A Guide to

Iran's Presidential Election

JUNE 2013

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PROJECT
ON MIDDLE EAST
DEMOCRACY

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The Project on Middle East Democracy is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to examining the impact of American policy on political reform and democratization in the Middle East. Through dialogue, research, and advocacy, we aim to promote understanding of how genuine, authentic democracies can develop in the Middle East and how the U.S. can best support that process.

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INTRODUCTION

On June 14, Iranians will vote in a presidential election to replace incumbent President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, whose term ends in August. The election is being held in the shadow of 2009's contested vote, which prompted massive protests and a subsequent government crackdown that resulted in the arrest, detention, and torture of thousands. Many Iranians are understandably disillusioned, believing the June election to be nothing more than a means by which the Iranian government can reassert its legitimacy and deepen the allegiance of its citizens to the system. Despite these concerns, the election process presents a unique window into the internal debates and disagreements gripping the Islamic Republic.

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, and the twelve-person Guardian Council acting under his authority, retains extensive control over the electoral process. It is generally believed that the outcome will be predetermined through vetting, fraud, or both. In 2009, the Supreme Leader's decision to endorse Ahmadinejad before the Guardian Council had certified the results both violated the election law and undermined faith in the Supreme Leader's historic role as a neutral arbiter. Factional infighting and elite rivalries have worsened, and the political battles that have typically characterized these rivalries are now being waged publicly—a development that is dramatically affecting the pre-election environment.

BACKGROUND: PREVIOUS PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN IRAN

Since the Islamic Republic's inception, the presidency has been a constant source of political scandal and unrest. In February 1980, Abdolhassan Bani-Sadr was elected president by an overwhelming margin, receiving nearly 11 million out of 14 million votes. Throughout his tenure, Bani-Sadr was in constant conflict with the clerical Islamic Republic Party (IRP), which eventually impeached him in June 1981. In July, Bani-Sadr's prime minister, Ali Rajai, was elected president, though he was assassinated in a bombing less than a month after taking office. In October 1981, IRP founder Hojjatoleslam Ali Khamenei became Iran's first clerical president. The Assembly of Experts then nominated Khamenei for the position of Supreme Leader following Khomeini's death in 1989.[1]

In 1989, a presidential election was held alongside a national referendum proposing amendments to the Constitution. The referendum passed, and an amendment succeeded in eliminating the post of prime minister. Hashemi Rafsanjani won the July 1989 election with 15 million out of 16 million votes. During his two terms in office, Rafsanjani advocated for free market reforms and a more conciliatory, pragmatic foreign policy. Rafsanjani focused primarily on rehabilitating the Iranian economy in

[1] See Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (Princeton, New Jersey: Yale University Press, 2006), 249-265, and Yasmin Alem, *Duality by Design: The Iranian Electoral System* (Washington, DC: IFES, 2011), 49-51.

the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War. Despite his popularity, economic hardship and factional infighting crippled many of his initiatives.[2]

In 1997, reform-leaning Mohammad Khatami, Rafsanjani's Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, ran against Speaker of Parliament Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri, Khamenei's favored candidate. Though relatively unknown, Khatami campaigned on a reformist platform that called for increasing the rights of women and minorities, greater freedoms, and a foreign policy grounded in dialogue and mutual understanding. He won 20 million out of 29 million votes in an election characterized by an unprecedented turnout rate of over 80%. Most analysts believe the 1997 election remains the sole presidential election in which the establishment's preferred candidate did not win.[3]

During the 2005 election, reformists struggled to field a candidate as strong as Khatami, while populist Mayor of Tehran Mahmoud Ahmadinejad succeeded in obtaining the support of many conservative groups, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and the poor.[4] For the first time in Iranian electoral history, no candidate succeeded in winning a majority in the first round. In a run-off between Ahmadinejad and former President Rafsanjani, Ahmadinejad won 17 million out of 27 million votes, with 60% voter turnout.[5]

Leading up to the 2009 election, the Guardian Council approved four candidates: Mir-Hossein Moussavi, Khamenei's former prime minister; Mohsen Rezaei, a conservative former Commander of the IRGC; Mehdi Karroubi, a reformist former Speaker of Parliament; and the incumbent, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Reformists rallied behind Moussavi and Karroubi, and after a three-week campaign period characterized by allegations of corruption, heated television debates, and widespread rallies, Ahmadinejad was declared the winner. The Ministry of Interior reported an 85% turnout (the highest in Iranian history), with Ahmadinejad winning 63% of the vote.[6] Ahmadinejad's opponents accused the government of fraud, and subsequent investigations seemed to support their claims. Even in light of these reports, massive protests, and unprecedented criticism from prominent political figures, the Supreme Leader endorsed Ahmadinejad's reelection and the Guardian Council certified the results.

[2] Ibid.

[3] See Ibid. and Shaul Bakhash, "The Six Presidents," *Iran Primer,* http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/six-presidents.

[4] See Alem, "Duality By Design," 52, and Bakhash, "The Six Presidents."

[5] "Election Results: Iran 2005 Presidential," IFES Election Guide, last modified January 24, 2012, http://www.electionguide.org/results.php?ID=140.

