

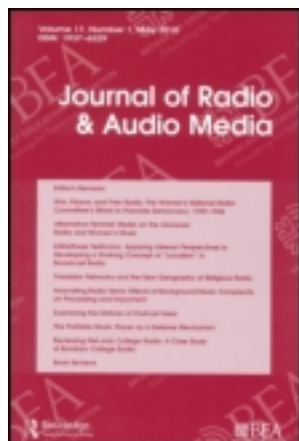
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### Different Periods of Post-Revolutionary Radio in Iran: Audience Evolution

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# Different Periods of Post-Revolutionary Radio in Iran: Audience Evolution

**Abdolhossein Kalantari and Hossein Hassani**

*Iranian society after the Islamic revolution in 1979 entered a new era. Almost all public domains and social institutions underwent drastic changes, and this caused many subsequent changes in the media in terms of both form and content. The number of radio stations increased and they are paying more attention to content quality in order to absorb new groups of people and to establish a more permanent position in Iranian society. The present study analyzes the changes to Iranian radio by dividing the post-revolution time into three periods, with a fourth period that has just started. It also deals with the challenges radio faces in the future in Iran.*

## Introduction

After the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, comprehensive changes occurred in social, political, cultural, and economical realms. Because the Islamic revolution was a religious transformation, it attempted to institutionalize Islamic teachings and doctrines into all social structures and institutions. The changes imposed caused further changes in the form and content of those structures. Media (especially radio and television) were included and took the changes seriously because many revolutionary leaders and religious groups censured media before 1979 for broadcasting so-called anti-Islamic programs containing westernization, consumerism, immoralities, etc.

The broadcast media that existed before the revolution was totally transformed thereafter and was bound to keep every nuance of programs within the dominant ideology's framework and in accordance with the Islamic standards. This fact is expressly mentioned in the constitution. In its introduction it is stated that radio and television "must serve as the means to broadcast Islamic culture and to develop the Islamic revolution. In doing so, they must make usage of the convergence

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of different, constructive ideas and thoughts and seriously avoid of broadcasting destructive, anti-Islamic characteristics" (Abdolaahi, 1996, p. 28).

This general policy has been followed continuously over the 3 decades since the Islamic revolution. In addition to considering the changes media have experienced in content, this article aims to analyze the changes in form and the fluctuations in the number and type of audiences. The course of decisive changes during different periods is discussed as well; the periods include the first period from 1979 to 1989, considered to be the golden age; the second period from 1989 to 1999/2000, thought of as the decline of radio with a dramatic decrease in audience numbers; the third period from 2000 to 2009 is regarded as the "renaissance" or rebirth period. With the changes in radio management in early 2009, there has begun a new age.

In this article the types of radio stations launched in those three periods are introduced and their goals and missions are examined; furthermore, Iran's most important stations are discussed in greater detail. Audience evolution and the changes in audience numbers during the studied periods are analyzed; the challenges Iranian radio confronts in the future are discussed at the end.

### **The First Period; Radio's Golden Age in Iran**

After the Islamic revolution in 1979, "National Iranian Radio and Television" changed its name to "Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting." Iranian radio continued broadcasting programs under "Voice of Islamic Republic of Iran," but with a new approach. A few hours after the new leader took control, the "Council of Islamic Revolution" pronouncement was broadcast by radio. This medium started its post-revolution life immediately and changed its mission into an Islamic-revolutionary one.

The story of radio is much different from that of television. Well-known cultural and literary characters frequently took part in radio programs, and radio, unlike television, had no inclination to broadcast "trivial" programs which were opposed by religious, tradition-oriented families. The majority of Iranian people, including the elite and educated, preferred radio over television (Kaaveh, 2008).

It is noteworthy that broadcast media were not widespread and people were not intrinsically tied to it. There are two primary reasons for this. Many individuals could not afford a television or a radio set, and the content of the programs was not in harmony with religious beliefs and standards so that, even years after the revolution, some parents had not allowed to their children to use broadcast media. The previous regime was under constant criticism for encouraging the broadcast of immoral, anti-Islamic programs when the media could be used for religious leaders to express their views. The height of radio's transformation occurred after 1979 with the "islamitization" of programs. Prior to that time there were few Islamic programs, and a new job title came into existence: the editor. Most radio practitioners and employees before 1979 had little information about Islamic standards, and the editor was the man who made sure the programs met Islamic standards.

