

Teim



TEIM Election Watch Analysis

ELECTORAL REPORT:

IRAN/Local and Assembly of Experts 15 December 2006

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Background of the elections:

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became President of Iran in May 2005 with the support of the fundamentalists led by the Ayatollah Taqi Mesbah and the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei's conservatives, defeating Hashemi Rafsanjani's pragmatists and the reformists of Mohamed Khatami. However, it appears that the tacit alliance between Khamenei and Mesbah broke down, and a new alliance was established with Rafsanjani, backed by the conservatives, pragmatists and reformists in the elections for the Assembly of Experts, to curb the political and institutional threat represented by the growth of the fundamentalists. In the local elections, the reformists presented joint lists to recover the positions lost earlier in the 2003 elections to the conservatives and fundamentalists. The Council of Guardians – responsible for vetoing presumptive candidates in both cases – cleared the way for the conservative candidates, vetoing a large number of reformist, fundamentalist and independent candidates.

Quantitative indices of democracy:

Iran was classified in the following democratic performance rankings just before these elections:

Measurement	Name and year of report or database	Institution	Index	Points, ranking and classification
Political rights and freedom	Freedom House Report 2006	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 2000	Peace Research Institute of Oslo and Tatu Vanhanen	ID: Synthetic democracy index, Part: participation, Comp: competition	ID: 5.13, max. 49 Part: 28.55, max. 70 Comp: 17.95, max. 70 (Democracy minimum: ID: 5, Part: 10, Comp: 30) Classification: Does not surpass democracy minimum
Consolidation of authoritarian and democratic institutions	Polity IV 2004	Center for International Development and Conflict Management, Univ. of Maryland	Democracy: consolidation of democratic institutions Autocracy: authoritarian consolidation Polity: synthesis of both	Democracy: 0 Autocracy: 3 Polity: - 3 (Scale of +10, very democratic to -10, very authoritarian) Classification: Factionalism/restricted competition
Perception of corruption	Transparency International Corruption Perception Index 2006	Transparency International (TI)	TICPI: corruption perceptions index	TCPI: 2.7 points out of 10, (Scale of 1, very corrupt to 10, not at all corrupt) Rank: 105 out of 158 countries
Management of political and economic change	Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2006	Bertelsmann Foundation	MI: Management Index, quality of transformation management	MI: 3.17 points out of 10, Rank: 95 out of 118 countries Classification: Management with little success

Democracy, including press status and corruption	World Democracy Audit 2006	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
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Quantitative analysis of electoral democracy:

The lack of political parties and the difficulty of unequivocally establishing the party affiliation of the elected candidates makes it impossible at this time to use the criteria of the Polyarchy 2.0 formula to evaluate the degree of democracy in these elections.

Definition of the political system:

Iran is a theocratic republic (ecclesiocracy/clerocracy) with dual legitimacy, popular and religious. The government is centralised, with a strong presence of the clergy in the most powerful institutions in the political system: Supreme Leader, Council of Guardians, judiciary, Assembly of Experts and Expediency Discernment Council.

Definition of the electoral system and parties:

Two-round majority system for parliamentary and presidential elections, with a one-round majority system for local and Assembly of Experts elections. There are no political parties, but rather flexible electoral alliances between the different ruling political trends that end up creating proposals for open lists of candidates. The current trends in the country are reformist, conservative and fundamentalist. There are also some independent candidates.

Voters elect the candidates (not closed electoral lists) and must handwrite the names and codes of the candidates on the ballot.

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

The lack of voter rolls and the fact that Iranian citizens can vote in any constituency, regardless of their place of residence, favours candidates in specific cities and constituencies.

Election results:

In the Assembly of Experts, victory went to the lists that supported Rafsanjani. He obtained more than 1.5 million votes in Tehran, double the votes for Taqi Mesbah, his main opponent. Of the 86 members of the new assembly, 11 were reformists from the Khatami-Karroubi line, 34 pro-Rafsanjani-Khamenei pragmatic conservatives and 41 pro-Mesbah fundamentalists. The reformist-conservative alliance gave them the majority.

In the local elections, the reformists recovered a number of positions lost in 2003, but without obtaining any considerable majorities. Of the 15 positions elected in Tehran, the list allied with the current conservative mayor, Bagher Ghalibaf, won 7 seats, the supporters of Ahmadinejad another 4 and the reformists 4.