[6] See Alem, "Duality By Design," 49-52, "Freedom in the World 2010: Iran," Freedom House, http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/iran, and "IFES Election Guide," IFES, last modified January 25, 2012, http://www.electionguide.org/.

THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

7-11 MAY
During a five-day registration period, candidates submit documents at the Ministry of Interior.

11-16 MAY
The Guardian Council reviews candidate eligibility and vets each candidate, with the option to extend the deadline by five days.

21 MAY
The Ministry of Interior releases the names of eight individuals approved to run by the Guardian Council. Candidates begin campaigning.

31 MAY
The first of three presidential debates is held, and each candidate is invited to participate.

5 JUNE
Second presidential debate.

7 JUNE
Third presidential debate.

13 JUNE
The campaign period ends 24 hours before polls open.

14 JUNE
Election day.

21 JUNE
If no candidate receives a majority of votes in the first round, the top two candidates will participate in a run-off election.

LAWS CONCERNING ELECTIONS

The 1979 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, amended in 1989, provides a legal framework governing elections to the country's four elected institutions: the Assembly of Experts, Parliament, municipal councils, and the Presidency. Articles 113 to 132 outline the general principles governing presidential elections as well as the powers and duties of the President vis-à-vis other institutions. According to the Constitution, the president is elected to a four-year term by a direct, majority vote of the people, with reelection permitted only once. Article 115 specifies general eligibility requirements, which the Guardian Council is legally empowered to review:

> The President must be elected from among religious and political personalities possessing the following qualifications: Iranian origin; Iranian nationality; administrative capacity and resourcefulness; a good past record; trustworthiness and piety; and a belief in the fundamental principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the official religion of the country.

The Guardian Council also holds the responsibility of supervising elections, according to Article 99.

Two electoral laws provide additional insight into this responsibility as well as the overall operation of presidential elections: the Law on Presidential Elections and The Law on the Guardian Council's Supervision of the Presidential Elections.[7] The Law on Presidential Elections outlines the electoral system, candidate and voter requirements, the formation of election boards, candidate registration, campaigns, and violations. The "Law on the Guardian Council's Supervision of the Presidential Elections" describes the Guardian Council's supervisory responsibilities, with a particular focus on the composition and duties of supervisory committees. Earlier this year, the Law on Presidential Elections was amended by Parliament to allow for the creation of a new electoral management body, the Central Executive Election Board (CEEB).

THE GUARDIAN COUNCIL

The Guardian Council is responsible for monitoring, supervising, and setting guidelines for the conduct of each presidential election. The 12-person body consists of six jurists appointed by the Supreme Leader, and six legal experts elected by Parliament. Before the election, the Guardian Council vets all candidates who have registered to run with the Ministry of Interior.

Prior to the election, the Guardian Council establishes a Central Supervisory Committee (CSC) composed of seven members, at least two of whom are members of the Guardian Council itself. The CSC then designates a supervisor for each county: as of 2011, there are 368. These supervisors monitor each polling station, and reports are submitted back to the CSC for review. At any point in the process, the Guardian Council can suspend or cancel the election based on this review.

THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR (MOI)

The Ministry of Interior is charged with administering the elections under the Guardian Council's authority. Before any election, the Ministry forms an Elections Center in the Ministry's permanent Elections Office, housed in the Bureau of Political Affairs. The Elections Center is responsible for the creation of county-level Executive Committees that select the number and location of polling stations, assign poll workers, and oversee complaints and violations, should they occur.

CENTRAL EXECUTIVE ELECTION BOARD (CEEB)

The CEEB is a new electoral management body developed earlier this year, after Parliament made amendments to the Law on Presidential Elections. President Ahmadinejad's critics were eager to amend the law, in light of the Minister of Interior's control over electoral administration and the president's threats to intervene in the electoral process. The amendments were seen by many as an attempt to wrestle control over the elections from Ahmadinejad and the Executive Branch.

[7] Copies of relevant electoral laws can be found at the Ministry of Interior's Office of Elections website, http://www.moi.ir/Portal/Home/Default.aspx?CategoryID=c2cf29ae-2e8e-4319-a926-1e311d44c6d1. A full copy of up-to-date presidential election laws can be found here: http://www.moi.ir/portal/File/ShowFile.aspx?ID=aa23f20a-1659-4508-8005-9a748448396c.