In the first years after the Islamic revolution, the Islamic government was not firmly established. Because of the weakness of the central government, autonomist and secessionist activities of different ethnic groups in different parts of the country, and attempts of political parties to claim their share of authority, used radio programs as a means to their political ends. These groups gradually left radio as the Islamic government became more powerful and new staff members from a variety of cultural organizations such as education, religious schools, and revolutionary institutions established their presence on radio. In this way, Islamists gradually cast their domination and authority over media (especially radio) and exploited them to promote Islamist beliefs and to ground a religious society in Islamic beliefs about freedom and justice for all the people.

The medium of radio in the new Islamic period pursued the following main goals:

1. Deepening the religious (Islamic) thoughts by and within the framework of radio programs with artistic decorations to be paid attention by the audience.
2. Revival and promotion of the revolutionary values.
3. Patterning: radio has the duty to provide the individual, family, and society with suitable patterns and guidelines.
4. Fighting against "cultural invasion."
5. Educational purposes: radio should be a "public university" which teaches how to live and informs of novelties in science, politics, and other realms in a way that is understandable to all classes of people.
6. Information giving.
7. Recreation and fun (Kaaveh, 2008, p. 58).

Being cheap and easily accessible, radio became a unique and conspicuous medium after the revolution. The so-called "imposed war" that broke out between Iran and Iraq 1 year after the revolution introduced the golden age of Iranian radio. Radio has been and still is a primary medium during a crisis, and it was extensively used during the war period to help managing the crisis. Historically, radio started in Iran in the years after WWII<sup>1</sup>; and the first years of Islamic radio after the revolution were defined by the war between Iran and Iraq. Radio staff produced programs which were, in their views, to unify and psychologically bring together the whole body of society which was experiencing hard days of revolution and war respectively (Kaaveh, 2008).

By 1986 radio played a more effective role in the war than any other organization for delivering propaganda and information. Although programmers were trying to produce programs in harmony with social conditions, they had other programs related to the war. The specialized "Front Radio"<sup>2</sup> (Radio Djeheh) was launched in 1986. It was common to think that the war would end quickly, but in 1986 it was realized that Iraq was going to exhaust its resources against the Iranian army with the effect of lengthening the war. Front Radio was launched to broadcast programs 3 hours per day—8:30 to 11:30 a.m.—in order to support the war effort and provide hope for Iran's people (Rahimi, 2008). These radio programs were an element of

the "Sacred Defense." The programs provided the latest information and news of war, encouraged soldiers, and undermined the enemy's confidence (a psychological operation against the enemy) (Djavadzadeh, 2009). From the outset Front Radio made radio a real para-military "front," proving that radio is a medium that can transfer quickly from one cultural-political situation to another. War was a real crisis and Front Radio effectively managed it.

As Kaaveh (2008) states,

After the war ended, it continued broadcasting programs but now its task was to improve the psychological condition of the released prisoners who have come back to their families, and prepare people to stand against economic boycotting and cultural invasion from without. One may be able to argue that, from this perspective, no medium during the whole history of radio has been so much involved in different dimensions of its audience (and generally speaking, nation) life as Iranian radio during the imposed war period. (p. 61)

Radio was especially well suited to thrive in the sociopolitical conditions dominating the society in the first decade after revolution, and was an appropriate companion for the Iranian people. Anxiety resulting from the war, the need to access information via the most direct and readily available medium, the lack of media sources which could broadcast news in a short time, and finally insufficient media management within other media made radio the only widely accepted, welcomed medium in the first 10 years after the Iranian revolution. Hence the start of Iranian radio's golden age (Rahimi, 2008).

Radio played a significant role at that time. It was a link between people and soldiers (because it was heard on the front lines), it could be heard day and night, and it was controlled directly by Ayatollah Khomeini—commonly recognized as the founder of Revolution—and on some occasions he gave direct advice to radio practitioners about what to do and what not to do. Radio was accessible during bombardments and when there was no power, and it was much easier to produce live radio reports than television reports from the front. In those situations, television had no choice but to rebroadcast radio reports with the help of some pictures (Rahimi, 2008).

Reflecting war events, encouraging soldiers, and creating unity among people were not the only tasks of radio at that time. Other radio programs were welcomed and received a good deal of attention; "Home and Family" (Khane va Khanevade), "Friday Morning with You" (Sobhe Djom'e baa Shomaa), and "The Way of Life" (Raahe Zendegi), to name a few, have an established place in individuals' memories and invoke a sense of nostalgia. In other words, people during this period relied heavily on radio. Because radio was easily accessible and affordable by most people, and television programs were broadcast for limited hours of the day over two channels, radio became the dominant medium. Radio proved it could successfully handle a crisis and accomplish the relative tasks which it was assigned. However, with the end of the war this domination faded.

