



## Assessing the Strength of Iranian Opposition Groups

May 11, 2011

### Central Questions

- How strong are Iranian opposition groups?
- What are the regime's strategies?
  - Can it rally support through its nuclear program?
- What are the roles of the Iranian security forces?
  - How much influence do they possess?



## Summary

- Iran today: Opposition groups are not strong
  - Regime is coup-proofed
  - Uses nuclear program to rally support
  - Social Media – used by regime and opposition
- Strength of opposition groups depends on the domestic balance of power
- There are indicators that suggest a regime is weakening



## Agenda

1. Framework
2. Iranian Opposition and Regime
  - Indicators
3. Iranian Nuclear Program
4. Social Media
5. Conclusions



## Building a Framework

- Critical Elements
  - Why opposition groups vary in strength:
    - Opposition Characteristics
    - Regime Characteristics
    - Background Variables
  - Why the framework is useful:
    - Applicable to other nations
    - Can be used over time
    - Provides indicators of opposition group strength



## Regime Types: Based on Political Competition

		Regime	
		Strong	Weak
Opposition	Strong	Liberal Democracies	Fragile Governance
	Weak	Authoritarian	Failed Regimes



## Iranian Opposition Groups

1. Green Movement
2. Islamic Iran Participation Front
3. Confederation of Iranian Students
4. People's Mujahedin of Iran



## Opposition Strength

Strong	Indicators	Weak
✓	Coordinate Multiple Large Protests	✗
✓	Sustain Multiple Large Protests	✗
✓	Raise Resources for Sustained Campaign	✗
✓	Unpaid bounties on opposition members	✗
✓	Replace Strategic and Operational Leadership	✗
✓	Diverse Membership	✗
✓	Generate Responses from the Regime	✗



## Opposition Group Strategies

- Raise awareness
  - Protests, rallies, social media
- Recruit diverse membership
  - Set common goals
- Undermine legitimacy of regime
  - Co-opt key groups



## The Iranian Regime

- Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)
  - *Basij, Qods*
- *Artesh* (regular army)
- Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS)
- Clerical Elites



## Regime Strength

Strong	Indicator	Weak
✓	Collect Revenue	✗
✓	Compliance	✗
✓	Police Institutions	✗
✓	Separation of Powers	✗
✓	Smooth Transition of Power	✗



## Current Iranian Regime Strategies

- **Crackdowns on Opposition Groups**
  - Violence
  - Suspension of civil liberties
- **Coup-Proofing**
  - Creating competition between institutions
  - Balancing powerful constituencies
- **Diversionsary Tactics**
  - Rallying support for nuclear program
  - Instigating Nationalism



## The Iranian “Nuclear Card”

### Important groups invested in the program:

- Scientific Community
- Students
- General Population
- Military and Paramilitary
- Clerical Elites

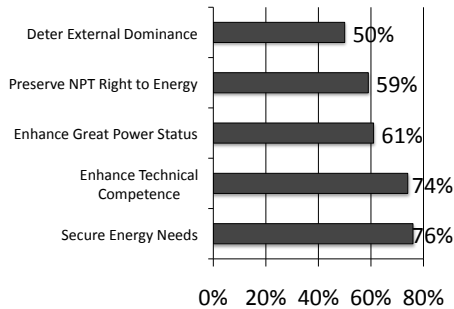
### The regime maintains support by:

- Investing in the program
- Linking Iran’s future to the program
- Stressing external threats facing Iran
- Appealing to nationalism

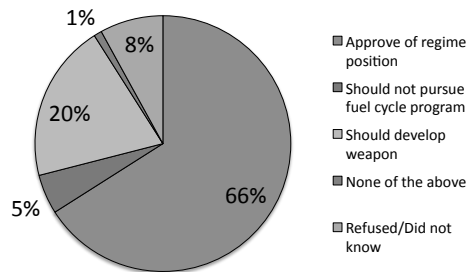


## Iranian Nuclear Program

### Reasons for Iran’s Nuclear Program



### Percent Agree with Regime Position



## Social Media is a Double-Edged Sword

### Opposition

- To coordinate
- To attract attention
- To disseminate information
- To act as virtual sanctuary



### Regime

- To project strength and presence to opposition groups
- To monitor and destabilize opposition groups

Bahman25	65,000+ friends
Against Bahman25	17 friends



## Application to Iran

		Regime	
		Strong	Weak
Opposition	Strong		Iran 1979 
	Weak	Shah's Iran 	
			Iran 2011





## Conclusions

- Regime strength and opposition strength are interrelated
- Iran has a history of and capability to successfully use coercion to suppress opposition
- Iranian opposition groups are weak, and few have the potential to become strong



Questions?