The CEEB's primary responsibility includes supervising the Ministry of Interior's administration of the elections, though the CEEB still answers to the Guardian Council. The amendments undermined the Ministry of Interior's administrative role, transferring some oversight and monitoring responsibilities to the judiciary and the State Prosecutor. The eleven-person board includes four permanent members and seven appointees. Permanent Members include the Minister of Interior (who serves as Chair), the State Prosecutor, the Minister of Intelligence, and a Member of Parliament. The seven appointed members are public figures, recommended by the Ministry of Interior and approved by the Guardian Council. CEEB members include:

- Mostafa Mohammad-Najjar, *Minister of Interior*
- Heydar Moslehi, *Minister of Intelligence*
- Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Eje'i, *Prosecutor General*
- MP Mohammad Ashouri, *National Security and Foreign Policy Committee*
- Morteza Bakhtiari, *Minister of Justice*
- MP Ismael Kowsari, *Deputy Chair, National Security and Foreign Policy Committee*
- MP Mohammad Mehdi Zahedi, *former Minister of Science and Technology*
- Seyyed Reza Taghavi, *Chairman, Friday Prayer Policy Coordination Council*
- Hassan Rahimian, *Supreme Leader's Representative to the Martyr's Foundation*
- Ansieh Khazali, Chancellor, *Alzahra University*
- Mohammad Mohammadian, *Supreme Leader's Representative to Universities*

CANDIDATE REGISTRATION

Article 115 of the Constitution and Article 35 of the Law on Presidential Elections set six eligibility requirements candidates must meet at the time of registration. As previously mentioned, candidates must: be political and religious men; of Iranian origin; be a citizen of Iran; possess management and leadership abilities; have a good reputation and be trustworthy and pious; and be faithful believers in the Islamic Republic and be followers of the official religion of the country (Islam).

Candidates must register to participate in the election with the Ministry of Interior. Article 55 of the Law on Presidential Elections details the registration process, which takes place during a five-day period. The Ministry of Interior then submits a list of names to the Guardian Council, which has an additional five days to vet candidates. The Guardian Council reviews each candidate's fitness for office, though the Council can request an extension of five days if necessary. Candidates may submit additional information or testimonials for review while the Council deliberates. The Guardian Council then sends a list of approved candidates to the Ministry of Interior, who then announces the candidates.

VOTER REGISTRATION

According to Article 35 of the Law on Presidential Elections, Iranians meeting three criteria are eligible to vote: they must be citizens, at least 18 years old, and "sane." For the first time, a record 50 million Iranians are eligible to vote in the upcoming election. Iran does not maintain a voter registry or roll, and eligible voters can vote at any polling station in the country. Consequently, voters are not required to formally register to vote before they show up to the polls on Election Day.

CAMPAIGNING

The campaign period officially begins after the list of candidates is released, ending 24 hours before Election Day. Article 63 of the Law on Presidential Elections requires that equal access to the media be provided to all candidates. Before the campaign period commences, the Minister of Interior establishes a committee that monitors all media-related activities. The committee includes the Prosecutor General, the Minister of Interior, and the Managing Director of Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB), Iran's state-run television and radio organization. Television and radio ads must be pre-recorded, and the following activities are specifically forbidden: advertising during Friday prayer sermons, using government funds or institutions for publicity, distributing ads or campaigning at public institutions, or defaming other candidates. Campaigning is not permitted at polling stations, and individuals administering the elections are not permitted to advertise for individual candidates.

VOTING AND COUNTING

On Election Day, each voter presents a form of birth certificate, or shenasnameh, which features a photograph and thumbprint alongside the voter's unique identification number. Each ballot is connected to a ballot stub, and once the stub is separated, there are no identifiers that connect it back to the ballot. Voters press a thumbprint onto the stub, which is then separated from the ballot and deposited into a distinct box. Voters then cast their vote on the ballot—after voting, the voter's name and number is recorded.

The absence of voter rolls makes it difficult for Ministry of Interior officials to track where Iranians vote, even though the voting system is designed to detect and prevent fraud at different stages of the process. Because there is no way to connect stubs with ballots, voting is relatively private. In cases where the number of ballots exceeds the number of stubs, the number of extra ballots is randomly selected and removed from the ballot box before counting begins.

After polls close, typically at 8pm, officials count stubs and ballots. Only polling station representatives from the Ministry of Interior's Executive Committees, the Guardian Council, the Provincial Governor, or candidate representatives may observe the counting process.

OUT OF COUNTRY VOTING

Article 53 of the Law on Presidential Elections allows embassies, consular sections, and other political representatives outside Iran to form Executive Committees for the purpose of conducting out of country voting. Because Iran does not allow voting by proxy or mail, out-of-country voting is conducted through personal ballots. Executive Committees are formed shortly before the election, and they are tasked with managing the external vote, including finding polling locations and staff and implementing the voting and counting process.

In 2009, 130 countries administered out-of-country voting, and 304 ballot boxes were sent to locations abroad. The ballots were located at embassies, consulates-general, and, in some cases, mosques and universities. Nine individuals were staffed at each polling location, and nearly half a million ballots were sent to embassies around the world. For the upcoming election, 135 countries will participate, with 295 ballot boxes distributed to embassies around the world.

THE PRE-ELECTION POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

AHMADINEJAD AS SPOILER

In the months leading up to this year's election, a new challenge to the system has emerged in the form of President Ahmadinejad himself. Since 2009, Ahmadinejad and his affiliates have mounted several unsuccessful challenges to the Supreme Leader's influence. Less than a month after Ahmadinejad's controversial reelection, he attempted to appoint Esfandiar Rahim Mashaei, one of his closest confidantes, to the position of first Vice President. A growing chorus of voices, including many from within Ahmadinejad's Cabinet, expressed outrage over the appointment. The Supreme Leader eventually forced Mashaei's resignation, despite the president's open challenges to the Leader's authority to do so. Mashaei was then appointed chief of staff, a position he held until 2011.