## The Second Period; the Decline of Radio in Iran

After the war a variety of electronic media appeared throughout the country, and television increased the number of available channels and the quality of its programs while radio was fading into the background. Lasting for almost 10 years, this period was characterized by huge decreases in radio's audiences (Rahimi, 2009).

Khodjasteh, who had been the director of the Iran Radio Organization for a long time, believed that

The decline of radio started in 1991. Radio has a pre-revolution history and a post-revolution one. Revolution is a transition point for it. One can, however, analyze the status of radio in Iran and determine when its golden era is; the era, including the time of audience satisfaction and its effectiveness, belongs in fact to the post-revolution time. It can even be said that during this time radio was so welcomed that different groups of people bought radio sets. Radio played a characteristic role in information-giving, especially during the war period, but its decline, in fact, began to happen from 1986–7 where nobody perceived it. (Oudbaashi, 2008, n.p.)

He maintains that "people [were] referring to radio during war time and radio was, for this reason, not paid much attention [by authorities], but its rivals were entering the media sphere. From 1987 on, the decline has clearly shown itself and in other words it was the end of the golden age" (Oudbaashi, 2008, n.p.).

Rahimi (2008) holds that the second period of radio's life began in 1988 and lasted for 10 years, the period in which television drew attention. As the hours of broadcasting and the number of television channels increased, television's attraction grew to the extent that it dominated theater and cinema as well. These were not the only technologies with which radio had to compete; VCRs were widespread, and magazines expanded their scale and scope. It seemed that radio had lost its appeal for people and that radio seemed old-fashioned and out of date. This state of affairs led to a decrease in audience numbers for some of radio's most welcomed programs. For example, "Friday Morning with You," "Home and Family," and "Hi, Good Morning" (salaam Sobh Bekheyr) had only 20%, 6%, and 2% of the audience respectively, while during the golden age these figures were: "Friday Morning with You" 60% to 75%, "Hi Good Morning" 30% to 40%, and "Home and Family" 20%.

Radio staff were generally demoralized and struggled to retain their audience. However, this was not the case for all radio programs. "Hi, Good Morning" developed a new approach, "Friday Morning with You" used improvisations and "What's up From Thursday to Thursday" invented different satirical characters, and are examples of programs that found a strong audiences. There is a characteristic feature which makes radio different from television: in radio individual stations have particular audiences while in television the program draws the audience. For this reason few national radio programs are widely welcomed by the public (Oudbaashi, 2008).

Radio practitioners responded to the threats and reconstructed radio according to the new media environment. As Khodjasteh stated "... radio reconstruction began in 1993 ... radio has, in fact, started to redevelop itself, for the life and existence

of radio as such was at risk after the golden age. IRIB management had not paid enough heed thereto, and radio was gradually completely posited in a bad situation" (Oudbaashi, 2008, n.p.).

According to Khodjasteh, "Message Radio" (Radio Payaam) was established in late 1994 and broadcast a considerable volume of music along with news programming each 15 minutes. It was somewhat successful in gaining audience attention (Olfat, 2004). Other radio stations were successful but "Message Radio" was an example of the new form and content of radio. Other stations included "Quran Radio" which was launched as an independent station in 1982, and "Public Radio" and "2nd Station" known later as "Culture Radio."

At a time when IRIB funds were directed mainly toward television, radio practitioners prepared for important changes for their stations by adopting new approaches. "Message Radio" and "Tehran Radio" were launched in the mid 1990s, and in 1997 "Youth Radio" began broadcasting to young people. For radio to survive it had to solve the strategic problem of reaching and gaining audiences. In the last years of the second period radio's goal was "maintaining the actual audience, absorbing the potential audience." Different kinds of radio stations were established and launched to fulfill this goal.

### The Third Period; Radio Renaissance

The start of the third period corresponds with the time when "Ma'arif<sup>3</sup> Radio" was established in 1998. Radio's goal is to maintain current audiences and absorb new audiences. To realize this goal radio had to make significant changes. Managing messages, effectiveness, the ability to compete, increasing quality and efficiency, addressing audience needs, paying attention to creativity and productivity, and appealing to different social groups were among the issues addressed by radio in order to survive in the media sphere. In short, radio defined new functions and missions for itself. It could educate different groups of people and offer them specialized information. People with no desire to listen to entertainment programs were offered information through radio. The purpose of these changes was to maximize radio's potential as a unique medium. To survive radio adapted to society's needs.

