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TEIM Election Watch Analysis

ELECTORAL REPORT:

IRAN/Presidential election

12 June 2009

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Background to the election:

Iran's tenth presidential election coincided with the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Republic and with an incipient crisis in the political leadership resulting from clashes between the reformist and conservative sectors, but also between factions among the conservatives, including both President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei as well as Hashemi Rafsanjani -the Chairman of the Expediency Discernment Council and the Assembly of Experts-, the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Ali Larijani, and other important figures in the Iranian political establishment.

Aware of the importance of unity in order to confront Ahmadinejad's candidacy for re-election, the different reformist candidates withdrew their candidacies, throwing their support to one of the only two candidates who were finally accepted from this group, Mir Hussein Moussavi, the former Prime Minister and main ally of former President Mohammad Khatami and Mehdi Karroubi, the head of the *Etemad-e Melli* or National Trust Party and a former Speaker of Parliament. For the conservatives, Ahmadinejad and Mohsen Rezai, the former leader of the Revolutionary Guards, were the final candidates, despite the fact that 475 candidates registered to be vetted by the Council of Guardians.

For the first time, televised debates were allowed between the four candidates on state television and airtime was allotted for each candidate. A record audience watched the debates whose content, because of the accusatory and critical tone – unthinkable a month earlier – left no Iranian indifferent. The direct accusations between the candidates for the presidency and the questioning aimed at key figures in the political elite surprised everyone, and revealed the cracks existing in the heart of the political elite. Ahmadinejad even criticised Hashemi Rafsanjani, the second most powerful man in Iran and political rival of Khamenei. Accusations of corruption, lies and nepotism were repeated in the debates, but political and economic programmes were missing from them. However, enormous expectation was generated about the course of the vote count and the final result, encouraging mass participation in the election, even higher than during the time of Mohammed Khatami.

Campaign events were well-attended in general and especially during the last week of the campaign, when Moussavi and Ahmadinejad confronted each other in the capital. The political rallies brought the city to a standstill with scenes of festivity never before seen in earlier elections.

The popular mobilisation in favour of both candidates was unprecedented and guaranteed that participation would reach record levels in the history of presidential elections, with almost 84% of citizens older than 18 voting, according to the official data from the Interior Ministry.

The Interior Ministry had announced a series of measures to guarantee the transparency of the vote count, which they were not able to verify on election day.

Quantitative indices of democracy:

Iran was classified in the following democratic performance rankings just before this election:

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	Freedom House Report 2008	Freedom House (FH)	PR: political rights CL: civil liberties	PR: 6, CL: 6 (Scale of 1 = free to 7 = not free) Classification: Not free
Degree of democracy in earlier elections	Polyarchy 2.0 2002 (referring to the 2001 elections)	Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIOS) and Tatu Vanhanen	ID: Synthetic democracy index, Part: participation, Comp: competition	ID: 2.94, max. 49 Part: 25.15, max. 70 Comp: 11.70, max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30) Classification: does not surpass democracy minimum
Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	Polity IV 2007	Center for International Development and Conflict Management	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 0 Autocracy: 6 Polity: -6 (Scale of +10 = very democratic to -10 = very authoritarian) Classification: average authoritarian consolidation
Perception of corruption	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2008	Transparency International (TI)	TICPI: corruption perceptions index	TICPI: 2.3 points out of 10 (Scale of 1, very corrupt to 10, not at all corrupt) Rank: 141 out of 180 countries
Management of political and economic change	Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2008	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management Index, quality of transformation management	MI: 2.8 points out of 10, Rank: 112 out of 125 countries Classification: Transformation management with limited success
Democracy, including press status and corruption	World Democracy Audit 2008	World Audit	World Democracy Rank: political freedom (FH) + press and corruption (TI)	World Democracy Ranking: 138 out of 150 countries, division 4 out of 4

Quantitative analysis of electoral democracy:

Degree of democracy in these elections	Measurement of democracy in these elections according to the Polyarchy 2.0 2009 index, calculated by TEIM Election Watch	ID: 20.78, max. 49 Part ¹ : 55.57, max. 70 Comp ² : 37.4, max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30)	Classification of the elections: Democratic³
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¹ Participation was calculated on the basis of the Iranian census of 28 October 2006, which reflected a population of 70,472,846 inhabitants (source: Geohive <http://www.xist.org/cntry/iran.aspx>) and the official data published by the Interior Ministry (<http://www.moi.ir>).