Ahmadinejad continued to position Mashaei as a likely successor during his last two years in office. Mashaei has accompanied Ahmadinejad on trips throughout the country, which have been perceived by many as thinly veiled campaign events. Ahmadinejad later adopted the phrase "Viva Spring" as his campaign motto, in an attempt to link Mashaei's candidacy to the Arab Spring. At a poorly attended rally at Azadi Stadium in April, Ahmadinejad sought to unofficially launch Mashaei's candidacy, though threats from clerics and military officials prevented Mashaei's attendance. Shortly before the Guardian Council began vetting candidates, the president threatened to reveal incriminating information concerning the corrupt activities of several prominent conservatives. After a number of attempts by Speaker of Parliament Ali Larijani to summon and dismiss members of the Cabinet, in a speech to Parliament, Ahmadinejad released an audio clip of the Speaker's brother implicating the family in corruption. Though Mashaei's candidacy was rejected by the Guardian Council, there is still reason to believe that the president and his affiliates could act as spoilers before or after the election.

THE REFORMIST DILEMMA

The Reformists could be another source of election-related intrigue before or after the vote. Many of the activists and reformists who led the Green Movement in 2009 have been imprisoned, and the security apparatus has largely succeeded in crippling the group's activities. Nonetheless, within reformist circles, debate over the parameters of involvement in the election continues. Before the registration period, many reformists, including former President Khatami, set preconditions for their participation, including the release of Green Movement activists from imprisonment and house arrests, as well a guarantee that the election would be free and fair.[8] Reformists in favor of boycotting the election argued that participation would unjustly offer legitimacy to an unfair process.

Despite this debate, many also argue that participation could be an opportunity to galvanize the electorate and provide at least some opportunity for Iranians to voice their demands. Those in favor of participation continued to call on Khatami or Rafsanjani to run, and many were disappointed with the Guardian Council's decision to reject Rafsanjani's candidacy. Though Rafsanjani is not a considered a reformist, he is resented by the Supreme Leader's allies for his perceived support of protests in 2009.

Following Rafsanjani's disqualification, the reformist camp is again in a state of disarray. Some speculate that Rafsanjani and Khatami could together endorse one candidate, likely Hassan Rouhani, who is close to Rafsanjani, or Mohammad-Reza Aref, who has stronger reform credentials. Even with the support of Rafsanjani, neither Rouhani nor Aref has a political base capable of mobilizing a large number of voters on June 14. Meanwhile, many prominent reformists, such as Mostafa Tajzadeh, have urged for a boycott, as have a number of exiled opposition figures.[9]

CONSERVATIVE DISUNITY

Tension and uncertainty among Iran's competing political factions has been exacerbated by the absence of a strong, popular unity candidate. Earlier this year, three individuals close to the Supreme Leader came together to search for a consensus candidate: former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, former Speaker of Parliament Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel, and Tehran Mayor Mohammed Baqer Qalibaf. The "2+1 Coalition," as it came to be known, was reportedly tasked by the Supreme Leader to find a candidate. As the election neared, and as other conservative coalitions sought to field candidates of their own, each member registered to participate in the election.

Meanwhile, another conservative group, the Endurance Front, presented its own

[8] "Political Prisoners Write Letter to Khatami about 2013 Election," *Rahe Sabz*, April 17, 2013, http://www.rahesabz.net/story/68876/?utm_source.

[9] See Arash Karimi, "Prominent Imprisoned Reformist Calls For Boycott of Iran Elections," *Al-Monitor,* May 27, 2013, http://iranpulse.al-monitor.com/index.php/2013/05/2092/prominent-imprisoned-reformist-calls-for-boycott-of-iran-elections/#more-2092, and Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran opposition figures unite to condemn election as a charade," *The Guardian,* May 28, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/28/iran-opposition-condemn-election-charade?CMP=twt_gu.

candidate: former Minister of Health Kamran Baqeri-Lankarani. Led by influential hardline cleric Ayatollah Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, the group seemed unsure of its support for Lankarani, with a reported split between clerics in Tehran and Qom. Just before the registration deadline, Saeed Jalili, the current Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, registered to participate. Lankarani subsequently withdrew from the race, and the Endurance Front endorsed Jalili. The emergence of Jalili as a strong candidate has come at the expense of the 2+1 Coalition, which has struggled to put forth a Principlist candidate. After each candidate was approved to run by the Guardian Council, Haddad-Adel himself expressed his frustration: "The philosophy of our coalition, or whatever you would like to call it, was to prevent multiple Principlist candidates so as not to split votes in the presidential election, and it was not organized."[10]