Khodjasteh, who took over the task of radio reconstruction in this period, stated that "to maintain the actual and to absorb the potential audience is the main strategy, for the essence of radio was vanishing." To meet the needs of audiences, the policy of radio organizations needed to develop both special and specialized stations.<sup>4</sup> Twelve strategies were defined: 1) develop various programs; 2) reform production approaches according to audience desire, need, and prescription<sup>5</sup>; 3) institute qualitative supervision from within; 4) create structures of interrelations between stations and deputies; 5) create unity in radio organizations; 6) refine and restrict the scope of activities; 7) maximize efficiency; 8) develop theoretical domains/fields; 9) educate; 10) fly; 11) transform; 12) move toward "multimediazation" (Oudbaashi, 2008).

The first and most important strategy was to develop specialized stations. In this way Iranian radio stations were divided into three groups: general stations such

as "Iran Radio," "Tehran Radio," "Message Radio" and "Alborz Radio"; special stations such as "Culture Radio," "Youth Radio," "Talk Radio," "Sport Radio," and "Ma'ārif Radio" (which are specific to certain groups of people); and specialized stations such as "Health," "Quran," and "Business" (which deal with specific issues) (Rahimi, 2008).

Specialization was considered the main task and diverse channels were launched in 10 years. "Ma'ārif Radio" appeared in 1998, "Sport radio" in 1999, "Health," "Business," "Voice of Islam" (English version of Ma'ārif), "Familiar Voice," "Talk," "Song," and "Melody" radio in subsequent years. At first it was thought that radio must develop qualitatively, for radio was losing its audience and something needed to be done. However, the passing of time proved that special and specialized channels, by putting forth certain topics which cover almost all the classes and groups of people, successfully attracted new audiences (Rahimi, 2008).

In this period, radio redefined its functions and activities in order to keep pace with society's changes and dynamism. Additionally, it moved from an entertainment medium toward an informational and educational medium. Radio was no longer exclusively recreational to be used during leisure times; rather it broadcast specialized programs which were successful. "Youth" and "Talk" radios started according to the policies designed by IRIB within the "Media Horizon" goals to revitalize radio. "Youth Radio" undertook the mission of absorbing young people and interacting with them. It broadcast programs that use a different way of communication and appealed to young people's tastes (Rahimi, 2009). According to Khodjasteh radio has succeeded in doing two things: first, listening duration increased from 1 hour a day to 2 hours and 40 minutes; second, the audience increased from 29–30% to 49–51% (Khodjasteh, 2008).

During the third period of radio's life after the revolution, a law was passed which gave the most creative and best programmers the opportunity to be promoted into management positions; radio organizations did not let managers from other organizations apply for and hold management posts in radio. Programmers who had innovative plans which satisfied the needs of audiences could manage radio (Rahimi, 2009). Audience listening from 1983–2008 is demonstrated in Table 1.

As the figures show, from 1989 to 1993 there was a considerable decrease in audience numbers, then, with "Message Radio" established, audience numbers increased, and increased again in 2002 with the success of new approaches to content in stations like "Youth Radio." Dr. Khodjasteh resigned his directorship and put an end to the third period with all its achievements and successes; a new era of radio characterized by new management began in 2009 after Dr. Khodjasteh's resignation.

## Iranian Radio Stations Now

Currently, full-time stations include: "Iran," "Youth," "Quran," "Tehran," "Message," "Culture," "Sport," and "Ma'ārif." Specialized and part-time stations in-

**Table 1**  
**Average of Radio Audience 1983–2008**

Year	Audience (percent)	Year	Audience (percent)
1983	18	1996	34
1984	18	1997	21
1985	23.2	1998	29
1986	29.66	1999	18
1987	24	2000	16
1988	23.5	2001	22
1989	19.2	2002	42.23
1990	16.33	2003	39.5
1991	13	2004	49
1992	17	2005	39.2
1993	26	2006	37
1994	30	2007	34.65
1995	20	2008	30.1

*Note.* Source: Research Center of IRIB, 2009

clude: "Talk," "Health," "Song," "Melody," "Business," and "Alborz" to which one can add "Familiar Voice," and Internet radio "Iran Seda."

"Message," "Youth," "Iran," "Sport," and "Tehran" are well known and have more listeners than other full-time radio. Among part-time radio "Talk" has recently gained an audience. "Youth Radio" has been one of the fastest growing channels country-wide because of its specific style of programming and popular music broadcasts, and it could surpass "Message Radio" which enjoys a large audience. Analyzing radio in Iran shows that "Youth" and "Talk" radio drew many individuals to radio for the first time (Djavadzadeh, 2009).

"Message Radio" is one of the most listened to in Iran. It was launched in 1993 broadcasting programs 15 hours a day and by 1996 broadcast 24 hours. Programs broadcast through "Message" include music, news and traffic reports, but music enjoys the largest block of programming. By 2007 it was the only channel in Iran broadcasting music. The content of this radio channel is the reason for its popularity.