² Competition was calculated using the official data published by the Iranian Interior Ministry (<http://www.moi.ir>) as a reference.

³ It is important to remember that this classification does not evaluate – for this or for any other case – the veracity of the election results, which are discussed below, but only computes the official information provided by the Interior Ministry.

Definition of the political system:

Iran is a theocratic republic (ecclesiocracy/hierocracy) with dual legitimacy, popular and religious. The government is centralised, with a strong presence of the Shiite clergy in the political system's most powerful institutions – Spiritual Leadership, Council of Guardians, Judicial Power, Assembly of Experts and the Expediency Discernment Council. Since Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became president in 2005, an increase in the power of the Revolutionary Guards in the power structure has become evident.

Definition of the electoral system and the parties:

Majority two-round system (TRS) for presidential elections. There are no political parties, but rather flexible electoral alliances between the ruling political trends that end up proposing open lists of candidates. The current trends are reformist, conservative and fundamentalist. The candidacies are individual and must be vetted by the Council of Guardians, the highest Iranian election authority.

The voters must handwrite the name and code of the candidate on the ballot. There are no dark rooms or areas with curtains and the vote is put into the urn directly, without an envelope. There is no prior registration or electoral census. Voters can go to any polling place in the country, regardless of their place of residency. There is no electronic vote count or monitors from the candidates involved in the Interior Ministry's general count.

Impact of the electoral process and size of the constituency on the elections:

In the case of the presidential election, there is only one constituency, although the data are broken down by province and municipality.

Election results:

- Participation: 84%
- Votes cast: 39,165,191
- Valid votes: 38,755,802
- Null votes: 409,389

Candidate	Votes	Percentage
Mahmoud Ahmadinejad	24,527,516	62.63%
Mir Hussein Moussavi	13,216,411	33.75%
Mohsen Rezai	678,240	1.73%
Mehdi Karroubi	333,635	0.85%

Source: Interior Ministry

Evaluative analysis of the election:

Participation:

The absence of any prior voting register or census complicates the determination of the participation percentages, which is done using the total potential voting population, according to the information from the population census. According to official data, 84% of potential voters went to the polls. This high participation was visible, especially in Tehran, where more than 7.5 million people voted, compared to the presidential election in 2005, when fewer than 5 million people voted. It is important to note in this context that the minimum voting age then was 16, while it was raised to 18 for this election.

According to the subsequent complaints presented by the defeated candidates, and accepted by the Council of Guardians, in at least 50 cities, more than 100% of the population truly living there voted, and in many more cases, participation was between 90% and 95%, which is rather suspicious.

Competition:

Electoral competition is measured by the acceptance of candidacies by the Council of Guardians. In this election, only four candidates cleared the filter and there were no important complaints about any rejected candidates. The four had a solid revolutionary background and did not represent a very different alternative to the current government from an ideological point of view, although significant differences were evident in their approaches with respect to anti-corruption, economic and foreign policies. As on other occasions, no female candidate passed through the electoral filter.

Transparency:

The transparency of the election process has been severely questioned by the losing candidates, who contested the results before the Council of Guardians for the first time. Also for the first time, a partial recount of 10% of the votes was done, in the middle of a wave of street demonstrations rejecting the final results, without the presence of any representatives of the opposition due to their refusal to legitimise the recount. More than 600 formal complaints were made to the electoral body, which rejected them after a week of negotiations and discussions between the members of the political elite and after the sermon by Khamenei on 19 June which ratified the results, openly endorsing the re-elected president.

A lack of transparency is common in Iranian elections and the announced guarantees were not applied. The haste in publishing the results seemed very suspicious, since fewer than 15 hours after the polling stations had closed, the final results declaring an overwhelming victory for Ahmadinejad were announced.

An analysis detailing the data broken down by province reflects many differences from historical voting trends. Moussavi only won in two provinces, while in the other 28 provinces, Ahmadinejad was declared the winner. When the results are compared with earlier elections, it is possible to verify that the ethnic vote in the peripheral areas of Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan, Khorasan and Baluchestan have generally chosen reformist candidates or candidates with ethnic ties to these provinces, which was not the case in this election. If this historical trend and the unreliable pre-election opinion polls had been corroborated, Moussavi, Rezai and Karroubi should have won large numbers of votes in these areas, unlike what occurred on 12 June.