However, the flexibility of the electoral alliances and the near absence of any ideological or political definition of the candidates make it difficult to corroborate the exactness of the data corresponding to the political affiliation of all of the candidates who won seats, both in the Assembly of Experts and in the local councils. The number of reformist, pragmatic or fundamentalist councillors or Assembly members may vary, therefore, according to the information source consulted.

Evaluative analysis of the elections:¹

Participation:

The lack of a census or voter rolls before the election complicates the task of determining the participation percentage, which is done using the total population of voting age, according to the population census.

According to the data from the Home Secretary, the national voter turnout was 60% for the Assembly of Experts (vs. 43% in 1990 and 37% in 1998) and 65% for the local elections (vs. 64% in 1999 and 43% in 2003). The province of Tehran, with 40%, continues to register the lowest participation level in the country, despite having increased with respect to the local elections in 2003 (23%). The voting hours were extended until 10 p.m. Portable voting booths transported in buses were used to guarantee the vote in far-off or heavily populated areas.

Competition:

At first, the election filter of the Council of Guardians, presided over by Ahmad Jannati, an ally of Khamenei, only admitted 144 of the 492 pre-candidates who wanted to run for the Assembly of Experts. Later revisions raised that number to 181, but the voluntary withdrawal of some reformist candidates left the final list at 163 candidates. Most of the reformists were vetoed, as were many of the fundamentalists, leaving the road clear for most of the conservative candidates, supporters of Khamenei and Rafsanjani.

In the Tehran local elections, 1,441 candidates ran, of whom 119 were vetoed by the parliament, which is responsible for this process. A few days before the elections, an additional 78 candidates withdrew their candidacies.

Transparency:

The results were accepted by the candidates from all of the political trends, except for isolated cases in which a recount of the votes was requested. There were 140 reports of irregularities – 66 in Tehran – during the campaign and on election day, fewer than the 300 presented during the 2005 presidential election. These included thousands of SMS telephone messages which were sent

¹ This section uses TEIM's 6 election criteria which are: Participation, Competition, Transparency, Representation and Debate, Openness and Significance. See the home page for an explanation of each of these criteria:

<http://www.observatorioelectoral.es>

to promote certain candidates. Complaints were made about favouritism from some provincial units of the IRIB – the Iranian television and radio broadcasting body – towards certain candidates and trends, despite the prohibition of their use during the campaign. Some foreign press were present and allowed access to the polls although there were no international observers. According to the Home Secretary, more than 75,000 inspectors participated in the voting, although there were complaints that some of them were expelled from the centre for the ballot recount.

The need to write the names of the candidates on the ballots in the polling station (33 names in the case of Tehran), without a separate polling booth, made secret voting almost impossible in all cases.

Party representation and debate:

Representation is determined by the Council of Guardians' veto, which blocks certain political currents from participating in the elections. The debate took place in the written press, as on other occasions. The television did not allow any election advertising during the short, 7-day campaign. The closure of the *Sharg* newspaper deprived the reformists of their main outlet. Many politicians requested that the campaign be extended and asked for debates between the candidates, especially in the local elections.

Openness:

While the limitation of the candidacies by the Council of Guardians eliminated the possibility of surprises, the results on a national level for the Assembly and in some provinces like Tehran were unexpected.

Significance:

The results revealed that the current government under Ahmadinejad was not able to favour its own candidates. The stability of the system and continuity of the current president were maintained, and the permanence of Supreme Leader Khamenei as the head of state was assured. The significance of the elections was, therefore, dual. They preserved the system and set limits insofar as the aspirations of the President and the fundamentalists.

International political reaction and implications:

The international press accepted the results as valid, putting special emphasis on what the defeat meant for President Ahmadinejad, as a punishment for his handling of foreign relations and the country's economy.

Conclusions:

These joint elections meant a reorganisation on the part of the regime's political elite which eliminated the centrifugal tensions that both reformists and fundamentalists can exert on the system. It is important to note that this reshuffling was carried out using the same institutional tools that had allowed both Khatami and Ahmadinejad to be elected to the presidency before.

For the political elite led by Ali Khamenei and Hashemi Rafsanjani and for the very political institution of the Supreme Leader, the threat represented by the growth of the fundamentalist sectors allied with Taqi Mesbah was defused.

Ahmadinejad received his first public scolding for his performance as president, despite the fact that in numerical terms, the political trend that he represents did not lose a considerable number of votes.

Reference to two other Internet analyses of these elections:

Shahram Rafizadeh

<http://www.roozonline.com/english/archives/2007/01/001171.php>

Golnaz Esfandiari

<http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/12/A2B68F48-0826-40EC-A1965DF742E49616.html>