"Youth" was launched in 1997 and broadcast 13 hours per day with the following goals: acquaint youth with the fundamentals of the Islamic revolution; make them aware of cultural invasion; and guide them to the ways they can actualize their cultural-artistic capacities and capabilities. "Youth" radio is one of the most listened to stations in Iran thanks to its critical approach. Sometimes it has trespassed into forbidden activities and in this way attracted a large audience from different ages. Broadcasting programs which criticized the government, using special performances by broadcasters, and broadcasting specific questionable programs resulted in many

criticisms leveled at "Youth" radio. Its controversial broadcasts led to a management change with many programs eliminated. Iranian radio entered its fourth era characterized by the introduction of new management.

## Conclusion: Challenges Radio Faces in the Fourth Period

During the last decade radio improved its base by linking the process of programming with theoretical and cultural discussions so that audiences were satisfied with radio in this era when a variety of media were accessible to them. However, we are again experiencing a decline in programming and audience numbers; thus radio is losing its previously high status among media. One can say that radio in the fourth period after 1979 does not follow the principle of prescription-desire-need which guaranteed success for radio in the third period (Djavadzadeh, 2009).

Radio has experienced difficulties because of pressure from three media sources: First, There is competition from increasing numbers of television channels (state television); second, Persian speaking non-Iranian satellite television channels which have content—for example music videos including women's dance—which Iranian media cannot broadcast because of legal or religious reasons<sup>6</sup>; finally, there has been a considerable increase in Internet users in recent years. Any change in radio must be aimed at strengthening it to be able to confront these challenges.

It should be noted that radio and television in Iran, according to the constitution, are controlled by, and in hands of, the government. There cannot be any private television channels or radio stations. Accessibility and ownership are among the main challenges for all media (especially radio). No individuals, social groups or other kinds of organizations are allowed to establish independent, private media to express their ideas and to represent them. However, this is not the case in other parts of the world. There are thousands of local and community radio stations in many countries which are managed by different local, ethnic, and racial groups, even by those who speak another language than the official one. Such local stations exist in Iran, but they are few, and they are all supervised by the state and obliged to broadcast the majority of their programs in Persian, the official language of Iran.

The impossibility of establishing radio station minority groups or a private sector is another challenge for radio organizations and seems to remain impossible, for it is illegal under the constitution. Another controversial challenge before Iranian radio is broadcasting music. This issue has from the outset of Islam been a very problematic one, with some Ayatollahs arguing for its legitimacy and some against it. Radio, therefore, cannot easily broadcast any type of music, in any measure, at any time.

Iranian radio passed through three different periods and entered a new one characterized by a decrease in audiences. We will wait to see if radio authorities strive to remove obstacles or simply let radio go the way it will, losing strength and the place it had acquired.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The first Iranian radio station was launched in Tehran in 1940, April 24.

<sup>2</sup>Since fighting for God is considered to be of great importance and value according to the Islamic teachings, the war between Iran and Iraq was also seen from religious perspective and hence entitled "The Sacred Defense." The word *front*, also given an ideological meaning, refers to a place where the enemies of religion (esp. Islam) are fought and defeated.

<sup>3</sup>Knowledge radio which deals especially with religious knowledge.

<sup>4</sup>According to Khodjasteh, there is a great difference between the "special" and "specialized" radio programs although it may be thought that they are very close or even identical. The special radio program is provided for a certain group of audience like "Youth Radio"; while the specialized radio program deals with a specific issue like "health radio." There are also many radio programs which could be both special and specialized (Khodjasteh, 2008a, p. 65).

<sup>5</sup>Khodjasteh divides the approaches to program making into three groups as follows: *Prescriptive Approach* which, although paying enough attention to the audience, gives priority to their prescription, well-being, and necessities. Advices are obvious examples. *Needs Approach* is the second approach which focuses on the audience needs and to some extent desires, they therefore do not care about the necessities and audience improvement in subjective areas. The third is *Need-Prescriptive Approach* which by meeting the needs of its audience moves toward the prescriptions needed to heighten the cultural and subjective life of people. This approach is on the one hand welcomed by the audience because of its paying attention to the needs thereof and on the other hand leads to the audience promotion and sublimation (Khojasteh, 2008b, p. 18–19).

<sup>6</sup>Satellite TV of VOA and BBC Persian, which mainly broadcast political and anti-Islamic regime programs and also Farsi1, now attracted a large percent of Iranian audiences in prime-time and are the most watched satellite TV channels in Iran.

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