A CRACKDOWN ENSUES

Beginning in March, as conservatives competed for influence within elite circles, the Iranian government began cracking down on activists, journalists, and bloggers in earnest. On March 16, a number of prominent reformists, including a former Member of Parliament, were arrested on their way to meet with former President Khatami. Around the same time, Bagher Asadi, a diplomat at the Iranian Mission to the United Nations in New York, was arrested in Tehran. No reason was given for his arrest, but some speculate that it was linked to an op-ed he wrote in 2004 expressing his support for Khatami. Iranian authorities have also harassed activists serving sentences stemming from the 2009 election protests. Authorities have sent some back to prison from medical leaves, cancelled paroles, or revoked visiting rights.[11] Tehran's public prosecutor reportedly informed some prisoners that their leaves had been cancelled simply because of the election.[12]

Iranian authorities have also cracked down on the Iranian press. Intelligence Minister Heydar Moslehi told members of the media in March that he would take any measures necessary to "prevent the emergence of sedition prior to the election."[13] Authorities have repeatedly summoned the editors of major publications to the Ministry of Intelligence and warned them not to criticize the government, in addition to shutting down newspapers and imprisoning journalists. The government has also continued what the Committee to Protect Journalists refers to as a "revolving-door

[10] "2+1 Coalition Candidate to be Determined after Television Debates," *Fars News*, May 21, 2013, http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920231000913.

[11] Saeed Kamali Dehghan, "Iran cracks down on activists in runup to election," *The Guardian,* May 21, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/21/iran-election-crackdown-rights-activists?CMP=twt_gu.

[12] Fereshteh Ghazi, "New Wave of Summons, Return of Prisoners to Prison and Executions," *Rooz Online,* May 20, 2013, http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/archive/2013/may/20/article/new-wave-of-summons-return-of-prisoners-to-prison-and-executions.html.

[13] "Iran targets reformist press in the run-up to elections," *Committee to Protect Journalists,* March 7, 2013, https://www.cpj.org/2013/03/iran-targets-reformist-press-in-the-run-up-to-elec.php.

policy" of arresting journalists and releasing others on short-term furloughs—only to then arrest more journalists. In March, Iranian authorities shut down three reformist media outlets: *Mehrnameh*, *Tajrobeh*, and *Aseman*. On April 27, *Baztab* published an article alleging that Ahmadinejad was in possession of a recording that confirmed the government's complicity in fraud during the 2009 election. Just hours after the article's publication, Baztab's website was taken offline and its managing editor, Ali Ghazali, was arrested on charges of "creating public anxiety through repetition of claims of election fraud in the 2009 election." As of April, at least forty Iranian journalists remained imprisoned.[14]

The government has also increased its role in controlling, monitoring, and censoring telecommunications activity. The government has started blocking virtual private networks (VPNs), which many Iranians use to access blocked websites, including Facebook. Skype, Viber, and Tor—popular voice-over IP services commonly used to communicate internationally—have all experienced sporadic outages, prompting suspicions that authorities are prepared to cut or moderate communications services during the election.[15] The government introduced stricter rules for mobile phone companies, and SMS messages containing keywords like "Mashaei," and "Hashemi" were periodically filtered.[16] Websites belonging to opposition figures were also frequently blocked, including websites affiliated with Mashaei, Khatami, Rafsanjani, and Rouhani.[17] Several days before the release of the list of approved candidates, Iranians reported that the Internet was in a "coma," as Internet speeds slowed to a crawl throughout Iran.[18]

CANDIDATES

On May 21, the Ministry of Interior released the names of eight candidates the Guardian Council had approved to run in the election, after disqualifying 678 individuals who registered to run. Each of the approved candidates has a long history of government service, with varying degrees of loyalty to the Supreme Leader and his conservative allies.[19]

[14] Sherif Mansour, "As election nears, Iran's journalists are in chains," *Committee to Protect Journalists,* May 8, 2013, http://cpj.org/reports/2013/05/as-election-nears-irans-journalists-are-in-chains.php.

[15] Russell Brandom, "World Wide [Redacted]: inside Iran's private internet," *The Verge,* April 24, 2013, http://www.theverge.com/2013/4/24/4259672/world-wide-redacted-inside-irans-private-internet.

[16] Golnaz Esfandiari, "Text Messages With Name of Ahmadinejad Aide Blocked/Unblocked In Iran," *RFERL*, April 6, 2013, http://www.rferl.org/content/iran-text-messages-blocked-mashaei/24949552.html.

[17] "57 Days Until the Election," *BBC Persian*, April 18, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2013/04/130418_l51_ir92_57_daysto.shtml.

[18] Mohammad Davari, "Internet enters 'coma' ahead of Iran presidential election," *Middle East Online*, May 19, 2013, http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/?id=58837.

[19] Images taken from: www.rouhani.ir; www.drjaliliy.ir; www.ghalibaf.ir; www.velayati.ir; www.draref.net; www.gharazi.com Wikimedia Commons: Derafsh Kaviani (CC-BY-SA-3.0), Hessam M. Armandehi (CC-BY-2.5)

ALI AKBAR VELAYATI

MOHSEN REZAEI

MOHAMMAD-BAQER QALIBAF

MOHAMMAD GHARAZI

GHOLAM-ALI HADDAD-ADEL

SAEED JALILI

MOHAMMAD-REZA AREF

HASSAN ROUHANI

MOHAMMAD-REZA AREF

Aref served as First Vice-President of Iran from 2001 to 2005, following incumbent President Mohammad Khatami's reelection. Aref received his MSc and PhD in Electrical Engineering from Stanford University in 1980. Following his return to Iran after the Revolution, Aref became an advisor to the Minister of Science, Research and Technology. Since then, he has served in a number of technocratic government positions.

