

*Executive Summary*

# **Popular Youth Culture within Contemporary Iran**

**An Analysis of Iranian Blogs and Photoblogs**

Prepared for a select group of U.S. government agencies  
interested in developments in the Persian Gulf region

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## **Executive Summary**

Nearly 70 percent of Iran's population is younger than 30. Many technologically savvy young Iranians use blogs as an informal forum to air opinions. Despite strict governmental controls, an estimated 40,000 to 100,000 blogs are active in Iran. Youth blogs offer relatively candid insight into Iranian popular youth culture. This report presents findings from our systematic reading, coding, and evaluation of English-language blogs and photoblogs created by the resident Iranian youth community posted since mid-2006.

We measured and noted blogger opinion on a range of popular culture topics: Iranian domestic leadership, domestic policy, U.S. foreign policy, international affairs, gender relations, religion, technology, sports, music, fashion, film, television, and literature. We find that young Iranian bloggers discuss political issues (especially Iranian domestic policy) and technology most frequently. Negative opinions dominate blog and photoblog treatment of political issues, gender relations, fashion, and television. By contrast, bloggers share positive views on religion, technology, sports, music, film, and literature. In addition to summarizing the direction of blogger opinion with descriptive statistics, we present substantial qualitative analysis of blogger perspectives by topic. These more nuanced qualitative findings constitute much of the report. We also present a brief study of blogger responses to the British hostage situation that unfolded in March–April 2007.

Despite meticulous data collection and evaluation, we are hesitant to generalize views expressed by bloggers in our sample to young Iranians more broadly. We note several selection biases inherent to any study of blogs and photoblogs in a less developed country, biases that are only increased by our focus on English-language blogs. Blogger self-selection and government censorship present additional obstacles to generalizability.

## **Foreword**

This report is produced by students in the Master of International Public Affairs (MIPA) program in the Robert M. La Follette School of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin–Madison for a select group of U.S. government agencies interested in developments in the Persian Gulf region. The opinions and judgments presented in the report do not represent the views, official or unofficial, of the La Follette School or of the client agencies for which the report was prepared.

The authors of this report are enrolled in the Public Affairs Workshop, International Issues, the capstone course in their graduate program. The workshop provides MIPA students the opportunity to improve their analytical skills by applying them to an issue with a substantial international component and to contribute useful knowledge and recommendations to their client.

I am grateful to Wilbur R. Voigt whose generous gift to the La Follette School supports the workshop projects. With his support, we are able to finance the production of the final reports, plus other expenses associated with the projects.

The La Follette School offers a two-year graduate program leading to a Master of Public Affairs or a Master of International Public Affairs degree. In both programs, students develop analytic tools with which they assess policy responses to issues, evaluate implications of policies for efficiency and equity, and interpret and present data relevant to policy considerations.

The workshop provides practical experience applying the tools of analysis acquired during three semesters of coursework to actual problems clients face in the public, non-governmental, and private sectors. Students work in teams to produce carefully crafted policy reports that meet high professional standards. The reports are research-based, analytical, evaluative, and (where relevant) prescriptive responses to real-world clients. This culminating experience is the ideal equivalent of the thesis for the La Follette School degrees in public affairs. While acquiring a set of analytical skills is important, it is no substitute for learning by doing.

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