The differences in favour of Ahmadinejad in some provinces were enormous, even in Mehdi Karroubi's province and Mir Hussein Moussavi's own city, where both reformist candidates lost. The characteristics of the voting system make it difficult to detect fraud and mistakes, but a turnout higher than 100% in some provinces cannot be explained by thousands of voters suddenly travelling to places in the middle of the country and far from large cities for no reason.

The oft-mentioned rural backing given Ahmadinejad would not be statistically that important, considering that only 30% of the population in Iran is rural.

The source of the 24 million votes won by Ahmadinejad is difficult to explain sociologically when compared to the presidential elections of 1997, 2001 and 2005. Of the conservative candidates, Nateq-Noori, with 7 million votes, was the most popular in 1997, followed by Ahmadinejad in the first round of 2005 with 5.7 million votes. On the other hand, the reformists have obtained higher numbers of votes since 1997. Khatami won 20 and 21 million votes in 1997 and 2001, respectively and in 2005, the three reformist candidates – Karroubi, Moin and Mehralizadeh – won 10.5 million votes in the first round, twice that of Ahmadinejad and much more than Rafsanjani, who won only 6.1 million.

Additionally, high participation rates have historically favoured reformists in the 1997 and 2001 presidential elections, the municipal elections in 1999 and the parliamentary elections in 2000, while low participation rates have favoured conservatives. This time, on the contrary, the record participation rate of 84% overwhelmingly favoured Ahmadinejad.

When taken together, all of these data support the oppositions' suspicion of possible electoral fraud, despite the fact that the opposition has no reliable alternative data.

Party representation and debate during the campaign:

According to the Supreme Leader Khamenei's own words in his sermon of 19 June, "the four candidates were directly approved by me", which implies that none of them represented political options that were totally at odds with the government or the political elite. The elite outsiders committed to the revolution and obedient to the Supreme Leader, as on other occasions, did not have a place in the electoral game, especially on the presidential level.

The debates took place mainly on state television, where for the first time, equal airtime was given and also for the first time, the four candidates met face-to-face in six 90-minute debates. In this case, television surpassed the written press as a vehicle for debate and had a huge following by the people. However, the accusations by the Committee for the Protection of Votes, made up of supporters of Karroubi and Moussavi, accused the Iranian radio and television of taking sides and giving much more time to Ahmadinejad in news and special programmes that presented the achievements of his presidency. The 20-minute right to rebuttal granted *in extremis* to Ahmadinejad on the last day of the campaign fed this accusation.

Openness:

Despite the fact that many opinion polls projected a slight advantage for Ahmadinejad over Moussavi, the lack of credibility of these studies, carried out by biased members of the media, made it almost impossible to foresee the results of 12 June. The limited unity among the political elite itself, even after the

results were announced, shows that the results were not what many expected or even reflected what really occurred.

Significance:

The significance of this election was made clear by the extremely high participation rate and the events that occurred after the final results were published. The results *per se* did not produce any changes in the internal or international policies of Ahmadinejad's government, although a partial change is expected in his cabinet, aimed at appointing trusted men to key posts, even at the risk of clashing with his own faction in parliament, which must approve ministerial appointments. 62% of the votes plus the solid support of the Supreme Leader represent an absolute approval of the policies applied over the last 5 years by the government and, therefore, do not need any reform.

Consequence and impact on the political system:

The 12 June election revealed the insuperable differences within the political elite. The two main figures in the political clash, Ali Khamenei and Hashemi Rafsanjani, supported, respectively, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mir Hussein Moussavi in the presidential confrontation. The result was an overwhelming victory for Khamenei. The reinforcement of his power, supporting the president and supported by the military force of the Revolutionary Guards, has left the reformist and pragmatic opposition – headed by Rafsanjani, Moussavi and Mohammed Khatami, the former reformist President between 1997 and 2005 – without any political options.

When the reformist opposition challenged the results, it meant a loss of trust in the electoral system and in the leading Iranians in power, who were accused of arbitrariness and favouritism with respect to the winning candidate. The loss of legitimacy for the ruling system may be one of the main consequences of results that are not accepted by all the people.

However, what is most critical for the Iranian ruling class are the differences with the clerical hierarchy in Qom, which has also issued criticisms in fatwas and statements from some clerics who are highly respected by the government, like the Grand Ayatollahs Sanei and Moussavi Ardebili, and even the opposition Grand Ayatollah Ali Montazeri. All have commented on how badly the authorities handled the election. The Association of Combatant Clerics, one of the two most influential political-clerical associations in Iran, has also criticised the results, supporting the claims of Moussavi, Karroubi and Khatami, as did the Association of Researchers and Teachers of Qom, which is very prestigious among the Shiite clerical elite in Iran.