Despite withdrawing in protest from the 2008 Parliamentary elections, Aref has avoided political controversy, especially since 2009. Aref will likely draw support from the reformist camp, but his uncharismatic demeanor and the reform movement's marginalization from politics are liabilities. Earlier in April, Aref claimed that reformists had "boosted" relations with the Supreme Leader.[20] Shortly after the campaign began, Aref announced his desire to see the field of candidates narrowed to two or three.

MOHAMMAD GHARAZI

Gharazi's selection as a candidate has come as a surprise, given his age (72) and relative absence from politics since Khatami's election in 1997. Gharazi served as Minister of

[20] "Reformists boost relations with Supreme Leader: Aref," *Iranian Labour New Agency*, May 5, 2013, http://ilna.ir/en/news/news.cfm?id=713.

Petroleum from 1981 to 1985, and Minister of Post from 1985 to 1997. Before the Revolution, Gharazi served as a deputy for the Mujahideen-e Khalq (MEK), but left the group before its departure from Iran. Early in his career, Gharazi was considered a leftist, along with former Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Moussavi.

The motives behind Gharazi's approval are unclear, given his status as an outsider. Gharazi's campaign has focused primarily on combating inflation. Upon registering to run, he announced his campaign motto as "anti-inflation government." Gharazi has not received any significant endorsements at this point—he is running as an independent, and was not nominated to run by any major group or faction.

GHOLAM-ALI HADDAD-ADEL

Haddad-Adel has long been a confidant of the Supreme Leader, serving as one of the Leader's closest advisors. His daughter is married to the Supreme Leader's son, Mojtaba. Haddad-Adel is an incumbent Member of Parliament, where he served as Speaker from 2005 to 2008. In 2012, Haddad-Adel launched a failed campaign to serve as Speaker, losing to Ali Larijani.

Haddad-Adel's coordination with Qalibaf and Velayati suggests some disagreement and disunity among the conservative camp, which struggled to find a consensus candidate in the months preceding the elections. Those close to the Supreme Leader trust Haddad-Adel, but his withdrawal in favor of a stronger candidate remains possible. His campaign manager, MP Hossein Nejabat, recently announced that members of the 2+1 Coalition could decide on a consensus candidate up until a week before the elections, on June 6 or 7.[21] The *Isargaran* group, a conservative political party founded by President Ahmadinejad, has endorsed his candidacy.

SAEED JALILI

Since announcing his last-minute decision to enter the race, Jalili has emerged as the election's frontrunner–and is widely perceived to be the Supreme Leader's favored candidate. Jalili has served as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council since 2007, having previously served as Deputy Foreign Minister. In his capacity as SNSC Secretary, Jalili is also Iran's chief nuclear negotiator—and enjoys considerable support from the Supreme Leader, the IRGC, and the clerical establishment.

Despite being a frontrunner, Jalili's strong campaign has been the subject of some controversy. Influential hardline cleric Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi recently endorsed Jalili, despite initially supporting Kamran Baqer Lankarani. The United Front of Conservatives, a Parliamentary political coalition headed by Speaker Ali Larijani, has also announced its support for Jalili. Some believe that, in light of Mashaei's disqualification, Ahmadinejad might opt to endorse Jalili's candidacy.

[21] "Iran's election: Principalists in disarray after Hashemi disqualified," *Iran's View: The Persian Perspective,* May 26, 2013, http://www.iransview.com/irans-election-principalists-in-disarray-after-hashemi-disqualified/740/.

MOHAMMAD-BAQER QALIBAF

Qalibaf is the current mayor of Tehran, having previously served as Commander of the IRGC Air Force. Since 2005, Qalibaf has presented himself as a moderate, pragmatic alternative to Ahmadinejad, despite the reluctance of some conservatives to support his candidacy. Qalibaf is believed to be the IRGC's preferred candidate. Prior to the elections, rumors circulated that Qassem Soleimani, leader of the IRGC's elite Qods Force, endorsed Qalibaf. The IRGC refused to acknowledge the rumor, but went out of its way to reject allegations that the rumor was false.

Of all the candidates in the race, Qalibaf's political base is the largest. Qalibaf is not as likely to earn the support of influential clerics, but his political base in Tehran could be decisive. In the months leading up to the election, Qalibaf has avoided the sharp political rhetoric of his predecessor, opting instead to focus on management of the economy. However, at a recent campaign event, Qalibaf detailed his role in the abuse of protestors in 1999, 2003, and 2009, claiming that he himself beat those who participated in the protests.[22]

MOHSEN REZAEI

Rezaei currently serves as the Secretary of the Expediency Council, a position he assumed after serving as Commander of the IRGC for sixteen years. This is Rezaee's third consecutive attempt to run for president, having previously submitted his candidacy in 2005 and 2009. Rezaei is known internationally for his role in the 1994 AMIA bombings in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Interpol issued an arrest warrant for Rezaei in light of his involvement.

