicate among these hypotheses, but it documents the emergence of a feminist generation in Iran, in two senses.

First, today's generation of young, educated women has attitudes and behaviors that are significantly different from other Iranians.

⁵⁶See the movement's website, "Taqyir bara-ye barabari," <http://www.we-change.org>.

Second, today's generation of young women as a whole is significantly different from older Iranians and from younger men. These distinctions are visible in survey data even though they may be partially hidden by a third sense of generational shift that the present study cannot address: whether today's older Iranians are more feminist than they were when they were younger. To the extent that the Islamic Republic has spurred Iranians to defend women's rights—for example, among the educated women interviewed by Esfandiari—then the distinctiveness of educated young women's feminist attitudes is all the more striking.

