



## Iran's Political Parties Link to Persian Blogosphere More than News Sources

In Iran's online political networks, bloggers are among the most commonly sourced external links, trumping both the domestic and international news media. Moreover, Iran's political parties are more likely link to bloggers than to each other.

### Party Sourcing

In previous research for pITPI, we found that Iraq's online political sphere was brokered by a surprising amount of Western media. While one might expect the more radical anti-republican portion of the Iranian political sphere to reach out to Western media for support, parties across the spectrum utilize Iranian weblog hosting and link more frequently to Iranian media outlets than Western outlets.

In the network map of Iran's online political sphere, each dot represents an external link originating from the political parties' websites. When two dots connect, it is a site that two parties linked to and any links position political parties closer together based on the program's algorithm. We can see the clear arrangement around blogs and state-run media sites.

We generated the network maps using a Microsoft Research program called NodeXL. Upon generating the maps, we noticed that many of these western

sites are placed (by the program's algorithm) in the center of the map as a link between these groups.

The party that most other parties link to is the Green Path of Hope, which emerged following the riots of summer 2009.

Surprisingly, universities in the United States provide some additional supporting sources for Iranian political parties. We found links to 6 educational institutes in the United States, including: Harvard University, Oberlin College, University of California–San Diego, Colorado College, Carnegie Mellon University, and MIT.

### A Blogosphere Unto Its Own

The Iranian blogosphere is uniquely bounded. The online Iranian political sphere is built with references and links to personal blogs and Iranian media outlets. Rather than utilizing Western blog hosts, the majority of blogs linked to by Iranian political parties are hosted by BLOGFA (blogfa.com), a free Persian weblog service. Blogfa is number 192

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globally in the Alexa traffic rank and number 3 in Iran specifically, ranking only before Google and Yahoo!. Of the 41 blogs linked to by Iranian political parties, 26 are hosted on Blogfa. The second most occurring blog hosting site is Blogger, owned by Google, with 6 linked to blogs.

In part, government censorship limits Iranian political parties' exposure to Western news sources and online tools. This factor is backed by the prevalent use of Twitter during the 2009 elections in Iran. Government outsiders leading political change, such as Mir Houssein Mousavi, were unable to utilize 'traditional' internet communication as a result of state censorship and resorted to organizing via mobile to internet communication, primarily on Twitter.

Yet the government learns when it slips. Today, only three of Iran's political parties have links to Twitter, and it is possible that radical parties are unable to utilize websites representing their politics and find other means.

The most important centers of online politics in Iran are Persian bloggers. News sites and other political parties are slightly less important centers.

## Methods

A comprehensive list of Iran's political party data was built using both the Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook and Wikipedia, anticipating

that this combination of "official" and "unofficial" data could bring major and minor, new and established parties to the list. Several search engines and media databases were consulted to confirm the URLs for parties that had websites.

Of the 41 political parties identified to be currently active, 25 possessed active websites and two parties, Executive of Construction and the National Trust Party, had recently active websites that are no longer in service. The Republican and Democratic Party of Iran, National Front, the Green Path of Hope parties linked to no external websites, but each did have multipage websites with their own news write-ups provide. Across the 25 websites were 720 external links, of which 554 were unique.

It is important to remember that the nodes represent external links and do not represent the 'size' of the website or include each page in the site's directory. While some sites were incredible vast in number of pages contained in the entire directory. This may skew the perception of a political party's online presence if the majority of child sites were links to other internal pages. While a party may have a large directory, and be regularly updated, if it were interested in shielding its viewers from external sites fewer links would be included.

To analyze the structure, Web Data Extractor crawled each of political party URLs and extracted all external-facing



URLs on the entire directory for each URL. An XML based add-in for Excel 2007 called NodeXL, developed by a team funded by Microsoft Research, was used to create network maps with the data like that pulled from Web Data Extractor. NodeXL generated the Network Linkage Map between Political

Parties in Iraq in Figure 1. The map arrangement of nodes and clusters is based on the Harel-Koren algorithm, which groups the nodes (individual sites as dots) based on common external links. This method also captured numerous links to internet tools, such as Google and Adobe.

### About the Project

The Project on Information Technology and Political Islam ([www.pITPI.org](http://www.pITPI.org)) at the University of Washington's Department of Communication investigates the politics of information infrastructures in Muslim societies, and the civic and political uses of digital media in the Muslim world. This research was supported by the World Information Access Project ([www.wiaproject.org](http://www.wiaproject.org)) and funded by the National Science Foundation under award IIS-0713074. Any opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

**Table 1: Top External Target Websites**

<b>Website (Number of Parties Linking to Site)</b>	<b>URL</b>
Free Persian Weblog Service (7)	<a href="http://www.blogfa.com">www.blogfa.com</a>
Islamic Republic News Agency (7)	<a href="http://www.irna.ir">www.irna.ir</a>
Blogger: Free Blog Site (6)	<a href="http://www.blogspot.com">www.blogspot.com</a>
Iranian Student's News Agency (6)	<a href="http://www.isna.ir">www.isna.ir</a>
Baran Foundation (5)	<a href="http://www.baran.org.ir">www.baran.org.ir</a>
Iranian Labour News Agency (5)	<a href="http://www.ilna.ir">www.ilna.ir</a>
Mizan News Agency (5)	<a href="http://www.mizannews.ir">www.mizannews.ir</a>
Tishk TV (5)	<a href="http://www.tishktv.tv">www.tishktv.tv</a>
YouTube (5)	<a href="http://www.youtube.com">www.youtube.com</a>
Aftab News (4)	<a href="http://www.aftabnews.ir">www.aftabnews.ir</a>
BBC (4)	<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk">www.bbc.co.uk</a>
Etemaad (4)	<a href="http://www.etemaad.com">www.etemaad.com</a>
Hambastegi Daily (4)	<a href="http://www.hambastegidaily.com">www.hambastegidaily.com</a>
Green Path of Hope (4)	<a href="http://www.kaleme.com">www.kaleme.com</a>
Google (including News, Videos) (4)	<a href="http://www.google.com">www.google.com</a>
Rooz Iranian News (4)	<a href="http://www.roozonline.com">www.roozonline.com</a>
Tabnak Professional News Site (4)	<a href="http://www.tabnak.ir">www.tabnak.ir</a>



Figure 1: Network Linkage Map between Political Parties in Iran