Most analysts and observers have not taken Rezaei's candidacy seriously. In 2009, he finished fourth, with less than two percent of the popular vote. His campaign has focused primarily on the economy, corruption, and government mismanagement, though he has committed to continuing talks with the P5+1 if elected.

HASSAN ROUHANI

Rouhani is the only cleric running in the election. Rouhani served as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council from 1989 to 2005, where he managed nuclear negotiations during Khatami's Presidency. Rouhani is also a member of the Expediency Council and the Assembly of Experts. Additionally, he is President of the Center for Strategic Research, a research institute linked to the Expediency Council.

Rouhani has been extremely critical of President Ahmadinejad's government, and he has frequently been the subject of retaliation by Ahmadinejad's associates. In a recent TV interview, Rouhani passionately defended himself against accusations that he had conceded too much to the international community during his tenure as chief negotiator. In his response, Rouhani also subtly referenced allegations of

[22] "Presidential Candidate Brags About His Direct Role in Violence and Repression," *International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran,* May 16, 2013, http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2013/05/ghalibaf_tape/.

corruption in Ahmadinejad's government.[23] Rouhani could eventually emerge as the favored candidate of reformist groups, especially if Aref agrees to drop out of the race. Rouhani has a long history of working with reformist leaders, and he is close to former President Rafsanjani. The Association of Combatant Clerics, an influential reform-leaning clerical association, and *Kargozaran*, a political party close to Rafsanjani, have endorsed Rouhani's candidacy.

ALI AKBAR VELAYATI

Like Rezaei, Velayati is wanted by Interpol for his role in the 1994 AMIA bombings in Argentina. Velayati served as Foreign Minister from 1981 to 1997, and he now serves as the Supreme Leader's top foreign policy advisor. Velayati considered running in 2005, but many believe he withdrew his nomination in light of Rafsanjani's candidacy.

Velayati, a member of the "2+1 Coalition" with Haddad-Adel and Qalibaf, is also close to the Supreme Leader. Velayati's electoral appeal seems marginal; he lacks the charisma of his competitors, and his career in foreign policy has left him without a serious political base. So far, Velayati has avoided controversy, and has instead chosen to focus his campaign on economic issues and the need to combat inflation.

AREAS OF CONCERN AND POTENTIAL ABUSES

Government abuse of the electoral process will continue, despite an already lively, competitive campaign period. Institutions involved in the process have disqualified candidates, censored and banned legal election-related activities, and arrested the campaign staff of at least one candidate. The elections will be a significant event, but the electoral process has lacked credibility since it began in earnest last month.

ELECTORAL FRAUD

The absence of voter rolls or a voter registration system undermines the integrity of the elections and could serve as one avenue of fraud or manipulation of the counting process. As some argued in 2009, the absence of voter rolls allowed election officials considerable leeway in exaggerating electoral returns in certain cities. Though the Ministry of Interior maintains a list of those eligible to run by province, Iranians can vote at any polling station across the country. The pervasiveness of illegal voting, ballot stuffing, graveyard voting, and the printing of extra documentation by the government remains a concern. In 2009, some provinces reported a number of ballots that exceeded the number of eligible voters. According to official results, conservatives received 113 percent more votes than they did in the 2005 election.[24]

The potential for electoral fraud is further compounded by the absence of domestic and international observers. Only the Guardian Council, MOI polling staff, and

[23] Arash Karami, *"Iranian candidate gives surprising contentious TV interview,"* May 28, 2013, http://iranpulse.al-monitor.com/index.php/2013/05/2099/iranian-candidate-gives-surprising-contentious-tv-interview.

[24] "Freedom in the World 2010: Iran," *Freedom House*, http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2010/iran."

candidate representatives participate in monitoring the elections and counting ballots. In many cases, even candidate officials are banned from observing: in 2009, there were frequent reports of opposition candidates being prohibited from participating in the counting process and evidence of unused ballots going missing.[25] Even before polls closed and the counting process began, state-run media announced that President Ahmadinejad had been reelected.

MEDIA AND INTERNET CENSORSHIP

The government has also taken steps to limit the public's access to information, as media and telecommunications censorship remains extensive. State-run television and radio stations censor content, with programming subject to pervasive government oversight and interference. Although many Iranians own illegal satellite dishes that allow access to foreign media, they are frequently jammed by the government. Foreign correspondents in Iran are closely monitored, and usually prohibited from taking pictures or filming.[26] There are extensive rules regarding what the media can write or broadcast: press laws contain 17 types of "impermissible" content, and outlaw news items that "attack the Islamic Republic," "insult the Supreme Leader," or "disseminate false information."[27]

Since 2009, the Internet has become subject to even further censorship, monitoring, and government control. The government oversees a majority of the institutions involved in regulating, managing, and legislating telecommunications, and in 2012, it established the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, an agency answering directly to the Supreme Leader. The Council formulates and coordinates the government's cyber policies.[28] All Internet service providers, websites, and blogs are required to register with the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. Opposition websites and those affiliated with government critics are frequently filtered and blocked, and the government has the authority and ability to monitor all e-mail and chat conversations. Anyone who posts unauthorized content or circumvents the blocks and filters implemented by the government is subject to arrest.[29]

Additional foreign websites could be blocked or hijacked around the time of the election. The government could also shut down Skype and Viber, as it has often done in the past, making make it more difficult for Iranians to communicate with anyone

[25] "2009 Human Rights Report: Iran," U.S. Department of State, March 11, 2010, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/nea/136068.htm.