Nevertheless, it is very early to say that the Islamic system of government is coming to an end. The frictions in the heart of the elite are making it very clear that after 30 continuous years in power, the current generation of political-religious patriarchs is playing its particular game of chess with an eye on the generational change in the elite. The leaders in power, represented by Khamenei, Rafsanjani, Mesbah Yazdi, Ahmed Jannati, and other clerics who form part of the Khomeini revolutionary group, are between 70 and 80 years old and must give way to a new power group. And in this context, Ahmadinejad, representing the hard conservative wing in Iran, is in the best position, with explicit support from the Supreme Leader and the Pasdaran and Basij Forces and 24 million votes.

However, the overwhelming electoral victory and the backing of the Supreme Leader could mean another type of challenge to the political system in the near future as it is possible that Ahmadinejad is interested in maintaining his position after the two terms allowed by the Constitution, like other presidents who have made populism their style of governing. Although the constitutional reform process is complicated and controlled by the Council of Guardians, the political autonomy that Ahmadinejad may have achieved could encourage him to push through an amendment that will allow him to run for a third term, thus positioning himself as the most important non-clerical person in the country.

International political reaction:

The initial wariness of the U.S. administration, which expressed its desire to stay out of Iran's internal affairs, as it has done on other occasions, contrasts with the very critical positions taken by France and Germany, which dismissed the election results as fraudulent and demanded a common condemnation by the European Union. The European ministries have expressed their concern about the violence used to stop the protests, as well as the treatment of the foreign press. Pressure, mainly from human rights groups protesting the repression that was unleashed in Iran, has conditioned the European Union's position, which does not seem determined to take any drastic diplomatic measures beyond summoning all of the Iranian representatives in European capitals to discuss the detention of local civil servants in the British embassy in Tehran. Australia, Canada and Japan also questioned the results and subsequent repression of the demonstrations. The United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also expressed his concern about the situation following the elections, but did not question the veracity of the results.

The presidents of Venezuela, Brazil, Pakistan, India and Turkey, on the other hand, recognised and congratulated President Ahmadinejad for his overwhelming victory, as did the Arab League, Syria, Yemen and Oman. In Arab countries, popular support for Ahmadinejad is undeniable and his policy of confronting the United States and explicit support for Hezbollah and Hamas represent an example that many demand of their own leaders.

Russia and China also recognised the results when they congratulated Ahmadinejad, leaving the countries that question the veracity of the vote in the minority.

Iranian citizens living abroad expressed their rejection both of the official results and the later repression of the demonstrations, organising their own demonstrations in most European capital cities.

Conclusions:

The tenth presidential election in Iran was the least typical and most controversial in the history of the Islamic republic. The electoral participation, the result of the atmosphere of debate and enthusiasm in the streets beforehand, was the main element that marked the experience as indelible. The subsequent events, the challenges, demonstrations, and repression, were also unique and unforgettable for the collective Iranian memory. The consequences of this election will reveal themselves in the short- and mid-term future, but also in the long run, now that social differences and differences among the elites have been made evident and cannot be concealed. The street clashes between the police

and Basij forces and the demonstrators continued, although to a lesser degree, a month after the results were announced. And the declarations, announcements and fatwas from different key political and religious figures have multiplied with the passing of the days. It is therefore hasty to say that the political discussion ended with the ratification of the results by Khamenei, beyond the fact that it is clear that the results will not be modified. The political negotiation among the elites was considered necessary to silence internal opposition and criticism and it will be possible to observe the evolution of events in the months to come.

From an electoral point of view, the challenges to and questioning of the results by a large proportion of the political elite and Iranian population suggests that the legitimacy of the new government has been quite diminished and with that, governability decreases, making it necessary to use more repression to maintain the stability of the system.

Reference to two other Internet analyses of this election:

Ansari, Ali, "Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran's 2009 Presidential Election", Chatham House, June 2009, available at:

http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/14234_iranelection0609.pdf

Abdo, Geneive, "In Wake of Protests, Khamenei Faces Split Inside Regime", in NDI *Iran Election Bulletin* Vol 1, No. 9, 26 June 2009, available at:

<http://www.ndi.org/node/15572>