[26] "The Enemies of Internet: Iran," *Reporters Without Borders,* 2013, http://surveillance.rsf.org/en/iran/, "Freedom in the World 2010: Iran," and "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012: Iran," *U.S. Department of State*, accessed May 27, 2013, http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm?year=2012&dlid=204359#wrapper.

[27] Ahmed Shaheed, "Special Rapporteur's March 2013 report on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," February 28, 2013, http://www.shaheedoniran.org/english/dr-shaheeds-work/latest-reports/3135-Special-Rapporteurs-February-2013-report-on-the-situation-of-human-rights-in-the-Islamic-Republic-of-Iran.html#4, and "The Enemies of Internet: Iran."

[28] "The Supreme Council of Cyberspace: Centralizing Internet Governance in Iran," *Iran Media Program*, April 8, 2013, http://iranmediaresearch.org/en/blog/227/13/04/08/1323.

[29] "The Enemies of Internet: Iran."

outside the country. Chat and instant messaging tools have often been shut down as well. The government also has the ability to slow Internet connections even more than it has already, making it difficult for Iranians to upload photos and videos. Opposition websites could be blocked, hacked, or shut down by denial-of-service attacks, as they were in 2009. The government has also created mirror websites to track the uploading and transfer of unauthorized content. The government has filtered content sent via text message, and it may seek to shut text messaging down completely as it did in 2009.[30]

Many Iranian journalists and newspapers have already been banned from writing about the elections, as they were in 2009, when over a hundred journalists were arrested between the start of the election and the end of the year. If foreign journalists are allowed into the country, which is typically rare, they could be arrested or sent home.[31] Minister of Culture Mohammad Hosseini has frequently reported that additional measures will be taken to supervise foreign journalists covering the elections from Iran.

RESTRICTING DEMONSTRATIONS

The upcoming election could prompt a new round of massive street protests. Iran's Constitution prohibits public demonstrations that "violate the principles of Islam." In 2009, the government used this prohibition to deny permits for organizing protests. Should demonstrations occur, security forces and paramilitary or vigilante organizations such as the Basij or Ansar-i Hezbollah could intervene. In 2009, security forces used tear gas, batons, and rubber bullets to disperse demonstrators—as well as live ammunition. Between 70 and 200 demonstrators were killed in the aftermath of the election, though some argue the number could be much higher.[32]

Should the elections lead to protests or other public criticisms of the government, the government will likely move to prosecute individuals (and in some cases, extract confessions), using the "Law on Offenses against the National and International Security of the Country." This law criminalizes freedom of expression, speech, and assembly. It includes broad provisions against collusion and gathering against national security, propaganda against the government, disturbing public order, membership in illegal groups, participating in unlawful gatherings, insulting the Supreme Leader, and publishing lies. Confessions are often obtained through torture, and sentences commonly include prison terms of up to 25 years, flogging, internal exile, or work bans. The crimes of "enmity against God" and "sowing corruption on earth" could also be used to sentence activists to death.[33]

[30] See "Freedom in the World 2010: Iran," "Freedom in the World 2011: Iran," Brandom, "World Wide [Redacted]: inside Iran's private internet," and "The Enemies of Internet: Iran."

[31] "Freedom in the World 2010: Iran."

[32] See "Freedom in the World 2010: Iran," "2009 Human Rights Report: Iran," and "Toward a Human Rights and Democracy Agenda for Iran," United for Iran, October 2012, http://www.united4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/U4I_report2012.19.pdf.

[33] "Codifying Repression," Human Rights Watch, http://www.hrw.org/node/109622/section/9.

Since 2010, approximately 6,000 political activists have been detained—many of them for crimes covered by the law.[34] Many Moussavi and Karroubi campaign staffers were arrested after the election, and both candidates' offices were searched and closed. Mohammed Ali Abtahi, a high-profile reformist and former vice-president, was one of the most prominent individuals arrested in 2009, when he was accused of "acting against national security and propaganda activity."[35] In August 2009, the government staged mass show trials for arrested protestors and opposition figures, and at least 697 of those convicted remain in prison today.[36] Moussavi and Karroubi have been under house arrest since February 2011, when they called for demonstrations in support of the Arab Spring protests and uprisings. No charges have been brought against them.

[34] "Toward a Human Rights and Democracy Agenda for Iran."

[35] "Iranian reformist Abtahi bailed after sentencing," *BBC,* November 22, 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8372849.stm.

[36] See "Toward a Human Rights and Democracy Agenda for Iran," and Dehghan, "Iran cracks down on activists in runup to election."

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